Theory Into Practice

The Teaching Profession: Faculty as Leaders

As a philosophical construct, the notion of “faculty as leaders” places the creation and control of the learning environment squarely into the hands of faculty. “[T]eacher-leadership integrates the notions of teaching and leadership. It is a process rather than a positional concept… [and] is grounded on professionalism and collegiality” (Pounder, 2005).

A number of researchers have spoken eloquently about the actions and traits of faculty leaders. Sherrill (1999) defined faculty leaders as individuals with the ability to provide exceptional classroom instruction built upon a solid understanding of the discipline and coupled with sound pedagogical knowledge. It is this idea, that excellent instruction is the marriage of a thorough understanding of the discipline with sound knowledge of teaching and learning strategies, which gave rise to City Colleges of Chicago’s Faculty Development Seminars (FDS), in which faculty learn research-based best practices for improving learning and student engagement.

Silva et al. (2000) defined faculty leaders as those with the ability to:

- nurture relationships;
- model professional growth;
- encourage change; and
- challenge the status quo (p. 22).

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (1995) faculty leaders are those individuals who are constantly looking for ways to improve learning and the educational experience as a whole. Berry and Ginsberg (1990) described faculty leaders as individuals who also engage in mentoring and coaching, and are always learning through formal professional development as well as through more informal venues such as reading and sharing with colleagues. Harris and Muijs (2003) define faculty leaders as individuals who are focused on improving learning through the development and modeling of effective pedagogy. Faculty leadership is exercised in professional collaboration, coaching, mentoring, leading work groups and instructing in professional development activities.

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Did You Know?

Who of the following individuals attended a community college?

A. George Lucas, Film Director, Writer, Producer
B. R. Bruce Merrifield, winner of the 1984 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, Emeritus Professor of Biochemistry, Rockefeller University
C. Carol Browner, former administrator, Environmental Protection Agency
D. Kweisi Mfume, former president, NAACP
E. Brian Valentine, senior vice president, Windows Division, Microsoft Corp.

Answer: All of them. Leaders in fields including business, medicine, education, government, and the arts got their starts at community colleges. Lucas attended Modesto Junior College in California, Merrifield attended Pasadena City College in California, Browner attended Miami-Dade Community College in Florida, Mfume attended Baltimore City Community College in Maryland, and Valentine attended Centralia College in Washington.


Upcoming Faculty Development Seminars (FDS)

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<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Nov. 7, 8, 21, 22, Dec. 5</td>
<td>9 am–3 pm each day</td>
<td>Harold Washington, Rm 619 for Nov. 7; Rm 618 for other days</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Nov. 10-21 (weekdays only)</td>
<td>6-9 pm each weekday</td>
<td>District Office, Room 201</td>
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Please contact Prairie Markussen for more information or to register for Faculty Development Sessions (FDS) @ 312-553-2721 or pmarkussen@ccc.edu. FDS is free of charge and open to both full-time and adjunct faculty as well as academic administrators.
By the Numbers

Community College Performance

While community colleges offer broad access to higher education, these institutions have also been the subject of criticism for low graduation and transfer rates. Under the federal metrics currently used to measure graduation rates, colleges report the number of full-time, first-time undergraduates who have completed a degree within 150 percent of the normal completion time. Defenders of community colleges have long complained that the federal method is too simplistic because it relies on measures that are more appropriate for four-year institutions. For example, federal measures fail to track outcomes for part-time students even though the majority of community college students are part-time. Community colleges also serve significant numbers of minority, poor, and non-traditional students. The enrollment patterns of these students often fluctuate because of work and family responsibilities and they may need more than the allotted three years to complete an associate's degree.

In July, 2008 researchers from a six-state consortium of state agencies and community colleges released a report documenting student outcomes which addressed some of the limitations of the federal reporting system. When both full- and part-time students were included and degree completion time was extended out to six years, degree completion rates improved significantly. For example, in Florida, the rate of full-time students who completed a degree almost doubled from 19 percent to 35 percent when the time to degree was extended to six years. When extended time to degree was applied to Florida’s part-time students, the number earning degrees almost tripled from seven percent to 20 percent.

To read more about how federal agencies measure community college productivity and the related policy implications, see the references noted below.

References


Tech it Out

A Better Mouse Trap: The Student Assessment of Learning Gains (SALG) Student Course Evaluations

During the opening activities of a workshop on student course evaluations, 50 or so college faculty and administrators from across the US, Canada, Japan and Taiwan reached the following consensus:

- Everyone does student course evaluations;
- Words used by the group to describe evaluation instruments included: bad, flawed, unfair, unhelpful, and useless;
- Student course evaluations generate a sense of suspicion and persecution among the faculty and are viewed as more of a popularity contest; and
- Student course evaluations never get at the heart of what we need to know: Did the student learn under the guidance of the faculty?

Elaine Seymour (University of Colorado-Boulder) felt the same way. In the late ‘90’s Seymour and a group of colleagues created an innovative introductory chemistry class. Her research showed that instructors using the non-traditional methods received lower scores on evaluations even when other measurements showed that students learned more than those in traditional courses. Seymour and her colleagues were observing a phenomenon that has been documented in a growing body of research. Gender and racial bias, faculty dress, student expectations, level of the course, assigned grade, etc. all significantly impact student course evaluations yet have nothing to do with whether or not the student learned.

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Who’s Who

Parker J. Palmer (born 1939 in Chicago, Illinois) is an author, educator, and activist who focuses on issues in education, community, leadership, spirituality and social change. Palmer received the Ph.D. in sociology from the University of California at Berkeley in 1970. A member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quaker), he lives with his wife, Sharon Palmer, in Madison, Wisconsin.

Palmer served for fifteen years as Senior Associate of the now defunct American Association of Higher Education, and now serves as Senior Advisor to the Fetzer Institute. He founded the Center for Courage & Renewal, which oversees the “Courage to Teach” program for educators across the country and parallel programs for people in other professions, including medicine, law, ministry and philanthropy. (http://www.couragerenewal.org/)

Palmer is noted for his ability to articulate the spiritual side of teaching and learning and his book, The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner landscape of a Teacher’s Life eloquently speaks to the art and trial of touching others through the learning process. He has published poems, more than one hundred essays and seven books, including several best-selling and award-winning titles. Palmer’s work has been recognized with ten honorary doctorates, two Distinguished Achievement Awards from the National Educational Press Association, an Award of Excellence from the Associated Church Press, and major grants from the Danforth Foundation, the Lilly Endowment, and the Fetzer Institute.

Published Works Include:

Reading Recommendations


Faculty Collaboration: Creating Multidisciplinary Learning Communities, The Community College Enterprise, Fall 2007 by Alexander Thomson http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4057/is_200710/ai_n21185464/pg_2?tag=artBody;coll1

Leadership Challenges for Classroom Teachers, Education, Fall, 1995 by Martha V. Henderson & Bennie Barron http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3673/is_n1_v116/ai_n28664003/pg_1?tag=artBody;coll1


Professional Development

- November 13, 2008: Strategic Metamorphosis: Transforming Community Colleges, Innovative Educators Webinar - 1:00-3:00 EST http://www.innovativeeducators.org/_p/924.htm
- November 19, 2008: Student Success: Recruitment and Retention Strategies for Minority Students, Innovative Educators Webinar- 1:00-3:00 EST, http://www.innovativeeducators.org/_p/952.htm
- December 4, 2008: Community College Student Success: Programs, Interventions, and Outcomes, Innovative Educators - 1:00-3:00 EST, http://www.innovativeeducators.org/_p/920.htm

Call for Proposals

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Theory into Practice (Continued from page 1)

Among the faculty leaders at City Colleges of Chicago there is a shared vision for the classroom experience which includes a desire:
- To positively introduce students to the discipline being taught and to help connect the subject to the students’ personal experiences;
- To help students master the foundational skills they need to be successful in advanced classes or in their chosen career;
- To allow each student to embrace and explore the curriculum in his or her own unique way; and
- To continually improve learning and teaching.

CCC’s faculty leaders balance these goals with a fundamental commitment to academic integrity.

The role of faculty leaders and professionals also means not only having a vision for the classroom, but acting upon that vision. For some of us acting on that vision means pursuing additional education. For others, it means developing and implementing a concrete plan to create the kind of classroom environment we have envisioned. For some it means engaging in the difficult task of self evaluation to determine if the techniques and strategies used are bringing about the desired learning experience. For still others, acting upon our profession means that we reach out to mentor new adjunctions, first-year faculty, and yes, even administrators. For some of us, it means beginning to think and act as the leaders and professionals that we are. Whether pursuing additional knowledge, planning and strategizing, evaluating, mentoring or taking those first leadership steps, the most telling hallmark of faculty leaders is engaging in all these activities not because we are coerced or forced, but for the love of our disciplines and for the most human of endeavors – learning.

In this month’s edition of Catalyst you will find professional development opportunities, calls for papers at professional conferences, access to a discussion board, articles on faculty leadership, and—in the technology section—access to a free online faculty evaluation form designed to help students provide a more objective evaluation of faculty leadership, and—allowing each student to embrace and explore the curriculum in his or her own unique way; and

Tech it Out (Continued from page 2)

About SALG: In an effort to have students focus on what helped them learn and by extension, help faculty improve their teaching, Seymour and her colleagues created the Student Assessment of their Learning Gains (SALG), an on-line course evaluation instrument which asks students to evaluate how much they gained in understanding, skills, appreciation of the discipline and habits of the mind. Faculty can create a customized course evaluation from a database of learning-focused questions or they can select from 150+ course evaluations created for disciplines ranging from the sciences to education and foreign languages. All materials are free of charge and average time to complete the survey is roughly 12 minutes.

Using SALG to Improve Learning: Faculty don’t always utilize course evaluation results to closely examine instruction because they feel the instruments are flawed or that the results are used in a punitive nature. The SALG offers faculty who are committed to improving instruction an easily accessible, safe space in which to solicit student feedback on instruction. Students access the course evaluation via a password and only the authoring instructor can view the results. Summary of results are available in both statistical and graphic form.

While the SALG is voluntary, studies done by Seymour and her colleagues found that when faculty communicated to students that the purpose of the evaluation was to help improve instruction, student response rate averaged about 80%.

To access the SALG website, please go to: www.salgsite.org.

To read about the development of the SALG and supporting research, go to: http://www.salgsite.org/docs/SALGPaperPresentationAtACS.pdf

REFERENCES