



Joan D. McMahon

A new development at many university and college campuses is the establishment of centers (often called Centers for Teaching Excellence) to create and support the improvement of teaching. This article describes the development of one such center, and suggests criteria for making decisions regarding center design.

Six P's for Establishing a Center for Teaching Excellence

Many campuses are creating new Centers for Teaching Excellence under a number of different names to support and promote improvements of teaching on learning. The article explains the Six P's of how the Center for Instructional Advancement and Technology (CIAT) at Towson University (TU) in Baltimore was created, virtually overnight, and grew to a staff of ten within 18 months

The Six P's include purposefulness, programs, personnel, politics, policies, and personal touch. Each will be discussed to clarify how the TU Center was created and to suggest a guide for other campuses in developing and operating their own centers.

Purposefulness

Our purposefulness came from a pent-up demand for faculty support in the area of teaching and learning. Traditionally, TU's faculty development office funded research and travel and gave small grants to support faculty in new course development and curricular renovation. When, in the mid-nineties, our institutional mission was reclarified and a Strategic Plan was implemented, it became apparent that the teaching part our mission needed to be supported more fully. The Center emerged from the purposeful need to support faculty in the teaching mission of the institution. The provost saw the relevance of creating a center within the strategic plan of the University, thus providing status and sup-

port from the top administration. What germinated from earlier work in the faculty development area became, in a ten-month period, a well-furnished center staffed by a team of eight professionals. Within eighteen months, the staff had grown to ten professionals, demonstrating the administration's support for the mission and demand for faculty support. The first year we were provided \$40,000 from the provost's budget for operating funds. The second year we were given \$60,000.

Our mission for the first 18 months was:

"The Center for Instructional Advancement and Technology supports Towson University's commitment to excellence in teaching. The Center is faculty's central resource where innovative solutions in the enhancement of the teaching/learning experience can be explored and developed. The Center provides faculty the opportunity to investigate and apply current and experimental technologies with faculty on 1) curriculum and course design, development of course materials, teaching and learning strategies, and 2) uses of new and powerful technological applications as they apply to teaching and learning."

Our Faculty Development office dealt with global issues on teaching, research, and service, and in providing funding support for such initiatives. Our Computing and Network Services division provided staff software training and hardware support and upgrades for approximately 500 computers that arrived within one academic year. The Center worked cooperatively with both divisions, but focused specifically on the teaching and training needs of the faculty.

Programs

The Center's programs were based on assessing the classroom requirements of faculty and the perceived learning needs of students as well as the faculty's immediate training needs to learn about technology innovations in teaching. In the course of one year, our Center offered six open houses, started a technology fellows program supporting ten faculty, offered over 62 workshops attended by approximately 350 faculty, and conducted colloquia and teleconferences, and provided one-on-one technical support.

We kicked off the Center's official opening with a general Open House that was attended by 15% of the 500 faculty. We were so surprised with the response that we ran college-specific open houses once a month in the succeeding semester so introduce the faculty to our services and programs. In the next three semesters we offered workshops in teaching/learning, instructional systematic design, and technology; had a vendor showcase where publishers demonstrated the latest in instructional support materials (including technical resources); sponsored a Great Teacher's Colloquium; hosted several teleconferences, designed, implemented, and evaluated a Technology Fellows program; identified and used expert faculty as Center Consultants; and developed and coordinated Special Interest Groups.

Personnel

The demand for programs created a need for additional personnel. When TU got a new Associate Vice President in May, 1996, the Center grew, in one semester, from a staff of one half-time faculty member to a Director, a .75 FTE senior faculty Program Coordinator, and an administrative assistant; then added a full-time instructional designer in the second semester, a head of multimedia service, and a support staff over the summer, and a full-time technical consultant and contractual clerical worker by the end of the first year. By the end of the fourth semester, there were two additional professionals and an expansion of the physical facilities. Each staff member had fully networked state-of-the-art hardware and software. The Center itself also had several state-of-the-art PCS and Macs for faculty to use with the Center staff available at their sides. Our Distance Learning Staff (two professionals) also became an affiliated part of the Center's operation.

Politics

To get the right professionals in the Center required the talents of a skilled negotiator, who in this case was the Associate Vice President. She was able to transfer positions, shift personnel, and create a Center staffed with dedicated and effective people. She made deals, traded services, and reorganized positions, space, and job descriptions to make the Center a place faculty would want to go. She built support on campus, negotiated a position for a senior faculty member to be part of the permanent staff to lend credibility to the services, and created a Steering Committee that also included faculty who rotated onto it.

Policies

The Center was created with the belief that faculty needed a one-stop shop, a place where they wouldn't be shuffled from one person to the next to find information and instructional support. At first the Senior Faculty Program Coordinator was the main contact person. This gradually shifted as faculty became more aware of other persons in the Center who could provide guidance and information.

After the first six months of operation, the Center staff held a retreat to analyze where they had been and where they were going. A discussion of "values" showed that we valued faculty time more than our own. When faculty walked into the Center, we stopped what we were doing and serviced them immediately. This meant that we had to be cross-trained in many new technologies so that any of us could handle faculty questions at a basic level. We had to plan the cross training for ourselves, with each of us taking on specific training components.

We also came to realize that we would not and could not be aligned with any part of the promotion and tenure process. We were not an evaluative center. We visited classes openly to offer suggestions to those that sought advice. We did, however, provide documentation on attendance at workshops and individual consultations that faculty could use any way they chose. Some chose to use the documentation as evidence of scholarly growth in teaching.

When word got out that we existed, part-time faculty also began asking for services. Since TU has over 500 full-time tenure-track faculty to serve, we marketed programs to full-time, rather than part-time, faculty. In retrospect, we realized we would also have to serve the part-time faculty because they are part of our constituency.

We had to examine how we managed our time, how we kept each other informed about our own individual meetings, and how we answered the phones, referred people, and tracked data on Center usage. Our technical consultant set up an on-line data tracking system for the staff so we could document how we spent our time.

We looked at interruptions and how we got the basic work of the Center done on a daily basis. We looked at how we used student help, got out mailings, and standardized our office software. Within 15 months, we were completely networked with our own server so that we could do file sharing and printing regardless of computer platform. We bought software to track program coordination among the Center staff.

Personal Touch

Our focus shifted from looking at the number of people participating in our activities to meeting the needs of individual faculty. This meant that it was acceptable to have six faculty enroll for a workshop rather than 30. In a sense, six is a high number in that faculty had real problems or needs specific to their discipline or to a technology used. We also provided follow-up sessions with the faculty's own materials in their own offices. Making the interactions personal also developed trust and rapport between faculty and Center staff. The word spread easily and demand for services rose. We started to schedule some of the one-on-one sessions on Friday afternoons, which helped focus our energy, time, and resources.

Summary

We often joke in the Center that we have gone from zero to (Office) 98 in what seems like seconds. The speed at which the facility has grown has exceeded our expectations and our space and has put increasing demands on the professional staff. Our newest discovery is that most faculty come here for their own personal and professional development. It is tied to their intrinsic motivational needs, not the extrinsic ones the university usually rewards. That alone sends a message to our colleagues about how to reward faculty. The Center provides a place of intellectual collegiality where meaningful work is being supported. Faculty needs are being met at a completely different level than before, increasing their motivation to learn and apply new knowledge.