

IT'S A NEED TO KNOW SITUATION

A CASE STUDY OF A NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY FOR A TEACHING CENTER

Introduction

How can we ensure that our teaching centers continue to meet the needs of our teaching staff while inspiring them to be innovative, reflective and engaged? Well the first step should be to ask them!

The 2013-2014 academic year saw our Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning adapting to a new Director, a heavy administrative load and a central role in the institution's accreditation project. Concerned that we weren't meeting the core responsibility of our mission to "provide opportunities, resources and supportive communities that foster exemplary teaching, curricular innovation and professional development of the faculty", we decided to ask for help from our constituents.

This poster will present the development, analysis and application of a Needs Assessment Survey distributed to our teaching staff during Fall Semester 2014. Further, we will discuss our future assessment of the changes applied, and further plans to keep our constituents involved in the direction and improvement of our center.

Development

The first step in the development of the survey was to research other needs assessment survey efforts at similar teaching centers. By reviewing a wide range of surveys including those from the Office of Faculty & Organizational Development department at Michigan State University¹ and Kansas State University, Salina², and including input from the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs and a sampling of faculty, two main areas of focus were identified-

- Current perspective of the Center
- Future avenues of development & offerings for the Center

Current Perspective

The first goal was to identify the impact of current programs offered by the Center and any obstacle that prevented faculty from applying. To this end, a question was developed that asked faculty for their familiarity with each of our programs with the following choices -

- Participated
- Applied but did not participate
- Considered applying
- Heard of it
- Never Heard of it

For those participants that chose the option 'Considered Applying' a follow-up question was posed that asked, if the respondent was comfortable doing so, to elaborate on what factors played a part in not applying.

Future Avenues of Development

The second goal was to identify the areas of professional development that faculty would like the Center to focus on. Initial attempts at drafting this question led to unwieldy and time-consuming survey objects. In order to solicit the information we needed while also respecting the respondents' time, fifty possible topics were identified that aligned with the Center's mission and categorized into seven sections.

- Course Design
- Course Delivery
- Independent Studies
- Assessment
- Existing Technologies
- Emerging Technologies
- Beyond Teaching

Other questions included a text area for faculty to suggest their own topics for professional development, the modality in which they would like development (workshops, online content or individual consultations) and the best time to offer workshops.



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Full Survey

To view the full survey, visit the following link
<http://goo.gl/9FLVrw>



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Analysis

The survey solicited a reasonable response with about 30% of instructional staff (n=45) from a broad range of academic units participating. Participants also had a representative range of teaching experience in a variety of modalities – online, face-to-face and blended.

Current Perspective

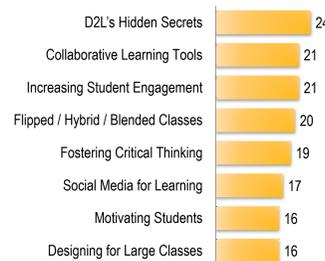
The first insight was the differing levels of recognition of existing programs. While some of the most popular programs had 100% recognition, some, even those that had seen considerable investment of time and money, had a low level of recognition. Of particular concern were the low rates of recognition of the Center's website, the Instructional Design Award and the opportunities for Individual Consultations.

The reasons submitted by those respondents that had considered applying for a program but ultimately did not, also gave us some insight into how the Center, our programs and our selection process were viewed. Some of the themes seen included -

- a lack of departmental support for non-disciplinary activities (including those that were teaching and learning centered),
- the perceptions that the programs were only open to tenure-track faculty
- difficulty finding teaching-centered development opportunities for which to apply for funding
- a belief that the selection process may be biased

Future Avenues of Development

Top Topics, All Categories



For the second section of the survey, the questions identified a broad range of topics that faculty would like addressed. While some were expected, such as D2L Hidden Secrets and Flipped/Hybrid/Blended Classes, some were more of a surprise. Faculty's interest in Social Media for Learning and Fostering Critical Thinking were far more popular than originally expected.

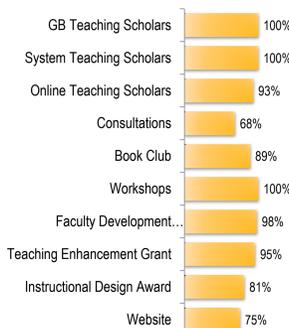
This trend continued throughout all categories, with some outlined below.

Top Topics per Category					
	Design		Delivery		Assessment
Increasing Engagement	21	Motivating Students	16	Rubrics	13
Flipped/Hybrid/Blended	20	Questioning Techniques	14	Assessment for Learning	11
Fostering Critical Thinking	19	Handling Difficult Students	12	Better MC Exams	9
Existing Tech		Emerging Tech		Beyond Teaching	
D2L Secrets	24	Tablets	14	Discussions w/Colleagues	14
Collaborative Learning	21	MOOCs	10	Avoiding Burnout	13
Social Media for Learning	17	Synchronous Online Tools	10	Writing Grant Proposals	11

The write-in comments identified a number of other suggestions from faculty including professional development on diversity issues in teaching and the importance of facilitating faculty sharing.

When it came to the modality of professional development, faculty displayed a strong preference for learning in workshop format (53%), a lesser desire for online support (36%) and there was minimal demand for individual consultations (11%). The question to identify the best workshop time was inconclusive.

Program Recognition



Application

On analysis of the survey, the Center applied a number of solutions to meet the identified needs.

Existing Program Evaluation

Working with an advisory board, the Instructional Development Council (IDC), a number of our processes and least recognized programs underwent a systematic evaluation.

- The Center's awards underwent a significant redesign to better specify guidelines for applicants and to make the individual awards better align with current institutional goals.
- The expectations for the faculty consultant position were reevaluated to include consultation opportunities for all instructional staff. The need to better promote the service to chairs, departments and faculty was also highlighted.
- All of the Center's program/grant calls now require applicants to visit the website in order to increase the visibility of this resource.
- All of the Center's program/grant calls now state that they are open to all instructional staff and that successful applicants are chosen in a blind selection by the IDC

Collaborative Blog

The realization that faculty required a broad range of professional development opportunities was initially an overwhelming prospect. To meet this need in an efficient manner, it was decided to work with other academic, staff and student organizations to launch a collaborative blog. "Teaching and Learning at UWGB", has had over two thousand visitors in three months and offers instructors a broad range of topics centered around teaching and learning. With authors from across the institution, the blog has been a time and cost effective way to meet the wide range of needs identified in the survey. To learn more about the creation of the blog, watch the presentation at <http://goo.gl/z5tbPL> or visit the link below. To visit our blog, visit <http://blog.uwgb.edu/cat/> or visit the link on the far right.



Collaborative Workshops

Working with the institution's Inclusive Excellence and Human Resources departments, the Center is co-sponsoring a series of workshops for faculty and staff that discusses a wide range of diversity issues on campus. Early pilot workshops include Understanding Anxiety from a Multicultural Perspective and a workshop on how to better understand transgender issues on campus. Ultimately, the collaborative hopes to run a self-paced online course for staff and faculty on Diversity that would include viewing the workshops either in person or online and reflecting on how it will impact their practice.

Future Application

Additional issues uncovered that the Center would like to address in the future include

- The request for informal discussions with colleagues could be addressed by facilitating Communities of Practice.
- Further diversification of the topics covered on the blog will be necessary to ensure that it continues to meet the requests of the faculty. Future articles on the blog will focus on the topics in the table 'Top Topics, All Categories'.
- In direct response to faculty suggestions, a future section of the website will promote off-campus, teaching-related professional development opportunities.

Conclusion

The process of developing, analyzing and applying the survey has helped our Center from a number of perspectives.

- It has given the Center valuable insights to consider while reflecting on the mission and future of the department under a new Director.
- It has supported funding requests to administration in order to meet documented faculty needs.
- It has helped the Center critically evaluate current offerings and future opportunities to ensure that they are meeting the needs of our primary constituents.

It is hoped to resurveying faculty on a biannual basis to continue the growth and reflection that the exercise has prompted.

References

1. <http://fod.msu.edu/sites/default/files/faculty-sample.pdf>
2. <http://www.sal.ksu.edu/faculty/pleite/010807PreliminReportFacNeedsAssessm.pdf>