



# Faculty Development and Initiatives at Salt Lake Community College

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## Institutional Effectiveness

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## Introduction

Almost a year ago, Vice President Barbara Grover asked me to be interim Director of Faculty Development and charged me with rethinking the position and its work at SLCC. In what follows, I attempt to briefly describe the current state of faculty development at the College, identify challenges, and then provide a set of recommendations.

Recently, attempts have been made to better organize faculty development opportunities in the form of a catalog and semester-by-semester schedule. The catalog represents an initial attempt to shed light on the state of faculty development at Salt Lake Community College. It shows us what we are doing, but it also reveals gaps, misaligned efforts, and a lack of coordination. What it has most revealed is a lack of a framework. While it is a start, a staple binding and glossy paper do not a professional development strategy make.

## The Challenge of Faculty Development at SLCC

A good portion of faculty development is invisible to the College at large. It happens within departments in the form of specialized journals, discipline-specific conferences, and department-level trainings. We should neither lament nor try to change this fact. Disciplines matter. But the College also has a stake in a faculty member's development more broadly.

In terms of more centralized development, the College's efforts have historically been small, decentralized, and voluntary. Faculty who have engaged in more college-wide faculty development activities have done so out of an intrinsic desire to improve their teaching. It is not clear how these activities contribute to one's professional advancement at the institution. We have had faculty achieve tenure who have consistently and visibly engaged with various development activities. We also have tenured faculty who have never attended a college-wide professional development event. That's a problem. That being said, we should recognize that key changes and initiatives at the College were driven by the then FTLC. Assessment, ePortfolio, and distance education all began under the leadership of previous FTLC Directors.

Finally, faculty development at SLCC has been an event-driven affair. I label this approach to development the event fallacy. We need to move beyond thinking about development in terms of events and conceive of professional development as a process that takes place over time. Understood in this way, many current activities faculty already engage in begin to look like professional development. When faculty work with eLearning on a course redesign project, that is

professional development. When faculty endeavor to construct a new assessment approach in partnership with Tom Zane, that is a form of professional development.

As we enter into a phase of elevated expectations around professional development for faculty, SLCC needs to do its part in providing relevant development opportunities so faculty can meet those new expectations. Doing so will require the College to focus on three challenges:

1. Developing a system of faculty development

In addition to the decentralized state of faculty development, it is not clear to faculty nor academic administrators what counts. We do not, in other words, have a system of value when it comes to development. We will be challenged to get beyond the ad hoc nature of faculty development until we have a system whereby development activities have a kind of currency: development must count toward a faculty member's professional advancement. In partnership with academic administration, we must construct a clear framework by which development activities are recognized in a relatively consistent and uniform way across the institution.

2. Reaching adjuncts

SLCC currently has no centralized plan for onboarding and training adjuncts. For the first time this fall, the office of Faculty Development piloted a small orientation. While we were pleased with our initial effort, it is clearly not enough. The majority of our instruction at this institution is performed by adjunct instructors, yet we have no system in place for orienting, supporting, and training those adjuncts. Some departments do a relatively decent job of supporting adjuncts. Others do almost nothing. Adjuncts show up in an ad hoc fashion to Faculty Development-sponsored events and trainings. What if all new adjunct hires were required to take a module entitled "Introduction to Teaching at SLCC"? What if a certain number of professional development hours were simply included in an adjunct contract, thereby liberating us from our cumbersome registration and approval system? What if adjuncts didn't have to ask permission to develop themselves?

3. Scale: reaching many faculty across different campuses

With two full-time and two-part time staff, the office of faculty development is challenged when it comes to meeting the needs of 360 full-time faculty and 1100 adjuncts. Whenever we schedule offerings, we receive feedback from at least some faculty that the date and time

are wrong or that we should be on a different campus. One potential answer is eLearning professional development offerings. We have begun to provide more organized offerings inside Magna Commons, an online faculty development platform. We are also exploring recording more of our professional development offerings so people on other campuses can access them. Ultimately, we need to think about additional staff and/or engaging faculty fellows or other areas of expertise across our various campuses.

Ultimately, the challenge of faculty development can be boiled down to this simple question: will the office provide relevant, engaging development opportunities? And will those offerings have value within the rest of the College?

## Recommendations and Resources

For something to have value within the institution, there has to be some consensus about our goals. In what follows, I talk about the appropriate focus for development and the resources needed for faculty development to flourish at SLCC.

### Focus: What does it mean to be an SLCC educator?

We need to answer the following question: What does it mean to be an SLCC educator? Without a clear and compelling statement that describes the knowledge and skills of an SLCC educator, we cannot focus our efforts. Instead, we will be stuck in our current pattern: many different areas across the College doing many different things with little to no coordination and almost no shared understanding about how these activities contribute to the shared work of the College. So how do we construct teaching as a shared endeavor at SLCC? No matter the discipline, what do we want our professors to know and to do? Four relatively obvious areas of focus come to mind:

1. The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: All SLCC faculty should have at least a functional literacy in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). They should be able to explain their approach to teaching and anchor that explanation in existing educational scholarship. Every year, faculty should be reading in the current literature on student learning and effective teaching. And they should be actively translating that research into their own classroom practice.
  - a. Competency: An SLCC faculty member can explain his or her approach to teaching and anchor that explanation in SoTL.

2. Technology: Teaching, whether purely online or so-called “traditional” instruction, is increasingly mediated by technology. We are all using learning management systems, courseware, and classroom engagement and lecture capture technologies. Faculty are also increasingly challenged to think about the accessibility of learning resources. All SLCC teachers now need to become fluent in the current and emerging instructional technologies. Faculty need to make conscious decisions about technology, and those decisions should be supported by SoTL.
  - a. Competency: An SLCC faculty member uses our LMS, our ePortfolio platform, and basic classroom technology, and she should be familiar with active learning technologies.
  
3. Diversity/Inclusivity: SLCC is an open-access institution with an increasingly diverse student body. That reality has to influence our shared approach to teaching. Faculty should, therefore, understand the community college. What kind of institutions are community colleges? What is their history? And how does that history influence the present? And who are our students? Alongside the scholarship of teaching and learning, there is research around working with underprepared or ELL or first-generation students.
  - a. Competency: An SLCC faculty member understands and can talk about student diversity. He or she can connect his or her teaching to some theory of retention/student success (i.e. scholarship beyond SoTL).
  
4. Educational Initiatives: SLCC can also do more to use professional development as a mechanism for forwarding initiatives, influencing culture, and working toward strategic goals. If, for instance, the College is interested in developing greater awareness and expertise among faculty around issues of diversity and inclusivity, then faculty development has to play a role. Initiatives represent the bleeding edge of development. They tell us where we need to start providing development opportunities two, three, four years from now. They are on the horizon of institutional development. Recall that our most relevant and far-reaching educational initiative came out of the then FTLC—our General Education ePortfolio requirement. I am, therefore, recommending that Educational Initiatives and Faculty Development be collapsed back into one position.

- a. Competency: the best SLCC faculty (full professors) are pushing the institution to take risks, adopt new approaches, to rethink our assumptions.

### Resources Needed

In addition to the above recommendations around areas of focus and integration of effort, I am recommending Faculty Development and the College reallocate resources in order to make the following possible. Mostly this will involve salary savings from combining two Director-level positions (Initiatives and Development) and folding two or more part-time positions into a full-time position.

1. Full-time Faculty Development coordinator. The work of helping envision, coordinate, schedule, and market the various faculty development opportunities is a full-time job. Right now it is being put on the back on a part-time operations associate.
2. Full-time Educational Initiatives coordinator. SLCC now runs one of the largest OER initiative in the country. That initiative is being led by me and supported by one part-time operations associate. It needs help. Other OER initiatives at places like Maricopa have full-time Directors and Assistant Directors. At the very least, SLCC needs a full-time OER coordinator to help manage the initiative.
3. Faculty Teaching Fellows. The office of Faculty Development would like to issue a call each year for Faculty Development Fellows. These fellows would propose projects for engaging faculty in SoTL projects. They would also help the office of Faculty Development connect with multiple sites and locations.
4. Certificate in Community College Teaching and Leadership. In partnership with Staff Develop, we are proposing a Certificate program in partnership with the University of Utah Educational Leadership and Policy Program. This would be a 15 credit certificate. We plan on subsidizing approximately 6 spots a year by combining our tuition reimbursement and providing money for scholarships. We propose moving the C.A.L.M money toward this effort.

## Conclusion

Effective instruction that engages our students and serves the mission has to be at the center of any strategy or plan around student retention and completion. Community colleges, more

so than other institutions, are ideally positioned to influence instruction, to have teaching speak to the mission, vision, and values.

I describe my own journey as a professor at SLCC in this way. I started as an English professor with strong disciplinary identity. I was also a member of the School of Humanities. And I suppose I was an employee of SLCC. Without losing my disciplinary affiliation, I increasingly began to identify as a community college instructor. I slowly understood that I work for a special kind of institution with a transformative mission. I increasingly appreciated that my work inside the classroom served a larger goal outside the boundaries of English 1010 or 2010. That increased understanding was both technical and cultural. It grew from an improved knowledge of General Education and my discipline's role within it. And it was brought about by greater use of tools like the ePortfolio that grounded General Education in technical practices like having students upload signature assignments. In other words, my own professional development journey improved my work at the College. We need to figure out how to make this happen for every SLCC faculty member. Their journey is our journey.

## Appendix: List of Recommendations and Resource Requests

### Recommendations

1. Combine the positions of Director of Educational Initiatives and Faculty Development.
2. In dialogue with academic administration and faculty leadership, create a framework for faculty development at SLCC focused around an answer to the question: What does it mean to be an SLCC educator?
3. Work on including professional development in the adjunct contract. Liberate Associate Deans from tracking hours and free Faculty Development from our home grown registration system.
4. Move from an event and workshop model of faculty development to a process model whereby projects that take place over time count as professional development.
5. Combine or better coordinate Faculty Development with Faculty Support, Instructional Design, and Learning Advancement.

### Resource / Reallocation Requests

1. Full-time Faculty Development Coordinator
2. Educational Initiatives Coordinator
3. Certificate in Community College Teaching and Leadership
4. Faculty Development Teaching Fellows