Launching or Revitalizing a Teaching Center: Principles and Portraits of Practice

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Some teaching centers flounder while others flourish. This paper provides concrete suggestions for launching or revitalizing a teaching center, drawn from the experiences of these authors and from principles in the literature. Two center directors worked to apply the principles in the literature to their newly launched or revitalized centers. One of the authors (Tara) was placed in charge of a floundering center. Dramatic changes transformed it from a “forgotten unit” to a flourishing center. The other author (Susan) launched a new center, which is well on its way to playing a central role in university life.

A small body of literature outlines principles for building and sustaining a successful teaching center. Certainly, to successfully launch or revitalize a center, directors and other staff must consider these principles. In some cases, however, even thoughtful consideration of these principles can still leave a director with a murky sense of where to begin. It is not always clear how best to make the principles concrete for a specific campus. In these cases, specific information or examples (e.g., about funding) are needed. This paper is designed to provide examples of how to apply principles of good practice by describing how the two authors applied the principles to their centers.

What are the principles put forth in the literature? Organize the center’s work around clearly defined goals and situate the center’s work appropriately in the institutional context (Ambrose, 1995; Diamond, 1984; Fidelere & Sorcinelli, 1992; Nemko & Simpson, 1991; Nyquist, 1986; Sorcinelli, 2002). Acquire the resources necessary to make faculty development possible (Sorcinelli). Then, using the available resources, start slowly and lead with strengths (Ambrose; Sorcinelli). Offering a few high-quality programs allows a new center to establish the value of its work from the start. Create buy-in from faculty and key university personnel (Ambrose; Diamond; Fidelere & Sorcinelli; Nemko & Simpson; Sorcinelli). This builds credibility and predisposes faculty to participate in programs that the center offers. Build collegiality and community (Fidelere & Sorcinelli; Gray & Conway, 2007; Nemko & Simpson; Sorcinelli) because connecting with others reduces isolation and provides opportunities for faculty to share ideas. Plan and conduct substantive assessment of the center’s work (Diamond; Nyquist; Sorcinelli). Good assessment will allow the center to communicate its successes to the larger campus community and to respond to changing institutional needs. In addition to these principles in the literature, we add one to the list. Specifically, develop a professional network beyond your home institution. Not only does such a network provide your center with new ideas, but relationships with other faculty developers will allow you to call on colleagues for support when it is needed in your work.

The authors of the paper are two center directors who have successfully built or rebuilt teaching centers at mid-sized universities, using these principles as a guide. Since 2003, Tara has directed the Teaching Academy at New Mexico State University (NMSU). NMSU is a Carnegie research-extensive, Hispanic-serving, land grant institution with 650 full-time and 700 part-time faculty members and 17,000 students on the main Las Cruces campus. The center was founded in 1980, but by 2002 it had fallen on hard times. Our president and provost rethought the center. The center was renamed the Teaching Academy and expanded from a four- to a five-person unit when a director was hired. Dramatic changes transformed it from a “forgotten unit” to a flourishing center. Almost overnight, the Teaching Academy began offering five times as many events annually, which generated nine times the level of participation. Each year, the Teaching Academy provides 10,000 hours of training to 1,000 participants. The mean level of participation is 10 hours and 50% of NMSU faculty members attend at least one event annually.

Susan is the founding director of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at Boise State University, a com-
prehensive metropolitan university currently increasing its focus on scholarship and research. Boise State enrolls 20,000 students, with 600 full-time and 400 part-time faculty members. Founded in 2006, the Boise State center has involved approximately 40% of the faculty in each of its first three years of programming. It has also played a central role in a number of campus-wide initiatives. Using the principles described above as a guide, we provide a set of concrete suggestions that can serve as a place to begin when starting or revigorating a teaching center.

Principles and Portraits of Practice

Table 1 provides a summary of the principles outlined in the literature and examples of related tasks that can be undertaken when launching or revitalizing a center.

Organize the work of your center around clearly defined goals (Ambrose, 1995; Diamond, 1984; Fidelier & Sorcinelli, 1992; Nemko & Simpson, 1991; Nyquist, 1986; Sorcinelli, 2002). It is important to have a clearly articulated mission statement and goals, as these will help to define the scope of your activities and focus your work (Diamond, p. 52). To write these short statements, there are a couple of steps you should take. First, consult mission statements and goals from other teaching centers for ideas. Second, include as many people in the writing as possible so that you will get their input as well as their buy-in.

Both Tara and Susan determined the mission and goals of their centers after getting ideas from other centers and getting input from others on campus. Tara hosted three open forums on her campus. About 20 faculty, graduate students, and staff from all over campus gathered and their ideas were forwarded to the Provost, who offered suggestions as well. This generated a better statement of mission and goals than the center staff could have created alone. The mission is: “The Teaching Academy provides training, mentoring, and networking to all NMSU educators.” The goals are “supporting teachers, enhancing learning, and building community.” During the year before the center was opened at Boise State, the mission was framed by a planning committee of faculty, with input from the Provost. The center’s mission is to “support, promote and enhance teaching effectiveness and to facilitate engagement in student learning.”

As mentioned earlier, your mission statement and goals will determine the scope of your activities. Specifically, they will determine whether your center will become a faculty development center or an instructional development center. A faculty development center helps faculty (and possibly graduate students) to perform all of their professional responsibilities; an instructional development center focuses its activities more narrowly on improving teaching and learning (Ambrose, 1995, pp. 79-80). A broad mandate, like that of the NMSU Teaching Academy, may give faculty more reasons to use the center. A more narrowly drawn mission, like that of the CTL at Boise State, means that the center will need to partner with others on campus to provide integrated support for faculty (Sorcinelli, 2002).

Situating the work of your center within your institutional context (Ambrose, 1995; Diamond, 1984; Fidelier & Sorcinelli, 1992; Nemko & Simpson, 1991; Nyquist, 1986; Sorcinelli, 2002). Successful centers are responsive to institutional culture and local needs. Aligning the work of the center with institutional priorities and faculty and administrative needs will allow the center to select programming and services that will be valued and are likely to successfully impact teaching and learning (Diamond, p. 51). This principle necessitates that you find out what your stakeholders want and need, provide programming

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that fits these needs, and address the full range of expectations for faculty at your institution.

To identify what stakeholders want and need, you may want to administer a survey, but both Tara and Susan opted to use interviews with individuals and groups, because talking to faculty and administrators can yield richer data than a paper survey (Ambrose, 1995, p. 80; Neal & Peed-Neal, 2008, p. 20). At NMSU, a task force that formed the center gave initial guidance and direction. Faculty provided additional input during the open forums that shaped the goals of the center. At Boise State, the CTL planning committee provided input prior to the center opening. After the CTL was founded, Susan met with the Dean’s Council and attended meetings of department chairs in each of the colleges. Several departments invited Susan to a departmental meeting. All of these occasions were used to gather information about how the new center could best support faculty. On each campus an advisory board was established to provide ongoing direction for the center. It is also important to note that both Susan and Tara were hired out of faculty positions on their respective campuses and each had a decade to get to know their institutional culture before launching or revitalizing their centers.

Another way to situate a center in its institutional context is to address the programming needs of your institution. When choosing programming, focus on the issues that need special attention on your campus (Diamond, 1984, p. 51). Consider information you have gathered from your needs assessment. Ask the Provost and other key people to identify important issues. For example, at NMSU the Provost requested that the Teaching Academy focus on measuring learning outcomes and on assessment in general. That year, Tara invited two experts on assessment to give workshops and arranged a handful of local workshops. At Boise State, a group of faculty, frustrated with the high incidence of plagiarism, lobbied for the adoption of a software service to monitor the use of sources in student writing. Susan used this as an opportunity to create a broader discussion about source use in student writing. A workshop was designed to demonstrate the software service and to discuss a variety of strategies for helping students to use sources properly. Offered on multiple occasions, these workshops were the most well received of those offered in the first semester of Susan’s center. A third way to situate your center within your institutional context is to offer programs that address the full range of expectations for faculty at your institution. Many teaching centers focus solely on teaching, but it can be helpful to offer at least an occasional workshop to address the full range of faculty concerns.

Put the teacher first, even if you are billed as an instructional design center. If the best teachers do not survive in the system, it will negatively impact instructional design. So start with the teacher, and address their full range of needs, including “deal-breaker” issues like time management, publishing, writing grants, and negotiating the promotion and tenure process. (Gray & Conway, 2007, p. 182)

By doing workshops on these topics, you demonstrate that your center understands the full context in which faculty work on your campus. You may attract a broader audience for this kind of workshop, which may increase the audiences for other events. Tara has hosted a series of workshops on publishing and has helped to host an annual workshop on promotion and tenure. Although Susan’s mission is more narrowly focused on teaching, Susan has also expanded the center’s reach by encouraging faculty writing circles to meet in the center’s space and by co-sponsoring programming with other units on campus.

Acquire the resources necessary to make faculty development possible (Soricelli, 2002). At least four kinds of resources are critical to the success of a center: time, staff, space, and money. You may want to consider time first, as the time available for you and your staff to facilitate programming and services will determine the scope of the center’s activities. The responsibilities of the center director will expand to fill all available time. You will be asked to be involved in all kinds of campus initiatives and committees. If it is at all possible, negotiate a teaching load that will allow you time for this involvement. Further, be cautious about making too many commitments of your time (e.g., committee assignments), at least at first. Both Tara and Susan have full-time appointments as center directors. Tara teaches one undergraduate course every 2 years and Susan teaches one course each year. Both find that teaching allows them to connect with students and maintain credibility with faculty.

Request the most staff that you can reasonably ask for, including a full-time director and at least a half-time assistant (Soricelli, 2002). In hiring staff, think about who is going to handle your Web site, or whether you will outsource it. Designing your Web site is the most technical job that your center will perform (unless you also have a participant database). It is not enough to have a “director” and an “administrative assistant” if neither can handle the Web site — unless you have a concrete plan for outsourcing it. Tara directs a six-person full-time equivalent unit. She has a graphic artist on staff who created the Web site. Another staff person (a computer programmer) is specifically devoted to the database. Susan was assigned a full-time administrative assistant, who maintains the Web site. When the Boise State CTL was founded, the campus Academic Technologies unit (staff of 19) and the Service-Learning program (staff of 3) became divisions of the
center, with the directors of each division reporting to Susan. In the CTL’s second year, an Associate Director was hired.

Lobby for adequate space. On a large campus, it might mean an office for each staff person and a good-size workshop room in your suite. A workshop room is one way to create a true “center” for teaching and learning. Also, having space is symbolic of status and legitimacy (Ambrose, 1995, p. 84; Soricinelli, 2002, p. 17). It prevents having to reserve other spaces and haul everything for every event to locations across campus. It also allows you to host a variety of gatherings, some of which may not be your own programming, which facilitates collaboration and community building on campus. The size of the workshop room is important. Try to get a room that seats at least 50 comfortably so it will handle large events as well as small ones. A 1,200-square-foot room is ideal: It does not feel too big when only a few people attend and it does not feel too small when 50 attend. Both Tara and Susan were assigned workshop spaces and adjacent staff offices. Tara was assigned a workshop room with 1,200 square feet of meeting space in an older building right in the middle of campus. Susan was assigned 1,000 square feet of new meeting space, which was under construction in the first year of her center, with larger spaces available in the student union for bigger events.

Think carefully about your budget needs and communicate with other center directors about the size of budget needed to support the organization that you want to build. Make sure that you are funded with hard money because grants demand much time and are very competitive without any guarantee of success (Soricinelli, 2002, p. 17). To get advice from other center directors about how big your budget should be, join the listserv of the faculty developer’s network, Professional Organizational Development (POD) Network, at http://www.podnetwork.org/publications/resources/mailing_list.htm. Post a question in which you ask how much money you will need to accomplish your goals.

In the early planning stages of her center Susan posted a question to the POD listserv about how big a budget like hers should be. She received several off-list responses that allowed her to defend a well-crafted budget request. Susan’s budget was planned to be phased in over several years. Initially, she was provided an operating budget of almost $50,000. She found this budget to be adequate to begin a library, offer limited travel opportunities, and bring in 3-4 outside workshop facilitators. The operating budget has now grown to over $100,000, allowing for additional funding of faculty travel as well as new programming, such as faculty learning communities.

Tara inherited an operating budget of $40,000 a year, which she found woefully inadequate on a mid-sized campus. She responded by raising more than $100,000 a year from various other units on campus, including all deans. She raised this money for 5 years before she was given an additional $75,000 of hard money on the condition that she raise no more money on campus. With this budget she can bring in seven external speakers, send four people each to two national teaching conferences, support four semester-long programs, and otherwise support her center.

Lead with strengths and begin slowly, offering a few high-quality programs (Ambrose, 1995; Soricinelli, 2002). Once your center is launched, schedule some programming but don’t overdo it (Ambrose, p. 85; Soricinelli, p. 19). Offer a few workshops presented by others, a signature workshop of your own, and consulting. Beginning with a few workshops provides visibility for your center. Workshops work well because they are community oriented, they require a limited commitment from faculty, and they plant ideas, getting participants to think about their teaching and excited about the possibilities. If you have a budget to hire external speakers, you might hire one or two and mix those programs with one or two workshops presented by your own faculty.

How much programming did Tara and Susan offer during their first semesters? In the first semester of NMSU’s Teaching Academy, Tara was able to schedule fairly extensive programming because she was moving into an established center with a staff of four. She hosted three outside facilitators and three open forums to establish the mission, goals, logo, and motto for her center; she also directed a semester-long program and presented a workshop. Tara’s associate director facilitated eight locally run workshops. In that first year, about 500 people participated in events. In its first year, the Boise State CTL hosted workshops from four outside facilitators, a few follow-up sessions, and a few locally run workshops. About 300 faculty of all ranks participated in center events.

As you plan the content of your initial programs, consider creating a signature workshop of your own. You will be invited to speak or work with various groups on campus many times and this workshop can form an important part of the reputation of your center. For example, you may want to create a general workshop that contains your very best ideas for becoming a stronger teacher. Make this workshop truly excellent; work on it until you receive participant evaluations of 6.5 on a 7.0 scale for questions that evaluate the effectiveness of the workshop. Tara developed her signature teaching workshop containing 12 ideas for improving teaching, which she easily modifies for both short and long workshops. When she has less time, she offers fewer ideas. Susan’s first workshop was on course design, offered in response to a departmental request. This allowed her to “test run” the workshop and then offer it to the campus as a whole. Rather than start from scratch, she utilized suggestions from Dee Fink’s
Creating Significant Learning Experiences. This workshop is now offered at the end of every semester.

In addition to providing workshops, volunteer to help faculty one-on-one through consulting services (e.g., by visiting a class and/or performing mid-term evaluations). Consulting is one way instructors “translate” what they have heard in workshops into application in their classes and is arguably the most important work that center staff does (Neal & Peed-Neal, 2008, p. 30). You might expect to increase consulting activity until you spend 50% of your time on it (Neal & Peed-Neal, p. 30), but it can take a long time to get a lot of clients in a consulting program. Start early with a few clients and let the word get around among faculty that this is a good thing to do. Send a flyer to the campus that publicizes your consulting services and makes it clear that these services are confidential. Personally invite each new faculty member to try consulting (personal communication, Mary Deane Sorcinelli, August 1, 2007). If your campus does not use a nationally normed evaluation, consider paying for faculty to use the IDEA evaluation or some other such evaluation tool. Then schedule appointments for them to meet with you and discuss it. During these appointments, ask whether they would like for you to come to their classes for an observation.

Tara and Susan approached launching consulting programs on their campuses differently. Tara was cautious about offering consulting services and mid-term evaluations: She waited until the third year to start publicizing them because she worried that the center might be overwhelmed by a large number of requests. Looking back, she could have offered these services from the second semester because only a handful of people responded to the initial publicity. She developed her first serious cohort of clients when she introduced the IDEA evaluation on her campus and invited each client to have her visit his or her class and interview the students. Susan offered limited consultation services in the first semester of her center. She made herself available for classroom observations and SGIDs (mid-term evaluations). Only a half dozen instructors took advantage of the opportunities, so the number was not overwhelming. Instructors and department chairs were clearly appreciative that the services were available. Discussing the services with people across campus, especially with administrators, quickly made it clear that the center was offering something new and of value. The confidentiality of the consultations allowed Susan to communicate that the center’s mission is to support faculty development, not to make summative evaluations of faculty teaching.

Create faculty and administrative buy-in for your center (Ambrose, 1995: Diamond, 1984; Fidelner & Sorcinelli, 1992; Nemko & Simpson, 1991; Sorcinelli, 2002). Buy-in is very important for a new center (Ambrose, p. 79), both before and after the center opens. Some of the most effective ways to create buy-in have already been described. Conducting a needs assessment provides the opportunity to be responsive to the campus community. Programming that responds to local needs will further help to underscore the relevance of your center. You also get buy-in when you talk to campus leaders about the center, publicize center events, host a grand opening, and launch a Web site.

Get your center’s story out by talking with campus leaders. Be proactive in helping people to understand your center, its programming, and the role that it will play on your campus. Prepare a short (less than 10-minute) explanation of the center’s mission and how participation will benefit colleges and departments. Arrange to meet with the Provost and other key administrators (deans and department chairs) so you can share your ideas. Use these opportunities to get input from them (Ambrose, 1995, p. 80). Further, invite campus leaders to key events at your center, so they can see your work for themselves. This will begin the process of getting buy-in from the key players on your campus from whom faculty “take their cues” (Ambrose, p. 83).

Both Tara and Susan speak regularly to campus leaders about their centers. Tara has spoken at the Associate Deans Council and the Deans Council several times over the past few years. Annually in June she meets individually with each dean. During her fourth summer as director she met individually with over 50 department heads. Susan spoke at the Deans’ Council and chairs meetings in each of the colleges of her institution during the first year of her center. Since then, she has connected informally with deans and other administrators at campus events. Both Tara and Susan meet with new department chairs each summer. These meetings are an excellent way of “getting the word out” about the center.

Another way to get the word out about your center is to publicize center programming (Gray & Conway, 2007, p. 183; Holton 2002). Think carefully about how to reach faculty on your campus. To what kinds of communication are they most likely to pay attention? What frequency of communication is useful but not annoying? For workshops, consider publicizing each event multiple times (Gray & Conway, p. 183). Experiment with various combinations of e-mails and flyers. For the first several years in her center, Tara publicized each event with an “overview” flyer listing all events for the semester, as well as a flyer and an e-mail featuring each individual event. The overview flyer is sent before the semester starts so that faculty can make arrangements to attend the workshops in which they are most interested. Now that Tara’s center has established its reputation on campus, she publicizes each individual event via e-mail to limit the paper resources her center consumes. In addition to an overview flyer sent in August, Susan sends out a flyer each month describing events happening at the center and uses the campus Web-
based newsletter to highlight some events. Faculty are reminded of selected events or programs via an e-mail message from the Provost. Both Tara and Susan send a reminder e-mail to all those who have registered for an event.

Yet another important way to let people know about your center is to host a grand opening. This provides an opportunity to build community and to acquaint the campus with your programs and services (Gray & Conway, 2007, p. 181). Invite a speaker to give a short address and host a reception. Depending on your budget, the speaker could be from outside the university or could be a well-respected faculty member or administrator. As the speaker at her grand opening, Tara featured Charles Glassick of the Carnegie foundation, co-author (with Ernest Boyer) of Scholarship Assessed and Scholarship Reconsidered. The keynote address was followed by a progressive dinner so people moved through three rooms to get their full dinner. In the second year of the Boise State CTL, Susan held an afternoon reception in conjunction with the grand opening of the building in which the CTL is now housed. In addition to a number of short speeches, her staff helped to give tours of the unique spaces in the building, including the center’s new space.

A fourth way to get the word out about your center is to launch a Web site. As you’re starting, develop a simple, streamlined site that is easy to navigate. Think “less is more” as you design it. Think about what you want your site to do for visitors and for your center. You already know what your site and center provides and can do, but it’s not likely that visitors to your site know this until they have visited it several times. So, think about what visitors to your site are most likely to be searching for and how they might search for what they need, and make those things easy to find and easy to use. Build a navigation tool that prioritizes the functions of your site, groups similar functions, makes the most frequently used functions most prominent, and supplies appropriate links to parent and child organizational units. Make the navigation links available on every page of the site to make it easy to get around in the site.

Both Tara and Susan launched new Web sites soon after their opening or re-opening. Tara inherited a skeletal site but launched a new site within 18 months of reopening her center (http://www.teaching.nmsu.edu). Her center used institutional templates (preformatted Web pages) to simplify the site design. At Boise State, Susan worked with staff from the CTL Academic Technologies division to design and launch a new Web site within the first semester of the CTL opening (http://ctl.boisestate.edu).

Build collegiality and community into your center programming (Fideler & Sorcinelli, 1992; Gray & Conway, 2007; Nemko & Simpson, 1991; Sorcinelli, 2002). The opportunity to connect with faculty outside one’s department provides some faculty with a strong incentive to attend center events. Further, some of the best faculty development occurs when peers share ideas. Some of the ways in which centers can encourage such community building have already been described. In addition, both Tara and Susan sponsor programming aimed at building community, including a celebration of teaching, off-campus teaching conferences or institutes, and ongoing programming on campus.

Both Tara and Susan provide programs designed to build community, including an end-of-year celebration of teaching that brings faculty and administrators together. At NMSU this is the event that recognizes those who have become members of the Teaching Academy that year. At Boise State this event features a faculty speaker and celebrates the accomplishments of center participants and teaching award winners. In another effort to build community, both Tara and Susan fund faculty to travel together to teaching conferences and institutes. Off-campus conferences and institutes provide the opportunity for faculty to get to know one another away from their campus routines and can produce very strong connections that continue to be cultivated once the event is over. Finally, both Tara and Susan offer ongoing programs that build community. These include writing groups, faculty learning communities, writing-across-the-curriculum institutes, and short courses of 5 to 15 weeks duration.

Assess your work from the beginning (Diamond, 1984; Neal & Peed-Neal, 2008; Nyquist, 1986; Sorcinelli, 2002). Good assessment will provide information that you can use to improve what your center is doing as it matures. It will also allow you to help others understand the ways in which you contribute to teaching and learning on your campus. Start with good record keeping and expand the ways in which you assess your work as your center grows (Neal & Peed-Neal, p. 29). The most basic form of assessment requires keeping records of who participates in your programs, how much they participate, and how satisfied they are with the programs.

Both Tara and Susan keep records of participation using a database. Tara’s database provides a record of who participates in what events and how often each person participates. It allows her to know how many training hours the center is providing and to send data to deans and department heads about how much their faculty and graduate students are participating. Finally, it enables her to send each participant’s records to that person at the end of the year (instead of giving individual certificates after each event). When the Boise State CTL was founded, Susan’s Academic Technologies unit already had a database registration system for workshops. The database was modified to track participation statistics and generate various reports.

To properly assess your programs, you will also want to find out how satisfied participants are with each event.
and with the program as a whole. To do this, you may want to evaluate each event by asking questions with a Likert-type response scale, such as, “The time I invested in this workshop was well-spent.” “I would recommend this workshop to a colleague,” and “I will apply the information I learned in this workshop.” After a few years you may also want to perform an impact study, which asks participants how much they think the center has impacted teaching and learning. An impact survey can provide data to demonstrate that your center is successful.

Both Tara and Susan conduct Likert-scale evaluations after every workshop. After 3 years, Tara conducted an impact survey using the online tool Survey Monkey™. She surveyed 415 past or present NMSU Teaching Academy members (members have attended at least 10 hours of events in 1 year). By keeping the survey short and by having a drawing for an iPod, Tara attained a very high response rate (62%, n = 259). Eighty-nine percent of respondents agreed with the statement, “Based on my experiences with the NMSU Teaching Academy, I have made positive changes in my teaching.” Eighty percent agreed with the statement, “Based on my experiences with the NMSU Teaching Academy, I have observed positive changes in my students’ learning.” The survey also elicited a wealth of comments about the value of the teaching center.

Develop a professional network beyond your institution. Networking will allow you to access resources beyond your institution. You may be able to network locally or regionally if you are fortunate enough to live in an area with multiple centers at other institutions. However, you will not want to miss the rich resources provided by the POD, the faculty development organization for North America (see http://www.podnetwork.org/). The POD network is a collaborative community in which members regularly go out of their way to help each other. Engaging with POD resources and people will be invaluable in getting your center off to a successful start. First, join the POD listserv (see http://listserv.nd.edu/archives/pod.html), which will provide you with concrete answers to posted questions. (Eventually, you will have your own question to post). Second, attend the POD conference, held each fall. In addition, attend the POD-sponsored International Institute for New Faculty Developers (IINFID), which occurs in June of odd-numbered years (see http://www.iinfid.org). Both conferences provide a wealth of information about how to start and sustain a center, as well as personal contacts that can be invaluable as your center’s work gets under way.

Both Tara and Susan have found POD resources and relationships to have a significant impact on the work in their centers. Both attended the POD Network conference for several years before launching or revitalizing their centers. Tara’s travel was funded by the existing center on her campus and Susan’s travel was funded by the Provost’s office. Learning about how other centers and center directors organize their work was essential in preparing to discuss their center’s mission and goals. Susan attended the IINFID after 1 year as a center director and found it especially helpful for her own professional growth as a faculty developer. Both Tara and Susan regularly post feedback questions to the listserv and receive rich answers. Tara’s most recent post was about how to conduct a needs assessment. In response to the post, a half-dozen faculty developers sent a needs assessment instrument.

In addition, the professional relationships Tara and Susan have made through the POD Network are rewarding; such relationships provide another mechanism by which you can benefit from the experience of other professionals. For example, in the second year of Susan’s center, in order to gain some insight into how to structure a faculty developer search, Susan contacted several people she had met at POD meetings whom she knew had recently hired a colleague in their center. These discussions provided Susan with some very helpful ideas for framing her search for an Associate Director.

Conclusion

The portraits of practice described here grew out of the “to do” list (Table 1) that, in turn, emerged from consideration of the principles in the literature that guide successful centers. Applying these ideas will help new centers to offer substantive opportunities for instructors to engage in improvement or innovation and will generate a “buzz” about what the center is doing. The response to initial offerings can provide a new director with important feedback about what resonates on his or her campus, allowing the center to evolve based on local needs, challenges and opportunities.

References


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