

Bringing Faculty Learning Communities to Prescott

Sponsored by Your Center for Teaching & Learning Excellence

Dina M. Battaglia, Ph.D., Director

***“The most valuable resource that all teachers have is each other.
Without collaboration our growth is limited to our own perspectives.” Robert John Meehan***



TAKING LEARNING TO NEW HEIGHTS

WHAT ARE FACULTY LEARNING COMMUNITIES?

A *faculty learning community* (FLC) is a group of trans-disciplinary faculty working together in groups of 8 to 12 (no less than six). Each FLC engages in an active, collaborative, year long program with the goal of enhancing teaching and learning. Participants in FLC's may select projects that allow for 1) experimenting with teaching innovations, 2) assessing resulting student learning, and 3) concluding with the development of a conference poster to be presented at the annual *CTLE FLC Forum* during the spring semester as well as a regional or national conference.

Evidence shows that FLCs increase faculty interest in teaching and learning, and provide safety and support for faculty to investigate, attempt, assess, and adopt new (to them) teaching and learning methods.

There are two types of faculty learning communities: *cohort-based* and *topic-based*. Descriptions and details for each type of FLC are provided below.

COHORT-BASED LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Cohort-based learning communities address the teaching, learning, and developmental needs of an important cohort of faculty that has been particularly affected by the isolation, fragmentation, stress, neglect, or chilly climate in the academy. The curriculum of such a year long community is shaped by the participants to include a broad range of teaching and learning areas and topics of interest to them. These communities will make a positive impact on the culture of the institution over the years. Examples of cohort-based communities are those for first-year faculty, junior faculty (which may include first-year faculty), mid-career faculty, senior faculty, and department chairs. *This year, first-year faculty are invited to participate in a Learner Centered Teaching learning community facilitated by Dina M. Battaglia, Ph.D.*

TOPIC-BASED LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Each **topic-based learning community** designs a curriculum to address a special campus or divisional teaching and learning need, issue, or opportunity. These FLCs offer membership to and provide opportunities for learning across all faculty ranks, cohorts, and professional staff. Members focus on a specific theme, and once decided, propose topics for study to the FLC Program Director via email, (battagd1@erau.edu, Dina M. Battaglia, Ph.D.). A particular topic-based faculty learning community may end when the campus-wide teaching opportunity or issue of concern has been satisfactorily explored and addressed. This year, some topic-based learning communities I suggest (but are not limited to) include:

- Pedagogical Benefits of Classroom Capture (for Swivl and/or Echo 360 users)
- Active Learning Strategies
- The Impact of Significant Learning Course Design on Student Motivation

FLC MEMBER EXPECTATIONS & COMMITMENTS

FLCs meet once or twice a month for a period of at least six months; have voluntary membership; meet at a designated time and in an environment conducive to learning; employ the Kolb (1984) experiential learning cycle; develop empathy among members; operate by consensus, not majority; develop their own culture, openness, and trust; engage complex problems; energize and empower participants; have the potential of transforming institutions into learning organizations; and are holistic in approach. FLCs differ from other more informal types of faculty working groups (e.g., book clubs, teaching circles, brown bag seminars, etc.) because of the emphasis on community, scholarly teaching, and the *scholarship of teaching and learning*.

Faculty learning communities emphasize the team aspect of working together and on the ultimate beneficiaries of the program: the students in the participants' courses (Cox & Sorenson, 1999). Faculty learning communities, while including the efficiency of getting things done, have more *focus on the social aspects of building community*. For example, FLCs may partake in off-campus retreats and conferences, a dinner or gathering during the year that may include spouses or partners, and regularly scheduled meetings may take place off-campus at a coffee house or restaurant. An FLC is truly a special kind of "community of practice" (Wenger, 1998).

NEXT STEPS...WHERE TO BEGIN

If interested in participating in a FLC this year, I encourage you to begin conversations with colleagues across campus that share your interests in the study of teaching and learning. Once you have identified **at least six members** interested in learning more about a particular topic related to teaching and learning, or matters pertaining to faculty development specific to a particular cohort, please have one member of the proposed FLC email me the following information (battagd1@erau.edu):

1. First and last names of each FLC member
2. Members' college and department affiliation
3. Members' faculty rank/staff position title
4. Proposed topic of study/FLC theme
5. Members' availability to attend the FLC "Kick-Off" Gathering at CTLE on **September 15th from 4:15pm – 5:15pm, RASC 1, Room 103**

PLANNING AHEAD

Once you and your fellow FLC members have decided upon a topic that has been approved by the FLC Program Director (Dina M. Battaglia, Ph.D.), I encourage you to begin thinking about the following upcoming tasks:

- ⇒ Each community member selects one course he or she is teaching in the upcoming term to be a "focus course" for the FLC project
- ⇒ Each participant searches for and reads articles to inform his or her teaching and learning in the focus course and FLC project
- ⇒ Each individual designs and writes a description of his or her teaching and learning project specific to the said course selected
- ⇒ Each individual prepares an initial learning plan, placing his or her teaching and learning project in context with other FLC components and activities

Specifics pertaining to the above aspects of the FLC professional development project will be discussed in detail at the **FLC Kick-Off Gathering on September 15th**.

REFERENCES

Cox, M. D., & Sorenson, D. L. (1999). Student collaboration in faculty development: Connecting directly to the learning revolution. *To Improve the Academy*, 18, 97-127.

Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential learning*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Information included in this FLC Initial Call was adapted from Dr. Milton Cox, whom many refer to as the "father of FLCs" (adapted from <http://www.units.miamioh.edu/flc/whatis.php>)