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Faculty development initiatives offered by Centers of Teaching and Learning

Dilmeire Sant'anna Ramos Vosgerau¹

*Graduate Program of Education, Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná
Imaculada Conceição Street 1155
Curitiba, Brazil*

Lincon Venancio Bilibio²

*Department of Economics, Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná
Imaculada Conceição Street 1155
Curitiba, Brazil*

Abstract

Establishing a Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) is one of the ways a higher education institution can signal its commitment to faculty development. We investigated 23 of the best teaching universities in the world to identify the faculty development initiatives offered by their CTLs in a qualitative, exploratory study. The data from the institutional websites of the CTLs was analyzed in ATLAS.ti using cycles of coding. The analysis yielded not only a list of the initiatives, but also a four-dimensional model of how CTLs operate. We propose that CTLs have an attitude dimension, a subject dimension, a delivery dimension, and an administrative dimension. Framing CTLs in such a way can help institutions to establish or enhance their own CTLs in a way that considers their own capabilities and weaknesses, and therefore prepare for the future.

1 Introduction

Faculty development grounds pedagogical work and contributes to the quality of the educational process (Zabalza, 2004). As such, it should not be seen as a responsibility of faculty only, but rather of the educational institution as a whole. The pedagogical work done by faculty is a collective – and not a solitary – endeavor which needs to be developed. It is up to both the institution and faculty members to work together to ensure this development occurs.

One way a higher education institution can show its commitment to faculty development is by establishing a Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). By doing so, the institution gives voice to the collective endeavor of faculty development and materializes that commitment through actions, resources, and conditions that enable it.

Some of the actions performed by CTLs constitute the process known as *pedagogical support*, which should function “[...] always through inquiry and intervention, culminating in the production and advancement of knowledge [...]” (de Souza, 2010), and ultimately connect to teaching. It involves inquiry into the practice of teaching as a premise to improve professional quality (Mayor Ruiz, 2007; Sánchez Moreno, 2008).

Inquiry into teaching as a way to produce and advance pedagogical knowledge was proposed by Boyer (1990) in his seminal redefinition of scholarship. What he initially proposed as a

¹ dilmeirerv@gmail.com

² lincon.bilibio@gmail.com

scholarship of teaching was later reviewed to include inquiry into learning (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999), coining the concept of *scholarship of teaching and learning* (SoTL) that is commonplace in academia today.

Certain that creating a CTL is an important step for future-ready universities, we set out to identify faculty development initiatives offered by established CTLs at the best teaching universities in the world.

2 Methodology

The methodological design of our research is shown in Table 1 below.

RESEARCH CHARACTERISTICS			
What faculty development initiatives are offered by established CTLs?			
Qualitative approach	Exploratory method	Pragmatic worldview	
CTL data collection			
25 best teaching universities (Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2019)	➔ Identification of CTL websites	➔ Collection of 8 data points (website institutional texts)	➔ Data spreadsheet
Data analysis – Coding cycles in ATLAS.ti (Saldaña, 2013)			
Eclectic coding (provisional coding from theoretical framework + descriptive coding emerging from data)	➔ Subcoding on codes grounded in too many quotations	➔ Identification of four dimensions of CTLs (researcher inference)	➔ Code mapping into the four dimensions

Table 1: Methodological design of the research

2.1 Data collection

We used the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2019 to identify the 25 best teaching universities in the world. 22 of them had readily identifiable CTL websites. Eight data points were collected from these websites. Three came directly from institutional texts and were the data proper used in the analysis: mission, objectives, and activities. The collection of these data proved challenging because they were not neatly organized in these categories on the websites, and some texts were repeated across multiple collected pages. The five remaining data points were demographic: university name, country, CTL name, affiliation, foundation date, website, and access date. The data were organized in a spreadsheet to be imported into the qualitative analysis software ATLAS.ti.

2.2 Data analysis

In analyzing the data, we primarily drew from our theoretical framework of SoTL. We created 18 provisional codes *a priori* involving three papers that described characteristics of SoTL (Huber, 2001; Kreber, 2002; Rice, 1992). Whenever we encountered identifiable CTL activities that were not in the theoretical framework (such as *offering consultations*), we created new descriptive codes. Occasionally, we also found themes that were common to many CTLs, but were not activities by themselves, such as references to *inclusive teaching*. We also coded these themes descriptively.

In our analysis, we identified that some codes shared certain characteristics. For example, *pedagogical knowledge* and *assessment* were codes that described subjects taught by CTLs, whereas *consultations* and *courses* described ways CTLs interacted with their target audiences. Through inductive reasoning, we proposed that our codes could be grouped in four dimensions: the subjects being taught, the ways of delivering these subjects, the intended

results and attitudes to be fostered, and the administrative tools the CTL had available to articulate its programs. Finally, we mapped all of our codes into these four broad dimensions.

3 Results

The primary result of our research was identification of the faculty development activities offered by the CTLs. Due to analysis technique, we were able to achieve a secondary result in identifying a four-dimensional model to support the establishment of a CTL. As this model contains the primary result – which comprises what we called the *delivery dimension* – we will present them together.

3.1 Four-dimensional model of CTLs

Our model is made of: (1) a *Subject Dimension*, which can best be described by the content subjects of faculty development or by the interaction faculty–student; (2) a *Delivery Dimension*, which refers to the channels the CTL uses to reach its target audiences, the interaction CTL–faculty; (3) an *Attitude Dimension*, which comprises the attitudes the CTL projects to and tries to foster within the university; and (4) an *Administrative Dimension*, which comprises the tools and mechanisms a CTL has to advance its goals. It can also be described by the participation of an external (out-of-university) agent, either in funding or regulation. Table 2 presents all the codes in the final iteration of analysis, mapped to each dimension, ordered by the number of CTLs that exhibited them.

SUBJECT DIMENSION		#	ADMINISTRATIVE DIMENSION		#
Pedagogical knowledge		20	Providing grants and funding		11
Curriculum development		17	Articulating education strategy		8
Assessment		14	Awarding prizes		4
Instructional technology		11	Participating in national projects		1
Professional development		9			
Learner-centered approaches		8			
Pedagogical content knowledge		7			
Student engagement strategies		5	ATTITUDE DIMENSION		#
Online activities for students		5	Teaching excellence		14
Faculty recording of teaching and learning		3	Fostering innovation		13
Feedback		2	Being guided by evidence		12
DELIVERY DIMENSION		#	Inquiry into learning		12
Consultations		17	SoTL		9
Programs and courses (no credit)		13	Inclusive teaching		8
Workshops		12	Multi-disciplinary knowledge		7
Events		11	Novel resources for students		7
Giving feedback to educators		8	Reflection on teaching and learning		7
Developing instructional technology		6	Creating physical spaces for sharing		7
Credit-bearing courses		6	Supporting faculty experimentation		6
In-class observations		5	Supporting MOOCs		6
CTL recording of teaching and learning		5	Collaboration		6
Documenting innovation		4	Communities of practice		6
Confidential consultations		3	Supporting presentations		5
Pre-term orientation		3	Supporting publications		5
Web activities for faculty		3	Affirming a commitment to sharing		5
Media production		3	Valuing good teaching		3
Video recording		2	Acknowledging staff diversity		3
Open classes		1	Showcasing good teaching		2
Theater		1	Teaching expertise		2
Tutoring students		1	Acknowledging university particularities		2

Table 2: Number of CTLs per type of initiative offered, mapped to a four-dimensional model

3.2 Relationship between SoTL and the age of the CTL

We managed to identify characterizations of SoTL in the data of nine CTLs, despite the University of Michigan's CTLs being the only one that explicitly uses the words *scholarship of teaching and learning* on their website. Out of the nine centers that proposed SoTL as a faculty development initiative, six had been established more than 8 years prior to the data collection (2011 being the latest foundation date), and only one was less than 5 years old.

4 Discussion

Establishing a CTL can be a daunting task for a higher education institution. We propose the four-dimensional model as a general pathway for institutions that do not have a CTL to begin thinking about its establishment. We also think the model might be valuable to institutions that already have a CTL and are looking for ways to either validate the faculty development initiatives being offered, or expand their range of action.

In order to make the model easier to use, we proposed several questions to help guide the establishment of a CTL (Table 3). These questions were generated after the analysis of the code-mapped data, so naturally the categories in Table 2 are some of the possible answers for them. However, we highlight the importance of each institution focusing on its own strategic development goals and the capabilities and limitations of its staff in answering these questions.

Attitude Dimension	Subject Dimension	Delivery Dimension	Administrative Dimension
What is the mission of the CTL?	What subjects need to be taught to faculty to realize the CTL's mission?	How can the CTL deliver the contents in the Subject Dimension?	What mechanisms does the CTL have available to advance its goals?
What beliefs does the CTL have?	In what areas do faculty need support?	In what ways can the CTL interact with faculty?	How does the CTL gather support for its cause?
What values does the CTL want to foster in the academic community?	In what areas does the CTL want classroom dynamics to be improved?	What concrete activities can the CTL offer?	How can the CTL inspire and reward faculty?
What message does the CTL want to convey?			What are the external agents that can interact with the CTL and in what ways do they do so?

Table 3: Questions to guide the establishment of a CTL in the four-dimensional model

We can also say that the four-dimensional model is cyclical. The *attitudes* idealized by the CTL define the *subjects* which need to be developed, which in turn calls for a *delivery* mechanism to interface with faculty, which allows for the identification of *grant and award* recipients and can help steer *administrative* policies. The *administrative* policies, in their own turn, enable the CTL to realize its *attitudes* by providing mechanisms of articulation and funding.

We were satisfied to see that 12 of the 22 CTLs either conducted or helped faculty conduct inquiries into learning, and that at least nine of these made efforts to disseminate and publish their results, characteristic of SoTL. We understand that conducting SoTL requires some maturity and may not be feasible for recently established CTLs. Indeed, there seems to be some relationship between the age of a CTL and its commitment to SoTL, as explained in subsection 3.2.

Naturally, we also recognize that not conducting SoTL is not detrimental to the establishment of a CTL. SoTL is, after all, the last link in the chain, as defined by Kreber (2002), and subsumes both teaching excellence and teaching expertise. In fact, all the 15 remaining CTLs that are not engaged in SoTL are probably situated in what Kreber calls teaching expertise.

5 Conclusions

We strongly believe that future-ready universities must commit to excellent teaching and learning, and that establishing a CTL and ultimately conducting SoTL is a robust way of doing so. In particular, we can say that the best teaching universities in the world today promote teaching excellence, innovation, inquiry into learning and SoTL, and inclusive teaching, and are guided by evidence. They do this through consultations, programs, courses, workshops and other events, and by providing feedback to educators and developing new technologies. These universities address topics such as pedagogical knowledge, curriculum development, assessment, instructional technology and professional development by leveraging means such as grants, funding and awards, and by articulating education strategy within the university.

We hope that this four-dimensional model will serve as an entry point into the rich potential of CTLs for universities looking to establish or restructure their own CTLs, and help them design long-term plans for addressing each of the four dimensions.

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