

**PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR
IMPROVED OUTCOMES,
COMMUNITY, AND RENEWAL: THE
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
EXPERIENCES OF TENURED
FACULTY, YEARS SIX AND ABOVE**

.....
THE FOOTHILL DE ANZA
COLLEGE DISTRICT
TEACHING AND LEARNING PROJECT

YEAR TWO OF TWO YEAR STUDY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

.....
Research and Recommendations

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MAPPING AND ANALYZING THE EXPERIENCES OF TENURED FACULTY

Executive Summary

Foothill-De Anza Community College District's mission features a strong commitment to creating a *"dynamic learning environment that fosters excellence, opportunity and innovation in meeting the educational needs of our diverse students and community."*¹ The development of just such a learning environment depends upon modeling high levels of learning throughout the district. Engaging in professional development activities, formal and informal, inspire growth in faculty. Studies have shown that when teachers learn together in professional learning communities their students learn more and achievement gaps narrow.² When students are exposed to these norms it demonstrates the kind of life long learning that Foothill and De Anza aims to promote.

Foothill-De Anza Community College District has engaged in conversations over the last three years regarding two inter-related challenges: how to improve student performance and how to inspire widespread pedagogical excellence. Chancellor Martha Kanter initiated and led this initiative with a Steering Committee comprised of educational leaders from both campuses. Over the course of the first project year (2005-2006) the consultants, Amy Gerstein and Nancy Ragey, worked with the Steering Committee³ to identify existing Programs and Services, Structures and Decision-making bodies that existed on each campus that worked to address the concerns embedded in issues of teaching and learning.⁴ The second year of the project involved a study of faculty in their 1st-5th years of teaching and yielded a greater understanding of the professional development experiences of the new full and part time faculty with a focus on their learning experiences, where and how they learn, and the extent to which their learning opportunities are institutionalized and embedded in their daily work with students..

This year the Teaching and Learning project consultants engaged in a study of the tenured faculty (6 or more years) at both Foothill and De Anza colleges. The primary goals guiding this inquiry were:

- To describe and analyze the professional development experience of veteran faculty.
- To examine institutional practices and systems that inhibit, promote and/or reward professional development
- To prepare recommendations to enhance professional development for all faculty, based on the research findings.

What follows is an executive summary of the findings from this inquiry. The full report of findings is available upon request to the Chancellor's office.

¹ Mission statement, website

² See for example (Mc Laughlin and Talbert (1993) ; Lee, Smith and Croninger, 1995)

³ A full list of the members of the Steering Committee can be found in Appendix 1

⁴ For a synopsis of findings from year one, see Appendix 2

Study Methods and Participants

The total number of tenured faculty identified for participation in this study was 378. Faculty who had worked for six or more years were invited to participate in this study. Participants include teaching faculty and faculty who have primary responsibilities (library, counseling, etc.) outside of teaching. The investigation into the nature of professional development experiences for tenured faculty occurred primarily in two stages: Surveys and Focus Group Interviews. In Stage 1, we surveyed, through an anonymous and confidential on-line questionnaire; the total number of respondents was 165—a response rate of 44%. Of the 165 respondents, approximately 42% were from Foothill and 58% were from De Anza. The demographic spread of the survey participants looked much like the overall population. Stage 2 was a series of in-depth Focus Group Interviews of tenured faculty. We conducted 6 focus groups and four additional individual interviews with a total of 26 participants. These 26 respondents participated at the same rate from the two campuses (13 from De Anza and 13 from Foothill).

Summary of Findings

College Environment

Foothill and De Anza Community Colleges are well recognized as colleges of excellence. There is a decentralized system for tenured faculty professional development, with each college and the district offering a variety of support, programs, rewards and recognition. There is a strong commitment to professional development and significant resources are invested to improve teaching and learning on both campuses. Many faculty who participated in the survey and focus group interviews for this study applauded college and district efforts to support a strong professional development environment. However, there was little evidence of an overarching vision to guide the professional development for tenured faculty members.

Divisions and Departments

Divisions and departments are the professional “homes” for faculty. The majority of faculty who responded to the survey found their departments (80%) and divisions (72%) to be professional learning communities. Departments support work with colleagues for a variety of activities such as lesson planning, curriculum and connecting with colleagues. Data analyzed from the survey and focus group interviews suggest that department and division commitment, communication and investment regarding professional development are idiosyncratic. During focus group interviews, faculty reported that the degree to which divisions and departments behaved as professional learning communities or supported professional development, and/or provided professional learning experiences was dependent on a number of factors. These factors included the dean, department chair, college, and faculty in the department and division. The colleges or district did not appear to have a coherent written philosophy, policy or guideline for allocating department or division financial resources for professional development.

Focus on Accountability and Productivity

Several faculty on both campuses described a culture of accountability and productivity, which for some has resulted in a sense that the colleges are less focused on professional development

and academics. This culture stood in contrast to one focused on meeting the educational needs of individual students and supporting classroom innovation.

Connection and Community

Faculty expressed appreciation for the many opportunities provided by the colleges and district to support their professional growth. Despite the district's obvious commitment to creating an environment that encourages teaching and learning, survey and focus group participants described being less connected to their colleagues than in the past and they experienced increased isolation and diminished opportunities for both formal and informal professional development.

Description of faculty participation in professional development

De Anza and Foothill new faculty members engaged in a wide variety of formal and informal professional development opportunities. Formal professional development experiences would include such activities as conferences and workshops both on and off campus, whereas informal opportunities included the learning derived from serving on committees and developing courses. Faculty also described their participation in Professional Development Leave (PDL) and the ways in which this opportunity influenced their work.

Formal professional development

According to the survey questionnaire, 69% of tenured faculty spent five or more hours each quarter over the last year engaged in professional development. Much of this professional development has occurred on campus. Ninety-five percent (95%) of tenured faculty responded that they engaged in Department sponsored professional development activities and ninety-seven percent (97%) participated in District sponsored professional development activities. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the tenured faculty have attended conferences during the last twelve months. Twenty-eight percent (28%) of tenured faculty engaged in some form of university study during this time period. We learned that most of that coursework occurred during Professional Development Leaves.

Informal professional development

Tenured faculty on both campuses described a variety of informal professional development activities as essential learning. From committees, to community service, to study groups with other faculty members, there were myriad informal strategies employed to encourage professional learning.

Professional Development Leave Themes

Tenured faculty participated in Professional Development Leaves (PDL) as a highly significant element of their growth and learning. Overall, faculty reported that PDLs provided opportunities for learning and curriculum development that ordinarily they would not have had the time to pursue. For many faculty, they looked forward to a time to reconnect with their intellectual side—a side that is often somewhat dormant. Despite the positive picture portrayed of the PDLs, many faculty also described multiple challenges with the PDL system including a cumbersome process and limited interest and opportunities in sharing the learning that resulted from their PDL experience with colleagues.

FOCUS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The third major area of inquiry for our investigation in the Foothill-De Anza Teaching and Learning Project involved understanding the focus of professional development for new faculty. Tenured faculty focused their professional development in five general areas: subject matter, pedagogy, student learning, administration and technology. Their focus changes and evolves over time. There appeared to be common agreement regarding the domains of knowledge that are important for developing good teaching (e.g., general pedagogy, subject matter, learners, pedagogical content, curriculum, cultural relevance, etc.).

MOTIVATIONS TO ENGAGE IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

According to the survey questionnaire the top three sources of encouragement for tenured faculty participation in professional development included: personal interest, sabbaticals (professional development leave), and their dean. The most frequently identified motivation was faculty members' interest. We used the focus group interviews to understand further the nature of tenured faculty motivations for participating in professional development. *Intellectual stimulation* is the number one reason for tenured faculty to engage in professional development. The second highest response, *personal interest change/no stagnation*, is consistent with the survey findings. *Obtaining a higher salary* through PGA credits and PAA awards was a motivating force for most faculty. It was not the primary motivator but it was a key source of inspiration. To benefit from this motivation, however, they had to contend with the formal system of recognition that is cumbersome and problematic. Finally, understanding how to improve ones' teaching and how to better engage students was a source of motivation for professional learning for many faculty in our focus group interviews.

System of Recognition

The formal system of recognition at both colleges was cited by both study participants in the survey and focus group interviews as "highly bureaucratic and cumbersome." The process of obtaining PAA and PGA rewards was described as confusing, opaque, idiosyncratic and for some a deterrent. Internal inconsistencies frustrate everyone. Formal (conferences) and informal activities (writing, participating in committees and other college focused work) are not aligned with the system of rewards. The Deans and the PGA Review Committees have a lot of discretion regarding what gets approved which further adds to the particularistic nature of this system.

COMPARING THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE FOR ALL FACULTY

Comparing the College Environment

In our studies both years we looked at the degree to which faculty regarded their departments and divisions as professional learning communities. These professional "homes" for faculty were variously regarded as important sites for professional learning and growth. We did notice, however, that the degree to which the faculty regarded these places as professional learning communities does appear to change over the course of one's career. Faculty more frequently considered their departments to be professional learning communities than their divisions. This concurs with what we learned in interviews as well. It appears that there is a shift in perceiving

departments and divisions as professional learning communities after the first 10 years. Departments provided faculty with opportunities to meet with colleagues one on one, to participate in curriculum planning, observe each other teach, and lesson planning. These are considered typical professional learning community activities that support good instruction and powerful learning among faculty.⁵

Comparative Participation in Professional Development

Overwhelmingly, faculty at all levels of experience engaged in similar types of formal and informal professional development experiences. According to both the survey questionnaires and the focus groups faculty attend conferences as their primary source of professional development. Both new and tenured faculty participated in college and department sponsored professional development –much of that was informal (meetings, committees, etc.). The formal professional development chosen by faculty was typically outside conferences.

Comparative motivation to participate in Professional Development

It appears that for tenured faculty the greatest sources of motivation for professional growth have to do with intellectual stimulation, an interest in pursuing personal interests and warding off stagnation and an interest in ones' discipline. In contrast, new faculty are more motivated by becoming better instructors first and foremost. Then they are interested in learning more of their discipline and connecting with colleagues and making more money. This suggests that early in one's career the focus of learning is on developing the skills to teach and learn one's discipline. Later, we may assume that is less of a pressing concern as faculty gain skills and experience. They can then turn their attention to their own personal interests and concerns about stagnating in their roles.

INSTITUTIONAL IMPLICATIONS AND PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

In this research, there are key findings that suggest Foothill and De Anza are doing a good job in supporting the professional development of its faculty and most faculty members are committed to professional development for a variety of reasons. There are clear opportunities for building on a culture of scholarly and pedagogical curiosity and inquiry. However, we also found challenges in providing meaningful support and recognition for professional development. The recommendations below are three areas where we believe there is opportunity and urgency to address faculty professional development and ultimately expand and deepen it over time.

1. Renew and reform the systems of recognition

The research over the last two years has yielded important findings about faculty frustration with the bureaucratic systems of recognition in the colleges. For faculty in their first decade of service the PGA system and tenure process are their primary sources of concern. For more senior faculty it is the PAA system. In all cases, faculty were engaging in professional growth throughout their career. They were seeking recognition for their professional development in part either through PGA credits or PAA. All faculty in our samples reported the system was unnecessarily bureaucratic, cumbersome, and idiosyncratic. There is a drop off in the time devoted to professional development after 10 years; 33% of faculty in years 11-20 reported

⁵ See for example McLaughlin and Talbert (1993)

decreased time spent on professional development over the course of their teaching career while 39% of faculty teaching more than 21 years reported a decrease.

The FHDA District is facing a demographic shift that affords an opportunity for renewing and reforming the system of reward and recognition. Over the next five years, the cohort of faculty who will have taught for more than 20 years will grow by more than 100 people. This means, among other things, that the cohort of faculty who has professional development motivational concerns will be significantly larger. They will need fresh incentives to participate in professional growth.

Although we believe a fresh look at the systems of rewards and recognition for the colleges will be tough work, given the scope of the impact on teaching and learning and morale, we consider this both urgent and important. We understand renewing these systems will require patient, careful and meticulous discussions and negotiations with multiple stakeholders.

2. Nurture Professional Learning Communities

The faculty at both colleges engage in professional learning on and off campus. Those who engage in learning on campus were typically generating opportunities within their departments and are learning with colleagues. We heard many robust examples of faculty who study together, who observe each other and who were eager for more. Many of these examples included faculty who were collaborating with colleagues across the college in multiple departments. This type of learning was of particular interest to them. These examples of professional learning communities indicated that faculty were innovative and willing to engage in inquiry with colleagues on campus.

We also learned from respondents, both years of this inquiry that despite these particular examples of collaborative learning the faculty here are quite isolated. The more senior faculty described an eroded community and increased isolation. The newer faculty described isolation and a need for colleagues to help them as they made their way. Wherever they were in their career path, faculty expressed an interest in learning with others—whether in their departments or across departments. This is good news. Professional learning communities are a well-researched vehicle for strengthening teaching and improving student achievement.

The innovative professional learning already underway is fragile. It will need leadership and resources. Departments have already been identified as learning communities by many faculty in these studies. Deans have also been identified as influential in guiding professional development choices. *We recommend a concerted effort to nurture professional learning communities on campus, integrating them into the cultures and fabric of the institution.* Investing in the mid-level leadership of the colleges—the Deans and the Academic Senate—may well enable these professional learning communities to flourish. Building on research and experimentation that has already been tried will accelerate Foothill-De Anza's efforts and potentially head off skeptics.

3. Invest in infrastructure

Regardless of experience level or longevity, faculty offered the same set of recommendations regarding the infrastructure for professional development. *In order for faculty to learn they need*

personnel and an office devoted to professional learning opportunities for faculty. They need a space for convening. They want a place to learn together. These dimensions of infrastructure are both concrete and symbolic. Devoting resources to addressing these needs would score a “win” with the faculty. Further, redesigning Opening Day to foster more collaborative learning and planning would also enable faculty to engage in more authentic ways. This high profile event could showcase the values of the district and its commitment towards faculty learning. Finally, as we suggested in last year’s report, the colleges should continue to improve communication regarding professional development and opportunities for participation.

The full report from this two year inquiry project is available upon request from the Chancellor’s Office.