

Title: **A Culture of Evidence: Encouraging teachers at a two-year community college to engage in academic research**

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Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Explore a creative and promising new way of encouraging staff development utilizing staff-driven research into the teaching and learning process.
- Evaluate the impact of implementing a programme for academic research for two-year college teaching staff.
- Use our experience to inform and develop their own programme.
- Reflect on how much institutional policy/procedure may be influenced by eloquent and solid in-house academic research findings.

Session Outline

One common complaint in higher education is that academic staff return from conferences with wonderful and exciting ideas, but with little time or support for implementation – eventually relegating these innovative ideas to the bookshelf, filing cabinet, or dustbin. Additionally, in the US, it is often assumed that community college teachers can't or won't do academic research since it is not required of them for tenure.

As an office devoted to the development of teaching staff, we decided to prove the assumption wrong and address the support issue by developing a program that encourages our teachers to step out of the routine and pursue their own research interests – relevant to teaching and learning – with an aim toward improving teaching, learning, assessment, or other process.

The 18 month programme entitled the “Mastery of Teaching Institute” was developed and designed by a team of faculty to encourage solid research on teaching methods and strategies by providing access to institutional data, scheduling structured learning activities, unstructured discussion and feedback meetings, and financial assistance to aid with research costs. It is a faculty learning community (FLC), a community of practice devoted to exploring teaching and learning in higher education. FLCs have been shown to increase faculty interest in teaching and learning while providing a safe space for faculty to explore and implement new approaches (Cox, 2004). The Mastery of Teaching Institute is unique in that it allows participants to choose their own research topics (rather than administratively-chosen topics) based on their own teaching experiences and their intuitive sense of research direction. The results so excited the decision-making administration that they decided to give these

researchers a voice in policy-setting for the institution as a whole. Overview of research topics, challenges with implementing the program, and future directions will be discussed.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

- Welcome/Introductions. Context will be provided for why the Mastery of Teaching Institute was needed. (5 min)
- The next part will bring the discussion around to the participants' own experiences: do they sense that their teaching staff wish to pursue research opportunities? Are they already expected to do so? What support for research is available? (5 min)
- Presenters will discuss the design decisions (informed by existing faculty needs) and the overall structure of the 18-month programme. (10 min)
- Presenters will query participants on what types of research topics would be relevant to their teachers' needs and desires. (5 min)
- Presenters will discuss a sampling of topics of the Mastery of Teaching Institute, the dissemination of findings, the reception by peers and administration, as well as opportunities for directly influencing policy and direction of the institution. Three two-minute videos of faculty participants will provide an overview of the faculty topics and the administrative response.(15 min)
- General questions from participants. (5 min)

References

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Lenning, O. T., & Ebbers, L. H. (1999) *The Powerful Potential of Learning Communities: Improving Education for the Future in ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report*. ERIC Document: ED428606

Millis, B. J., and Cottell Jr, P. G. (1997) *Cooperative Learning for Higher Education Faculty*. Series on Higher Education. Oryx Press: Phoenix, Arizona.

Ortquist-Ahrens, L., & Torosyan, R. (2009). The role of the facilitator in faculty learning communities: Paving the way for growth, productivity, and collegiality. *Learning Communities Journal*. 1(1). p.29-62.