

A Proposal to Establish a New Staff Position in the Center for the Advancement of Teaching, March 2003

Overview

Since its inception in 1994, Xavier's Center for the Advancement of Teaching has sought to focus the University's efforts at advancing the art of teaching. In so doing, the Center supports a broad range of initiatives aimed at improving teaching and student learning, supporting faculty and student creativity and scholarship, and promoting faculty dialogue about issues in higher education in general and Xavier in particular.

The Center has enjoyed continuous external grant and institutional support since its inception, and has been particularly successful in supporting faculty use of information technology. To be sure, the Center is fortunate to have an extraordinarily talented staff (see Appendix) with a diverse array of expertise in information technology.

However, the Center has been only moderately successful in promoting and sustaining traditional teaching and learning initiatives that do not have an explicit focus on technology. We, the Center staff, believe the absence of a teaching and learning specialist and the paucity of non-technology initiatives are correlated.

Herein, we present a rationale for the establishment of a position in the Center for the Advancement of Teaching for a teaching and learning specialist, that is, a person with expertise in teaching and learning theory, and classroom assessment and research methodology.

We believe the addition of a teaching and learning specialist will allow the Center to revitalize a past initiative, enhance current initiatives, and develop new initiatives all with the aim of improving teaching and learning at Xavier.

Past Initiative

In 1996, Xavier was one of the small liberal arts institutions that joined 12 research institutions already involved in the American Association for Higher Education's (AAHE) Teaching Initiative. Local manifestations of the AAHE Teaching Initiative took the form of a modest number of teaching circles—both disciplinary and interdisciplinary—as well as course portfolio working groups. One working group, in particular, was comprised of 22 faculty members, including three chairpersons and two members of the University promotion and tenure committee. The work of this group included an examination of ideas and issues surrounding Ernest Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*.

During the 1998-99 academic year, a handful of faculty members explored the structures, policies, and practices on Xavier's campus that support or inhibit the scholarship of teaching. Perhaps the most significant outcome of the yearlong discussion was recognition of the need to provide an infrastructure that, in principle, models the infrastructure provided for traditional scholarship. The faculty group identified the following as necessary components of this infrastructure:

1. Models for designing and conducting classroom research;
2. A community of faculty meeting regularly to discuss the scholarly work they are doing;
3. Release time or stipends for those faculty who wish to conduct research on teaching and learning;

4. Information on teaching journals and their publication guidelines;
5. Information on opportunities to give papers at teaching and learning conferences and symposia.

Concomitant with these discussions were efforts by an *ad hoc* University committee to review and recommend criteria for promotion and tenure. The revised criteria for promotion include the following statement:

Scholarship is here defined as a process that generally includes, in various modes according to disciplines, the definition of a problem, the formulation of a hypothesis, and the choice of a methodology, its end the creation of a product that advances knowledge. This progression from discovery through peer evaluation and review to "publication," or making one's scholarship public, takes many forms, including: traditional research (where articles and conference papers "make public" the results of inquiry); the creative output of the fine arts (where performance, art work, and text "make public" outcomes of different forms of investigation); and the Scholarship of Teaching, here defined as making public, in conference presentation or pedagogical journal, for example, results from studying a problem about an issue of teaching or learning through methods consistent with disciplinary epistemologies, with the end of enhancing student learning.

The Center has made only modest attempts to promote and support faculty in their efforts to do scholarship in teaching and learning. We believe that the single greatest constraint limiting the Center's ability to substantively promote and support this form of scholarship is the lack of a staff person with both the relevant expertise and time to work with faculty.

Ideally, a teaching and learning specialist could serve as the coordinator of a teaching and learning research initiative modeled after AAHE's Teaching Initiative or its more recent incarnation, the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. At the very least, a teaching and learning specialist could prove to be invaluable to faculty who wish to conduct research on the teaching and learning process.

Current Initiatives

The Center supports several technology initiatives, including the Rich Media Projects Initiative, Technology Infusion Projects Initiative, Technology-Enhanced Curriculum Initiative, and the *How the Web Works* workshop series. Each of these initiatives includes assessment and evaluation components. In addition, projects associated with these initiatives involve faculty planning, development, and implementation of technology in the teaching and learning process. Time and time again, the Center staff, working along-side faculty, have recognized how valuable the input of a teaching and learning specialist could be to these initiatives.

The Center's current non-technology initiatives, the Course Portfolio Working Group and the Communities Initiative, would similarly benefit from the knowledge and experience of a teaching and learning specialist. Faculty members who participate in the Course Portfolio Working Group develop a project to assess some aspect of their teaching or student learning. Working closely with a teaching and learning specialist would enhance the faculty members' success in designing and analyzing the results of the project. This success may in turn be an avenue for faculty scholarship. Similarly, faculty projects associated with the Communities Initiative all have

assessment components that would benefit from the advice and guidance of a teaching and learning specialist.

It is worth emphasizing here that the Center's current technology initiatives are well supported by the Center's current staff members, most of whom have expertise in one or more aspects of information technology. The Center is unable, however, to provide a comparable level of staff support for its non-technology initiatives. This short-coming could be corrected by the addition of a teaching and learning specialist.

The Center recently received a three-year faculty development grant from the Bush and William and Flora Hewlett foundations, the aim of which is to improve student learning by fostering a campus culture where teaching and research are improved and made public. The Center will promote this aim through a continuous program of faculty development which:

1. Encourages faculty and student conversations that are focused on specific teaching and learning problems and opportunities;
2. Encourages faculty and student research, including the scholarship of teaching.

The Bush Foundation, in particular, has placed extraordinary emphasis on the assessment of this faculty development initiative. This assessment spans a broad range of activities, from individual projects to workshops and the entire initiative. The Foundation is keenly interested in knowing, based on thoughtful and appropriate assessment and evaluation, the affect its support has had on faculty behavior (e.g., teaching, scholarship) and student learning. Clearly, a teaching and learning specialist could ensure the success of this grant initiative by assisting faculty who are involved in the initiative, as well as Center staff who are responsible for reporting the outcomes of the initiative.

Finally, in Fall 2002, the Center launched an initiative to assess the affect of information technology on the teaching and learning process. The Center maintains electronic classrooms to facilitate technology rich environments for the delivery of classroom instruction. To make informed decisions on issues related to the electronic classrooms, improve the quality of our service, and to better understand the affect of information technology on teaching and learning, we have developed a survey for faculty and students who use the electronic classrooms. The survey is designed to:

1. Examine the progression of technology infusion;
2. Examine the affect of information technology on the teaching and learning process;
3. Assess the quality of the Center's services;
4. Identify possible technology upgrades or improvements;
5. Provide faculty members with data.

Regarding item 5 in the list, the survey data may prove useful to faculty in a number of ways including:

1. Making improvements in teaching and student learning;
2. Documenting the affect of technology on teaching and learning;
3. Developing a dossier for purposes of rank and tenure decisions;
4. Scholarship.

While developing this survey, the Center staff members often found themselves asking, "Is this the right question? Is this the best way to *get at* what we want to know?" Clearly, having a staff member with expertise in methods of assessing teaching and learning would have proved invaluable.

The Faculty Voice

Before presenting what we believe to be the "faculty voice" as concerns this new staff position, we wish to briefly mention, by way of anecdote, what may be one perception of faculty as concerns the Center for the Advancement of Teaching.

We believe that at least some faculty members perceive the Center as having a too-limited view of the teaching and learning process. Instead of having an expansive view of the process, which includes an understanding of a broad range of teaching methodologies and epistemologies, and a deep understanding of student learning styles, the Center has focused almost exclusively on the use of information technology. This point is perhaps best illustrated by a comment made by a former faculty member and now administrator who once referred to the Center for the Advancement of Teaching as the "Center for the Advancement of Technology."

This perception is perhaps justifiable, since the Center was established with a particularly strong focus on information technology (IT) at a time when this focus was necessary. The IT infrastructure at Xavier has evolved these past several years – a change accomplished in large part through the Center's implementation of the original grant from the Kellogg Foundation and subsequent grants from the Andrew W. Mellon and Bush foundations. Now, there are numerous University resources that support faculty use of technology. As noted previously, the Center is fortunate to have a staff that can support faculty use of technology. But the Center must continue to support other faculty needs and interests, particularly as they relate to teaching and learning in the broadest sense.

In Spring 2002, the Center established an Advisory Group to provide input on the effectiveness and direction of the Center, and provide guidance regarding the Center's response to specific campus issues, grant opportunities, and so forth. Presently, approximately 70 faculty members have volunteered to serve for two years on the Advisory Group.

As concerns this report, we asked the Advisory Group to examine the need for a staff position in the Center designed for a person with expertise in teaching and learning theory, and classroom assessment and research methodology.

The general opinion of the Advisory Group was, as one member put it, "This is a fabulous idea." More specifically, the Advisory Group made the following recommendations:

1. Hire a person with expertise in teaching and learning theory, and not assessment only.
2. If the Center hires from outside the university, it would be important that this person work with a faculty member in order to understand Xavier's culture, especially its teaching and learning culture.
3. Don't hire a pure theoretician, as regards teaching and learning. A "nuts-and-bolts" kind of person is needed.
4. We need someone to give regular workshops having to do with teaching and learning.

The Advisory Group clearly supports the addition of a teaching and learning specialist to the Center's staff.

For a complete report on the work of the Advisory Group during Spring and Fall 2002, please visit the Center's website at: <http://cat.xula.edu/about/advisory/>.

Summary

We believe there is overwhelming support for hiring a new staff person in the Center for the Advancement of Teaching with expertise in teaching and learning theory, and classroom assessment and research methodology. Because of the role this staff person will have in promoting effective teaching and student learning, we believe that the ultimate beneficiaries of this person's expertise will be Xavier's students.

Appendix

Current staff positions and responsibilities

Position	Responsibilities
Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate activities of the Center's staff and faculty • Create opportunities for Xavier faculty members to pursue professional goals • Seek external grant support for faculty development opportunities and infrastructure appropriate to the Center • Prepare planning documents, budgets, and reports for the Center • Report to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs
Administrative Assistant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate the day-to-day logistics of the Center and its staff • Conduct research for Center staff
Technology Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversee all aspects of the operation of the Center's multimedia labs and electronic classrooms • Work with ITC staff to coordinate services provided by the campus networks • Supervise lab assistants • Troubleshoot hardware and network problems, and arrange repairs and delivery of audiovisual and computing services to the multimedia classrooms • Assist in planning and facilitating Center activities
Laboratory Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervise the multimedia laboratory • Schedule and train student assistants • Teach students and faculty to use the computers and software • Monitor the security of the equipment and need for repair • Organize software, manuals, and catalogs • Assist in planning and facilitating Center activities
Multimedia Artist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production of graphics and multimedia components for faculty technology projects • Offer multimedia workshops for faculty • Develop and maintain the Center's website • Work with faculty in multimedia project design, development, and implementation • Assist in planning and facilitating Center activities
Instructional Specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist faculty in the implementation of technology into courses • Coordinate grant-related hypermedia courseware design, development, and implementation • Assist in the development of surveys and analysis of survey data • Systems administrator for WebBoard Conference system • Assist in planning and facilitating Center activities