2002 Faculty Development Survey: Ruminatus

We present here a description of what we considered to be particularly noteworthy survey results. We then offer our responses as a way of indicating how the results will inform the work that we do in the Center for the Advancement of Teaching.

We wish to thank Sr. Mary Ann Stachow (Theology) and Dr. Deany Cheramie (English) for their help in reviewing the results.

Teaching and student learning

Observations

1. "Teaching methods" was the only topic that was selected by a majority of the respondents (Table 1).

2. The top 5 topics selected by the respondents ("teaching methods," " using Blackboard," "student learning styles," "assessment of teaching and student learning," "new courses, curricula, or programs at Xavier") are related to teaching and student learning (Table 1).

Responses

1. The Center will offer at least one teaching methods-related workshop or brown bag discussion each semester during the 2003-2004 academic year. The Center will make a concerted effort to offer workshops or other faculty development opportunities on the remaining topics.

   We wish to point out that the ability of the Center to offer workshops and other faculty development opportunities and support for some topics related to teaching and student learning is limited largely due to the lack of a staff person with the relevant expertise. In this regard, the Center proposed in March 2003 the establishment of a new staff position for a Teaching and Learning Specialist. In such a person we seek expertise in teaching methodology, teaching and learning theory, and classroom assessment and research methodology (the proposal is on the Center's website at: http://cat.xula.edu/advisory). That the respondents' most frequently selected teaching and student learning-related topics is further evidence for the need of a Teaching and Learning Specialist.

2. Regarding "using Blackboard," Blackboard is a relatively new software application at Xavier and has rapidly gained popularity among faculty and students, as indicated by the usage data (the most recent usage data are on-line at: http://www.xula.edu/itc/blackboard/bb_stats200108.html). It is therefore not surprising that a large percentage of faculty members are interested in learning how to use Blackboard.

   To date, faculty members have had opportunities to learn about Blackboard through workshops offered through the Information Technology Center and the Library Media Center. At the time of this writing, the University is considering creating an Educational Technology Support Specialist position in the Library; the responsibilities of such a person would include providing Blackboard training for interested faculty members.

   The Center's support of Blackboard has primarily been though its Technology Infusion Projects Initiative—an initiative that supports a broad range of faculty use of technology, including Blackboard. More information about this initiative is on the Center's website at: http://cat.xula.edu/initiatives/infusion/.

Technology

Observation

With the exception of "using Blackboard," the other technology-related topics (i.e., developing a website, using WebBoard, developing computer-based course materials, distance education) were neither frequently selected nor clustered together in the same way that the teaching and student learning-related topics were grouped (Table 1).

Response

Most of the technology-related topics have had a fair amount of visibility on campus. For example, both the Information Technology Center and the Center for the Advancement of Teaching have provided workshops on developing a website. The Center, through its workshops and technology initiatives (e.g., Technology-Enhanced Curriculum Initiative, Technology Infusion Projects Initiative, Rich Media Projects Initiative) has also provided faculty members with opportunities to learn about WebBoard and develop a website or computer-based course materials. Thus, it appears that the University has done a good job of satisfying faculty members' interests in these areas.

We hasten to point out that other interpretations of these results are plausible. For example, there simply may be scant faculty interest in these technology-related topics, perhaps not at all due to the opportunities available to faculty. However, we tend to believe, based on the plethora of opportunities and the enthusiastic response of faculty members to the opportunities, that the University is in fact doing a good job of addressing these interests. Certainly, to distinguish between these two interpretations would require additional data.

Faculty interests

Observations

1. Faculty members indicated a significant decline since 1999 in interest in informal discussions, workshops, or other activities that concern the following topics: grant writing, developing a website, developing computer-based (non-Web) course materials, conducting traditional research, conducting classroom-based research, and faculty mentoring (Table 19).
2. Respondents indicated a greater interest in discussions, workshops, seminars, or other activities having to do with "higher education" and "copyright" (Table 20).

Response

1. It was, to be sure, a surprise to see such dramatic declines in faculty members' interest in these topics. We found these results, more than any others from the survey, to be the most difficult to interpret. We found ourselves asking questions such as: Were the results effected by administering the survey at a time of the year (i.e., at the end of the semester in December) when faculty members were perhaps simply exhausted and, overall, just less interested in many work-related topics? Did the threat of terrorism or the reality of an impending war affect the results? On the other hand, have faculty members' interests in these topics declined because they have had, since 1999, plenty of opportunities to explore or discuss the topics? Clearly, there are several plausible explanations, but each needs further consideration and more information before its validity can be established.

   That being said, we would like to speculate a bit more about the technology-related items.

   In 1999, when the first survey was conducted, the technology wave was cresting; there was a great deal of enthusiasm about the Web and it potential uses in teaching and learning. Moreover, the University was experiencing unparalleled development of its technology infrastructure. That faculty members' interest in these technology-related topics [i.e., develop

a website, develop computer-based (non-Web) course materials] has declined since 1999 may simply reflect the University's success in meeting faculty members' needs. Certainly, this is not the only interpretation of the results, but it does seem plausible. More information is needed before we can be certain of the meaning of the results.

2. Regarding faculty members' increased interest in the topics "higher education" and "copyright," we will host at least one event on each topic during the 2003-2004 academic year. We should point out that an ad hoc committee recently completed the draft of a new intellectual property policy for the University. It is very likely that all faculty members will have an opportunity to examine and discuss this document during the 2003-2004 academic year.

The Center for the Advancement of Teaching

Observation

The results indicate that the Center meets the needs or expectations of over 75% of the faculty, an increase of almost 25% since 1999 (Table 22).

Response

We are, as you could imagine, happy that the Center is meeting the needs and expectations of more faculty. But we're especially pleased with the magnitude of this increase. Because we didn't ask faculty members to tell us how or why we're meeting their needs or expectations, we're without an explanation. Bart, incidentally, would like to point out that he joined the Center in 1999. The rest of the Center staff would simply point out that more data are needed.