

Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Faculty Development



Needs Assessment Report



Academic Year 2023-2024 • Published 25 June 2024

Process and Timeline

In Fall 2023, CAT+FD sent out a survey to all faculty asking, with CAT+FD's mission in mind, what they saw as their most pressing need as a faculty member in the next 1-2 years. Thirty-four faculty responded. CAT+FD met as a team and identified themes in the data. From the survey data, we found the most pressing, self-reported needs for faculty members centered around the themes of educational technologies, scholarship support, and work-life balance/time.

In Spring 2024, we conducted three focus groups (N=4-5) with randomly selected faculty to expand on the themes that emerged from the survey data. We also conducted three focus groups with students nominated by randomly selected faculty members (N=2-3) asking them what their instructors need in the next 2-3 years to enhance student learning. We used AI to assist us as a team in identifying themes from the responses.

Findings: From Faculty

Five themes emerged from faculty as being highly important for CAT+FD to consider in the next few years.

1. Faculty Development and Support

Faculty need ongoing training and support in various areas, including technology integration (ed tech/AI), Brightspace training (#LEX Adv), scholarship support (including library training), and work-life balance. These topics are in line with our mission. Suggestions included improving onboarding processes, providing training in various locations (i.e., Mobile CAT), and supporting faculty in utilizing university technology effectively (e.g., Banner). This last suggestion could be outside the scope of our mission. Providing lunch/snacks is important. Regularly assess faculty needs.

2. Community Building and Engagement

CAT+FD's ability to build a sense of community among faculty members is important for collaboration and support. Suggestions include organizing events and initiatives to foster cross-disciplinary connections, creating networking opportunities, and creating opportunities/processes for sharing knowledge and experiences. Name tags at events would be helpful.

3. Advocacy and Representation

Faculty view CAT+FD as an advocate for them. Advocating for faculty needs and ensuring representation in decision-making processes are important. This includes advocating for resources, recognition, and support, as well as promoting diversity and inclusion within faculty development initiatives.

4. Cultural and Mission Alignment

Recognizing and aligning with the institution's cultural and mission-driven values, particularly as a Catholic HBCU, is essential. Suggestions include integrating these values into faculty development

programs, promoting cultural sensitivity and diversity, and ensuring that faculty support initiatives align with the institution's mission. Be aware of our Black identity and attend to this in our offerings by having Black voices and perspectives at the forefront. Have strategic partnership with other units on campus (e.g., EJHS). CAT+FD could directly celebrate Black history month in terms of programming.

5. Technology Integration and Access

Addressing the challenges and opportunities related to emerging technology is a significant concern. Faculty express the need for better access to technology resources, training, and support, as well as strategies to navigate technological changes effectively and efficiently. Many examples were beyond the LMS or ed tech, and thus beyond the mission of CAT+FD.

Other findings

When asked about the desire for an advisory group, faculty strongly supported the idea with the following recommendations.

- Have a clear description of expectations
- Have diverse representation (broadly defined)
- Have a standing meeting (like second Tuesday every month)
- Have department heads choose or ask for volunteers (one from each dept)

Faculty also made the following general suggestions.

- Perhaps have student voices at a few workshops per year (not more than a few though)
- Have admin participation only when listening in on speaker (not in discussions or roundtables).
- Like the hybrid option. Keep it.
- Offer programming specifically for mid- and late-career faculty

Findings: From Students

When asked what their instructors would need in the next two-three years to enhance student learning, four major themes emerged from students. Please note that we tried to steer students toward suggestions that fit within CAT+FD's purview.

1. Teaching Effectiveness, Adaptability, and Flexibility:

Students expressed a desire for professors to diversify their teaching methods and adapt to different learning preferences, particularly in STEM fields. They want professors who are personable, interactive, and flexible in their approach to instruction. There are concerns about professors being stuck in traditional teaching methods and not being adaptive to technological changes.

2. Communication and Transparency:

Students highlighted the importance of clear and transparent communication from professors, particularly regarding course expectations and grading policies. They want up-to-date syllabi, with accurate information on course content. They want prompt grading feedback. There are frustrations with inconsistencies in using Brightspace and a desire for better training for both students and professors. They like Brightspace when it's used well. Students want to feel heard.

3. Support and Resources for Learners:

Students express the need for additional support and resources to enhance their learning experience, particularly for those with learning differences. They want better accommodations, support groups, and resources beyond traditional classroom settings. There are concerns about the lack of resources for certain departments and the need for more faculty members to reduce the stress load on existing instructors.

4. Cultural Competence and Inclusivity:

There is an emphasis on the importance of cultural competence and inclusivity on the professors' part, particularly at an HBCU. Students expect professors to be understanding, compassionate, and respectful of diverse backgrounds and experiences. They don't appreciate condescending remarks or being treated like they can't learn. Trust students—most are not trying to “get one over on the teachers.”

Other findings

Perhaps unsurprisingly, students also expressed concerns about the workload, especially for non-STEM courses (e.g., XCOR).

Limitations

The overall response was low. For the student focus groups only a very few majors were represented.

Recommendations

Because we are having a transition to a new Director, the CAT+FD compiled a list of recommendations based on this report and transmitted them to the new Director.



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