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ABSTRACT

Recognizing the difficulties that first-time faculty face, the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) (Maryland) developed an extended orientation program for new faculty based on the principles of learning communities: shared knowledge, shared knowing, and shared responsibility. In 1998, CCBC committed to a 5-year strategy of becoming a learner-centered institution. As part of this implementation, CCBC leadership initiated the Council on Innovation and Student Learning (CISL) to serve as the college-wide think tank and stimulate experimentation and innovation in CCBC policies, procedures, and infrastructure. The CISL committee members specifically involved in developing a learning community for new faculty elected to review existing programs in colleges around the country first. They found that no existing program could be adapted for CCBC. CCBC developed the Learning Community for New Faculty (LCNF) program, in which new faculty members are required to participate for one year. The program consists of 2-hour biweekly meetings. Participation replaces college service and professional development requirements for the first year of teaching. The LCNF includes seven goals tied to CCBC strategic directions: (1) infusing technology; (2) learning support; (3) learning college principles; (4) management excellence; (5) embracing diversity; (6) building community; and (7) enrollment management. (Author/NB)

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# A Learning Community for New Faculty

## The Community College of Baltimore County, MD

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*The individual commitment to self-knowledge teaches you who you are, connects you with your history, unites you with others in the human condition, and challenges you to deeper relationships; the renewed interpersonal relationships provide the foundational knowledge person-to-person about human differences and the commonalities of the human condition; these inter-personal relationships strengthen the individuals involved together to go out and contribute to their communities. Stronger communities are built by people who understand relationships-and who know themselves and how to "know others"; comfort with community enables us to face intimacy, encounter difficulty, and build environments in our organizations that are comprised of people and not systems. Learning/Teaching begins with self-- then one other-- then a few together-- and so on... This is the way it tends to happen with authenticity and lasting effects.*

*--- Firestone, B.K. (1996). The Forms of things unknown: creativity and renewal in higher education. ACE/Alliance*

As the idea and principles of learning communities evolve in higher education, there are many definitions floating about to define the concept. Vincent Tinto (1998) stated it quite simply in his landmark publication, Learning Communities: Building Gateways to Student Success: "A Learning Community is a place of shared knowledge, shared knowing, and shared responsibility." (p.3)

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The first known learning community was established through the Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin in 1927. Although the development of learning communities in support of students in higher education has occurred in numerous ways and evolved through numerous phases over the last 70 years, the idea of learning communities in support of faculty and professional development is at an earlier stage of evolution.



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The new millennium offered great speculation and a number of predictions and forecasting of higher education trends. Among these were the shortfall of faculty resulting from retirement and the impact of a new breed of rookie and adjunct faculty among the teaching ranks. Suggestions to offset the potential faculty shortfall included strengthening recruiting programs for prospective faculty, offering more substantive adjunct faculty development opportunities, and improving in-house college faculty development efforts geared toward current faculty (Gibson-Harman, Rodriguez, & Haworth).

The start of any new professional experience can be overwhelming, but new faculty face an especially challenging task. Not only do they confront the prospect of learning the sometimes thousands of names and faces of their new campus community; they are also expected to understand and adhere to public education and institutional policies. But most importantly, new faculty face the incongruent task of determining how to take their expert content and somehow present it to students in a meaningful way. The main goal is for students to learn, but often enough, new faculty must first learn how to make this primary goal a reality.

Recognizing the difficulties that first-time faculty face, The Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) developed an extended orientation program for new faculty based on the principles of learning communities: shared knowledge, shared knowing, and shared responsibility.

**The Learning Community for New Faculty Program**

In 1998, CCBC committed to a five-year strategy dedicated to a learner-centered institution and, above all, creating an environment of Learning First. As part of the implementation of Learning First practices, CCBC leadership initiated the Council on Innovation and Student

Learning (CISL) to serve as the collegewide think tank and stimulate experimentation and innovation in CCBC policies, procedures, and infrastructure. CISL has evolved to meet cohesive collegewide needs and support the efforts of CCBC's single college/multicampus philosophy.

The CISL committee members specifically involved in developing a learning community for new faculty elected to first review existing programs in colleges around the country. The efforts being made for new faculty around the country are profound. Although CISL committee members recognized that as each institution is distinctive, no existing new faculty program model could be directly adopted that readily fit CCBC Learning First principles and culture. However, the national research and review by the CISL committee members was not in vain. When the time came to establish a mission statement, goals, and a general framework for CCBC faculty development, the CISL committee members were able to translate the data collected and target many of the needs and anxieties new faculty members face.

Recognizing first impressions as lasting impressions, representatives from the CISL, targeted student orientation and faculty development programs to promote new college introductions and a new college culture for first-time students and first-time faculty. The CCBC Learning Community for New Faculty was designed to assist faculty in becoming fully functioning members of CCBC as a Learning First college.

New CCBC faculty are required to participate in the Learning Community for New Faculty program for one year. The program begins each fall semester and ends at the close of the spring semester in June. The program consists of two-hour biweekly meetings, and schedules rotate among CBCC campuses. Participation in the Learning Community for New Faculty program replaces college service and professional development requirements for the

first year of teaching. Participation is assessed by academic deans and tied to new faculty's annual professional evaluation. Each faculty participant is assessed for learning styles and varying strengths and weaknesses. This information is used to create a group agenda for the year's activities and an individualized program path for participants.

The Learning Community for New Faculty includes seven goals tied to CCBC strategic directions:

1. Infusing Technology

2. Learning Support

3. Learning College Principles

4. Management Excellence

5. Embracing Diversity

6. Building Community

7. Enrollment Management

**Program Goals**

The special quality of the Learning Community for New Faculty at CCBC is the variety of creative and yet measurable ways these seven goals have been tied to collegewide strategic directions with stated yet flexible objectives and designated faculty outcomes. The following is one example of the format and outlined process for the stages of the seven goals:

***Goal 1.*** CCBC Strategic Direction-Infusing Technology: CISL Learning Community for New Faculty program will introduce methods of incorporating technology in the classroom by

***Objectives:***

Including, but not limited to

A. Introducing information on distance learning, telecourses, and online courses and

B. Providing training in WebCT

***Faculty Outcome:***

Faculty will incorporate one or more components of electronic educational resources into their courses. These can include but are not limited to a posted bulletin board, creation of a personal Web page, use of WebCT to post grades, or other creative methods.

This designated process identifies a working path and assessment measures to evaluate the impact and success of faculty development and learning processes rather than focus on abstract implications and philosophies.

**Evaluation Plan and Program Outcomes**

In addition to targeted goals, the program strives to provide new faculty with a cohort of support and encouragement, and enhance and demonstrate the best practices of a Learning First college. Following the definition of Shared Knowledge, Shared Knowing, and Shared Responsibility, and through the seven strategic goals, the Learning Community for New Faculty is designed to create faculty leaders and

- Introduce methods of incorporating technology in the classroom;
- Provide information on the support services available to students;

- Offer opportunities for new faculty to understand the learning college principles;
- Present the organizational system of the college;
- Communicate the values and benefits of a diverse campus culture;
- Encourage interaction with the communities of each campus;
- Introduce teaching strategies that will improve student enrollment, retention, and learning; and
- Support and expand information literacy projects.

In advance of the first Learning Community for New Faculty meeting, each participant completes a self-assessment questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire is to individualize many of the program activities and offer a variety of options for new faculty developments. In addition to the questionnaire, CISL program staff administers a formal Faculty Outcomes inventory that identifies roles and responsibilities of active participation in the Learning Community for New Faculty. At the end of the year and through shared feedback, department chairs, faculty members, and the program director evaluate the new faculty members' performance level and create a customized professional development plan to serve the new faculty members' goals and the goals of the college.

Beyond seeing new faculty incorporate components of electronic educational resources into their courses, participants are encouraged to evaluate and adopt alternative learning concepts and ideas that address diverse learners, learning styles, and principles of learning-centered education. In addition, new faculty completing the program should be able to develop learning outcomes assessments, course syllabi based on CCBC's common course outlines, and an evaluative goal in community outreach for each course taught. New faculty are also expected to participate in all aspects of the CCBC Mentoring Program that includes three lunch meetings, two nonevaluative observations with postobservation discussions, and additional college activities that foster mutual respect and colleagueship.

Through the process and development of the learning community, new faculty members initiated the development of a New Faculty Resource Manual. As each facilitator introduces their area of expertise, participants add materials and references to enhance their professional experiences. At the end of the program year, new faculty members have acquired a spectrum of custom materials for reference and reflection as they grow and become more firmly established.

**Summary and Lessons Learned**

Initial assessments of the program demonstrate the diverse demographics of new faculty hires and prior teaching experiences. The initial Learning Community for New Faculty plan did not allow enough flexibility to accommodate great diversity. New faculty members gave high ratings to a series of presentations on different aspects of the CCBC culture. However, they asked for less structured time and presentation and more time allocated to the discussion of individual issues and opportunities for more experienced teachers to demonstrate their knowledge and background.

As with the conditions of learning, changes in the program are currently under way, and each two-hour meeting will now be divided. The first hour will be devoted to the introduction of formal college information sessions, and the second hour is scheduled for conversations on immediate topics or issues new faculty choose. In addition, the CISL committee is looking carefully at the order of presentations and materials. The committee firmly believes that information should be offered in an order that more closely resembles the new faculty's need to know.

The CISL committee plans on annual review and appropriate alterations to guarantee the continued quality of the CCBC Learning Community for New Faculty. There is also the

potential for future modularization of this program for use by adjunct faculty, veteran faculty, and new administrators. Work has already been initiated toward creating a parallel open-door program on alternate weeks to accommodate the needs of other interested college staff and employees.

For more information, contact:

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