

PROF CENTER

NINE-MONTH REPORT

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I. Introduction

This report is a summary of the initial organizational structure and programmatic development that occurred in the first nine months of the Professional Resource Opportunities for Faculty (PROF) Center. It is intended to serve both as an historical record and as a practical guide for those who follow.

According to a 2009 Title V proposal, "In 2005 a TAMIU team of administrators and faculty attended the Building Engagement and Attainment for Minority Students (BEAMS) Conference. The team identified the need for a centralized center for teaching and learning excellence. However, not until spring 2009 did TAMIU make a commitment to meet this end by hiring an Interim Director" (p. 9).

Prior to this time, the PROF Center Advisory committee had projected the scope of purpose for the Center. According to the director's job description written by the Committee, it states that the PROF Center "is a faculty-driven initiative for the promotion of excellence in teaching and learning across the disciplines at Texas A&M International. The activities of the PROF Center are to include orientation of the new faculty; support and training for graduate teaching assistants; integration of instruction and assessment; mentoring programs and peer evaluation for teaching; setting standards for teaching and the evaluation of teaching; the coordination and interaction among teaching faculty and various support areas" (2008). Beyond this description, little documentation existed as to the Center's mission, goals and objectives, organizational structure, and/or programmatic development.

To first clarify the direction the newly opened office should take, the TAMIU Faculty Needs Survey conducted in fall 2008 was reviewed. Seventy-nine (79) faculty members responded to the survey, and of the twenty-one survey items, the primary concerns identified most frequently were:

- (1) Develop students' critical thinking skills (96.7%);
- (2) Design and implement effective discussion activities to facilitate student learning (87.3%);
- (3) Develop and implement activities to promote active learning (87.2%);
- (4) Use strategies to assist under-prepared students (79.7%). (pp. 1-9).

This data provided the foundation for initial programmatic development.

In addition to reviewing this document, the Interim Director interviewed college deans, departmental chairs, and faculty members to understand their expectations of the forthcoming center. She also talked with administrators to determine what goals and objectives would be feasible considering the existing budgetary limitations. Individuals from across campus consistently expressed the need for program development that would offer support for tenured and non-tenured faculty, paying particular attention to classroom instructional practices, TAMIU's unique student population needs, and the TAMIU campus culture. This data has been consistently used as the baseline for developing the Center's organizational structure and programmatic development.

The result of this examination prompted the development of broad goals and objectives, which were submitted for review to PROF Center Advisory Committee on March 25, 2009. In addition, a general two-year development plan was created to provide a general direction to the first developmental months.

In addition to stipulating general goals and objectives, the Interim Director asked the Advisory Committee to assist in creating a mission statement. After several renditions, the Committee approved the following:

Foster a culture of teaching and learning excellence across TAMIU, while supporting faculty in research and instructional practices that prepare students for success in their chosen academic or professional careers in a diverse, complex, and global society.

From this mission, coupled with the needs assessment and appreciative inquiry interviews, the vision for the Center grew. This vision was to develop a full-scale center within a five-year timeframe, where a multitude of programs and services would be offered. The Center would have a physical space that included a faculty lounge, small group workstations, conference area(s), individual work sites, and office spaces. Programmatic development would revolve around three strands of teaching, research, and service to interface with the tenure track faculty needs.

Concepts in this vision included the following:

Teaching and Learning Strand

- Develop a program for new faculty orientation, including monthly or quarterly modules that build on teaching and learning practices.
- Work with colleges to develop faculty mentoring program(s).
- Create a faculty fellows program using the seminar concept to create pods of interest groups. Topic examples include hybrid classes, technological interface, intentionally designed integrative learning, writing across the curriculum.
- Interface with existing OIT training sessions to enhance classroom practices with technology. Facilitate instructional workshops with a faculty-led application and have OIT trainers present the "how-to" session.

- Invite external speakers to campus and continue theme/topic with on-going modules, seminars and/or faculty-led sessions.
- Develop clearinghouse of teaching and learning practices accessible through website.
- Offer short sessions on diverse topics including syllabus development, instructional practices, diversity, communication in the classroom, etc.
- Create a “speakers’ bank” of TAMIU faculty expertise, and develop short sessions in line with expressed faculty interests.
- Develop adjunct faculty and graduate TA program(s) to assist with practical application of teaching and learning practices.
- Collaborate with Learning Community programs to integrate professional development, create systematized evaluation formats, and expand LC options to upper division courses.

Research Strand

- Invite external speaker to initiate research strand. Create writing circles to support faculty research development.
- Develop a bank of research tools.
- Create a clearinghouse for research on the scholarship of teaching and learning within the disciplines.

Community Service Strand:

- Create a central clearinghouse of opportunities, a systematized format where faculty receive assistance in developing community service projects

II. Organizational Structure

Fiscal, staffing and physical space needs were and continue to be primary concerns. TAMIU had committed to funding the PROF Center Director position; however, minimal funding was available for programmatic development. Since a minimal budget of \$10,000 had been allotted, a primary responsibility of the Interim Director was to find resources to sustain the Center.

In spring 2009, TAMIU learned that proposals for Title V funding cycle were due in July. A team from across campus wrote the proposal, which included a request for start-up funds for the PROF Center. The five-year request included \$376,948.00 in salaries for a Teaching and Learning Coordinator and a staff assistant, and \$120,000 in contractual consultants to finance program development. The project description states:

“Component Two will support professional development for faculty by 1) creating faculty professional development opportunities, and 2) equipping existing space allocations. Professional development will support faculty in developing and implementing instructional practices including orientation, mentoring programs, seminars focusing on Intentionally Designed Integrative Learning approaches, and service learning opportunities to promote student academic progress” (p. 20).

Although the proposal was not funded, this planning endeavor facilitated collaboration across departments and led to the identification of a physical location for the Center, which is the current Office for Institutional Effectiveness. It was determined that once the Student Success Building is ready for occupancy, many offices in Killam Library will be available. This particular identified office would make a feasible center with little structural changes needed.

In summer 2009, the Interim Director participated in the TAMU budgetary formal request process, asking for funds to hire a staff assistant and a research assistant. Neither position was funded. As a result, the office is staffed by the director position and two work-study student positions. Additional staff assistance support has been provided through collaborative efforts across programs. Needless to say, in order for the Center to grow into a full-fledged entity across campus, a minimal support staff of one full-time assistant is needed. Programmatic development will take an approximate budget as was delineated in the Title V proposal.

III. Event Planning and Program Development

The following list is a compilation of the events in chronological order that occurred during this nine-month period. The events and seminars that have been presented thus far can be divided into four categories: (1) teaching and learning practices, (2) technology for pedagogically- driven purposes, (3) learning communities, and (4) research. The majority of sessions have focused on the primary strand, teaching and learning practices. Technological implementation has had four sessions. The research strand began this fall with Dr. Jerry Thompson presenting a session on the research process. This list gives brief abstracts of the major events.

Spring 2009

- Friday, March 6 Emily Decker Lardner and Gillies Malnarich, Co-directors of the Washington Center.

This workshop explored the integrative learning community concept as a viable teaching and learning option. Practical tools were explored to facilitate implementing Learning Communities at any instructional level.

- Wed, April 8 Scaffolding Success for the Large Online Class
Presented by Kimber Palmer, J.D., Division of International Banking and Finance Studies

Offering large online classes is attractive to administrators who like greater teacher/student ratios and the smaller overhead expenses. But large classes can be unwieldy if taught like low-enrollment online classes. Offered are tried-and-true

techniques that accommodate enrollments of more than 50 without losing quality. These classes, which include intensive writing assignments, rich oral communication, and presentation assignments, utilize ANGEL's online assessment features to capture formative student learning.

- Wed, April 15 *Operational Definitions of Effective Teaching and Learning*
Presented by Luis Vega, Ph.D. Cal State University,

This conversation focuses on controversies, layers of burden and the interplay of funding with evidence-based learning. Topics for conversation include possible answers to why the scholarship of teaching and learning is in dire need and yet volatile.

- Mon, April 20 *Teaching and Documentation*
Presented by Jack Mino, MSW, Professor of Psychology/Learning Communities
Coordinator at Holyoke Community

Workshop 1: This workshop introduced participants to the seminar approach as well as to the process of documenting seminar work as an act of teaching, learning, and research. The Seminar is a pedagogical approach through which the process of active learning itself is made visible and audible. In the seminar, the group – not the instructor – is responsible for the exploration of a text and the construction of knowledge. The seminar is an approach that can be used with any course that encourages students to critically read and evaluate texts, and its collaborative nature makes it as signature learning community pedagogy.

Workshop 2: Want to get better connected? While there is no prescription for creating interdisciplinary learning communities (LCs), this hands-on workshop will introduce participants to the four essentials of integration, including: team-teaching, collaborative learning, interdisciplinary curriculum, and integrative assessment. Using a variety of LC course design tools, participants will begin to make the move from linked to more integrated LCs. [Note: If possible, please attend with your LC teaching partner(s), and come prepared with relevant course materials such as syllabi, reading lists, assignments, etc.]

Summer 2009

- June 25 Collaborative Peer Instruction thru Real-time Interaction, Feedback, and Assessment. Presented by Miroslava Vargas, Ed.D. and Julio Tovar, OIT

This workshop will be of interest to faculty who would like to use the web-based communication system, Adobe Connect, as an instructional tool. This web conferencing software makes classroom and assessment activities easily accessible

to students in both real-time classrooms and distance settings through numerous interactive media devices.

Summer Seminars

Three faculty summer seminars were developed and presented through the PROF Center. The seminar is a small academic circle where faculty members work together on a topic of common interest. Group members read literature specific to a common theme and engaged in discussions about the readings. From a deeper understanding of the readings and through dialogic exchange, participants examined their own practices to modify, revise, and/or create new strategies for implementation. Following are the project descriptions:

- **Composition Competence Faculty Summer Seminar**

Inordinate amounts of time are spent correcting student compositions. This faculty seminar, facilitated by the new interim director of the Writing Project, discusses and implements strategies for correcting compositions. The seminar group first reads and engages in seminar techniques to discuss selected literature on the topic of correcting student compositions. They then bring their corrected student work to the table, discuss practices, raise questions of composition and content delivery vs. grammatical corrections, and examine rubrics that work and don't work, etc. The group identified multiple ways to address composition correction, taking the discussion to a new level to find solutions to persistent questions.

- **Documenting Rich Learning Experiences: Using Technology to Capture Critical Thinking Moments with Jack Mino**

This faculty seminar was designed to introduce and apply the documentation process that captures student-learning moments through classroom-based discourse. Jack Mino, who developed this practice, was a consultant for this seminar via TTV. Faculty used selected readings to discuss documenting student work to then infuse their syllabi with this critical thinking technique in Fall09.

- **Learning Community Faculty Seminar**

Faculty in this seminar engaged with colleagues who want to design learning community concepts around a common theme. The seminar was based on current readings and encouraged reflective and creative time to develop new LC concepts for purposes of implementation in Spring 2010.

Fall 2009

- **Brown Bag Lunch Series**

Summer was a busy time at the PROF Center with the ongoing work of three Faculty Summer Seminars. In these small academic circles faculty members worked together on a topic of common interest. Group members read literature specific to a common theme and engaged in discussions about the readings. Then through dialogic exchange, participants examined their own practices to modify, revise, and/or create new strategies for implementation. In fall 2009, each faculty seminar presented their work to the larger TAMIU community.

- **Learning Community Work**

Collaboration continued with LC staff to develop a planning cycle whereby faculty could develop intentionally designed integrative classroom activities. This process began in Summer 09 and a planning calendar was developed with spring 2010 LC communities in mind. Work needs to continue to streamline the professional development and planning cycle for learning community faculty.

- **Master Teacher Program**

On the recommendation of Amy Poland, Ph.D., the Master Teacher Program was introduced to TAMIU faculty. Yezdi Bhada, Ph.D. presented both at New Faculty Orientation and returned to give faculty a one-day compressed version of the Master Teacher Program. Dr. Poland will continue this work by presenting four workshops in fall 2009 and spring 2010.

- **Fall Calendar of Events**

Aug 20	New Faculty Orientation
	What is effective teaching?/Course Preparation
	Yezdi Bhada, Ph.D., Half-day session with new faculty
Sept 18	Learning Community Summer Seminar Brown Bag Lunch Series
Sept 18	Learning Community – Spring Planning with Hayley Kazen, Ph.D.
Oct 1	Master Teacher Program, 4 modules with Yezdi Bhada, Ph.D.
Oct 16	Learning Community – Spring Planning, Meeting 2
Oct 28	Documentation Faculty Seminar – Brown Bag Lunch
Oct 29	The Publishing Process with Jerry Thompson, Ph.D.

- **Upcoming Events in November:**
 - Learning Objectives with Amy Poland, Ph.D.
 - Composition Competence Faculty Seminar – Brown Bag Lunch
- **Spring 2010 Event**

Feb 24 Guest Speaker: Tara Gray, Ph.D. (director, Teaching Academy – Publish and Flourish

The myth persists that prolific scholars are born not made, but research suggests otherwise. Much is known about the steps scholars can take to become prolific. In this workshop, participants learn a technique for getting meaningful feedback from others. Every scholar can become more prolific and these steps will show you how.

Dr. Gray, serves as an associate professor of criminal justice and director of the Teaching Academy at New Mexico State University. She has used these steps to publish three books, including *Publish and Flourish: Become a Prolific Scholar*. She has presented workshops to more than 3,000 scholars in twenty states, and in Guatemala, Mexico, Canada, and Thailand. As a workshop presenter, Dr. Gray is "spirited, informative and entertaining—she's anything but gray!"

IV. Conclusion

Inroads have been made toward developing the PROF Center; however, much more needs to be done to create a sustainable center. This includes obtaining funding that will sustain the Center with a support staff, physically relocating into a large area welcoming to faculty, and continuing with program development that meets the needs of and is supported by faculty. Development also requires formalizing communication networks that, although initiated in the first months of this project, still remain in the developmental stages. Throughout, this will require continued efforts to foster support across faculty entities and persistent collaboration among colleges, divisions, and departments across campus.