Faculty Learning Communities

Terms of Reference:

Background: Communities of practice is a term coined by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) to express the nature of situated learning within social relationships that perpetuate the meaning of a commonly shared practice. The concept of a community of practice is central to achieving the goals of faculty learning communities (FLCs) (Glowacki-Dudka & Brown, 2007). The practice of faculty learning communities could be understood as research, teaching, and / or clinical practice.

FLCs provide a structured approach for faculty, graduate students, and staff to establish communities of learning characterized by shared goals, collective identity, collaboration, respectful inclusion, and safe and supportive conditions, with the goal of progressive discourse toward knowledge building (Wenger, 1999). Cox (2004) established a core list of long-term goals associated with FLCs. These goals include: building a "collegial community of teachers and learners; providing a forum for collaboration in teaching and scholarship; promulgating a philosophy for teaching that reflects the complexity of the teaching practice; enhancing the scholarship of teaching and its application in the classroom; encouraging reflective practice; and increasing the value and importance of quality teaching" (Glowacki-Dudka & Brown, 2007, p. 1).

A priority of the Faculty Development Strategic Plan is to support a *Collaborative Culture of Teaching and Learning* through cultivating communities of learning. FLCs fulfill both individual and group goals, and are characterized by three key elements:

- **COMMUNITY** members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information.
- **DOMAIN** is 'shared domain of interest', a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic.
- **PRACTICE** is a shared repertoire of resources, experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015)

Purpose: The primary purpose of FLCs is to provide an environment for professional development, personal connections with peers, and opportunities to interact collegially to address issues pertaining to teaching and learning (Glowacki-Dudka & Brown, 2007). FLCs will support scholarly teaching and the scholarship of teaching and learning or discipline based educational research within areas of interest for faculty.

Faculty learning communities evolved with Boyer's (1990) presentation of an expanded concept of scholarship, including the scholarship of teaching. Richlin and Cox (1994) contend, "The scholarship of teaching involves two different, but closely related, activities, *scholarly teaching* and a resulting *scholarship* which differ in both their intent and their products" (p. 127). "The purpose of *scholarly teaching* is to affect the activity of teaching and the resulting learning, while the *scholarship of teaching* results in a formal, peer-reviewed communication in appropriate media or venues, which then becomes part of the knowledge base of teaching and learning in higher education" (Richlin & Cox, 1994, p. 128). Scholarly teaching and the scholarship of teaching are essential to fulfilling the responsibilities of the academy.

Membership: FLCs are open to all faculty, graduate students, and staff who have an interest in the focus area or domain of interest. Each faculty learning community will have up to twelve members who engage in an active, collaborative, yearlong agenda associated with enhancing teaching and learning that include

opportunities for learning, development, the scholarship of teaching and community building (Cox, 2004).

Process for Establishing an FLC: Faculty interested in establishing a faculty learning community will need to submit an application for approval to the Assistant Dean Faculty Development in addition to meeting the following criteria:

- Have up to twelve members
- Declare a domain of interest
- Indicate a commitment to facilitate the FLC for at least one academic year and fulfill the facilitator accountabilities (see Appendix A for FLC Application Form)

Facilitator Accountabilities: FLCs are dynamic social structures that require cultivation so that they can emerge and grow (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Facilitator accountabilities involve:

- Understanding its lifecycle phases and aligning expectations, plans, communication, collaborative activities, and measures of success to the current phase of the community's development.
- Utilizing the FLC Guide to support the development and growth of the FLC.
- Collaborating with community members to determine activities that align with the domain of interest and promote opportunities for learning, development, the scholarship of teaching and community building
- Collaborating with community members to determine frequency of meetings
- Submitting an annual report outlining community goals, learning activities and outcomes to the Assistant Dean Faculty Development (See Appendix B for FLC Annual Report)

Member Accountabilities: Community members will define and sustain the FLC over time. FLC member accountabilities involve:

- Choosing an FLC that aligns with an area of interest and your personal development goals
- Collaborating to determine the community's purpose
- Cultivating a culture of inquiry and evidence; engaging in planned activities that achieve the community's purpose
- Developing relationships of trust, mutual respect, reciprocity, and commitment necessary for strong communities
- Learning and developing a shared practice, based on an existing body of knowledge
- Generating and discovering new knowledge
- Taking purposeful action to carry out tasks and projects
- Participating in sharing outcomes with the broader faculty community

References:

Boyer, E. L. (1990). Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professorate. Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

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Glowacki-Dudka, M., & Brown, M. P. (2007). Professional development through faculty learning communities. New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development, 21(1-2), 29-39. https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.10277

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation. Cambridge university press.

Richlin, L., & Cox, M. D. (2004). Developing scholarly teaching and the scholarship of teaching and learning through faculty learning communities. New directions for teaching and learning, 2004(97), 127-135.

Wenger, E. (1999). Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity. Cambridge university press.

Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W. (2002). Cultivating communities of practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press

Wenger-Trayner, E. & Wenger-Trayner, B. (2015). Introduction to communities of practice: A brief overview of the concept and its uses. Retrieved from https://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/

Appendix A:

Faculty Learning Community (FLC) Application Form

Name of Faculty/Staff Facilitator: _____

Domain of Interest: _____

Names of FLC members:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Signatures:

FLC Facilitator _____   Date _____

Assistant Dean Faculty Development _____   Date _____

Appendix B:

Faculty Learning Community (FLC) Annual Report

Name of Faculty/Staff Facilitator: _____

Domain of Interest: _____

Names of FLC members:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Goals

_____
_____
_____

Learning Activities

Outcomes