Connect and Grow Through Faculty Learning Communities

Department of Physiology
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When students want to do better in their classes, they very often form study groups. These groups enable students to work together to develop conceptual understanding of the material in the course, as well as to make connections with others in that class or department.

But where do faculty go when they want to become more effective teachers?

One place is the UA Learning Initiative Faculty Learning Communities [1], which have been identified as a high-impact practice by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. In 2013, FLCs began as a part of the UA American Association of Universities Undergraduate STEM Education Project. Since then, the FLCs have evolved to include faculty from all disciplines with a wide variety of interests and backgrounds. One thing that all FLC members have in common is a strong desire to improve student learning.

As part of the semester-long program, we will be creating and working on a teaching reflection journal, which can be a large portion of a faculty teaching portfolio, used in promotion and tenure. In addition, we will be looking at educational literature from varying sources, which will lead to engaging conversations, opportunities to practice using evidence-based teaching and learning strategies, and participation in peer observations. (There's a registration link at the end of this article if you'd like to join us!)

Nine groups of six to 10 members are forming for the fall semester, each guided by one or two outstanding faculty members who volunteer their time to act as facilitators. The fall 2017 facilitators are:

- Ray Barnes, School of Architecture
- Paul Blowers, University Distinguished Professor, Department of Chemical and Environmental Engineering
- Kate Bunton, Department of Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences
- Eric Case, Department of Management Information Systems
- Zoe Cohen, Department of Physiology
- Erin Dokter, Office of Instruction and Assessment
- Lisa Elfring, Department of Molecular and Cellular Biology
- Amy Graham, Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry
- Rich Harper, School of Government and Public Policy
- Mike Mulcahy, School of Theatre, Film and Television
- Dana Narter, Department of Psychology
- Kayle Skorupski, Department of Nutritional Sciences
- Tom Wilson, Honors College

The focus of the discussions and the structure of the FLCs are determined by the members of
each group. However, the facilitators have suggested a few topics of interest to help prospective members identify peers who have interests similar to their own.

Topics include:

- Student learning in large classes
- Student learning in small classes
- How to engage students in online courses
- Diversity and inclusion in the classroom
- How to assess student learning

For detailed information about when the groups will meet, and each group's facilitators and suggested topics, please click here [2].

The FLCs will meet for one hour seven times throughout the semester in the beautiful Collaborative Faculty Room [3] in the Science-Engineering Library. An All Members Kickoff event, scheduled for early September, will provide insights into how to ensure inclusive excellence in all UA learning environments and an All Members Wrapup event in early December will include a talk/workshop with physicist Carl Wieman, a Nobel Prize winner and author of "Improving How Universities Teach Science [4]."

I'd like to close by sharing some of the comments we have received from members of previous FLCs.

"I think the program is great. ... I appreciate the University's investment to help one improve their teaching and a peer group is great, not only for teaching but being more connected to the university."

"Each FLC I have participated in has varied in structure and members. Each one brought something different and valuable to my teaching and learning."

"Creating community! I think that’s the best thing about the FLCs! You make contacts with others who have similar interests (but very different areas of expertise)."

If you're interested in participating in an FLC this fall, please visit FLC Registration - Fall 2017 [5]. Meetings will begin the week of Aug. 28. Please register by Aug. 23.

Zoe Cohen is an assistant professor in the Department of Physiology and will be a facilitator for a faculty learning community this fall. For more information about FLCs, contact Cohen at zcohen@email.arizona.edu [6].

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