

## **AC 2007-1840: IMPROVING ADJUNCT TEACHING THROUGH FACILITATOR DEVELOPMENT**

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Kathleen Alfano is the principal investigator of CREATE's NSF ATE Regional Center for Information and Manufacturing Technologies and has led CREATE (California Regional Consortium for Engineering Advances in Technical Education) since its development in 1996-1997. She previously served as Dean of Academic Computing and Professional Programs and is currently also a faculty member at College of the Canyons. She has over twenty years of successful faculty leadership, administration of technical departments, and leadership of State and Federal curriculum projects, especially in the areas of technical education. Dr. Alfano has a B.S. in Chemistry, M.S. in Education/Counseling, and a Ph.D. from UCLA in Higher Education, Work, and Adult Development. She also directs the Cisco Academy Training Center (CATC) for California and Nevada.

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Joseph Gerda has been at College of the Canyons since 1987, where he is currently a professor in the mathematics department. Since 1988 he has held a variety of positions including Department Chair, Division Chair, Coordinator for Instruction, Assistant Dean of Instruction & Athletic Director. He has been involved in the Hesburg Award winning staff development activity, The Associate Program of Adjunct Instructors, since its inception in 1989. His current interests includes staff development for adjunct instructors, improving online mathematics education and writing a statistics text integrating relevant problems, computer applications, and critical thinking. He holds B.S. and M.A. from University of Texas, Arlington, and an M.S. from U.C.L.A School of Medicine.

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Floyd Moos has been an educator for 36 years. Currently serving as College of the Canyons' Dean of Fine and Performing Arts, Floyd began his teaching career in 1973. He has worked at College of the Canyons since 1989 as an English instructor, department chair, division chair, and founding director of the college's Institute of Teaching and Learning. He joined the CREATE program in 2002, serving as NSF-CREATE Instructional Coordinator. He received his B.A. and M.A. from University of California, Los Angeles (U.C.L.A.) and an Ed.D. in Higher Education, Curriculum and Assessment from Nova Southeastern University.

## **Improving Adjunct Teaching through Facilitator Development**

Being able to employ technical experts as teachers has always been a strength for community colleges, particularly in departments like information technology, engineering technology and manufacturing technology where there are frequently large pools of practicing technicians and technologists in the field. However, technical departments are challenged by the fact that these experts frequently have little or no experience as teachers. Their lack of teaching expertise and experience can lead to a high turnover rate for adjunct instructors and a high attrition rate for students. Keeping adjunct positions staffed with competent teachers can be a frustrating experience for department chairs, who are trying to establish and build strong departments.

The California Regional Consortium for Engineering Advances in Technological Education (CREATE) project is a joint effort between seven community colleges and over 30 large high tech engineering/technology employers, which is supported by the National Science Foundation. Its purpose is to develop a regional approach to workforce preparation and training, and to meet emerging needs for innovative, flexible strategies to educate the workforce in new, technological advances in a wide range of high demand engineering technology fields. CREATE has addressed the problem of adjunct teaching improvement by developing a training program for full-time faculty who are interested in using department-sponsored teaching workshops to enhance adjunct teaching skills. Through a series of facilitator development workshops full-time faculty members are provided with the skills and the materials necessary to facilitate workshops for their adjunct teachers. Through these workshops, adjunct faculty are exposed to basic teaching principles and techniques and given an opportunity to practice teaching and to receive targeted feedback.

This paper describes the program and its results. There are three workshops that compose the program offered to adjuncts. However, the key to the approach is the facilitator development workshops in which full-time faculty are trained to implement a package of workshops to their own adjuncts. Based on this training faculty members are able to return to their home campuses with all the materials and the skills needed to quickly begin to improve teaching within their departments.

### **Statement of Problem**

The CREATE project includes seven community colleges working together under the direction of a regional grant director, Dr. Kathy Alfano. The region covered by the NSF grant extends from the northern part of Los Angeles County, through Ventura and Santa Barbara counties and into San Luis Obispo county. The grant principally serves the fields of computer networking, engineering, and manufacturing technology.

As the grant developed, department chairs in these fields began to voice a common concern. Being able to employ technical experts as teachers has always been a strength for community colleges, particularly in fields like those served by CREATE. However, technical departments are challenged by the fact that these experts frequently have little or no experience as teachers. Department chairs were frustrated in their efforts to build strong departments by their inability to

find reliable, competent teachers and the lack of support for developing those with weak teaching skills.

A lack of teaching expertise and experience can lead to a high turnover rate for adjunct instructors. In some cases department chairs decide not to rehire the instructor because his or her teaching skills are remarkably inferior. In other cases, the part-time instructors become uncomfortable and frustrated with the experience of teaching and decide not to return.

Such episodes can lead to high attrition rates for students and, most importantly, missed opportunities for learning. Some students may decide to pursue other fields and be permanently lost to the program. The problem may even undermine the efforts of department chairs to build a successful program or even to sustain the success of one. Arguing that some programs live or die on the success of their adjuncts is not overreaching.

Part-time faculty members have long been fundamental to the operation of community colleges. According to the American Association of Community Colleges, part-time teachers compose up to 66 percent of the public community college faculty across the nation.<sup>1</sup> Even though we know them more as a shadowy campus presence, operating more in the background than the foreground, we have come to understand how collectively crucial they are to the education of our students. And, when we think about it, we know how important their teaching skills must be to the quality of the education that our colleges are providing.

Since part-time faculty play such an influential role in community college instruction, the quality of their teaching and the opportunities they have for professional development should be key concerns for community college leaders. However, given the variety of logistical and economic roadblocks associated with adjunct faculty development programs, most institutions never mount an offensive.<sup>2</sup> Since most adjunct faculty have weak ties to the institution, some educators argue that the benefits of such programs are inconsequential.

In *Strangers in Their Own Land* (2002), Roueche, Roueche, and Milliron made a convincing counter argument: that part-timers need equal opportunities to grow and develop as professionals. The authors write that adjuncts,

(S)hould be integrated into the college community and recognized as increasingly important players in the teaching and learning process in the interest of providing quality instruction to the growing number of full and part-time students who will sit in their classrooms, in the interest of appreciating the investment value of the part-time faculty, and ultimately in the interest of establishing and maintaining the college's reputation for teaching excellence.<sup>3</sup>

The sheer number of classes covered by adjuncts makes a powerful argument that responsible colleges should invest in their teaching lives.

The department chairs in the CREATE program argued that this was even more true for those who were trying to develop or sustain small burgeoning programs, yet there was no answer from their institutions for their specific questions: what can a department chair do to help new

adjuncts make the transition from the workplace environment to the classroom environment? How can basic teaching skills and classroom management techniques be quickly instilled in new instructors? Is there anything that the institution can do to help?

The CREATE program decided that the first two questions could be answered using techniques for teaching improvement developed at one of the regional colleges, College of the Canyons, where a program for teaching improvement in adjunct faculty had been in existence since 1989. The grant decided that department chairs and/or other full-time department members could be trained to facilitate similar programs, in which they worked directly with adjuncts to improve teaching skills.

Training department members to facilitate their own teaching improvement workshops had several advantages: 1) departments could tailor the training to the needs of their own adjunct populations; 2) a mentor-mentee relationship would be developed between department members and adjuncts; 3) the teaching skills of full-time faculty members would also be enhanced by their participation in the training.

### Description of Program

The program is based on a facilitator development workshop that is offered in two parts, a five-day and a four-day segment. During these two segments participants are trained to conduct three professional development workshops, the Teaching Skills Workshop (TSW), the Teaching Demonstration workshop (TD), and Teaching in the Community College (TICC).

The *Teaching Skills Workshop* focuses on a specific set of instructional skills, which are the basis for planning and implementing any successful lesson. The workshop creates opportunities for faculty members to practice and develop these specific skills. *Teaching Demonstration* relies more heavily on mentoring. A full-time faculty member meets with a group of adjuncts to further discuss the lesson structure and principles introduced in the TSW. Over a period of weeks the adjuncts plan a lesson, which is then demonstrated in the real world classroom. This phase emphasizes reflective practice and culminates with a reflective paper written by the adjunct faculty member. *Teaching in the Community College* introduces participants to broader teaching topics that go beyond the planning of an individual lesson. These topics affect the planning of an entire course or propose the introduction of an entirely new approach or teaching practice throughout a course. Each of these three will be described in greater detail below.

The **Teaching Skills Workshop** is based on “microteaching” practices used nationally. Microteaching essentially requires teachers to teach 15-minute lessons to each other in a small-group setting. The workshop focuses on helping the adjunct instructor understand the structure of a lesson and how it can be successfully presented. One facilitator works with a group of four workshop participants. The lesson presenter receives immediate verbal feedback, as well as more detailed written feedback. The lesson is videoed in order to give the presenter an additional opportunity to learn from the experience.

The structure of the lesson is very basic and yet it contains elements that are apparently not practiced by many teachers on a daily basis. For instance, the practices of bridging into a lesson

or providing objectives are sometimes new to even experienced teachers. During this 18-hour workshop, each participant presents two lessons and observes and provides feedback in six other lessons presented by other participants. The learning is highly experiential and, frequently, as much learning occurs while observing lessons as when presenting. Many teachers have forgotten what it is like to be a student, and the role reversal can be an eye-opening experience.

Facilitators are careful to create a comfortable atmosphere, in which feedback is offered with care and thought. Participants receive feedback that is much more focused than might occur in a typical classroom observation/evaluation. And participants must then teach a second lesson on a new topic. The reflection and repetition involved in this cycle promote rapid improvement.

Ultimately, the experience is designed to prompt teachers to shift their focus from teaching to fostering student learning. The lesson structure used in the workshop places an emphasis on a “check for understanding,” through which teachers gain a deeper understanding of the disconnection that frequently exists between teaching and learning.

Participants are challenged to practice and demonstrate their skills in the classroom during the second workshop. This phase, called the **Teaching Demonstration** (TD), is designed to promote deeper reflection on one’s application of the principles and techniques promoted by the process. The facilitator from the TSW continues to meet with participants over a series of weeks in which he or she assumes a mentor role. The mentor and mentees meet to discuss the process of planning of a lesson and the application of the lesson basics in their classrooms. Each mentee produces a lesson plan, which is reviewed by the mentor and the other mentees as part of a group discussion.

The mentee then gives the lesson in the classroom and is observed by the mentor. In contrast to a classroom evaluation, the process places the responsibility for analysis and learning squarely on the presenter. The mentor and mentee meet for a post-observation meeting, in which the presenter is challenged to analyze his or her own performance. The mentor provides feedback, but the mentee is asked to write a reflection paper in which the lesson is analyzed and the process of reflection is recorded. The paper is reviewed by the mentor and may be returned for revision.

The paper is also distributed to the other members of the group by e-mail. The group meets to discuss the results and to individually describe the learning that has occurred through demonstration and reflection. As has been emphasized, the learning is highly experiential and individualized, and no attempt is made to establish a universal bar over which everyone must leap.

Having been grounded in the basics of lesson presentation, participants move on to broader issues in teaching. **Teaching in the Community College** (TICC) advances the discussion of teaching by addressing topics that extend beyond the framework of an individual lesson. For instance, the syllabus is a basic building block of course construction. Even experienced teachers seem to have issues related to the syllabus that they are interested in exploring with other teachers. Active learning, classroom assessment techniques, motivation, and learning styles are other topics addressed in this 15-hour workshop. The workshop also includes time for participants to initiate discussion of challenges that they are experiencing in their own

classrooms. In this way, the workshop is, in part, molded to the desires and predilections of the particular group.

According to a study done by the U.S. Department of Labor, employees learn as much about their jobs through informal discussions with colleagues as they do through formal training.<sup>4</sup> All of the workshops are filled with numerous opportunities for colleagues to converse informally during breaks. Experience indicates that the workshops also promote more networking within the department, furthering relationships that continue to grow outside the context of professional development.

All the workshops, including the TICC, are designed, as much as possible, to model the principles and techniques espoused by the program. Consequently, the participants continue to learn through the simple process of watching other teachers teach. All of the TICC workshops also include an active learning component, as the participants are adult learners who need to interact with the material. Furthermore, adult learners approach their learning pragmatically. Therefore, the workshops almost always require that the participants develop a plan for implementing the techniques that are being discussed.

The **Facilitator Development Workshop** (FDW) provides the training for faculty members to become facilitators of the three workshops described above. The FDW composes 55 hours of training, which is split into a four and one-half day workshop and a four-day workshop. The FDW is the backbone of the entire approach. The success of the program rests on its ability to teach faculty members to become their own faculty development facilitators.

During the first four and one-half day workshop participants experience a full TSW. The entire workshop is presented and participants receive the same training they will be implementing on their home campuses. However, starting the second day, they also begin to receive instruction on facilitator skills. On the third day they begin to assume some of the duties of facilitation and to receive feedback on their facilitation skills. The fourth day provides a chance for them to process the feedback they have received and to improve by facilitating an additional mini-lesson. The last half-day offers an opportunity to question and discuss facilitation skills and to plan for the implementation of the workshop.

The second FDW explains and models the remaining two workshops. The TD and the TICC are described and, to the extent possible, modeled for the participants. Throughout all these workshops the participants are provided with printed material, Word documents, and Power Point presentations that allow them to return to their campuses and to hit the ground running.

The National Science Foundation grant funds the offering of the FDW and provides participants with a \$500 stipend to cover travel expenses. Facilitators are paid a small stipend when they implement the workshops, as are their participants.

## Results

Faculty from across the country have been attracted to and participated in this professional development approach. The workshops were first piloted at College of the Canyons as a way to

test them and modify them before they were incorporated into a Facilitator Development Workshop. The FDW training started in the summer of 2003 with participants from the network of colleges in the grant's own region. Eleven faculty members from seven regional community colleges attended FDWs and were trained as facilitators. The piloting and the FDW training have resulted in sixty-eight full-time and adjunct instructors within the region participating in one or more of the three workshops (TSW, TD, TICC).

In the summer of 2005 the program began advertising the training through other regional NSF centers throughout the United States. Thirty-seven teachers have traveled to Southern California to participate in an FDW. Six have completed both parts of the FDW while the others have completed the first four and one-half days of training and most of that group will be returning in the summer of 2007 to complete the process.

The instructors who have attended the FDW are almost universally positive in their response to the training. In most cases they are full-time faculty members with years of teaching experience. Nevertheless, they report that many of the components of the lesson structure used in the workshops are new to them. The workshop trainers are able to see changes in their teaching over the course of just a few days as timing improves and lesson structures tighten. In other words, the overarching goal of the program is to improve adjunct teaching performance, but a significant by-product is the strengthening of the skills of the full-time faculty who will be training and mentoring them.

A workshop evaluation is administered at the end of each day both during the FDW and during the three basic workshops. A summative evaluation is administered at the end of each workshop as well. All the evaluations are anonymous, anecdotal and simply ask the participants direct questions about their experiences in the program and about their teaching practices. Although specific suggestions for change are sometimes made, the assessment of the workshops is overwhelmingly positive.

The evaluations from the Teaching Skills Workshop are particularly noteworthy because they reveal significant insights into teaching. Teachers are quick to see the power of the microteaching model and the value of practicing what they do. A new appreciation for clarity in a presentation is frequently noted. Having been placed in the role of students, faculty members begin to see the potential pitfalls of muddled objectives and fuzzy content from the student's point of view. A typical participant comment is, "I had no idea how vague I could be. Now I see why I need objectives for all my lessons." When asked how the workshop is changing their teaching practices, participants are most likely to indicate the use of a "check for understanding." This response indicates a shift of attention to the learning side of the equation and the use of techniques that help the teacher to know if learning is occurring. Some use the phrase, "paradigm shift," (or an equivalent) to describe the change in thinking about the nexus between teaching and learning. Still others emphasize the skills they learn related to time management or the use of feedback techniques.

In 2005, when the FDW began to be offered nationally, the grant began a commensurate effort to collect pre and post survey data from both instructors and students. Workshop participants were asked to complete a survey of their teaching practices and to administer a survey in their classes

that queried students about those practices. To date an insufficient amount of data has been collected to report any results.

Recently, the grant created a cohort of instructors who all teach classes in CISCO systems. This partnership with CISCO programs greatly strengthens the grant assessment process as the CISCO program includes a fully developed testing system for each course. Under the direction of Ann Igoe, the grant assessment office, a new research model has been developed within which student learning will play a much greater role. In addition to the pre and post instructor and student surveys, the grant now intends to use pre and post test data for the instructors in this cohort. In other words, the success rates of students on standardized testing data will be used to determine if the workshops appear to have affected student learning.

### Discussion

As mentioned previously, the workshops were based on a design developed much earlier at College of the Canyons (COC). At COC a similar version of the workshops has proven very successful and demand for entrance is consistently very high. Over two-hundred adjunct faculty have successfully completed the program. However, it should be noted that adjuncts at COC are granted a 10% pay raise upon completion of the program.

The design of the workshops was modified somewhat to accommodate the needs of the CREATE program. The TD and the TICC, in particular, were streamlined and packaged to make them easier for faculty to implement on their home campuses. The workshops were not designed particularly or exclusively for technical instructors. This decision was based on a belief that the basic skills most needed by the target audience were universal and not particular to the technical field. There was also a belief that the department chairs and other full-time faculty who were facilitating the workshops and serving as mentors could add additional material to serve this purpose when needed. In some cases instructors have decided to expand the scope of their ambitions and to begin offering the workshops outside the technical departments on their campus. The fact that the workshops were not tailored to technical instructors has served their purposes as well.

This design seems to have been successful in helping the grant to achieve its initial goals. The instructors in the grant region have been very pleased with the training and have used the workshops to respond to the needs in their own departments for adjunct teaching improvement. These faculty members believe that the experience of learning and facilitating these workshops has strengthened their own teaching skills and have given them a means to help other instructors become better teachers as well.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that instructors across the board perceive the training to be useful, but there is not yet evidence as to whether improved teaching has resulted in improved learning. Creating a tight and defensible research design for increases in learning is always difficult; finding truly comparable groups to compare is a challenge. Doing so with adjuncts is even more challenging when their schedules, their assignments, and their very employment at the college can be unpredictable and tenuous. To complicate matters further, their incentive to participate in the research is weak at best. However, the new research design based on the collection of

CISCO testing data, as mentioned above, is a promising approach to being able to make this case.

The design of the program was also very dependent on the abilities of the FDW participants to return to their campuses and to recruit other faculty to participate. At the regional level, full-time faculty were reasonably successful in doing just that. As the FDW has broadened the scope of participation, more instructors have returned home to find recruitment to be a major stumbling block. The workshops obviously require a considerable time commitment on the part of both the facilitator and the participants. Although the grant provided a small stipend, everyone involved had, to some extent, to be participating out of a genuine, personal desire for professional growth.

### Conclusions

Across the country community college departments are frustrated by their inability to find and keep competent adjunct faculty members. The problem is exacerbated by a lack of institutional support for adjunct teaching improvement. Part-time faculty members are frequently the last to have funds allocated to their professional development or recognition given to their unique needs. CREATE's approach to this dilemma has been to suggest that campus reform can develop just as readily from the bottom up as from the top down. Too many department chairs have grown old and wobbly waiting for the administration to respond to their pleas for adjunct teaching improvement programs.

CREATE's approach asserts that change can sprout from seeds planted directly into the department, nurtured by the efforts and will of dedicated full-time faculty determined to strengthen their departments and improve learning for students. The Facilitator Development Workshop provides faculty members with the basic skills and materials necessary to ground their adjuncts in good teaching practice. An adjunct faculty member exposed to microteaching concepts, provided with the wealth of feedback received through the program, and armed with a knowledge of proven teaching techniques has a far greater chance of success in the classroom.

These ideas have been tremendously well received by those in the trenches, who see the program as a lifeline in what is sometimes a barren, apathetic institutional sea in which they are sailing. Nevertheless, their success in implementing the program has varied, based on a variety of institutional and personal factors. No matter how much desire one has, growing such a program can be a daunting task and, clearly, more incentives for both full and part-time faculty need to be offered. And success will always be more likely in institutions where someone is willing to pull from the top while someone else is pushing from the bottom.

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