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Center for Research
on Adult Learning

*Seeking to Develop and Enrich an
Interactive Learning Community*

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CENTRAL MICHIGAN
UNIVERSITY

College of Extended Learning

Incorporating Faculty Issues in the Strategic Plans of the College of Extended Learning

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INCORPORATING FACULTY ISSUES IN THE STRATEGIC PLANS OF THE COLLEGE OF EXTENDED LEARNING

Executive Summary

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Center for Research on Adult Learning*

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

The project concept was a part of a larger strategic planning effort which challenged the College of Extended Learning at Central Michigan University to carefully examine their off-campus faculty needs and issues. During the summer of 1999, Dr. Del Ringquist, Dean of the College of Extended Learning, and Dr. Larry Smiley, Associate Dean of the College of Extended Learning, formulated the need for the current project, *Incorporating Faculty Issues in the Strategic Plans of the College of Extended Learning Project* (hereafter referred to as *The Faculty Project*). The Faculty Project was designed to develop strategic plans that focus on retaining and attracting quality CEL instructors while strengthening relationships with on-campus departments.

Project Personnel

Dr. Lana Ivanitskaya, Executive Director of the Center for Research on Adult Learning, outlined a process through which faculty issues can be systematically gathered and analyzed. CRAL's staff assisted with the implementation of the project, data analyses, and preparation of the final report. Dr. Kevin Love was selected as a consultant to implement a data gathering process for on-campus stakeholders (CMU department chairs and CMU faculty who teach off-campus). Academic Advisory Council members Larry Smiley, Patricia Fox, Megan Goodwin, William McDermott, Sherene McHenry, Lynn Holmes, Paul McKelvey, Ron Primeau, Terry Rawls, Nancy Reddy, and William Rugg guided the project development, assisted in interpreting project findings, and made recommendations regarding implementation steps. Additional input was provided by two CEL employees who have much experience working with CEL faculty, Carolyn Monahan and Jane Mills.

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

Focus Group Participants

Focus groups were conducted with CEL off-campus faculty, CMU on-campus faculty who teach for CEL, CMU academic department chairs, CEL-North administrative personnel, and regional CEL administrators. Focus groups were held in the following locations:

- Washington, D.C. (East)
- Kansas City, Missouri (West)
- Detroit, Michigan

- Traverse City, Michigan (Greater Michigan)
- Mt. Pleasant (on-campus and in CEL-North), Michigan

Overall, a total of 82 individuals participated in 11 focus groups conducted in multiple CEL regions. CEL faculty and academic department chairs represented 46% of project respondents.

Focus Group Questions

The general content of the focus group questions can be summarized as follows:

- Issues or concerns relating to off-campus faculty that needed CEL’s attention
- Identification of “burning issues” and priority areas
- Suggestions for resolving problems and addressing areas of concern
- Positive aspects of CEL’s relationship with its faculty
- Determination of the types of information CEL lacks in its efforts to include faculty issues in its organizational decision-making

PROJECT FINDINGS

Content Analysis of Participant Comments

Focus group participants contributed 649 comments to the stated questions. All comments were sorted by group type, e.g., based on location (off-campus vs. on-campus) or composition (academic vs. administrative). In order to interpret this large pool of responses, we used *Non Numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing System*, a program designed for development, support, and management of qualitative data analysis projects. The data were content analyzed and sorted into primary themes and secondary sub themes. The unit of analysis was defined as ‘one thought expressed by a focus group participant at any point in the discussion.’ While the significance of each theme was evaluated based on its relative size, all individual comments were considered important and valuable contributions to the goals of the project.

Themes and Sub Themes

Four broad theme categories were identified: those related to faculty, students, administrative issues, and marketing. Definitions of themes and sub themes, as well as their representative comments are presented in Appendix E. Each theme contained positive, negative, and neutral comments that matched the description of the theme. Out of the four theme categories, *Faculty* and *Administrative Issues* accounted for the largest number of project participants’ comments. As expected, project participants spent most of their time discussing faculty concerns. Indeed, over 70% of comments (n = 440) were devoted to faculty topics. To facilitate data interpretation, the *Faculty* theme was divided into 11 sub themes:

Sub Themes Included in the Faculty Theme, Sorted by Size

Faculty Sub Themes	Number of comments n	Percent of all comments
1. Academic standards (in grading, teaching, and syllabus)	173	26.81
2. Recruitment and approval	102	15.72
3. Faculty training and development	55	8.47
4. Compensation and recognition	54	8.32
5. CMU vs. CEL faculty	39	6.01
6. Faculty evaluation and student feedback	35	5.39
7. Teaching in compressed format	33	5.08
8. Interconnectedness among faculty	32	4.93
9. Motivation	22	3.39
10. Differences (e.g., regional) among CEL faculty	12	1.85
11. Research	4	.62

An *Administrative Issues* theme accounted for the second largest number of comments (n = 131), corresponding to 20% of all respondent comments. Comments related to *Administrative Issues* covered a wide variety of subjects, ranging from the faculty approval process and administrative support to facilities management and classroom technology. *Student* theme accounted for about 6% of comments (n = 50), with most attention being devoted to the preparedness and motivation of the student population. Finally, the *Market* theme accounted for a relatively small number of comments (n = 27) that corresponded to about 4% of all focus group comments.

Theme and Sub Theme Highlights

Project findings resulted in the classification of several themes and sub themes characterized by a large number of respondent comments (n >= 50). These themes were *Academic Standards* (n = 173), *Administrative Issues* (n = 131), *Faculty Recruitment and Approval* (n = 102), *Faculty Training and Development* (n = 55), *Compensation and Recognition* (n = 54), and *CEL Students* (n = 50). For a summary of comments in the largest themes and sub themes, see a PROJECT FINDINGS section of the report.

Group Differences

Group differences were examined by identifying the largest gaps between the groups. The group categories were developed based on focus group participants' region (Mt. Pleasant, East, West, and Michigan outside of Mt. Pleasant) and job (administrative vs. faculty), as well as in relation to CMU's campus (campus vs. on-campus). Large group differences (equal or greater than 9% of respondent comments) were found for the following themes: *Academic Standards*, *CMU-CEL*, and *Administrative Issues*. Compared to other regions, West and East regions devoted much attention to *Administrative Issues*, while Mt. Pleasant focus groups contributed a smaller number of comments related to *Academic Standards*. Faculty raised the issue of *Academic Standards* more often than administrators. On-campus focus groups devoted more attention to the relationship between *CMU and CEL*, while off-campus participants devoted more attention to the discussion of *Administrative Issues*.

INCORPORATING THE PROJECT FINDINGS IN THE CEL STRATEGIC PLANS

Action Steps Proposed by the Academic Advisory Council

The Academic Advisory Council met on April 27th and May 1st, 2000 to discuss the findings of the Faculty Project. The Council members provided detailed feedback on Faculty Project themes and proposed action steps that fell within the following four categories:

- I. Day-to-day issues
- II. Communication/articulation of academic standards
- III. Faculty recruitment, selection, and approval
- IV. Faculty training and development

I. Day-to-day issues

1. Review all “A” class lists; encourage new faculty to establish firm yet fair grading standards; warn faculty of the dangers of adjusting standards in mid-class
2. Identify obstacles to obtaining student grades from CEL faculty in a timely fashion
3. Implement on-line grading
4. Consider raising the GPA for admission
5. Review the value and use of End-of-Course surveys
6. Address the issue of outdated course syllabi
7. Make faculty forms available on-line
8. Establish a minimum standard for classroom facilities
9. Address the issue of inadequate classroom technology
10. Identify why some CEL faculty discontinue teaching for CEL
11. Establish career paths for assistant director/associate to program director to minimize turnover among regional CEL administrators
12. Involve CEL part-time faculty in research projects
13. Obtain Executive Team’s input into ways to recognize outstanding faculty; consider differential pay rates for different courses/teaching experience
14. Examine how CEL students define a “good instructor”
15. Continually collect data on CEL students and the outcomes of their participation in CMU programs; tie curriculum to academic outcomes

[Assign responsibility for items 1-15 to Larry Smiley, Associate Dean of the College of Extended Learning, who will engage appropriate help from specific persons or units as necessary]

II. Communication/articulation of academic (teaching and learning) standards

1. *Articulate CEL academic standards and expectations*
2. *Enhance Faculty Handbook to address teaching quality issues such as expectations for grades awarded, strategies for teaching in the compressed format, teaching pedagogy/androgogy*
3. *Increase awareness of academic expectations among CEL instructors and students*
4. *Take a public stand on quality; establish clear expectations for CEL faculty (if possible, spell them out in a contract)*

[Larry Smiley, Associate Dean of the College of Extended Learning, assigned responsibility for implementing items 1-4 (italicized) to a Faculty Project Taskforce]

5. Establish communication between faculty who teach the same courses or who have similar problems; establish and support multiple listserves to facilitate communication between on- and off-campus faculty and administrators
6. Promote respect for CEL faculty within CEL and the university community
7. When presenting CEL, emphasize its academic quality, not financial contribution

III. Faculty recruitment, selection, and approval (must be preceded by addressing items highlighted in cluster II)

1. Establish consistent faculty approval/re-approval guidelines and criteria; provide definition of a “good instructor”
2. Work with departments to determine approval/re-approval criteria
3. Examine criteria departments use to select temporary instructors in their own department
4. Examine the value of professional experience for off-campus teaching
5. Develop a plan for faculty recruitment and approval; clearly define the process of faculty approval
6. Examine procedures for rejecting instructors whose credentials do not match department requirements or those who apply for course approvals for which there is a substantial pool of instructors
7. Examine if there is a need for a more detailed application for teaching positions at CEL
8. Provide department chairs with a justification for approving or re-approving CEL instructors
9. Increase CEL interaction with departments to clarify criteria used for appointment and specify what data they need to conduct approvals
10. Provide resources and personnel time; have an office with qualified staff who can implement a faculty recruitment, selection, development, retention, and reward model

[Responsibility for addressing items 1-10 will be assigned by Larry Smiley, Associate Dean of the College of Extended Learning, who will engage appropriate help from specific persons or units as necessary]

IV. Faculty training and development

1. Establish a consistent faculty orientation, training and development system
2. Develop consistent, mandatory orientation programs for all faculty
3. Orient CEL faculty to CMU as an institution, as well as to the specific values, philosophy and goals of the program in which they teach
4. Establish an orientation session addressing FAQs and what to expect during the first night of class; make instructors and administrators more aware of student differences and provide guidance in accommodating individual differences and dealing with potential pressures
5. Prepare new faculty for teaching assignments; provide new (inexperienced) faculty with gradual exposure to classroom teaching, e.g., class observations, team teaching, mentor support
6. Continue to create a formalized and endorsed mentor system; enhance mentor practices and activities
7. Develop web-based (or CD-ROM) training materials for faculty
8. Develop faculty training that is uniform across regions
9. Offer a National Symposium on Adult Learning
10. Consider re-creating a position of an assistant/assoc. director for academic affairs

[Assign responsibility for addressing items 1-10 to Associate Dean and Staff Development/ Training Coordinator; they should work collaboratively with Directors to incorporate plans for improving faculty training and development]

Incorporating Faculty Project Findings into the CEL Strategic Planning

The proposed implementation steps addressed a number of priority areas outlined in the recent draft of the CEL Strategic Plan. Specifically, the Faculty Project recommendations addressed two strategic objectives in the Productivity/Performance priority area of the CEL Strategic Plan and 12 objectives in the People priority area that covered faculty recruitment, orientation, development, and mentoring. Del Ringquist, Dean of the College of Extended Learning, endorsed the creation of a special implementation taskforce to drive the development of concrete implementation plans and timelines. Following the Dean's recommendation, a Faculty Project Taskforce was created for addressing items 1-4, cluster II.

CONCLUSION

The Faculty Project resulted in a large amount of rich qualitative data, a detailed analysis of central issues, topics, and themes, followed by the discussion of future action steps aimed at attracting and retaining quality CEL instructors. The proposed implementation steps are expected to increase the academic quality of off-campus programs, improve student learning, and strengthen relationships with on-campus departments.

For a complete listing of respondent comments contact CRAL at CRAL@cmich.edu, (800) 950-1144, ext. 2534 or write to the Center for Research on Adult Learning, CEL-North, Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, MI 48859.

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