

2016 Strategic Plan Key Question Committee – Final Report

Question(s):

What are the hallmarks of great teaching and how do we develop excellence and then reward it?

Members:

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Summary:

The committee has determined that effective teaching is a critical component of student and institutional success at Indiana State University. Recent trends in enrollment and state oversight have engaged the faculty in teaching loads and responsibilities that require new support structures and ongoing professional development. Faculty must be recognized for the effort they are putting into their pedagogy to ensure content mastery and meet diverse student needs. The committee feels that *now is the time* to truly acknowledge the importance of teaching on this campus. A culture of excellence in teaching that is recognized and rewarded must become an institutional priority. Although much discussion about teaching has occurred, we must start to deeply invest time, resources, and personnel into ensuring all those involved in instruction have the support systems necessary to elevate teaching excellence to its proper place at Indiana State University.

Definition

Teaching – In this document, the term teaching includes face-to-face, hybrid, and online delivery methods.

Key Findings Summary

Key Finding 1	It is critical to have a common understanding and baseline definition of what defines teaching excellence at Indiana State University.
Key Finding 2	Continuous professional development surrounding effective teaching must be encouraged and supported to the extent that it becomes endemic.
Key Finding 3	Teaching innovation needs to be encouraged and rewarded. Sharing effective innovations with the campus community must be prioritized.
Key Finding 4	Faculty that are in need of extra support in understanding, developing, and applying pedagogical principles and practices require a rich and specific pool of resources.
Key Finding 5	Faculty need substantial and meaningful opportunities to engage in and share teaching growth. This growth must be shared with the community, rewarded, and deeply valued.
Key Finding 6	It is crucial to engage department chairs and deans in professional development that strategically supports teaching.

Recommended Actions Summary

Recommended Action 1	Create a teaching statement for Indiana State University that captures its significance in the mission of our institution. Prospective faculty should be made fully aware of its importance during the hiring process, and it needs to be deeply reinforced in all elements of institutional induction. Approval by faculty senate would allow it to become part of University Handbook and provide common language and guidance for all colleges.
Recommended Action 2	A cycle of professional growth in teaching must be encouraged for all faculty. This should be evidenced and highly valued in biennial review and the promotion/tenure process. Exceptional growth should be acknowledged and rewarded.
Recommended Action 3	Create a space for faculty to engage in teaching innovation. This space will be used for faculty training and student instruction. It will incorporate the aspects of design and technology that maximize the potential for teaching and learning.
Recommended Action 4	Faculty with limited teaching background or experiences will complete a teaching “course” that will provide appropriate knowledge and resources for individuals with limited expertise in teaching pedagogy. In addition, an instructional coaching structure will provide targeted support tailored to the individual.
Recommended Action 5	Programs to support teaching growth through reflection and inquiry will be offered to all teaching faculty. These programs will be financially supported, and successful completion by faculty will be celebrated and appropriately rewarded.

Recommended Action 6	The institution will provide quality professional development to department chairs and deans that equips them to strategically support effective teaching within their departments and disciplines. This support of effective teaching will directly relate to student success and retention.
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Background:

When Indiana State Normal School was founded in 1865, its primary mission was to train public school teachers. It has progressed from a teachers' college to a university with a rich and multi-purpose mission. Faculty evaluation is based upon the three elements of the academic enterprise: teaching, research, and service. Ernest Boyer (2015) stated that "good teaching is at the heart of the undergraduate experience." Although Boyer's statement focuses primarily on undergraduate teaching, it does, in fact, apply to graduate experiences as well. The past twenty years have seen teaching gain focused importance across the country as institutions of higher learning have worked diligently to create learning environments to meet the needs of a differentiated curriculum, develop assessments that reflect deep student learning, and serve diverse student learning needs.

In 1994, ISU created The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). The CTL was established after a 1989 task force emphasized the need for a focus on enhanced opportunities for faculty to improve undergraduate teaching. This unit eventually become part of The Center for Instruction, Research, and Technology (CIRT). In 2013, The Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence was established to concentrate solely on informing, supporting, and elevating teaching at ISU.

Indiana State's student population is currently the highest in its history. The campus community embraces this historic moment and celebrates the inclusive nature of our mission. This growth in enrollment has seen us begin to experience larger class sizes, more diverse student learning needs, and programs with instructors well versed in their discipline, but with limited background in pedagogical best practices that can negatively impact student success. These emerging conditions require that we look deeper into evidence-based teaching practices in higher education that is validated by research. It also requires proper faculty support to engage in this knowledge and facilitate course implementation. Faculty need to be equipped and supported to successfully navigate the needs of these trends. It is imperative that we make effective teaching a priority, part of the ongoing campus dialogue, and a valued component of our campus mission and culture.

Analysis Methods:

Initially the committee was provided resources from the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence. They included:

The Characteristics of the Superior College Teacher as defined through the works of Milton Hildebrand Kenneth Feldman.

7 Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching as identified by Susan Ambrose

Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education as identified by Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson

The committee met weekly and added to this collection as ideas and themes emerged through meeting conversations. Committee members reached out to colleagues at other institutions to identify successful practices across the country. These practices were shared with the committee and some were explored further within the context of our institution.

The COACHE (Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education) data that was collected at ISU in 2014 was also used in committee discussions. In particular, their White Paper Series that focused on national benchmark best practices was utilized to investigate programs that scored high in the COACHE areas of *Appreciation & Recognition* and *Nature of Work: Teaching*.

Members of the committee located and shared teaching excellence handbooks created in other university teaching and learning centers. In addition, several members identified specific programs at other colleges that could be of interest to our teaching and learning community.

Data collection emerged naturally throughout the process and supplemented committee dialogue. Members of the committee made valuable contributions through their own personal investigation and honest conversation. In conclusion, the committee utilized data and information curated through the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence resource collection, committee member research, and input from professionals on campus and across the country.

Key Findings:

As we began our meetings, we focused our conversations on the first part of our charge, to identify hallmarks of great teaching. After several rich and boisterous conversations, it became apparent that this was not a task to be completed in a few weeks. In addition, we realized that there is a vast array of belief systems on this campus related to effective instruction. We concluded that it would be advantageous to have a common understanding of what defines teaching excellence at Indiana State University. This could provide a foundation for common vocabulary across the institution that would inform teaching initiatives and evaluation documents/procedures.

After numerous discussions and review of data, the committee felt strongly that great teachers are consistently reflecting on and revising their practice. This requires one to take the time for self-analysis and seek out professional growth opportunities. This needs to happen each semester of one's teaching career and should be an institutional expectation that is highly valued by administration and faculty affairs committees. To create a culture of teaching excellence, this concept of continuous professional development focused on teaching must be encouraged and supported. The current campus climate seems to treat professional development as a sentence imposed on those with perceived poor teaching ability. Professional development should be seen not as a punitive measure, or even worse as something to be ignored, but rather as an expectation of all ISU faculty.

It takes time to create and carry out new and innovative instructional practices. Many faculty do not attempt innovative teaching practices because of the possible negative effect on teaching evaluations during initial implementation. Teaching innovation needs to be encouraged and rewarded in a safe and supportive environment. In addition, sharing effective innovations with the campus community needs to be prioritized so that others can learn from the journeys of their colleagues.

Some faculty members have limited background in teaching pedagogy and are in need of focused professional development. We have several programs with faculty well versed in their discipline, but with limited expertise on how best to share this knowledge with their students. It would be extremely beneficial to have a specified program for pedagogical development and a targeted individual who could coach and support the teaching growth of these faculty during their first few semesters in the classroom.

Once faculty have achieved tenure, what are the positive incentives to continue their professional growth in the area of teaching? Faculty need substantial and meaningful opportunities to engage in and share teaching development at all stages of their professional career. Many institutions provide a program that encourages faculty to take their teaching to a new level and rewards them for this achievement; Indiana State would benefit from offering a similar enterprise. These endeavors should be shared with the community, celebrated, and deeply valued.

It is necessary to engage department chairs and deans in professional development that strategically supports teaching. The committee would like to make sure all levels of ISU leadership value effective teaching and know how to skillfully support faculty as they work to improve, refine, and develop their teaching expertise.

Recommended Actions:

The committee recommends the creation of a substantive teaching statement for Indiana State University that captures its significance in the mission of our institution. Prospective faculty should be made fully aware of its importance during the hiring process, and it needs to be deeply reinforced in all phases of institutional induction. The committee would like for this teaching statement to become part of the University Handbook. Making it part of the University Handbook would further inculcate it into the academy by providing common language that can guide all colleges. Such a statement would be developed via the shared authority of faculty senate and related ISU stakeholders.

Participation in a cycle of professional growth in teaching needs to be encouraged of all faculty. This should be evidenced and highly valued in biennial review and the promotion/tenure process. Exceptional growth should be acknowledged and rewarded. It is suggested that faculty engage in creating yearly personal professional growth plans focused on teaching. These plans would allow faculty to *choose* one or more aspects of their teaching they want to enhance or improve. This process honors differences among faculty and empowers faculty to be in charge of their own professional development. The plan might include the teaching focus/goal and activities to support and assess goal achievement. Faculty would be encouraged to collaborate with colleagues, their department chair, and the Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence as they develop and implement their personalized plans. Successful and productive plans will be shared with the teaching/learning community. The committee wants to make teaching innovation, growth, and excellence overt on campus and part of the campus culture.

A space for faculty to engage in teaching innovation should be created and used for faculty training and student instruction. It will incorporate the aspects of design and technology that maximize the potential for teaching and learning. This space will support collaborative and active learning activities that empower students to explore course content and ideas in an environment that allows learning to

emerge in multiple formats. It will be highly visible and accessible to faculty who wish to utilize it for instructional use. In addition, teaching innovation needs to be encouraged and rewarded in a safe and supportive environment.

Programs to support teaching growth through reflection and inquiry will be offered to all teaching faculty. These programs will be financially supported and successful completion by faculty will be celebrated and appropriately rewarded. The committee recommends utilizing a master teacher program approach to this. In 2012, a committee was charged with the development of such a program specifically designed for Indiana State University. This committee completed its work and submitted the program for review. At the time, transition of personnel and other institutional priorities took precedent over implementation of this initiative. The committee recommends this former initiative be reviewed and considered as a foundational piece during development of a program for faculty who are successful in teaching, but have the desire to continue to grow and learn. Completion of such a program must be highly rewarded and valued on an institutional level.

It is imperative that we support the development of faculty with limited teaching background or experiences. A “course” or “module program of study” should be designed for these individuals to complete. In addition, these individuals would have access to an instructional coaching structure that will provide extensive personal consultation during their first few semesters in the classroom. This coaching structure would provide one-on-one support, observation and reflection opportunities, and resources to support instructional needs. The course and coaching support would provide appropriate knowledge, resources, and guidance for individuals with limited expertise in teaching pedagogy.

The institution will provide quality professional development to department chairs and deans that equips them to strategically support effective teaching within their departments and disciplines. This will be accomplished through participation in concentrated programs to further develop leadership skills that strongly value and promote successful teaching practices. Through this, ISU leaders will understand the importance of supporting and encouraging pedagogical advancement through reflection, refinement, and development of teaching expertise.

References

Boyer, E. (2015). *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.