Teaching & Learning at HCC: An Online Professional Learning Community for Adjunct and New Full-time Faculty

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Abstract: “Teaching & Learning at HCC” is an online professional learning community and is a dynamic and ever-evolving resource that all faculty access for teaching/learning strategies, professional development, and community college resources. Included are a video repository of lessons with associated lesson plans, online module ideas, lecture best practices, examples of weekly lesson plans, course syllabi, and interactive discussion boards. The goal of the online professional learning community is to encourage adjuncts and new faculty to develop their ties to the school and enhance their instruction and promote student success. Based on faculty participation and feedback we anticipate revising and opening the online professional learning community to other schools in the area. This will serve to expand the video repository and foster cross-collaboration between higher education institutions in our county and neighboring counties.

Educational Problem

According to the American Association of University Professors, 68 percent of faculty are in non-tenure track positions, and the majority of classes, approximately two-thirds, at community colleges across the nation are taught by adjunct faculty. Our institution, Hillsborough Community College (HCC), employs 309 full-time faculty members. An additional 1263 are adjuncts (HCC Factbook 2014, 2013). This is a higher adjunct number than the national average (Curtis, J., & Thornton, S. 2013).

Many adjuncts possess subject knowledge, but little or no teaching experience. Additionally, adjuncts often forego faculty professional development opportunities due to other obligations at their full time job. They are disconnected from the teaching community, as they are usually not on campus during traditional hours, or teach solely online. New full-time faculty face many of the same obstacles (Background Facts on Contingent Faculty).

New faculty are often new to the school and must quickly learn policies, procedures, and campus culture while trying to balance a full course load. This leaves little time to attend professional development workshops and integrate with the campus community. Creating an online professional learning community will address these challenges by providing information to faculty delivered asynchronously through an LMS-based massive open online course (MOOC) accessible 24-7.

The intended goals are to assist adjuncts and new faculty to connect with the campus community, participate in training and development offerings, and be knowledgeable of student success services and interventions. The overarching goal is to help all faculty become more effective instructors in their traditional and online classrooms, with positive impacts on retention and completion.

Project Description

This online professional learning community is for faculty development and is a dynamic and ever-evolving resource that all faculty access for teaching/learning strategies, professional development, and community college resources. Included are a video repository of lessons with associated lesson plans, online module ideas, lecture best practices, examples of weekly lesson plans (that cover a full course period), course syllabi, and interactive discussion boards.

The goal of the online professional learning community is to encourage adjuncts and new faculty to develop their ties to the school and enhance their instruction and promote student success. Currently, it is open only to our institution’s instructors. Based on faculty participation and feedback we anticipate revising and opening the
online professional learning community to other schools in the area. This will serve to expand the video repository and foster cross-collaboration between higher education institutions in our county and neighboring counties.

**Objectives/Outcomes**
- Identify and implement teaching strategies that will increase student retention and completion
- Employ active learning techniques that will enhance student engagement
- Create lessons that are aligned with course outcomes and objectives
- Discuss topics that relate to teaching/learning (best practices, classroom management, etc.) issues on an open online forum and determine solutions to these issues
- Demonstrate ties to school by actively participating in school functions and contributing to the school’s mission

**The Online Professional Learning Community Sections**
1. Overview and Objectives
2. Teaching and Learning Strategies
3. Teaching and Learning In Action
4. Interact

**Section 1 – Overview and Objectives**
In this section, faculty are welcomed to the online professional learning community and are given navigation instructions. Faculty are also offered an opportunity to use the community’s resources to complete a project for professional development hours. A breakdown of this section follows:

1. **Start Here**
   a. Overview welcome/navigation video and contact information
   b. Orientation modules for both adjunct and full-time faculty
   c. Introductory discussion board

2. **My Teaching Journal**
   This is the final deliverable that faculty must produce to successfully earn professional development hours.
   a. Description:
      i. The Teaching Journal is a reflection of your semester. The main goal is to improve the overall teaching and learning experience. Teaching Journals include experiences, responses to and feelings about what happened each week. An effective Teaching Journal will help determine which lectures, readings, activities, assignments and assessments were successful over the course of the past semester. This information can be used to implement new materials and teaching strategies the next semester.
   b. Requirements: The Teaching Journal must:
      i. span one full semester and include thorough weekly observations of what was successful/unsuccesful that week;
      ii. include syllabus with course objectives;
      iii. include weekly list of activities, readings, lectures, graded assignments, assessments and which objectives were met via each;
      iv. include a plan for one new activity that will be piloted the following semester;
      v. attend one college function or join a committee and prove attendance/membership.

**Section 2 – Teaching and Learning Strategies (“Faculty Toolbox”)**
The Faculty Toolbox section of the online professional learning community allows faculty to quickly access information about our institution. Additionally, faculty can find best practice resources that aid in instruction and student learning. Modeled after an ‘ER,’ faculty can quickly match a student/class ‘symptom’ to the applicable instructional ‘remedy.’

1. Basic information about HCC
a. Mission statement/ Open door policy
b. Campus-wide resources
c. Clubs, organizations and committees
d. College Computing Systems (LMS, Class Roster, Grading)

2. ER (Educational Responses):
   a. Strategies, delivered via self-paced modules, webinars and printable resources to address common teaching concerns. Topics include:
      i. Student Engagement
      ii. Student Prior Knowledge
      iii. Student Application
      iv. Student Behavior

Section 3 – Teaching and Learning in Action (the “Uncut Classroom”)
The Uncut Classroom is the heart of the online professional learning community. In this section, faculty will find a repository of lessons that have been implemented in current courses at HCC. This repository is an ever-evolving resource, being built via lecture and lesson donations from HCC’s full-time faculty. Faculty may visit this area to see what their colleagues are successfully doing in their courses. The intent is to model effective instruction and teaching strategies.

1. Live Lessons
   a. Videos of live lessons for all delivery types
   b. Instructor testimony (supplemental to lesson video) where instructor discusses their process
   c. Lesson plans of the videotaped lesson are provided
   d. Discussion Board for discussing lessons, sharing ideas and asking questions regarding how to modify it to meet specific needs

2. Modules from Online and Hybrid courses
   a. Digitized lectures
   b. Online activities
   c. Instructor testimony (supplemental to lesson video) where instructor discusses their process
   d. Online modules that model best practices with regards to Quality Matters

3. Lesson plans
   a. Weekly lesson plans for web-enhanced, hybrid, and online course delivery methods

4. Lecture best practices for all delivery methods
   a. Chunking lectures
   b. ADA compliance
   c. Course alignment

Section 4: Interact
Interact is a series of discussion boards where faculty can interact with their peers online. Here, discussions occur regarding the Live, Hybrid and Online lessons.

1. Discussion Forums relating to Uncut Classroom
   a. Introduce Yourself
   b. Live Lesson Q/A
   c. Hybrid and Online Lesson Q/A

Implementation
During summer 2014 we began soliciting donations for Uncut Classroom. At this time, we have received donations from a variety of disciplines, across all course delivery formats. Additionally, faculty have been actively donating to the “ER,” sharing presentations given at In-Services and conferences. Faculty have been happy to
donate and have not received any form of compensation or professional development hours. Collection of donations will continue throughout spring 2015 and beyond.

This spring (2015), we sponsored an initial group of full-time and long-time adjunct faculty to complete the My Teaching Journal exercise. We met with them three times throughout the spring semester and will meet with them at the end of the fall 2015 semester to collect feedback and offer instructional design support. The first meeting clarified expectations. The second meeting gathered mid-term feedback and empowered faculty to visit an activity in their course that may need redesigned. The third meeting took place at the end of the semester. At this point, all reflections were completed and faculty were paired with an instructional designer to help redesign their activity to be implemented fall 2015. The final meeting will occur at the end of the fall 2015 semester. At this meeting, the faculty will provide feedback and testimony on their experience with the My Teaching Journal exercise. We will be collecting anecdotal data throughout this time and making any necessary modifications to the Teaching Journal and to the online professional learning community.

Project Importance

Each year, the department responsible for providing faculty professional development administers a survey to all full-time and adjunct faculty. Overwhelmingly, faculty have responded that they would like more opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues from other campuses and disciplines as a means to share ideas. An importance is also placed on trainings that expand individual teaching repertoires by offering practical teaching strategies focusing on active learning, flipped models of instruction and assessment.

This year, the school is beginning its five year accreditation review. As part of the review, the school is working to increase student retention and completion. The professional learning community helps meet this goal by empowering the faculty to experiment with innovative and engaging pedagogy. This emphasis fosters a culture that is both reflective and flexible encouraging faculty to revise instruction that meets the ever changing needs of their students.

References

