

**Teaching and Learning Forum (TLF)
Program Review Site Visit
Dean's Response
Academic Year: 2018-19**

Submitted by:
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Introduction

This program review of the Teaching and Learning Forum (TLF) is the first for the program since its inception in 1992. The TLF director and staff prepared and facilitated a thoughtful self-study, Program Review Evaluation Team site visit and report, and a realistic response to the Evaluation Team site visit report with next steps clearly articulated. The self-study was guided by a purpose to identify actionable ideas and opportunities for continuous improvement within the contexts of 1) programs and services; 2) resource allocation and infrastructure, and 3) organizational structure. This approach to the review process was informed by *A Center for Teaching and Learning Matrix* developed by the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Professional Organization Developers Network (POD). This well-conceived framework provided excellent infrastructure guiding both the TLF team in writing the self-study and guiding the site visit team in their questioning and reporting out of their findings.

The Program Review Evaluation Team was exceptional with several experts in faculty development represented there. The Evaluation Team's careful review of the TLF program was informed by feedback from the Weber State University community of faculty, staff and administrators, as well as emerging evidence-based practice in the field of educational development and the expertise and experiences of the review team members themselves. The commendations recognize the strong foundation for teaching development that TLF has built at Weber State University. The recommendations mostly centered on more clearly defining the mission and scope of TLF and its structure in hopes of reducing confusion about TLF and TLA (Teaching Learning Assessment committee) and better serving faculty.

Both commendations and recommendations made by the site review team and the TLF program's response to them are addressed below.

Site Visit Team Commendations

The Site Visit Review Team's commendations for the TLF program are consistent with my own observations of TLF. There are a handful of very well-defined reoccurring events for which TLF is known – New Faculty Retreat, the Adjunct Faculty Retreat, and Book Groups. There are two newer programs that seem to be emerging and gaining traction but are not very well known yet – Communities of Practice and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) Scholars program. The Evaluation Team recognized the dedication of the TLF director and staff as strengths of the program along with the support TLF receives

from the administration and Faculty Senate. Additionally, the connections across campus that TLF has developed and nurtured are also to be commended for creating stronger support networks for faculty development across campus units. These commendations are well deserved.

Site Visit Team Recommendations and Program Response

The recommendations from the Site Visit team were extensive, well-informed and very helpful for moving the Teaching and Learning Forum forward. The team made recommendations (briefly summarized below) to address the following five challenges identified by the Site Visit Team:

- There is a need for clarity about TLF's mission and focus.
- There are many needs, but limited TLF capacity.
- The TLF structure is confusing.
- The TLF Communication strategy is not as effective as it could be.
- Breadth of Faculty Involvement is limited.

Recommendation #1: Clarity of Mission and Scope.

The Site Visit Team recommends that the TLF Director initiate a set of conversations about the mission of the TLF and how it is operationalized and supported with the Associate Provost, Faculty Senate and other stakeholders. The Site Visit Team recommended a whole host of questions to ask of these stakeholder groups and provided resources to help guide the director's thinking about the various roles a center for teaching and learning can play at universities.

Recommendation #2: Teaching and Learning Forum Structure.

The Site Visit Team recommends that the TLF Director initiate a conversation with Faculty Senate Leadership and the Associate Provost to consider the ways in which the current structure is working and ways in which it may not be optimized to help Weber State move forward strategically. National context was provided for understanding structures of teaching and learning centers along with data on centers their staffing at peer institutions. They raise the question about whether or not a part-time director for the center is adequate and sustainable. Additionally, the role of assessment and TLA in particular is raised as something that needs to be well defined moving forward.

The TLF's responses to recommendations 1 and 2 are outlined in detail in the Program Review Action Plan document. Generally, the TLF team agrees with the recommendation that it is time to revisit the mission and structure of TLF and is committed to doing so via a strategic planning process which is underway as of August 2019.

Recommendation #3: Building on Strengths

The Site Visit team recommends TLF consider how it can build on its solid reputation as an office that organizes events. The Site Visit Team asks numerous questions in this section of the report to push the TLF team to leverage their existing programming strengths, prioritize and align all programming, and cautions not to take on too much without "right-sizing" the staffing. The response crafted by the TLF team in the Action Plan document

addresses this particular recommendation by agreeing that prioritization, alignment and right-sizing need to occur but they also present an action plan that suggests exploring the expansion of current programs/services or creating some new ones to fill gaps and better meet the needs of faculty and deans. I recommend a careful approach to expanding or creating anything more until a critical look at structure and mission of TLF are complete.

Recommendation #4: Communicating.

The Site Visit Team recommends that TLF should consider what the goal(s) of its communication are. Who is the TLF trying to reach and what is the best way to reach them? And perhaps explore communication practices of other successful entities on campus. TLF's response to this recommendation is to intentionally create a communication strategy. This has not been considered before so this systematic approach to communication is exciting and should prove to be fruitful in terms of keeping faculty well-informed and recognized for their participation in TLF sponsored programs.

Recommendation #5: TLF Program Assessment.

The Site Visit Team recommends aligning programs, services, and relationships strategically around the TLF mission so that it will be easier to assess the work of the TLF. Assessment of the effectiveness of the programs and services provided by TLF have been a challenge and the TLF team's solution is to work with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment to develop a limited and strategic program assessment strategy. This is a welcomed and exciting development.

Recommendation #6: Add Value and Reach Beyond "The Choir"

The Site Visit Team provided several ideas for helping TLF reach beyond the usual cadre of faculty who attend TLF events. Some suggestions included: moving TLF to more central and welcoming space; revisit how faculty professional development is rewarded in the rank and tenure process; aligning services with specific needs of deans and department chairs; target faculty at different stages in their development (beyond new faculty retreat); and consider incentivizing faculty engagement. The TLF team agrees with and welcomes the suggestions of the Site Visit Team and has thoughtfully outlined action steps they can take with various stakeholder groups to begin acting on some of these suggestions.

Recommendation #7: The Name

Finally, the Site Visit Team urges TLF to facilitate conversations about the name, Teaching and Learning Forum, and consider changing it. This decision to change the name would be best informed by the discussions about the mission and structure of TLF. As of August 2019, TLF's director, Colleen Packer, initiated an all-day retreat to kick off a year-long process for evaluating and reimagining the current mission and structure of TLF. In this process, the name of TLF has been carefully considered and will be changing to better reflect the work facilitated by the center and to make it more intuitive to its stakeholders.

Additional Recommendation not Included in the Site Visit Team Report

I would encourage TLF to consider how existing resources like the instructional designers in WSU Online might fit into the reimagining of the function and structure of TLF. There

may be an opportunity to more closely align the work in TLF and WSU Online and I would encourage the exploration of these possibilities.

Conclusion

The Site Visit Review Team's recognition of the need to step back, reflect and potentially restructure the TLF at Weber State University seems completely appropriate. The commendations and recommendations made by the Site Visit Team are solid and the program's response to these is thoughtful and recognizes that much of their future action is contingent upon whatever comes from the conversations they are having with varied stakeholder groups. I encourage the TLF program to continue to push forward with their efforts to evaluate and adjust the TLF's mission, vision, structure and communication plan. I have been impressed with the results of the working groups focused on these areas to date.