

Experience with a program of faculty development

MYRNA C. NEWLAND, JAMES R. NEWLAND, DAVID J. STEELE
 DIANA R. LOUGH & FREDRICK A. MCCURDY
 University of Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha, NE, USA

SUMMARY *The authors describe the faculty development program at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Faculty needs were identified in instructional skill development, academic socialization and mentoring. Committees with campus-wide representation designed the instructional activities. Among the total 749 faculty, 59% attended at least one faculty development offering consisting of one and two-day institutes or two-hour luncheon workshops in the past five years. Evaluations ranked each event highly for quality, relevance, impact on teaching and usefulness. Experiences in creating a successful faculty development program at an academic medical center are reported. Success was measured by attendee numbers and increased participation of faculty in teaching and mentoring. Factors contributing to this success include generous financial support by leadership, broad-based planning and administrative support.*

Introduction

Changes in the curricula at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) resulted in fewer large lecture-type classes and an emphasis on small-group teaching, problem-based learning (PBL), critical thinking, personal reflection, use of computers and computer-based instruction (Steele & Susman, 1998). UNMC faculty were surveyed in 1995 as part of the Interdisciplinary Generalist Curriculum Project (Steele *et al.*, 2001). Survey results and personal interviews identified needs for instruction in small-group management and teaching, giving feedback, lecture skills, student evaluation, basic test writing and defining educational objectives.

We present the results of our experience in implementing a program of faculty development that can be used as a model by other institutions.

Goal and planning of faculty development

The goal of a faculty development program is to provide all faculty with developmental resources for meaningful and productive careers (Evans, 1995; Wilkerson & Irby, 1998). An Educational Development Institute (EDI) held in August of 1997 was based on faculty needs.

Educational Development Institutes

The goal of EDI is to enhance the teaching skills of faculty in order to improve the quality of instruction. A committee composed of faculty from all academic units planned EDI activities. In addition to local faculty, outside expert faculty were recruited. In addition, these individuals stimulated and challenged local faculty and provided opportunities for

networking and mentoring. Local faculty gradually provided more of the program content.

Programs were offered at no cost to participants and continuing education credits were provided. Publicity was spread through newsletters, the campus computer intranet and direct mailing of program brochures.

Noontime focused topics

In order to reach faculty who could not attend a full two-day institute some topics were conveniently scheduled around the noon hour. These Luncheon Workshops, which offered continuing education credit, covered a wide variety of topics ranging from using the Internet to writing educational objectives.

Mentoring Institutes

Hitchcock (Hitchcock *et al.*, 1997) pointed out that in addition to training in newer instructional methods faculty need opportunities to develop networks of colleagues, find appropriate mentors and understand the fundamentals of faculty life, in order to progress up the academic ladder. These needs are more acute for women and minority faculty, who often cluster at lower academic ranks and for long periods of time (Levinson & Weiner, 1991).

A series of Mentoring Institutes (MIs) were designed to facilitate the development of mentoring relationships between junior and senior faculty, provide information on personal management and career management, and encourage development of leadership skills.

Administrative Colloquium

A year-long administrative skills/leadership program consisting of two two-day workshops and several quarterly events began in February of 2000 and has continued to the present.

The course is intended for faculty currently in a leadership position who wish to improve skills or faculty who anticipate the need for these skills in the future. Participants are awarded a certificate on completion of the program.

Evaluation and assessment

Between August 1997 and 30 June 2001, 443 (59%) of a total UNMC full-time faculty of 749 have attended at least one faculty development program. At the end of each EDI or MI

Correspondence: Myrna C. Newland, MD, University of Nebraska Medical Center, Department of Anesthesiology, 984455 Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha, NE 68198-4455, USA. Email: mnewland@unmc.edu

an evaluation form was completed by participants. Speakers and content were evaluated on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being 'poor' and 5 being 'excellent'. In addition, written comments were solicited with suggestions for new topics or improvements for future presentations. All programs scored at 4 or above on these measures and written comments were positive.

Staffing and costs

Adequate funding was provided by the chancellor of the Medical Center and the dean of the COM. Local faculty were in place with expertise and commitment in the areas of education, research, and career development. Outside experts initially provided credibility to programs and supported local faculty efforts. Including diverse faculty members in planning ensured a broad range of topics and ideas and helped generate enthusiasm and participation. Costs of a two-day workshop held off campus with one or two outside speakers averaged US\$8000 to US\$10,000. One-day workshops with local speakers only were US\$1500 to US\$3000. Luncheon workshops averaged about US\$900 each for 35-40 attendees. The Administrative Colloquium and Educational Scholars Program each had a budget of US\$25,000 per year. Other expenses included publicity, brochures, newsletters, posters, committee expenses and travel. Total budget ranges from US\$75,000 to US\$125,000.

Changes and improvements

The principles of total quality improvement were utilized to improve each program. An immediate debriefing session following each program as well as suggestions by attendees, which allowed for changes and ideas for improvements to be reviewed while the material was fresh. Improvement made the sessions more interactive. We crossed departmental lines and utilized experts from other units of the University of Nebraska System. Planning committee members developed synergy and a strong sense of camaraderie among themselves.

Although we do not have firm data beyond satisfaction with the various programs they have attended, there have been a number of positive developments in the teaching climate at UNMC, and improvements in teaching skills and opportunities noted by participants, since the inception of our comprehensive faculty development program. Among these are the following:

- The development of formal 'teaching circles' (Bernstein, 1996) in the areas of PBL, pulmonary diseases and gastrointestinal diseases.
- Increasing interest in PBL as reflected in the numbers of 'first time' attendees at sessions devoted to this educational modality and increases in the numbers of faculty volunteering to serve as PBL facilitators from 54 in 1998 to 74 in 2000.
- Faculty report increasing comfort with large- and small-group teaching; and the year 1 and year 2 Curriculum Directors who oversee course organization, implementation and examination development both note that there has been improvement in the use of technology (PowerPoint and the Web) in instruction, more attempts to introduce interactivity in large-group lectures and increasing sophistication in examination questions.

- More faculty willing to take part in instructional activities. Evidence that faculty have participated in development activities is now part of the annual faculty evaluation.
- There is an increased awareness of the value of mentoring on campus. Several departments have initiated mentoring programs for their faculty.
- An Educational Scholars Program (ESP) was begun in January 2002. Through workshops, monthly journal clubs, short courses and mentoring, the participants in this 18-month focused program will acquire the knowledge and skills needed to carry out educational research and development projects.

Recommendations

- Based on our experiences, we recommend:
- Establish a planning group consisting of faculty with a strong and genuine interest in faculty development. Broad representation helps to generate support for the program and provides a diversity of views and approaches leading to more creative program development. Invite nationally recognized experts but do not ignore 'local talent'. When given an opportunity, local faculty (including faculty members at other local institutions or within the university at large) can provide excellent programming and for a fraction of the costs of the outside expert.
- Devote time and energy to developing the support of the leadership of your organization. Present key 'stakeholders' with a well-developed and practical plan.
- Develop a credible plan for evaluating the program and for demonstrating the impact it has on faculty life and work.

Limitations

A major limitation of our program is the absence of objective outcomes data. It would have been preferable to design a means of assessing outcomes prospectively before beginning the institutes.

While the model for faculty development that evolved at UNMC works well for us, different conditions at other academic medical centers will probably give rise to modifications in the approach presented here.

Conclusion

In this paper we offer our experiences in putting together a program of faculty development based on broad participation in planning and execution. Success of the program is measured in part by the numbers of faculty attending and evidence of faculty participation in teaching, research and mentoring. Improved performance of students on national examinations is a goal but difficult to attribute to one cause. Generous financial support and encouragement by administration has been essential to the success of this program. Use of feedback from faculty attendees, input into planning by a broad representation of faculty and support of dedicated faculty have been key elements for success.

Notes on contributors

MYRNA C. NEWLAND, MD, is a Professor in the Department of Anesthesiology University of Nebraska Medical Center.

JAMES R. NEWLAND, MD, is a Professor in Pathology/Microbiology at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

DAVID J. STEELE, PhD, is Associate Professor in the Department of Family Medicine, University of Nebraska Medical Center. Dr Steele is now professor and assistant dean for curriculum and evaluation, College of Medicine, Florida State University, Call Street and Stadium Drive, Tallahassee, FL 32306-4300, USA.

DIANA R. LOUGH, PhD, is Assistant Professor (courtesy appointment) in the School of Allied Health Professions, University of Nebraska Medical Center.

FREDRICK MCCURDY, MD PhD MBA, is a Professor in the Department of Pediatrics, University of Nebraska Medical Center.

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