

Faculty Development Information Survey Preliminary Results



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Faculty Development Information Survey Overview

Purpose

The purpose of the Faculty Development Information Survey was to determine the current teaching and learning development needs of McMaster instructors. Formalized faculty development programs are widespread in the UK and Australia, and are designed to provide training to new faculty as well as to provide the necessary tools to more experienced faculty to increase student engagement and shift conceptions of teaching to a more learner-focused model (Gibbs & Coffey, 2000; Gibbs & Coffey, 2004; Ginns, Kitay & Prosser, 2008).

Similar formalized programs are becoming established at a number of Canadian post-secondary institutions (Hubball & Burt, 2006; Kanuka, Heller & Jugadev, 2008). In 'Refining Directions', McMaster commits to "provid(ing) an innovative and stimulating learning environment where students can prepare themselves to excel in life," (McMaster University, 2003). In the Centre for Leadership in Learning, we contribute to this goal by developing new, creative ways to ensure that instructors at McMaster are equipped with tools necessary to engage our students and provide a stimulating learning environment.

Respondents

The online survey was sent to approximately 1750 McMaster University instructors. This included all full-time faculty, contractually limited faculty, clinical faculty, and sessional lecturers. The survey was anonymous and voluntary. The survey was available for a period of two weeks, and during that time 248 responses were generated, indicating a response rate of 14.3%. Surveys were collected from each of McMaster's six Faculties and Schools, representing a balanced cross-section of instructors with some in their first year of university teaching and others with 40+ years of teaching experience. The average respondent had 13.7 years of university teaching experience (10.6 years at McMaster). The average age of the respondent was 47 years.

Forty-three percent of the respondents identified as female ($N = 106$), 41% identified as male ($N = 101$), and 0.4% identified as transgendered ($N = 1$). Sixteen percent ($N = 40$) did not provide a response to this question.

Topics and Analysis

The Faculty Development Information Survey consisted of four sections and 31 questions. The first section examined topics of professional development and contained eight questions. The second section asked questions relating to professional development delivery methods and timing of events (nine questions). The third section dealt with the topic of technologies in teaching (three questions). In the final section, demographic information was collected from the respondents in a series of 11 questions.

Key Findings

Preferred Topics

- Pressing issues that instructors felt could be addressed by a professional development program (five most pressing issues):
 - Dealing with issues of time
 - Teaching large classes
 - Using technology in teaching
 - Addressing new assessment options
 - Engaging students more effectively
- Instructional aspects survey respondents would like to see in a faculty development program (top five):
 - Tracking teaching over time to improve based on feedback
 - Integrating teaching and research
 - Participating in peer review of teaching/mentorship
 - Respecting diverse learning styles
 - Exploring educational research methods

Need for Faculty Development Program

- An apparent need exists for a structured faculty development program at McMaster. Fifty-four percent of the survey respondents indicated that they were either 'somewhat interested' ($N = 77$) or 'very interested' ($N = 41$) in participating in such a program if it were to become available.
- When the survey respondents were asked about in participating in events offered by the CLL, 90% indicated they were interested.

Preferred Program Delivery

- Responses indicate that there is a preference to meet weekdays during the afternoon
- The preferred length of workshop is 1-2 hours
- The data showed that instructors prefer to meet face-to-face rather than online or in a 'blended' format
- The preferred style of content delivery is through workshops or informal, small group discussions
- Survey respondents indicated that they prefer to meet during the December or April exam periods as opposed to spring/summer semesters or on weekdays throughout the semester

Use of Technology

- 70% of respondents indicated that they use a learning management system (e.g., ELM, LearnLink or WebCT), slide show presentations, or email (or some combination of the three) in their teaching
- The greatest barrier identified to using technology is an inaccessible learning management system
- The greatest benefits reported to using technology are improved communication, improved student engagement and student interaction, and a platform for digital content delivery

Next Steps

Since running the initial online survey we have run five focus groups (with 25 participants) to further explore the teaching and learning development needs of McMaster faculty. The focus group participants had indicated their willingness to participate in the online survey. We are just beginning to examine this data, and a preliminary summary of the results will be available by July 2010.

Moving forward, we plan to use the data from the survey and the focus groups, combined with a review of the teaching and learning development literature and an environmental scan of teaching and learning development programs both within Canada and internationally to inform all teaching and learning faculty development initiatives at McMaster. Programming that will be informed by this work will commence at McMaster in fall 2010.

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