

In Their Own Words: Making Teaching and Learning Visible on the CU Boulder Campus

Academic Futures White Paper, Faculty Teaching Excellence Program (FTEP)

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The challenges and solutions described here have been identified from discussions with campus colleagues and stakeholders, collaborations with teaching and learning centers at other R1 universities, and seminal research from the scholarship of teaching and learning.

I. BACKGROUND

FTEP Background:

The [Faculty Teaching Excellence Program \(FTEP\)](#) has been the centralized, inclusive teaching and learning center at CU Boulder since its inception in 1984. Serving approximately 1,750 tenure-line and non tenure-line faculty across nine schools, colleges, and programs, FTEP is a campus tradition known for its successful development of faculty by putting student learning first. FTEP fosters a culture of teaching by supporting those faculty who seek assistance in teaching well. In response to a larger student body as well as a larger number of faculty since 1984, FTEP has grown into a multidimensional center, including an academic seminar in assessing course goals and gathering evidence about student learning, academic seminars for new assistant professors, and a colloquia series on making teaching and learning visible in the classroom. It is significant that FTEP has expanded its mission to foster faculty members' adaptive expertise, that is, a deep conceptual understanding of teaching and learning (rather than knowledge of facts and procedures only), the capability of improvising and using judgment in the classroom (rather than dependence on scripts or instructions), and flexible applications of knowledge and skills (rather than routinized applications).

FTEP encourages faculty to view their career in teaching in higher education as a process that grows over time through deliberate practice, innovation, and transformation. FTEP's developmental framework for teaching excellence is founded in three habits of mind: inclusive, learning-centered, and collaborative ways of knowing and being. In turn, these foundational habits of mind ground four non-hierarchical, interwoven facets of teaching excellence: 1) teaching and supporting learning, 2) professional learning and development, 3) mentorship, and 4) research, scholarship, and intellectual inquiry. FTEP supports and recognizes faculty in their continual development from exploring, to engaging with, to expanding upon each of these facets of teaching. FTEP recognizes that there is no single entry point into this framework, given that the development of teaching excellence is iterative and context dependent.

The program translates evidence-based research, data, and evidence from the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) into actions that leverage the expertise of highly skilled faculty to "teach teaching" to their peers. FTEP draws on partnerships with teaching and learning centers at other universities to deepen the range and scope of its programs at the University of Colorado Boulder. FTEP is a multifaceted program, offering a range of services and events that faculty members can choose from based on their particular needs, interests, and disciplinary background. Because CU Boulder is a R1 university, the program curates a large scope and wide variety of services to faculty, including symposia, short courses, and classroom and consultation services. In the myriad ways that FTEP serves the campus community, the program manifests the

principles of inclusive pedagogy: a student-centered approach to teaching that attends to student differences and takes deliberate steps to ensure that all students, across differences in academic and social background as well as physical and cognitive abilities, feel welcomed, valued, challenged, supported, and mentored in their academic work.

Program Effectiveness:

FTEP is a centralized and inclusive center that serves a substantial portion of faculty across campus. However, despite substantial growth in the size of the student body and the faculty, FTEP's budget has been frozen for the past fourteen years. Additionally, FTEP employs a significantly smaller staff than centers of teaching and learning at comparable institutions. Nonetheless, the arc of the program has enhanced faculty promotion to tenure and has transformed itself each year, offering innovative events, services, and mentoring to meet the evolving needs of the campus. FTEP has successfully designed and launched three initiatives in the past years: the [*New Assistant Professor Program \(NAPP\)*](#); the [*Summer Assessment Institute: Achieving Course Goals and Gathering Evidence about Student Learning*](#); and the [*Making Teaching and Learning Visible \(MTLV\)*](#) initiative.

FTEP gathers evidence from Faculty Information Systems (FIS) regarding faculty participation in the program in relation to tenure awards. This evidence shows that, over time, participation in FTEP has become increasingly important in faculty's successful promotion to tenure. For each year since 2015, at least 70% of new tenure awardees have been FTEP participants. FTEP gathers open-ended feedback from participants in symposia, short courses, and one-on-one consultations. The data reveal that faculty receive not only "just-in-time" and immediate teaching resources from FTEP, but also experience career-long shifts in their habits of mind regarding teaching and learning. For example, one faculty member provided these comments regarding a Classroom Learning Interview Process (CLIP) consultation:

Thanks to the CLIP... I gained self-awareness with regard to my teaching, identified my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher, and learned how to make my teaching more creative. [The CLIP] provided a fresh perspective on different matters that helped me become a more effective teacher as I was getting ready for my tenure review. I would highly recommend doing a CLIP to any faculty member.

Another faculty member stated, in regard to FTEP's one-on-one consultation services, "I am grateful that CU has developed these teaching tools and is thinking about how to institutionalize more robust and fair assessments of teaching."

II. CHALLENGES

Challenge 1: Make the process of teaching and learning visible on the CU Boulder campus.

Despite the campus commitment to effective teaching and to student learning, the actual process by which faculty iteratively design, refine, and redesign their curricula through discipline-specific intellectual inquiry, as well as the process by which students learn, overcome challenges, and grow intellectually over the course of a semester, has not been made sufficiently visible. In other words, these processes remain hidden beneath such concrete products as course syllabi, student grades, and FCQ results; therefore, the routes by which faculty and students navigate a course trajectory – both successful and less successful – remain unavailable for others to relate to, learn from, and adapt. The challenge is to simultaneously honor the intellectual work of the

faculty in course development and allow their peers to learn from their process, as well as to give students a voice by documenting their learning process as products of their assignments and courses.

FTEP addresses this challenge through the successful launch of two new teaching and learning initiatives: the *Summer Assessment Institute* and the MTLV project. The *Summer Assessment Institute* provides faculty a unique opportunity to learn with peers about practical ways to improve student learning. Faculty cohorts from the same discipline work collaboratively and in small groups during the *Summer Assessment Institute*, and subsequently mentor their department peers in assessment tools, such as aligning course assignments with course goals. Institute participants are awarded a \$500 stipend by Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Russ Moore for professional development in teaching and student engagement. The *Summer Assessment Institute* teaches faculty strategies and tools for designing assessments for student understanding throughout the semester and how learning goals and assessment of goals drive course design. Participants also learn how to advance peers' expertise by archiving course syllabi in their departments.

In 2017, FTEP launched the MTLV initiative, an opportunity for faculty to publish a [benchmark teaching portfolio](#) on the FTEP website. These portfolios document the intellectual inquiry and research that inform faculty members' design for learning. The vision is that MTLV course portfolios will become part of the fabric of the institution's exchange of ideas. The innovation of MTLV is not the content of the courses, but rather the fact that faculty are making their pedagogy, course development process, and their challenges and insights more visible and accessible than they have historically been. MTLV is a natural outgrowth of the *Summer Assessment Institute*. Faculty participants in the *Summer Assessment Institute* are invited to join the MTLV initiative for the following academic year. MTLV members then attend the following summer's *Summer Assessment Institute* as special guests, providing short presentations and facilitating peer-to-peer discussions. Thus, the *Summer Assessment Institute* and MTLV together build a sustainable learning community of faculty whose experiences benefit themselves, their peers, and importantly, their students' learning.

Together, these new initiatives have succeeded in *making teaching visible* on the CU Boulder campus, particularly through fostering faculty expertise in assessing students' learning, and through the showcasing of faculty course portfolios on the FTEP website. FTEP is now prepared to further *make learning visible* through continued development of these initiatives.

Challenge 2: Support faculty in adopting and implementing these teaching and learning initiatives. Given faculty's commitments to teaching, research, scholarship, and service, they require support, guidance, and encouragement in deepening their teaching acumen.

Challenge 3: Bring these teaching and learning initiatives to full scale. These initiatives represent systemic, not momentary, answers to the admonition to honor faculty members through a representation of their intellectual inquiry as authors of course curricula (Bernstein, 2002). To that end, each initiative must be expanded to full campus scale with new faculty cohorts.

III. POLICY/PROGRAM BASED SOLUTIONS

Solution 1: Develop and sustain the current MTLV initiative, and incorporate student e-portfolios into the initiative. The current MTLV initiative has showcased six faculty teaching portfolios on the FTEP website, and is preparing to showcase another ten portfolios from the 2nd

yearly cohort of MTLV participants. These teaching portfolios serve to *make teaching visible*; or, in the words of Assistant Professor Pete Newton (Environmental Studies, MTLV participant):

In my mind, the innovation of the MTLV is not the content of the courses that we are teaching, but rather the fact that we are making our pedagogy, course development process, and our challenges and insights more visible and accessible than they have historically been. The content could be anything...the fact that those things are visible to others (for them to judge, learn from, adapt, relate to, etc. as they wish) is what defines MTLV.

In the next stage of the development of MTLV, *student learning* will be made visible as well. This will be facilitated by the creation of end-of-semester student e-portfolios for the courses documented by the MTLV faculty. Student e-portfolios are web-based collections of a student's reflective inquiry in a particular course. In contrast to collections of work products (e.g., papers, exams, creative works), e-portfolios are instead authored by students, documenting their reflections on their learning processes. The focus of an e-portfolio is not on evaluation of students' work, but rather on self-assessment, peer feedback, and critical thinking about course goals (Stanford University). By assembling an e-portfolio over the course of a semester, students *make learning visible* – to themselves, their peers, and their instructors. In this way, the MTLV initiative will not only highlight and publicize faculty's pedagogical development, but also archive the process of students' learning and intellectual growth over the course of a semester. This is a transformation, given that pedagogy and learning are often viewed as two distinct processes in a course, instead of being viewed as reciprocal processes.

Solution 2A: Increase faculty participation in the *Summer Assessment Institute* and MTLV.

FTEP's model of faculty development in teaching and learning begins with an invitation of department chairs to nominate faculty members for participation in the *Summer Assessment Institute*. These faculty are subsequently invited to join the MTLV initiative in the following academic year, in an iterative process of developing their adaptive expertise in teaching and in making their intellectual inquiry visible. In other words, the creating of a teaching portfolio through MTLV is the natural outgrowth of faculty participation in the *Summer Assessment Institute*. To facilitate this process, FTEP requires continued and ongoing support from the Provost to provide the \$500 stipends for *Summer Assessment Institute* participants each year. FTEP requires additional funding to provide \$500 stipends for MTLV participants.

Solution 2B: Provide faculty training in the adoption of new campus technology to facilitate student e-portfolios. The new campus learning management system, Canvas, includes a built-in platform for the creation of end-of-course e-portfolio assignments. To assist MTLV participants in implementing this technology, the Office of Information Technology (OIT) will provide training, e.g., through the efforts of Aisha Jackson, Associate Director, Teaching and Learning Applications.

Solution 3: Increase FTEP staff. In order to bring these initiatives to full scale, FTEP requires additional staff. Currently, FTEP operates with a minimal staff of one Program Director (Dr. Mary Ann Shea), one part-time Program Assistant, one part-time Graduate Research Assistant, and one part-time Undergraduate Student Associate. Additionally, FTEP provides a small

stipend to one faculty member who coordinates MTLV logistics. FTEP requires additional funds to support the increased management responsibilities of the MTLV coordinator, as well as an Undergraduate Student Associate to provide organization for the *Summer Assessment Institute*. The Program Director staffs each of these developments with the assistance of part-time staff.

References

Bernstein D. 2002. Representing the intellectual work in teaching through peer-reviewed course portfolios. In Davis S, Buskist W, eds. *The teaching of psychology: Essays in honor of Wilbert J McKeachie and Charles L Brewer*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. p 215-229.

Stanford University. "Student E-portfolios." *Stanford Teaching Commons*, <https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/resources/teaching/evaluating-students/assessing-student-learning/student-e-portfolios>. Accessed 1/29/2018.