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ASSETT-CTL Fellow Final Report
GSSL

Title: Talking about Teaching: GSSL Department Workshops

Summary: In Spring semester 2024, I arranged a series of workshops within the department during department meeting times to think about how we might broaden our discussion of teaching that included faculty (research and teaching professors), graduate students, and staff. The discussions took place both in person and online (hybrid format) to enable as much participation as possible. The concept was a mixture of information sharing and conversation about strengths, strategies, pitfalls / difficulties, and other experiences from in the classroom.

Challenges Addressed: My motivation for the workshops was to consider how we might come together to think about our roles as instructors but to also find different ways that we might find commonalities across our disciplines. In the Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures department, we teach a variety of languages and courses, covering Russian, Eastern European, Eurasian and Slavic, Nordic studies, and German. Many of the courses are in target languages and focus on language acquisition but many other courses highlight the many cultural similarities and differences across national borders. By opening up conversations on pedagogies and teaching methodologies, my hope was to bring people together that disengaged from internal hierarchies.

Desired Result: I outlined this above in the challenges addressed but my motivation for creating these workshops was to initiate discussion about teaching but also to create a space where faculty, students, and staff could come together and think about department climate and culture. Currently we're in the process of renaming our department and also revising some of the main objectives and goals that span our wide array of courses. My hope was that by talking about teaching and allowing people to share their experiences, we might also understand the various teaching styles and research / teaching concentrations within the department. Often department meetings concentrate on specific questions and objectives. By opening up the stage, so to speak, my goal was to open up lines of communication but also identify some areas of potential collaboration.

Project: In advance, I discussed with the department chair about setting aside some of the department meeting times for Share-Outs or unstructured workshops about teaching with the department. Department meeting times are usually free periods for the majority of teaching faculty, as well as graduate students, making it an ideal meeting time. In addition, the department meetings are set up in a hybrid format, further enabling faculty and students to participate in a mode that best fit in their schedule. Initially, I considered asking specific people to share during the meeting times. However, I decided to keep the schedule open and to send out emails in advance of the meetings to encourage people to think about sharing without putting pressure on any one specific person or persons to share. In the end, this was a good idea, as it create an atmosphere that anyone was free to share their ideas and experiences with others without scrutiny or undue stress. I opened each meeting with a few words and a couple questions to help instructors / faculty and students think about what they might want to share. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to find a good time for the hands-on workshops that I had wanted to hold with graduate students. However, based upon the participation and interest from teaching faculty and instructors, I plan on continuing some of these meetings and workshops into the

2024–2025 academic year, especially because at that time I will no longer also serve as the Director of Graduate Studies for the German program.

Outcome: Overall the experience during the meetings was good. We discussed a variety of topics that came up during the “Share-Outs” including concerns about AI, online course presence and learning platforms, syllabus design, backwards design in teaching, student-centered discussion-based learning, ungrading, and other topics that were part of the workshop series during Fall 2024 for the ASSETT-CTL Fellows program. We also discussed work-life balance and grading, ways to encourage student engagement, and things that we struggle with in terms of teaching post-lockdown, mental health and students, and the shifts in instruction that have taken place over the past few years. I think in the future a department working group might help to encourage further conversation as well as some hands on workshops to help encourage faculty and instructors to make fuller use of things available through Canvas and resources on campus. I realized throughout the meetings how disconnected the department is in many ways and that the opportunity to discuss our individual courses and to think about ways to share knowledge (even asynchronously online through the department Canvas page) would model the type of community that many would like to see in the department but has (as of yet) not come unto fruition.

Faculty Fellows Experience: I think the workshops the first half of the year were really beneficial in meeting with people from across the campus and engaging in conversations about teaching that might model what I planned to do within my own department. It was also helpful to cover a range of topics. Although I did not always agree with some of the modes and emphases, in particular about what inclusive pedagogy and universal design might look like in courses, I also felt that the diversity of opinions and experiences helped me to understand where people are coming from and where I might help to guide some of the faculty to think about ways to integrate new teaching strategies into their own courses. I was fortunate in the fact that there were a few faculty members in the department who have taken advantage of workshops and talks through CTL. I think in the future I'd like to be involved in one of the working groups through CTL to continue these conversations with others outside of my department. In particular, I would love to see a working group that focuses on improving student success, engagement, and retention through the use of more accessible and inclusive pedagogical strategies that might bring together people from across campus, perhaps even collaborating on intersecting or cross-referential pedagogies and disciplines. Because I work mostly on Black studies but within a German program, the concept of interdisciplinary work is constant. However, I recognize that others work in more highly-focused disciplines. Overall, I appreciated the opportunity of being a faculty fellow for CTL-ASSETT and plan to encourage others in my department to consider developing their own projects.