Enhancing teaching and learning at Samford through a robustly funded and supported Center for Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship.

INTRODUCTION

An engaged faculty is a developed faculty, and development activities are central to creating and sustaining a culture within any institution that values and rewards effective teaching.

Andrew Westmoreland, 2013

Imagine a place where experienced faculty could learn innovative ways to use technology in the classroom; where new faculty would be supported and nurtured as teachers during their first years at the university; where schools and departments could receive guidance regarding course design and curricular restructuring; where faculty could come together to share novel approaches to teaching and learning; and where adjunct instructors could learn to become more effective teachers.   Imagine a place where faculty could be introduced to cutting-edge scholarship related to teaching and learning and learn to become more effective scholars themselves.   A fully funded and supported Center for Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship can be the catalyst for making all these things happen at Samford.   Imagine a place where faculty are trained to use high impact practices in their courses, and where those practices result in increased rates of student success.   An investment in faculty development has been shown to lead to increased rates of student success. This link was investigated in a multi-year study undertaken by faculty at Carleton College and Washington State University to assess how students' learning is affected by faculty members' efforts to become better teachers. The authors show that faculty participation in professional development activities positively affects classroom pedagogy, student learning, and the overall culture of teaching and learning in a college or university (Condon, et.al. 2016).

The CTLS emerged from the Problem-based Learning initiative that swept across Samford in the late 1990s, when funds from the Pew Charitable trust were used to establish the center.   Since that time, the center has existed in name only with no full-time director, and very little institutional support. The lack of a full-time director and any significant financial support has meant that the center has existed in the shadows and has never realized its potential as an integral part of the life of the university. The number of centers for teaching and learning has increased in the last several years. In 2001, a study by the POD (Professional and Organizational Developers) Network, identified approximately 300 such centers in U.S. colleges and universities. In 2011, an updated study identified over 900 centers, with over 20% of U.S. colleges and universities supporting some center for faculty development focused on teaching and learning (Kuhlenschmidt, 2011).

The current CTLS Director receives a 1-course/semester release and a small stipend to coordinate CTLS activities.   The director reports to the Associate Provost for Academics.   For a university of this size, such a low level of investment in faculty development—particularly related to teaching and learning-- makes it difficult for faculty to develop and enhance their skills as effective teachers.   Noted Faculty Development expert and author Dee Fink examined the funding support for a variety of faculty development centers and he recommend investing between 0.5% and 1.0% of the total faculty salaries

on faculty development (Fink, 2015).   This QEP proposal requires increased funding for CTLS to support a full-time director and staff, plus funds for increased programming and resources.

How does your idea make a meaningful impact on learning?

This proposal is based on the idea that engaged, well-trained, and well-supported faculty are the key to enhanced student learning. Providing a coherent program of faculty development activities and support for professional growth can result in enhanced learning outcomes across the schools and departments of the institution. The link between effective teaching practice and student success was explored in the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education. The investigator's findings "clearly suggest that effective teaching practices count in ways that extend beyond achievement in individual courses to the fostering of general intellectual skills and orientations, as well as increased student retention" (Pascarella and Blaich, 2013). In addition, more intentional investment in faculty development can lead to the increased adoption and implementation of high-impact teaching practices (HIPS). The Association for American Colleges and Universities (AACU) recognizes that teaching practices have an impact on student persistence to degree and that some teaching practices are more effective than others. (Kuh, 2009). However, many faculty lack the training necessary to use these practices in an effective manner. "For HIPs to spread, faculty members need development and encouragement to innovate in the classroom. They need the right tools and a conducive environment to develop high-quality high-impact practices" (McNair and Albertine, 2012, p. 5).

How does your idea inspire broad participation?

Teaching and learning are the threads that bind this increasingly diverse and complex institution together. Virtually all of our faculty have teaching responsibilities, and a well-supported Center for Teaching, Learning, Scholarship can be a place where faculty can gather together to learn, grow, and develop as professional educators. Programs can be developed and sustained for new and experienced faculty, tenure-track and adjunct instructors, and those who teach face-to-face or in a virtual environment. The impact of these faculty development efforts would be realized by undergraduate, professional and graduate students across the university.

How does your idea build on an institutional strength or address a weakness?

Samford is a place where teaching matters, but as Reder (2010) wrote "Teaching-focused institutions are coming to understand that merely claiming to value good teaching is qualitatively different from actively supporting effective teaching".   We have a faculty who are eager to grow and develop as effective and innovative teachers, and we must provide them with the necessary resources and support. Samford's relative lack of investment in faculty development is illustrated in the table below. Herman (2013) conducted a study that examined the ratio of teaching center staffing to both total faculty and to student enrollment at a variety of institutions in the United States.   Private universities had an average faculty development staff/student ratio of 1:2,487, while Samford is 1:17,353. The average ratio of faculty development staff to faculty at private universities is 1:83 while at Samford it is 1:1,233.

Institutional control or Classification	Ratio of FTE TLDU Staff with FTE Student Enrollment	Ratio of FTE TLDU Staff with FTE Faculty
All institutions	1:2223	1:108
Public	1:2487	1:125
Private	1:1710	1:83
Baccalaureate	1:1962	1:62
Master's	1:1985	1:101
Doctoral	1:2839	1:175
Samford University	**1:17353**	**1:1233**

Table 1: Samford University compared to ratios between FTE Teaching and Learning Development Unit Staff and FTE Enrollment and FTE Faculty by institutional control and classification. (Source: Herman, 2013) *Note: For the Samford ratios, this information is based on a .3 CTLS staffing, fall enrollment of 5,206 students, and an estimated full-time faculty of 370.*

How will you measure the outcomes of your idea? (200 words or less)

The assessment strategy of a well-supported CTLS will focus on outcomes rather than outputs. An output-focused assessment plan might look at the number of workshops conducted or the number of faculty participants.   An outcomes-focused approach will look for evidence of actual impact on teaching and learning practices. For example, one of the organizational goals of the CTLS might be to provide faculty with educational technology instruction. If that instruction is effective, then faculty should become more proficient in using educational technology, and students should report that faculty use technology more frequently and more effectively in their classes. Fink (2013) recommends 4 ways to assess the impact of faculty development efforts on changed teaching practice. Some of these include:

1) Direct Observation and Analysis by a Specialist
2) Asking Students about the Presence or Frequency of Specific Teaching Behaviors
3) Asking Teachers Specific Questions about Specific Changes in Their Teaching Practices

The assessment of this project requires a more rigorous and widespread use of student evaluation instruments—particularly ones that examine actual classroom practices. The Student Ratings of Instruction instrument from IDEA (in particular, their Teaching Essentials instrument) provides formative feedback about teaching methods highly correlated with instructor and course excellence (Fig. 1). Through the TE instrument, it is possible to link the work of faculty who have participated in expanded CTLS programs with adoption and implementation of proven high-impact teaching and learning practices.

Describe the frequency of your instructor's teaching procedures.

The Instructor:

	Hardly Ever	Occasionally	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost Always
Displayed a personal interest in students and their learning	○	○	○	○	○
Found ways to help students answer their own questions	○	○	○	○	○
Demonstrated the importance and significance of the subject matter	○	○	○	○	○
Made it clear how each topic fit into the course	○	○	○	○	○
Explained course material clearly and concisely	○	○	○	○	○
Introduced stimulating ideas about the subject	○	○	○	○	○
Inspired students to set and achieve goals which really challenged them	○	○	○	○	○

Figure 1: Example of the some of the questions that comprise IDEA's Teaching Essentials Instrument.

Source: http://ideaedu.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/TE_TeachingEssentials1.png

Another assessment approach would utilize the Teaching Behavior Checklist (Keely, Smith & Buskist, 2006). The instrument lists 28 different teaching behaviors and asks students to rate the behaviors on a Likert scale (Fig. 2).

Teaching Behavior Checklist

A = Dr. _____ always exhibits/has exhibited these behaviors reflective of this quality.

B = Dr. _____ frequently exhibits/has exhibited these behaviors reflective of this quality.

C = Dr. _____ sometimes exhibits these behaviors reflective of this quality.

D = Dr. _____ rarely exhibits/has exhibited these behaviors reflective of this quality.

E = Dr. _____ never exhibits/has exhibited these behaviors reflective of this quality.

Item Teacher Qualities and Corresponding Behaviors

1 Accessible (Posts office hours, gives out phone number and e-mail information)

2 Approachable/Personable (Smiles, greets students, initiates conversations, invites questions, responds respectfully to student comments)

3 Authoritative (Establishes clear course rules; maintains classroom order; speaks in a loud, strong voice)

4 Confident (Speaks clearly, makes eye contact, and answers questions correctly)

5 Creative and Interesting (Experiments with teaching methods; uses technological devices to support and enhance lectures; uses interesting, relevant, and personal examples; not monotone)

6 Effective Communicator (Speaks clearly/loudly; uses precise English; gives clear, compelling examples)

7 Encourages and Cares for Students (Provides praise for good student work, helps students who need it, offers bonus points and extra credit, and knows student names)

8 Enthusiastic About Teaching and About Topic (Smiles during class, prepares interesting class activities, uses gestures and expressions of emotion to emphasize important points, and arrives on time for class)

9 Establishes Daily and Academic Term Goals (Prepares/follows the syllabus and has goals for each class)

10 Flexible/Open-Minded (Changes calendar of course events when necessary, will meet at hours outside of office hours, pays attention to students when they state their opinions, accepts criticism from others, and allows students to do make-up work when appropriate)

Figure 2: Sample questions from the Teaching Behavior Checklist Assessment Instrument (Keely, Smith, and Buskist, 2006).

How does your idea complement our strategic plan?

The first focus area of Samford University's current strategic plan calls for an emphasis on student success. Within this focus area, goals include:

a. Create a remarkable environment for teaching and learning

b. Nourish and recruit a faculty and staff committed to exceptional standards of learning

c. Design and offer experiences that expand and illuminate traditional learning

In order for this vision to be realized, Samford needs an active, innovative, and well-funded center that supports the pursuit of these goals. Without adequate faculty development opportunities, it will be difficult (impossible) to achieve any of them. As Honan, Westmoreland, and Tew wrote (2013) "an institution with an effective and sustained faculty development plan is an energizing place to work and study. Development programs provide a forum for adopting institution-wide goals for student learning, articulating the desired outcomes, and nurturing the professoriate to be better guides for students in achieving the goals".

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