

Session Title:

Notes & Lessons from a Faculty Learning Community on Diversity & Inclusion

Abstract:

We designed and facilitated a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) of about eight faculty members on our campus to engage in a year-long conversation about diversity & inclusion in the classroom. A typical FLC has 8-12 participants, meets for 2 hours every 3 weeks for one academic year, and supports one another in learning, application, and SOTL around a topic of interest (ours was diversity & inclusion). This session will describe FLCs and will engage with participants in order to address questions and concerns about how to run a FLC. Further, we will address the takeaways we gained in our FLC regarding diversity & inclusion.

Keywords:

Diversity, Inclusion, FLC

Session format:

PDW

Time requested:

60 minutes

Resource needs:

No special needs

Conference Track: This session should *not* be considered for inclusion in the Conference Theme track.

Unique Contribution:

This material is not under review elsewhere. The authors have presented parts of this material at two very small, regional conferences (campus and region of a U.S. state). Each of those had presented our experiences *thus far* at those points in working with our FLC. Further, neither conference presentation had any particular emphasis on Management teaching. This proposal is different in that it reflects our thoughts having *completed* the year-long FLC. In addition, we will weave in applications particular to a Management classroom.

Indicate whether this is your first time submitting to an MOBTS conference: The first author has attended and presented at several MOBTS conferences. The second author has never presented at MOBTS/OBTC.

Notes & Lessons from a Faculty Learning Community on Diversity & Inclusion

Introduction

This Professional Development Workshop (PDW) is designed to encourage participants' interest in participating in or facilitating a Faculty Learning Community (FLC). As such, the PDW will

explore the general purpose, structure, and operation of a FLC, with a particular focus on facilitating a FLC. As an outcome, we hope that participants will come away with the confidence or, even, desire or passion to put together a FLC on their own campuses.

Learning Objectives, Engagement, & Takeaway

Among our objectives, we hope to 1. Define and describe FLCs 2. Articulate how FLCs could positively impact the design of Management courses and classes in general 3. Begin drafting proposals for future FLCs at participants' home institutions 4. Utilize our resources for independent study/exploration related to D&I in the Management classroom

PDW Overview

This session will describe FLCs and our experiences in designing and facilitating a FLC on diversity & inclusion. We will engage with participants in order to address questions and concerns about how to run a FLC. In particular, we will ask participants about issues of concern or interest on their own campuses, engage in Socratic questioning, and give participants an opportunity to draft preliminary FLC proposals.

In addition, we will address the takeaways we gained in our FLC regarding diversity & inclusion and how those takeaways relate to the design, structure, and results of the FLC process.

Overview of FLCs and of our Experience with FLCs

As faculty members, we were looking for ways to engage in meaningful conversations on campus about how to best serve ALL students in our classrooms, and especially how to better serve students whose lives are very different from our own. While certain campus events offered opportunities to begin conversations, we saw a need for deeper conversations and more sustained efforts among faculty. A Faculty Learning Community (FLC) provided the support and structure for this.

Our FLC, the Faculty Learning Community on Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education aimed to empower faculty to recognize differences as assets on or campus and in our community. Furthermore, the FLC developed strategies to identify, evaluate, and respond to diversity and inclusion issues in the classroom and curriculum. Not a committee, nor a task force, our FLC enabled 12 faculty members from disciplines across campus to learn in community through deep inquiry and sustained conversation over the course of 2019 in order to foster positive change in the classroom and on campus. While faculty are experts in their individual fields, not all faculty are experts on diversity and inclusion; by learning in community, members of the FLC established a robust discussion and course of action to make our classrooms more inclusive and equitable.

We remember Parker Palmer's claim, "The growth of any craft depends on shared practice and honest dialogue among the people who do it. We grow by trial and error, to be sure—but our willingness to try, and fail, as individuals is extremely limited when we are not supported by a community that encourages such risks"¹ Our FLC provided such a community.

Milton Cox, one of the originators of FLCs defines an FLC as "a small, specifically structured, yearlong, academic community of learners that includes the goals of building community,

¹ Palmer, 1998, "The Courage to Teach". Page 144

engaging in scholarly (evidence-based) teaching and learning, and the development of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL).” Importantly, he notes the following structural particularities: “an FLC is not a committee, task force, course, book club, or action learning set. These structures may lack community or the scholarship of teaching and learning. An FLC is a small-group learning structure with a process that enables its participants to investigate and provide solutions for just about any significant problem or opportunity in higher education.”²

A typical FLC has 8-12 participants, meets for 2 hours every 3 weeks for one academic year, supports one another in learning, engages in discussion, designs and implements new methods in the classroom or elsewhere on campus, and engages in SoTL. An FLC typically consists of one or two (co-) facilitator(s) in addition to 6-10 faculty members from across campus and representing a variety of disciplines. Facilitators should have some training in or deep study of FLCs. (Lilly offers specialized conferences on FLCs and Miami (Ohio) University has extensive resources available at <http://www.units.miamioh.edu/flc/index.php>).

FLCs typically follow a scholarly process, reviewing literature, debating points, piloting ideas, and often presenting or publishing their work in addition to creating outcomes valuable to the university community. Outcomes are decided by the FLC as part of creating the community. Potential outcomes include designing and implementing ways to address a classroom or campus problem or opportunity, creating workshops for fellow faculty, creation of a new course, or ideas for restructuring current processes, to name a few.

Our FLC consisted of two co-facilitators, the authors of this proposal, in addition to 6 additional faculty members from across campus and representing a variety of disciplines. One author teaches in the Humanities while the other teaches Management and has held leadership roles in our university’s teaching infrastructure. Additional participants were chosen after a review of applicants for the FLC. Participants were chosen to create a diverse group representing a variety of disciplines, experiences, and needs.

Starting and running a FLC on Diversity & Inclusion wasn’t easy. While interdisciplinarity, diversity, inclusion, community, and learning are common descriptors (or buzzwords) at universities, the rigid structure and corporatization of the university often works against these noble goals, instead silo-ing disciplines, excluding, and emphasizing individual achievement over community and collaboration. We hoped that getting an FLC up and running on campus might begin to counteract some of these trends in higher education.

We obtained a grant from our university’s Diversity & Inclusion office of \$6000 (US). This included money for books and materials and for professional development for FLC members and food/refreshments in order to foster community building.

We met for an entire academic year for 2 hours every three weeks. Early meetings focused on learning about diversity and inclusion in Higher Ed, critically gathering information about diversity and inclusion efforts on our campus, building a common vocabulary, building community, and brainstorming about pedagogical applications. We got to know one another, acknowledging our unconscious biases, and exploring how our own biases and those of our

² <http://miamioh.edu/cte/faculty-staff/flcs/index.html>

students impact the classroom environment. In order to begin developing a common vocabulary, we read Banaji and Greenwald's *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*, and in order to explore inclusion and exclusion in institutions, discussed diversity work as presented by Sara Ahmed in *Living a Feminist Life*. Later meetings discussed more advanced readings, welcomed guest speakers and student panels, and engaged participants in sharing their plans for applications to their classrooms.

Our FLC brought together colleagues from various colleges and disciplines eager to learn from one another. We witnessed faculty relishing the opportunity to simply get to know one another. One participant remarked, "It just feels so good to get to know my colleagues!" We agreed. As Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber discuss in *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy*, the corporatization of the university has imposed an instrumental view of not only time but also each other. "In a climate of accounting" simply conversing with colleagues belongs to "an economy of waste." (72). As Jane Tompkins notes, "Nobody has time ... You can't put a good conversation on your vita" and as a result, "there's no intellectual life left in universities, or precious little, because people are too busy getting ahead professionally ... to stop and talk to each other" (21). "The corporate [...] university often dismisses turning inwards and disavows emotion in pursuit of hyper-rational and economic goals" (Berg, Seeber 83). We appreciated the opportunity to provide intellectual life for our participants and the opportunity to uncover opportunities to improve diversity & inclusion on our campus.