SITE REVIEW SUMMARY
CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING, UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-ST. LOUIS
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Prepared by the External Reviewer:

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INTRODUCTION

For nearly 6 years, the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL) has provided services to achieve its mission: sponsoring "professional development programs for faculty, graduate students, and academic leaders" and creating "opportunities for all who work with learners to meet formally and informally to learn and to support one another's efforts to enhance the quality of undergraduate and graduate education."

The Center has worked to accomplish this mission at a time when UMSL, like most institutions of higher education, is striving to provide high quality education with limited funding, financial challenges, and students who often struggle to pay their tuition each semester. Because financial resources are tight, there is little new money to add resources for programs on the campus. Thus, it is particularly important that programs be efficient and successful.   It is within this context that I participated in the review of the UMSL's Center for Teaching and Learning.

REVIEW PROCEDURES

This review was conducted as part of the University's Five Year Quality Review requirements. As a first step, I read *The Center Review Self Study* prepared by Center Staff. My visit to campus began with a tour of the Center offices and related technology and meeting facilities. The review process itself commenced with an initial meeting that included the Provost, Vice Provosts for Student Affairs and Research, and Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate School. Also present were some Center staff and all review committee members. During this meeting, participants discussed the review process, and the review committee agreed to gather information with an open-ended approach focused on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges in four main areas related to the work of Center staff members:

1) What they are trying to do
2) How they are doing it
3) Who has responsibility for the work (Who are they collaborating with?)
4) How we/they know they are succeeding.

As the external reviewer, I joined members of the internal review committee in inviting various constituents to share their perceptions about the work of Center staff in any of these four areas. The feedback sessions in which I participated included individual meetings with Provost Glen Cope and Peggy Cohen, Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning and Associate Provost for

Professional Development. I also participated in interviews with 31 other individuals in four groups representing the UM New Faculty Teaching Scholars Program, the Center for Teaching and Learning Advisory Group, deans and co-sponsors of teaching and learning activities on campus, and teaching assistants.

I have based the following summary on what I read, observed, and heard during the review process and on my own professional insights from over 25 years of working with issues of instructional/faculty development and preparation of graduate teaching assistants (TAs). I have divided the summary into strengths/areas of quality and opportunities/recommendations.

STRENGTHS/AREAS OF QUALITY

The most important message I can convey from the review is this: *The Center, its contributions to the campus, and the individuals involved in it received the utmost praise throughout the review process. The support for the Center was universal, strong, and consistently expressed by participants in all groups.* It came from all levels of the institution—the Provost, the deans, the faculty, and the graduate students who have benefited from its programs. All of the individuals I heard from appreciated "the quality" associated with the Center's programs. The areas of quality mentioned most consistently are related to the approaches used by the Center, the resulting programs, the staff, and the impact.

Approaches

Among the approaches that exemplified the Center's excellent work were the needs-based grounding, the focus on learning, collaboration with other units, and assessment.

Needs-Based Grounding. It was clear from the beginning of this review that the Center staff members engage in "needs-based scholarship" grounded in the needs of their constituents. They initiated activities in 2000 based on a faculty needs assessment and have continued to define, develop, and refine activities based on ongoing feedback, always combined with input from others who are affected by the work of the Center. As a result, the Center has been highly successful in addressing pressing issues related to teaching and learning at UMSL.

Focus on Learning. The Center staff are known on campus for not only focusing on student outcomes/learning but also helping faculty and teaching assistants think more fully about what it means to be "learning centered." As one participant indicated, the perspective Center staff take is helpful because it focuses "on whether students are learning and how you can tell."

Collaboration with Other Units. Many interviewees cited the importance of the Center's collaboration with related units on campus. Center staff are involved with both graduate and undergraduate units/activities, other leaders who provide services for student affairs, technology, libraries, and research, and faculty from a variety of departments and programs. Through such collaborations, Center staff members develop mutually supportive campus relationships while also providing additional opportunities for related units to expand their own faculty networks.

Assessment: The impressive compilation of formative feedback reflects the importance Center staff attach to assessing their work. They know who participates in their activities, what departments are represented, how participants perceive the quality of the activities, and what to do to improve their efforts. As various interviewees expressed this approach: "Evaluation is expected [as part of their programs]," and "They have the information about how to change and [they] change when it is needed." Because of their ongoing improvement-based process, Center staff members are perceived as responsive.

Programs

Center staff members have developed programs to serve a wide range of disciplines and units on the campus. Most highly praised during the review were the New Faculty Teaching Scholars Program, the Professional Development for Graduate Teaching Assistants, and the teaching, learning and technology programs.

The New Faculty Teaching Scholars Program. The New Faculty Teaching scholars Program is recognized as a "flagship program" with "tremendous energy level." Interviewees in the review praised the program orientation and the retreats foremost for building community: "protected time to get to know each other across disciplines," "to meet others not only on this campus but other UM campuses and to build a network of people" and to learn "what it means to be a community of learners," "learning from one another" and "sharing practice." Past participants noted that the program is "not just 'one shot' but offers follow-up opportunities." The program also helps in learning "how the University works" (tenure and promotion, for example) and, in some of the past years, for "hearing varying perspectives" about the value of the University to legislators. One past participant suggested the program served "as a mentor to help in negotiating the University." Another appreciated the perspective represented: teaching and learning "as a multi-directional process and an appreciation of what students bring."

Professional Development for Graduate Teaching Assistants. Interviewees lauded the Center staff's important contributions to the professional development of graduate students as teaching scholars. Most frequently mentioned by faculty/administrators and the graduate students involved were the orientation and related follow-up. Graduate student participants appreciated what they learned through both the program and the opportunities to be mentors for other students. They also noted the value of handouts (especially discipline-specific resources), the time to debrief in disciplinary clusters, the opportunities the program provides for "engaging ideas about teaching and learning" and, as one student said, "providing an array of faculty I can access in the University through contact with the Center."

Teaching and Learning Technology Programs. Several references were made during the interviews to the collaborative efforts of Center staff in providing programs on uses of technology in teaching and learning. Both faculty and TAs noted the importance of the Center activities for providing introductions to the use of MyGateway and online course evaluations. Of particular note for them was the emphasis that is placed in such sessions on incorporating "sound pedagogical practices" with the uses of technology.

Staff

CTL staff members are perceived on campus as knowledgeable, energetic, and hardworking, stretching resources to meet a wide range of needs. The director, instructional designer, and coordinator of TA Programs all have national reputations for the quality of their campus work and for their participation, presentations, and publications in national organizations related to professional development for faculty and teaching assistants.   In addition, they have been most resourceful and innovative in obtaining assistance from additional graduate and undergraduate students who contribute in important ways to the accomplishments of the Center.

Impact

Throughout the review, interviewees noted the Center's effectiveness and impact. Some of the feedback was more general, with interviewees suggesting, as one did, that s/he was "impressed with the quality." Still others were more specific, noting that the Center staff "provide wonderful opportunities for faculty who care about teaching." In some cases, participants identified specific outcomes such as learning about developing syllabi, implementing different instructional strategies, using midterm feedback, and obtaining grants— all of which they may not have known about or used without the support provided through the Center programs. For many of interviewees, particularly from the faculty programs, the Center activities have provided impetus for "completely changing

ways of doing things, trying new things out, and constantly re-developing." Most impressive is the fact that several participants suggested that the work of the Center staff is changing the institution: "What I saw happen is faculty became more motivated, so they [Center staff] are continuing to make in-roads," "breaking down barriers," "getting the buy-in of the larger community," and ultimately, as one participant in new faculty program suggested, creating "cultural changes from the grass roots" by "building a generation that can critically assess teaching and learning."

CHALLENGES AND ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Although strengths of the Center were abundant, the review process helped to identify some challenges and areas for next steps or additional opportunities for Center staff to consider. I have categorized those challenges/opportunities into seven areas: space, focus, TA professional development, faculty participation, individual consultation, collaboration, and assessment. Those areas and related recommendations are summarized in the next section of this report.

Space

The major challenge related to the work of the Center was that at the time of the review there was no centrally allocated space for the Center. I found it especially challenging that the employees of the Center attempt to conduct business with each other primarily via e-mail from their disparate parts of the campus and that potential clients often have to go to several different locations to avail themselves of services. Thus, I strongly support the following recommendation for campus administrators and the Center Advisory Group members:

> *Recommendation*: *Secure centrally located space in which all Center staff can be housed together in an area that reflects the quality of the Center's work and the campus community's commitment to the Center's teaching and learning mission.*

Focus

In their effort to meet the variety of needs on campus through the years, Center staff have assumed roles in a variety of areas that go beyond providing neutral improvement-based professional development for faculty, academic leaders, and graduate students. As a result, their efforts have stretched their resources; they are overworked and unable to take advantages of some potentially good opportunities for next steps. Among the areas that most seem to stretch beyond their goals are the leadership roles in the program reviews and the activities that are directly servicing undergraduate students. If Center staff could reduce commitments in these areas, they might have more resources for other important efforts directly within their mission. Center staff could still be involved in crucial roles in program reviews and undergraduate services, but their responsibilities would be primarily in providing improvement-based support for faculty, graduate students, academic leaders, and programs/units involved in these areas. Three recommendations I would offer related to focusing efforts in this way are as follows:

> *Recommendation*: *Consider shifting major authority for program reviews to another unit on campus so that Center staff do not have the conflict of interest in trying to be both neutral resources and evaluators of the quality of campus programs.*

> *Recommendation*: *Seek additional ways to collaborate with student services units such as Student Affairs and the Student Success Center to provide resources for activities like service learning, supplemental instruction, undergraduate research, and the American Democracy Project.*

> *Recommendation*: *Consider using time saved from some of the undergraduate services to institute a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Symposium, similar to the undergraduate research symposium, in which faculty have a scholarly forum in which to share their efforts to enhance student learning.*

TA Professional Development

With the possibility of a certificate program and some additional time for Dr. Ebest to devote to the TA Professional Development Program, there are opportunities that could encourage even broader participation in program activities. I offer the following four recommendations:

> *Recommendation*:   *Define "teaching" broadly as "any interaction with students about the content of a course" so that the definition includes instruction in course sections, laboratories, tutorials, etc.*

> *Recommendation*: *Work with representatives of the Center for International Studies to determine next best steps for the further development of teaching skills for International Teaching Assistants.*

> *Recommendation: Conduct interviews with representatives responsible for TAs within departments to determine how the Center's TA programs, including the certificate program, can best support the needs of TAs from a range of disciplines working within a broad definition of "teaching."*

> *Recommendation: Identify TA liaisons in departments who can serve as contacts to help with marketing—explaining benefits, encouraging participation, and serving as advocates—at the departmental/unit level for the TA Professional Development Program.*

Faculty Participation

A challenge identified during the reviews was that there is not uniformly wide participation in Center programs by a range of faculty and, particularly, by senior faculty. At various times during the discussions, interviewees attributed the lack of participation to the time required for busy faculty to participate in such activities. As a result, there was discussion about the best design for sessions that are "as effective and efficient as possible" and that "make every hour count." Some argued that a three-hour workshop format requires too much time from many faculty. They proposed that workshops be designed with an information segment and an application segment with participants having options for attending only the first part or both parts. Others suggested that it was not so much the design but rather the relevance and usefulness of the topics that determined the degree of participation. Some indicated that "the learning curve" for some programs with a series of sessions, like the new faculty programs, is so steep that it might be helpful to develop more programs for experienced faculty and present only the most essential information in those initial programs for new faculty. Still others suggested that the way programs are marketed makes a difference in levels of faculty involvement. The use of faculty liaisons within departments or units was suggested as a way to extend marketing and provide another way for Center staff to involve stakeholders in contributing to CTL programming. As a result of the varying suggestions, I offer three recommendations to enhance efficiency and work toward broader faculty participation:

> *Recommendation: Gather information from constituents to help re-evaluate workshop design and determine how best to refine and present specific topics in ways that provide the best timing and flexibility to meet varied needs of busy faculty.*

> *Recommendation*: *Consider developing follow-up programs that extend into the second and third year beyond first-year programs and that more fully address developmental needs in teaching and learning.*

> *Recommendation: Establish faculty liaisons in departments/units to disseminate information about what faculty might learn in Center sessions, encourage participation, provide programming input, and serve as advocates at the departmental level so that all of the responsibility does not fall on Center staff to encourage participation and serve as their own primary advocates.*

Individual Consultation

Most Centers at other major institutions provide individual consultations as a basic service that can have the most direct impact on individual instructors and courses. Although limited resources probably inhibit consultation services of the Center for Teaching and Learning much beyond those that already exist, one additional possibility that could be efficient is to offer group consultation sessions on specific topics or issues common to a small group of faculty or a department. It could be especially important to adapt such issues to encourage participation by faculty who "have been around longer." A number of interviewees during the review indicated the need for more cross-disciplinary sessions such as: "Who the Students Are and How They Learn," "How to Make Class Discussion Happen," and "Teaching Research Methods Interactively" or discipline-specific topics like "Teaching Remedial Mathematics," "Learning in the Sciences," and "Teaching and Learning in the Clinical Setting."

> *Recommendation: Develop group consultation sessions on specific interdisciplinary or disciplinary topics that address the needs of small groups of faculty, including some of the senior faculty members.*

Collaboration

Like many Centers across the country, the CTL is providing services closely allied with other units that support faculty on the campus. Such closely related services require ongoing communication among relevant units to take advantage of synergy as well as to avoid duplication. Although the Center staff have been collaborative, I offer the following recommendation for ongoing communication:

> *Recommendation: Identify the various units on campus that are providing professional development opportunities and networks for faculty, TAs, and academic leaders and continue to coordinate efforts through ongoing, regular unit meetings and collaborative projects that make the most efficient and effective use of available resources.*

Assessment

Even though Center staff have done an excellent job of amassing formative feedback on their programs, they, like all of us in higher education, are now ready to take the next steps in assessing the impact of their work. In the spirit of such assessment, I recommend the following:

> *Recommendation: Seek ways, such as follow-up surveys or focus group interviews, to assess long-range impacts of Center programs on professional development for faculty and TAs and, ultimately, on faculty and student engagement, student retention, and student learning.*

CONCLUSION

For me, this review has confirmed that, even in this time of financial challenges and limited financial resources, the CTL at UMSL is a high quality and successful campus unit. With strong constituent support, highly regarded activities/services, excellent staff, and flexibility in collaborating and developing programs responsive to the needs of individuals and departments, the Center has distinguished itself on campus. As interviewees suggested, it is "a strong component on this campus for improving overall conversation on teaching and learning" and a resource that "we need to take care of" because it "provides university-wide support for real teaching, not didacticism." I hope the input from this review is helpful in reinforcing this good work of Center staff members and in stimulating their thinking about how they might further refine their efforts for even greater efficiency and success as they move into the next five years. I wish them the best of luck in their ongoing programs to support the teaching and learning portion of the University's mission.