Building a Center for Teaching at UMW: A Mid-Year Update

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Background

This document provides an update to the proposal to create a comprehensive Center for Teaching at the University of Mary Washington that was developed beginning in October 2018 and submitted in February 2019. Since implementing the original plan, hiring and training our staff, and developing programming, we have continued to reflect on our faculty development work to ensure it is meeting the needs of our faculty. We have also continued to seek guidance and advice from the Professional and Organizational Development in Higher Education (POD) Network as well as from directors and former directors of centers for teaching and learning around the country. We are thrilled with the positive response from faculty and the strong desire to be collaborative partners across campus. As we have grown considerably since offering a limited array of programming beginning in Fall 2018 and continuing to develop over the past year, we seek to combine the guidance we've received with what we've continued to learn about our own institutional contexts and ultimately work to develop a Center for Teaching that can be sustainable over the long term.

Reflections on our Mission and Vision

As explored in our proposal document, the mission and vision of the Center for Teaching is as follows:

> The Center for Teaching at UMW actively supports and encourages faculty in providing a rigorous public, liberal arts education.

> To fulfill its mission, the Center for Teaching:

>> Offers resources and support for evidence-based teaching and learning practices that create opportunities for applied, impactful learning experiences.

>> Cultivates a collegial culture of teaching excellence on our campus.

>> Serves as a hub connecting the university community across centers, services, and departments.

>> Provides holistic support for faculty throughout their careers.

This mission and vision connects with the university's role as a public, liberal arts institution and connects to our strategic goals as an institution. It is our belief that the Center for Teaching can and should play a critical role on our campus.

Evaluating the Center for Teaching's Current Programs and Services

Over the past year, the Center for Teaching has developed much more rapidly than expected and now offers an array of services and supports. In the beginning of the 2018-2019 academic year, there was neither a Center for Teaching on our campus nor were there programs or services offered. The American Council on Education (ACE) has developed a comprehensive matrix to assess and evaluate centers of teaching and learning using three categories: "Developing," "Partially Developed," and "Fully Developed" (Haras et al. 2019). Following these categories and recommendations, by most measures, the Center for Teaching would have been considered as "Developing" by summer 2019. The Center had an articulated mission and vision but did not have a dedicated space, web presence, or staff beyond a part-time faculty special assignment. Even still, the Center for Teaching offered grants, individual consultations, and developed a successful Faculty Pedagogy Colloquium series. Including all of this programming, we reached a total of 77 unique faculty members in 20 different departments across all three colleges in 2018-2019.

By October 2019, the Center for Teaching has moved into "Partially Developed" or "Fully Developed" in a variety of categories. We now have a robust website with an events calendar and teaching resources. We also publish a weekly email newsletter and have almost 90 subscribers. In addition to the faculty special assignment position of Faculty Program Director, we now have a full-time Associate Director and a Faculty Fellow. We have had two communities of practice running and the Faculty Pedagogy Colloquium series has continued. By May of 2019, we had offered 15 faculty consultations. As of the end of October 2019, only a few months into the academic year, we have already offered 29 consultations, 12 of which were consultations with other units on campus and 17 for faculty. Looking across all of our programming, we already have a reach of 38 unique faculty members, excluding newsletter subscribers. Furthermore, we have supported, both financially and logistically, a variety of collaborative programming, including a SafeZone workshop and talks co-sponsored with the Center for Community Engagement and the Speaking Center. We have also served as consultants to help create faculty development opportunities with the Office of Disability Resources, Honors Program, First Year Seminar Program, James Farmer Multicultural Center and Legacy Council, and the Library.

However, as our Center has shifted to "Partially" or "Fully Developed" in some criteria in the ACE matrix, we would still be considered as "Developing" in others, particularly in the area of Resource Allocation and Infrastructure as well as Organizational Structure. In these categories,

though, the Center's staff can only make recommendations and additional administrative support is necessary to assist in the Center's development.

Developing a Sustainable Center for Teaching at UMW

Our goal is to develop a Center for Teaching that aligns with evidence-based practices in faculty development, addresses faculty needs, connects with institutional goals, and is sustainable long-term. Over the past year, we've recognized several key challenges that have or will hamper these efforts and have developed recommendations for how best to address them.

Perhaps the most significant challenge is related to employee burnout, both amongst the staff of the Center for Teaching but also across the university. In our conversations with faculty, particularly faculty who have taken on additional service roles or special assignments, and with staff who have similarly taken on expanded responsibilities, we have found that burnout is common across our campus. Further, research shows that this type of burnout is often overlooked because employees are still actively engaged in their work but typically have high demands and low resources (Moeller et al. 2018). Within the Center for Teaching, we are well-poised to help address faculty wellness as part of our vision to provide holistic support and to provide evidence of the institution's commitment to teaching excellence. To do this work, though, we need to be repositioned as "workers with high engagement–low burnout profiles" which is characterized by having "high resources, moderate information processing demands, and low other demands" (Moeller et al. 2018, 2) and to advocate for this approach across our campus.

The high-demand, low-resource model that is more typical across the institution has a compounded effect on the workload of the Center for Teaching because so many centers, services, and departments have had resources or staffing cuts, or have not had the level of investment needed to enact their expected outcomes. While we are sensitive to the financial pressures the university is facing, there has not been a corresponding cut in demands as resources have been reduced. For units whose missions explicitly include faculty development programming, this has meant that the Center for Teaching is often positioned as the sole resource for developing these types of faculty opportunities and has led to a significant amount of time spent on supporting cross-unit programming. Furthermore, there has been relatively little progress on developing cross-departmental connections, with collaborations between centers serving as the main focus of our programming. Certainly, the willingness and eagerness to collaborate with the Center for Teaching is deeply appreciated. We have so many talented faculty and staff in the array of centers and services on our campus and the Center for Teaching can offer expanded programming as a result of these partnerships. However, what has become apparent is that as budget and resource cuts have stretched these units, they have still retained an expectation to deliver faculty development opportunities. We expected that these partnerships and collaborative programming offerings would slowly develop over several years, but the

resource constraints and immediate needs have resulted in a disproportionate focus on cross-unit collaborations given our current staffing and resources.

Staffing and Resources Needed

To develop a sustainable staffing plan, we consulted with Mary Deane Sorcinelli, the former president of the POD Network and the leading faculty development scholar, as well as with other members from the POD Network. If we are to exist sustainably as a well-developed Center for Teaching, and are to continue to be a campus hub while also developing our own in-house faculty development programming, we are in need of additional staff. The time needed to serve as a campus hub has shifted the focus away from the other three aspects of our vision and attempting to cultivate these partnerships while continuing to develop the skills of our staff and respond to faculty needs is unsustainable. Furthermore, the Center is currently out of alignment with regards to the programs and services offered and the staffing and resources provided. Overall, we have noticed there is an inconsistent relationship between the expectations of staff roles and the compensation provided. Faculty development jobs are plentiful as demand for centers for teaching have grown across the country and we will struggle to attract and retain talented staff if our compensation is so far out of market alignment and our list of job responsibilities grows. This section outlines the recommended organizational structure, including a reflection of the current staffing and challenges, as well as resource constraints and future needs.

Director

Currently, the Center for Teaching is led by the Faculty Program Director, whose role was created as a two-year special assignment to develop and begin to implement a plan for the Center for Teaching. This special assignment ends in May 2020. Considering the stage of the Center for Teaching's development, variety and demand for programming, and level of engagement, we are in need of a full-time director, ideally a 12-month administrative, tenured faculty position. We've experienced a relatively high demand for summer programming and development work and a full-time, 12-month position would thus be most appropriate. The Director, as advised by Mary Deane Sorcinelli and in the American Council on Education's Faculty Development Matrix, should have a generous course release, teaching no more than one to two courses each year (Haras et al. 2019). While our Center for Teaching was still developing, a part-time faculty special assignment was compatible with the work of the Center, but now that the Center for Teaching has moved into the "Partially Developed" category on most measures, and even "Fully Developed" in some measures of programs and services, the Director role should similarly move into the recommendations for at least the "Partially Developed" category:

> Center leadership role appropriate for institutional type, e.g., full-time administrative leader who comes from the faculty, or generous release time for small college director; low turnover (average term of service greater than three years). Initial metrics around

faculty/developer qualifications, experience, competencies, and rate of turnover factor into Center leadership (Haras et al. 2019, 4).

The Director, as recommended in the original proposal, should be responsible for developing, evaluating, and assessing programming within the Center for Teaching. Given the current development level of our Center and our programs and services, we propose hiring a full-time Director at an appropriate market salary.

Associate Director

A full-time, salaried Associate Director should be responsible for logistical support for development programming and should manage the administrative operations of the Center for Teaching. At a typical Center for Teaching at a university of our size and with our range of services and programming, three full-time staff members would be expected. We currently have one full-time staff member who is essentially doing the work of both a Director and Associate Director at other centers for teaching and learning.

Currently, our Associate Director's title carries the responsibilities more typically expected of a Director, following the responsibilities outlined above, and therefore the expectations and compensation of the current Associate Director role are not in alignment with the current research and practices found at other centers for teaching and learning.

Faculty Fellow

The Faculty Fellow role was developed following the Faculty Fellow model used by Academic Services at UMW, but we have found that this is not in alignment with recommendations by faculty developers. Rather than focus on a commitment to working a particular number of hours, the recommendation is that the Faculty Fellow receive a stipend or a course release and have a commitment to implementing a particular project, such as a community of practice or workshop series. This project should be developed in a way that matches the needs of the Center for Teaching with the interest and expertise of the Faculty Fellow, and the Fellow should also be encouraged to develop their own research project. These expectations should be clearly presented in a contract. We currently have one Faculty Fellow but considering the university's focus on teaching, we ultimately would like to see at least three Faculty Fellowship opportunities offered, which again would be more typical of similar institutions.

Senior Fellow

We would also like to develop a role of Senior Fellow to replace the current Faculty Program Director special assignment. The Senior Fellow should supervise and mentor the Faculty Fellows, particularly if they are more junior faculty, develop and implement specific faculty development programming as agreed upon in consultation with the Director, and serve as an

advisor and consultant to the Director. This position should include a stipend and a course release. One key strength of the current Center for Teaching team is just that - we are a team and are able to offer feedback and support to one another, and this component was missing in the last iteration of the Center when it was the Center for Teaching Excellence and Innovation. In consultation with Mary Deane Sorcinelli, a Senior Fellow role was recommended as more appropriate given the current course load and compensation of the Faculty Program Director but would preserve a role for a tenured, 9-month faculty in the direction and operations of the Center for Teaching.

Resources

Considering resources and programming more broadly, as mentioned, we've received feedback that both faculty and staff are experiencing burnout on our campus and this can hinder engagement with the Center for Teaching and implementing teaching changes. Research shows that faculty turnout and engagement is strong when there is a return on their invested time, typically in the form of grants, stipends, course releases, or even food (Gillespie and Robertson 2010). We have similarly found over the past year that turnout is generally greater when food is provided. However, food can be a significant expense, especially when we are positioned as a partner with other units on campus who have similar resource constraints. Furthermore, while we have continued to offer a limited number of Small Teaching Grants, we are concerned that there are few opportunities for larger transformative grants or grants that could enable collaborations within or across departments. In the 2018-2019 academic year, since the Center for Teaching had not yet launched, we had additional funds to be able to collaborate with the College of Arts and Sciences Dean on a larger Faculty Pedagogy Grant that had formerly been solely offered to faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences. While we appreciated this opportunity to partner and have heard very positive feedback from individual and teams of faculty awarded this grant, we do not have funds to continue supporting this grant within the current budget structure and it was not a recommended budget item included in the original proposal.

More broadly, we need to acknowledge that workload and burnout is a barrier to making teaching changes, even if these changes would help enact our strategic vision and institutional goals. This means that within the Center for Teaching, we need to develop more asynchronous materials to meet faculty where they are *when* they are, which can be a time-intensive process. We also need to be realistic about the necessity of larger pedagogical redesign grants to support faculty in making larger-scale teaching changes (Cannon-Rech 2019), which would require additional funding but would enable faculty to enact the various strategic initiatives promoted by the university.

Given the choice between increasing our operating budget and expanding our staff, our staffing needs are more essential:

> Having a director who is able to commit time to creating and leading faculty teaching and learning programs with a healthy budget is one clear sign of a college's commitment to improving teaching. A large budget, while nice, is not as important as a college's dedicated time - faculty time - to teaching and learning… (Gillespie and Robertson 2010, 303).

That said, it is recommended that "as the demand for events increases, both the budget for programming and the time needed to run the events should increase accordingly" (Gillespie and Robertson 2010, 303). Our initial budget was developed to be just that, an initial budget for a newly developing Center for Teaching, and additional financial resources will be needed to incentivize teaching changes and engagement.

Looking to the Future

As the university continues to implement strategic initiatives and focus on the academic experience of students, particularly in the area of retention, the Center for Teaching is well-poised to support these administrative goals. We are fortunate to work alongside dedicated faculty and staff colleagues and we are all lifted up when we feel valued in our commitment to student success and teaching. Furthermore, in times of financial challenge when we experience high demands but low resources, the Center for Teaching can help advocate for holistic faculty wellness and can work to create a collegial culture where we feel empowered to make small, sustainable changes that will be effective over the long term. To support this work, the Center for Teaching is in need of staffing and resources that are appropriate for its current level of programs and services. As we continue to grow, evolve, and reflect on the work that we do, we will likely need to continue to reevaluate our organizational structure and budget. However, we remain convinced that a comprehensive, well-supported Center for Teaching provides a significant benefit to our students (Condon et al. 2016; Rutz et al. 2012) and supports our institutional mission.

Summary and Key Recommendations

In conclusion, the Center for Teaching has made considerable strides and, by many measures, would be considered "Partially Developed" or "Fully Developed" according to the ACE Faculty Development Matrix. However, in several key areas of staffing and resources, the Center's development is lagging behind and we advocate for making several changes that will enable sustainable faculty development on our campus. Specifically, we recommend hiring a full-time, salaried Director as a tenured, administrative faculty role at an appropriate market salary. We also recommend reconsidering the responsibilities of the Associate Director and either making the position more focused on administrative management and logistics or, if the role includes implementing faculty development programming, shifting the salary to what would be expected at other comparable centers for teaching and learning. The Faculty Program Director special assignment should shift to a Senior Fellow role given the current level of compensation and

course release. The Faculty Fellow, along with the Senior Fellow, should take a project-based approach that meets the needs of the Center, connects with faculty interest, and avoids burnout. Finally, with regards to the current budget, we advocate for additional funds to support larger, transformative pedagogy grants, to support our current programming, and to build additional capacity. These recommendations are supported by the Center for Teaching staff as well as members of the Teaching Center Advisory Committee.

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