

## Interdisciplinary Faculty Learning Community: Reflections of Peer Review of Scholarly Teaching in Online and Hybrid Courses

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### **Overview of Formative Peer Review of Hybrid and Online Teaching Faculty Learning Community Activities**

In 2017-2018, faculty collaborated in a Peer Review of Scholarly Teaching in Online and Hybrid Courses Faculty Learning Community (FLC). The FLC was based on the principle that peer review is an extremely important mechanism for maintaining excellence in teaching online and in a hybrid environment. Faculty voluntarily enrolled in the learning community based on their own interests. The FLC met once monthly during fall and spring semesters, September through April. The FLC consisted of full-time tenure and tenure track faculty from a variety of disciplines: Biology, Business, History, Information Technology, Mathematics, Physics, and Sociology. Members had various levels of experience, but all had taught in an online or hybrid format. All participants had previously completed an internally developed eight week Distance Learning Design Seminar, designed to teach faculty the principles of designing effective online courses while providing faculty an experience as an online student in a collaborative environment. In addition, all had completed the Quality Matters Applying the Quality Matters Rubric course and attended additional faculty development related to course design, use of technology, and online teaching.

The faculty engaged in peer review specific to online and hybrid courses employing a format previously utilized during a peer review of scholarly teaching in face-to-face courses. The goal of the FLC was to apply a scholarly and reflective peer review process to online and hybrid teaching. During the year-long effort, faculty shared reflections about course conception and planning, classroom practice, and student learning with faculty outside of their own disciplines.

This article provides a description of the FLC activities used to structure the peer review. Following a review of the literature, the participants share their reflections on the process and effect that the peer review of scholarly teaching had on their course. Our experiences were consistent with prior findings that suggested that interdisciplinary support groups, such as faculty learning communities, enhance scholarly teaching by providing alternative perspectives from other disciplines (Denton, Sipple, & Cooper-Freytag, 2013). In addition, our experience suggests the use of a reflective FLC for reviewing online pedagogy is an investment in ongoing improvements to the ever-evolving new world of online teaching.

## **Literature Review**

### **Faculty Learning Communities**

Faculty learning communities have become common practice at colleges and universities committed to improving student learning and faculty scholarly practice. The benefits have been well documented. Faculty learning communities can “build a sense of collegiality around teaching and enhance the teaching and learning culture of a campus” (Cox, 1999, p.40). Peer review, in particular, has been recommended as a useful tool by numerous scholars (Denton, Sipple, & Cooper-Freytag, 2013; Cox, 1999). Another effective use of an FLC is to provide useful feedback for the improvement of online teaching (Schlitz, et al, 2009; Nugent, et. al, 2008). As many faculty today are utilizing technology far different from what they experienced as a student, a scholarly approach to considering technology usage can guide instructors toward enhanced use of more modern digital tools (Kirkwood & Price, 2013).

Participation by faculty in learning communities “across disciplines and faculty lines...has shown to improve faculty interest in teaching and increased use of effective methods of teaching...[and] student-learning outcomes” (Little et al, 2010, p. 432). The idea is for faculty to come together and share ideas to build better curriculums. There is value in faculty using real experiences at their own institution, where there is a shared understanding of the academic mission and values. This shared understanding benefits faculty in developing engaging learning experiences for students.

### **Reflection**

The faculty learning communities may utilize personal reflection, coupled with peer review of these reflections, and discussion to enable critical analysis of one’s pedagogy. “Reflection

helps people reconstruct experiences and make meaning out of them. According to developmental psychologists, meaning making is an essential component of lifelong learning and development” (Blumberg, 2015, p. 90). Through reflections, faculty may assess the educational experience they provide to their students online, through course and assignment design. By sharing the reflections with their peers, faculty can engage in critical review to gauge their teaching effectiveness (Blumberg, 2015). The reflections may be used by faculty to improve the course they review and transfer the learned experience to future classes. Faculty can also use the reflections to document their teaching for promotion and tenure evidence. The act of faculty reflecting in this way provides an opportunity to model the benefit of critical thinking and review to students.

### **Teaching Online**

Online teaching requires different pedagogy than face-to-face teaching (Chiasson, Terras, & Smart, 2015). The FLC represented in this paper focused specifically on hybrid and online learning. The literature supports the need for support communities for teaching effectively online (Chiasson, Terras, & Smart, 2015). Initially, faculty tend to use the conceptual framework from their face-to-face course when designing and implementing their online or hybrid course (Chiasson, Terras, & Smart, 2015). Distance learning seminars and training provide faculty experience as an online student in a collaborative environment (Green, et. al., 2010). During the process of developing and teaching online courses, faculty tended to change their conceptualization of learning from knowledge dissemination to knowledge creation (Green, et. al., 2010).

### **Faculty Learning Community, Exercises, and Interdisciplinary Reflections**

*Developing Faculty Learning Communities at Two Year Colleges* (Denton, Sipple, & Cooper-Freytag, 2013) was the foundation for our faculty learning community and the reflections on which we are basing this article. The authors advocated for institutions to implement learning communities to develop a scholarly review of teaching practices. We used their suggested guidelines and exercises to model our scholarly review of online learning. Although the original text was written with the face-to-face classroom in mind, the same practices are relevant for online courses. We utilized the peer review of colleagues’ work and

individual reflections on course conception and planning, classroom practice, and student learning to perform a formative review and inform scholarly practice.

The process was based on three exercises: Exercise 1 Course Conception and Planning, Exercise 2 Reflections on Classroom Practice, and Exercise 3 Putting the Focus on Student Learning. Partners were randomly assigned for each exercise prior to the meetings. Participants shared their assigned work with their partners prior to the meetings so they could provide feedback in a prescribed format at each FLC meeting. Partners reviewed the materials using a Praise, Question, Possibilities (PQP) review method for sharing in monthly FLC meetings (Lyons, 1981, p. 42). Then participants discussed what they learned from the feedback and self-reflection. Exercise 1 reviewed course conception and planning by conducting a peer review of the partner's self-reflection memo and syllabus. In Exercise 2, participants wrote self-reflections of their own classroom practices. In Exercise 3, participants were instructed to reflect on their teaching in terms of student learning and to choose an assignment or assessment to review. See appendices for the exercises and review prompts used in the FLC.

### **Exercise 1: Course Conception and Planning**

The first set of reflections focus on the experience with the *Course Conception and Planning* exercise. The exercise asked the participants to reflect on their syllabus in the class they were reviewing for the FLC. In the exercise, participants exchanged memos of their own reflection about their syllabus design and if it communicated to the students what they really wanted them to know. At the meeting, participants then discussed their memos, received feedback from their partners, and shared insight with each other. The following two reflections, written by professors in Mathematics and Physics, express how this experience impacted these participants, specifically why the faculty chose to join the FLC, what they learned through the process, and what they are still working to improve.

**Participant 1: Mathematics.** This Assistant Professor of Mathematics joined the faculty learning community (FLC) to evaluate ideas for their hybrid, developmental math class. Input and feedback are essential for the success of any innovation, yet teaching can be an isolating occupation. Opportunities to share ideas with other educators and receive feedback from peers is challenging. The FLC provided input and feedback while cultivating discussion into the different needs of online instruction. Participation in the FLC provided an opportunity to review the entire student experience, not just the online curricula. Experience with fully online courses

facilitated at other institutions led this Assistant Professor to question the effectiveness of mathematics instruction online, especially at the pre-college / developmental level. Further research in alternatives to face-to-face instruction supports the hybrid model to integrate online activities and resources with face-to-face interactions (Meyer, 2014; Ashby, Sadera, & McNary, 2011). The preparation and interest in online instruction were in an effort to provide evening students with similar opportunities as traditional daytime students.

This activity helped this faculty member explore the syllabus for a developmental mathematics course beyond the expectations set in the online design. It enabled an analysis of decisions for online content, organization of the class content, and how to help students connect their learning to their previous knowledge. By reconsidering the hybrid syllabus, partners communicated what was working and what improvements were possible in the online portion of the course. Without the communication and peer discussions, FLC participants would have been slower to recognize small changes that could help to clarify the class experience for students. The FLC memos and peer discussions were pivotal to adjusting course design to improve student success both in the course's math content and its larger goal of introducing students to college. The biggest challenge observed with the hybrid portion of the course was getting underprepared students to understand the consistent work they individually needed to do outside of class. Many students struggle with this awareness and additional "check-in" assignments help connect students with their progress with the online content. Working with underprepared, and often the most vulnerable early college students, faculty not only have the responsibility to teach students the skills needed for college-level mathematics but also, most importantly, how to be a successful college student.

**Theme of balance.** Faculty still struggle to find the balance between online instruction and the lecture element of the face-to-face class. Students have specific expectations for a mathematics class, which usually includes the teacher explaining how to solve specific problems. Many students come to the face-to-face portion of the class with the expectation that that course session would fully explain all the content needed for the homework that week. In reality, students need to review additional videos and examples throughout the week as they practice concepts with the online homework system. As a result, viewership of instructor videos had been slow to take root. Having the peer discussions and self-analysis of course decisions gave the FLC member a better direction of the blending of the online and face-to-face content to

encourage student independence while still teaching students the skills they need to be successful in college and future math classes.

**Participant 2: Physics.** An Associate Professor of Physics had taught physics in face-to-face courses supplementing with online content but was new to teaching fully online. This professor joined the Peer Review of Online and Hybrid Scholarly Teaching Faculty Learning Community (FLC) to benefit from scholarly discussions about online and hybrid learning, as well as the opportunity to review other courses and receive feedback on components of their hybrid course. Prior to offering General Physics I as a hybrid, the course was offered in a “flipped” format, which required students to watch pre-class videos beginning the introduction of content and example problems. The course was developed into a hybrid course to fully move introductory content to an online environment while supporting active student learning in the face-to-face portion of the class. This benefitted students in several ways. General Physics I is a challenging course that requires students to think critically and solve problems at a higher level than many students have experienced in previous coursework. As a result, some students need extra time to process the content. By moving the introduction of content online, students have the ability to take time to prepare before class and come prepared to ask questions. In addition, this format benefits speakers of English as a second language (ESL), who use the online content to interpret words they do not know prior to class.

By discussing the syllabus with the FLC partner, it became evident that it was not clear to students that the course was a hybrid course. The course met 3 hours/week for a 4-credit class, yet they did not necessarily understand that the fourth hour required online work. The faculty member had taken for granted that having the course listing on the Registrar’s website and mentioning it during the first class were sufficient for communicating that the course was a hybrid. During the first iteration of the course, some students did not realize the course was a hybrid until multiple weeks into the course. The FLC exercise guided the faculty to critically evaluate the structure and components of the course, reflecting on how each facet of the course supported student learning, and how best to assess student learning. The peer review of the reflection provided an opportunity to discuss the course design decisions made, how students perceived the online syllabus and feedback from a colleague on those components. The peer review process revealed the need to improve communication of course expectations by explicitly listing those expectations in the syllabus. The peer review partner identified some areas where

expectations could be clarified, as well as how the course activities supported the student learning outcomes. The biggest challenge with teaching the course as a hybrid was communicating course expectations to students and providing them with appropriate feedback in an online environment.

**Theme of active student learning.** Reflection on the hybrid course's conception and planning illustrate the continued struggle with the bigger question of how to teach effectively a quantitative course and higher-level problem-solving skills in an online environment. By using a hybrid course format, faculty can promote active learning strategies during the face-to-face sessions. These face-to-face active learning activities are key to understanding challenging content. Students often cite the discourse within their small group work on specific problems and then with the whole class helping their learning of physics. The discussion along with representations on student whiteboards during class are more difficult to replicate in an online environment. This faculty member is continuing to figure out how to scaffold student problem-solving skills in an online environment and the FLC reflections helped build a foundation for this effort.

## **Exercise 2: Reflections on Classroom Practice**

In the second set of reflections, faculty share their experience with the *Reflections on Classroom Practice* exercise. The learning activities exercise asked the participants to reflect on a specific activity/assignment in the class they were reviewing for the FLC. Participants wrote a memo of their own reflection on why this activity was appropriate for online learning, what students gained by doing this online, and what issues the faculty member saw with this activity. Participants sent this reflective memo and a description of the activity to a partner who responded with feedback. The two then discussed their memos and shared insights with each other. The following reflections express how this experience impacted these participants, specifically why they chose to join the FLC, what they learned through the process, and what they are still working to improve.

**Participant 3: History.** The assignment partners discussed this Associate Professor of History's effort to upend the lecture-driven format of the face-to-face unit on Egypt. For the online class, the faculty member built in an experimental activity to encourage active learning. The key exercise was the use of a highly detailed virtual tour of the tomb of Ramses VI; students were required to explore the tomb and make three observations about specific elements of what

they saw. Overall, the student's understanding of this unit was very clear, as almost all students commented on their fascination with the tomb tour and demonstrated this with more thoughtful, detailed writings on this assignment compared to other assignments in this course, or even assignments in the face-to-face course. The FLC partner lent a critical eye to the exchanged reflections and discussion meetings. The History professor noticed the developmental math instructor's heavy use of adaptive quizzing technology in the virtual setting. In this scenario, the adaptive learning exercises in the unit demonstrated the value of online instruction when the professor considers the opportunities provided by this format and creates additional opportunities for engagement. As someone with experience with introductory students in self-driven activities, the FLC colleague was emphatically supportive of the choice in the Egypt virtual tour to make students the drivers (literally) of their own education.

The FLC helped the faculty take the time to think about what students were doing in this unit and what it meant in a larger picture. The reflection and peer review process guided the faculty to consider the point of the unit and exercise, its success or need for improvement, and what the exercise suggested, or could suggest, about their own work as instructors. Within the reflection, these questions brought recognition of the value of the experiment of "Focus on Egypt" unit. While the faculty member was satisfied with the pedagogical goals of the unit, discussion with their FLC partner compelled them to have a deeper consideration of their online teaching philosophy and to move more deliberately towards a model based on higher student active engagement with the course content. At a micro level, they realized that the highly positive reaction of the students to the assignment should be explored in different uses, with increased use of Virtual Reality (VR) technology in particular. In a broader point of view, they moved from being intrigued with a more creative assignment to an intense commitment to a new view of the online format. In the eyes of this instructor, online history courses should not be a lesser substitute for in-person courses; they should be a daring experience that seizes on opportunities that only an online format could realistically deliver.

**Theme of student engagement.** A desire to find ways to increase student engagement was the catalyst to use a brand-new unit in the online World History survey, for the *Reflections on Classroom Practice* exercise. Introductory World History surveys are typically populated by students who are very early into their college career, and who may or may not have the skills or interest to be academically successful without the proper instructor interventions. That

intervention often means the instructor is a significant force for maintaining student engagement with the course while dispensing and synthesizing content for the students. In an online framework, what is already a challenge for a History course becomes even more difficult. The role of the instructor as content deliverer must be reduced, and a new way, focusing almost entirely on the independent student's ability to construct meaning from the units placed before him/her, must be put in its place.

**Participant 4: Mathematics.** The desire for an outside peer review led this Assistant Professor of Mathematics to join the FLC. The faculty member decided to offer a few hybrid sections before venturing into a completely online course setting. The chosen activity to review for the *Reflections on Classroom Practice* exercise was a PMI-Q (Pluses, Minuses, Interesting points, and Questions to peers) activity. In this activity, student's are required to build their own real-world application math problem drawn from their area of interest, related to the topic they signed up for, and present it to class as a recorded video. Students state some positive insights (*Pluses*), negative insights (*Minuses*), things that caught their interests (*Interesting points*), and questions to their audience (*Questions to peers*) to solicit participation in this presentation. As a summary, each student is required to synthesize a reflective memo on their experience with creating and solving a topical math problem, in addition to the overall experience with the presentation project. This activity appeared to be an effective strategy to not only promote students' engagement with the course content and metacognition but also to invigorate their interaction traditionally limited to Discussion Board posts. In order to assess each student's presentation as a final project, the instructor had created a rubric highlighting detailed expectations from each section of the project. The FLC peer partner recommended doing the same for the reflective memo section, and provide sample statements which portray deeper metacognition and constructive student-to-student feedback on the resulting presentations.

This FLC has assisted this faculty member in setting a scholarly metacognitive framework around their teaching of both hybrid and online courses. It was an opportunity to step out of the ordinary and delve into a reflective process about various aspects of course design, delivery, and assessment. It also enabled the faculty member to see the course from a larger lens and gain deep and thoughtful perspectives on students' learning process. All three exercises (*Course Conception and Planning*, *Course Activity*, and *Student Learning*) within the FLC helped them question and document the appropriateness, effectiveness, and reliability of different pedagogies

and strategies, and whether they met their course's primordial instructional goals. In addition, this provided them with insights on how to restructure the course design, flow, and assessment in a way compliant with the learner's abilities and learning satisfaction. The interaction with like-minded colleagues who were experiencing similar challenges was rewarding. The faculty member gained useful insights on ways to enhance engagement, interaction amongst learners, on how to regulate their learning, and how to make it accessible to all.

**Theme of student engagement.** While some challenges were expected, the most significant challenge pertained to effective ways to promote student engagement and interaction. The rationale behind the choice of activity was the lack of substantial student engagement and interaction in hybrid, but mostly in online classes. The activity was designed to cause students to teach and learn from each other's methods, strategies, presentations, and technical skills. This enables students to engage in a self-learning process of difficult math concepts, using resources provided in the class.

### **Exercise 3: Putting the Focus on Student Learning**

In the last set of reflections, faculty share their experience with the *Putting the Focus on Student Learning* exercise. This learning exercise asked the participants to reflect on their teaching in terms of student learning. Participants chose an assignment or assessment designed to elicit important aspects of student learning and on which they had some historical perspective. Participants wrote a memo of their own reflection on what the assignment or assessment revealed about students' learning in their course. Participants sent this reflective memo and a description of the assignment or assessment to a partner who responded with feedback. The two then discussed their memos and shared insights with each other. The following reflections express how this experience impacted these participants, specifically why they chose to join the FLC, what they see as benefits to the process, and what they are still working to improve.

**Participant 5: Biology.** An Associate Professor of Biology was very new to the world of teaching online. Transitioning a non-majors course, *Microbes and Society*, to an online format was an intimidating task. They joined the FLC to gain greater insight into how their peers adjusted assessments in an online format compared to a face-to-face format. This was particularly important to the instructor as informal face-to-face discussion in their *Microbes and Society* course had been used to expose students' preconceived misconceptions of science and to gauge how well the course content was addressing these misconceptions. These discussions

frequently involve students contributing with comments such as, “I heard....” or “My mom always said....”. The faculty struggled with how to achieve this type of spontaneous interaction in the online format and how to assess whether the course content was addressing misconceptions. To address the challenge of promoting interaction and effectively assessing course content, the faculty member reflected on a discussion board assignment. In the assignment, students were asked to pick a popular scientific topic such as vaccine safety or genetically modified foods, and then write a paragraph explaining the role of microbes in this topic, what thoughts they had on this topic at the start of the course, and how their thoughts changed as a result of the course. The students were required to respond to two classmates’ posts to give them the opportunity to “hear” and comment on other voices in the class. The frustration came when the faculty member received very limited responses that did not mimic the rich group discussion that occurs in the face-to-face format. In this online format, it was difficult to identify the misconceptions that students often bring to the course and to recognize any misconceptions that remained.

By going through the process of reflecting on many aspects of this assessment, the faculty member realized they needed to 1) assess how students are using content learned in the class to improve their scientific literacy, 2) generate discussion to reveal student opinions and embedded misconceptions, and 3) provide a means for students to share their thoughts on certain topics early in the course.

***Theme of course redesign.*** The greatest benefit of this exercise came in the peer discussion. As part of the peer review process, faculty exchanged reflections with colleagues and then discussed them during our face-to-face meeting. The exercise partner provided an exciting suggestion based on their teaching. They suggested creating an assignment early in the semester in which students create a fake social media post or a memo that reflects their perspective on a particular microbial related topic (vaccine safety, genetically modified foods, etc.). This assignment could then be used as a reference point for the discussion board assignment completed later in the semester. What is exciting is that it provides an avenue for students to use their creativity to express their thoughts and opinions. It also creates a visual that will likely generate better discussion and comment from their peers.

**Participant 6: Sociology.** As an Assistant Professor of Sociology and a newcomer to the world of online teaching, this participant had not only a deep curiosity for distance learning but

also a fear of a world uncharted. They joined the FLC to move beyond the simple mechanics of course delivery and to be more reflective and intentional about their pedagogical approach. After teaching the first online Introduction to Sociology course, the FLC member thought they had delivered the course effectively but was unsure if the learning activities for students were engaging, enriching, and fully supported the learning process. For the reflection, *Putting the Focus on Student Learning*, the faculty member chose an activity that was designed to introduce students to the agents of socialization, a core concept in the field of sociology. This concept is used to help students understand the sociological perspective and directly aligns with the course objective to develop a sociological imagination and apply it to everyday social situations. The activity chosen (a) directly aligned with a specific foundational learning objective, (b) was facilitated in both the online and face-to-face environments, (c) had been facilitated at least a few times, and (d) was an activity that could be improved through the process of reflection. As they examined the connection between the learning activities and the learning objectives, the faculty member discovered that some activities had no connection to the course or chapter learning objectives, and assessments did not always measure student learning. Other activities did a great job connecting to the course objectives and aligned with the assessments to identify student strengths and challenges with learning.

This reflection enabled the faculty member to examine this activity through the lens of the face-to-face and the online learning environments. The professor learned the structured discussion, with engaged students and clearly spelled out instructor expectations, was a critical missing piece in the online class. In the online environment, students were asked to complete the assignment as individuals, but in face-to-face courses, students were asked to complete the assignment in groups. Creating a rich interactive online where students had a dialogue with one another was an important component to shaping the learning atmosphere. This assignment was typically designated as a completion grade and thus did not have a rubric. Given the significance of the assignment to the course learning objectives, a rubric was needed to effectively measure the process of and to what extent learning was taking place. The rubric will provide more information on how to improve the assignment and what students struggle with the most. One of the major changes planned is to facilitate this activity within a blog format. This provides an opportunity for students to engage in more meaningful dialog with classmates in an effort to enrich the learning environment.

**Themes of course improvement, student engagement.** One can recreate the face-to-face environment virtually. Online interactions can be rich and filled with learning when facilitated with intentionality. When charged with *Putting the Focus on Student Learning*, different learning activities were examined, and the learning environment was reviewed more holistically. To strengthen the learning environment, focus on creating a more engaging and interactive learning atmosphere between student and teacher and between students and their peers is important.

**Participant 7: Computer Science.** Before this FLC, this Assistant Professor of Computer Science had participated in a similarly structured FLC designed for face-to-face classes. Reflecting on why and how tasks could be completed differently was a great help in refining their classroom teaching. For this exercise, they used an assignment that was a prompt for an online discussion board where students had to solve a problem, determining which of two deals from a local pizzeria was a better value. When discussing their reflection with an FLC peer, the FLC partner commented that the problem was interesting because it involved an everyday life situation that could be solved and interpreted in different ways. It gave more avenues for students to consider and required the students to evaluate the work of a student who may have solved the problem differently. While they had intended the problem to be practical, the variety of interpretations was not something initially planned. After the peer discussion, the faculty member has started to incorporate that aspect of problem design into more of their discussion board prompts.

The faculty member gained additional experience teaching online while participating in the learning community. They taught two online courses during the second half of the academic year. Both courses were completely new online preparations, so they were creating online content while reflecting on how and why they create online content. Starting a new online course during the FLC allowed them to quickly put some of the things that were discussed into action. After writing each reflective memo, they tried out their new ideas the next week in the online courses. It made a great deal of positive change to the way they did things in those two courses.

**Themes of course improvement and content and design.** Both the hybrid and fully online courses were to some degree successful, but the instructor felt like there was still much that could be done to improve the course. Based on the feedback received from the peer review of

the exercise, the faculty member planned to reframe problems and develop new problems in the discussion board prompts for all of their hybrid and online classes. They are moving beyond discussion problems where it is merely a matter of picking the right formula and correctly plugging in the numbers to problems, to assigning problems where there are multiple paths to the solution, sometimes using different formulas. This forces the students reviewing their work to first understand how someone else approached the problem, and then follow through the steps of the approach. This requires more insight and thought than merely checking if the other student picked the same equation that resulted in the same solutions.

## **Summary of Results and Conclusions**

### **Results of Collaboration**

The faculty participating in this FLC were experienced and pedagogically informed instructors. Like others, the participants found that learning to teach online has the potential to transform faculty assumptions and beliefs about pedagogy and to influence teaching practice in all modes as well (McQuiggan, 2012). Since critical reflection is needed to focus on student-centered learning (Blumberg, 2015), the faculty members decided to join an FLC that employed critical reflection to online and hybrid teaching.

This FLC has encouraged many of us to adopt a systematic process of documenting and engaging in regular scholarly peer review of teaching. In addition to discovering we had similar challenges in our online teaching, we came to discover the rich possibilities of this format as well. Participating in this FLC provided the opportunity to share ideas in online education with our peers across different disciplines who had an amazing level of thoughtfulness and creativity. This promoted the perception of the possibilities of what can be accomplished in the online environment. We came away thinking of creative concepts such as virtual reality, enabling students to experience other cultures or places remotely, or providing mathematics students with adapted learning experiences based on their mastery. Online interactions can be rich and filled with learning when facilitated with intentionality. This FLC provided inspiration for just that kind of intentional approach to teaching, becoming a “think tank” for online classroom environments.

This FLC was transformative because faculty looked at their courses and learning activities in a new light. While much of this discussion focused on their own personal reflective process,

being able to connect with others who were also reflecting in similar ways was extremely helpful. As we discussed the “how to” aspect of solving challenges, faculty discovered we shared similar challenges to strengthening our online environments. While most did not initially consider themselves an expert, upon completion of the FLC they felt more equipped to align themselves with a body of experts providing advice and ideas to shape the future of the online environment.

While we overall worked on improving our online instruction, by sharing our reflections and experiences, we learned about the kind of faculty working in this arena. In the analysis of the faculty reflections, several common themes are noted. Faculty interested in peer review of their teaching are typically interested in active learning, student engagement, course improvement, and balance (of time spent designing and implementing online course). Faculty looked for opportunities to review course improvement both content and design issues to determine if the content was understandable and the learning activities effective. Balancing the online versus face-to-face modifications was difficult, especially since most faculty had not experienced online learning as a student. Faculty must adapt what works in a face-to-face class into something that will work online, not just copy the in-class work to online, but also find ways to leverage the online opportunities.

As a community of faculty sharing experiences, participants learned they are not alone in feeling that they can always improve. Some faculty did not feel their assignment was quite where they would like it to be, but through sharing thoughts within the group, the feedback helped faculty move toward the goal the FLC set to build engaging assignments that enhance student learning in online formats. The reflections enabled the FLC participants to answer the questions: What did we learn? How did we improve our teaching? How can others benefit from our experience?

The themes that repeated throughout the reflections echoed the FLC member’s concern to *balance* what works in a face-to-face class with *intentional online design*. Faculty want to *be effective teachers* providing meaningful *student learning* experiences that support students in *active learning*. *Improvement of courses* was a primary goal of the FLC members. The self-evaluation and self-analysis helped them to move beyond their own self-imposed limitations online. Most importantly, faculty voiced their feeling that the *peer review* and *peer discussion* were transformative in their benefit to their current and future classes. Indeed, reflection and

critical review among peers utilizing a faculty learning community benefits faculty and students in lifelong learning and continuous improvement. Grounded in these faculty reflections, we recommend faculty who want to improve their courses engage in a peer review of scholarly teaching in online and hybrid courses faculty learning community.

### **Concluding Takeaways**

Reviewing the faculty takeaways provides us with a combined relevant knowledge base. When we merge our collective thoughts from our collaboration, we see that the FLC exercises helped us understand where our students were struggling with the online expectations of the course and that online learning should be designed for student learning (Blumberg, 2015). We adjusted online content to support the needs of our students. While we began with a conceptual framework based on our face-to-face courses (Chiasson, Terras, & Smart, 2015), we worked to bring face-to-face elements into effective online formats.

Faculty members reflected on their experience in the FLC and noted they continued to adjust online content to reflect the needs and requests of their students. The dedication of the faculty members to student needs, as noted before, is a testament to why we did this: Online learning should be designed for student learning. Learning can be accomplished quite well in an online environment. As we design and implement hybrid and online courses, we need to continue to investigate and consider online methods that support student learning. The FLC instilled a sense of accountability towards the betterment of not only online course content, delivery, and assessment, but also of our own teaching as online educators. It has taught us to adopt a regular process of documenting, peer review, and engaging in a scholarly reflection of our teaching. Ultimately, while peer review implies a review of what we have done previously, the value in the FLC was to teach us to think about what we will do for the future.

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## Appendix A

Some of these prompts were modified from those originally published in *Peer Review of Scholarly Teaching: Formative Feedback for Change* (Denton, Sipple, & Cooper-Freytag, 2013).

### Exercise 1

#### Scholarly Teaching: Course Conception and Planning – Online Teaching

##### Introduction

For this assignment think about one of your online (or hybrid) course syllabi as a scholarly activity.

##### Course Conception

Select the syllabus from one of your courses as the subject of a reflective memo. The memo should provide a peer with a window on the choices and rationale that underlie your syllabus. The following prompts are provided to guide you in this task -- but you do not necessarily need to respond to each question. The purpose here is to get you engaged in scholarly reflection about your online teaching. Please answer all prompts in the Online Content Syllabus Reflection and select several of those you find most relevant under Course Content Reflection.

Every course we craft is a lens into our fields and our personal conceptions of those disciplines or inter-disciplines. Give careful thought to the shape and content of your course as if it were a *scholarly argument*.

Because this is an online course, also consider throughout what is different about the course, is it clear in the syllabus, and how does your syllabus frame the experience to lead to the same outcomes a face-to-face section would.

Online Content Syllabus Reflection (consider **each** of these prompts)

- How do you let students know about the structure of the course (online/hybrid) and the out-of-class expectations and rationale?
- How are the learning delivery methods explained to students?

- If you were teaching this course face-to-face, how would students learn the content? (i.e. Lecture, text assignments, PBL, research, etc.). In the online course, how will students learn the material? Discuss your approach.
- How do you measure student performance? Discuss the integrity of this relative to the online course. (Note: discuss this at a higher level. In a later exercise we will look at one specific assessment that you select).

Course Content Reflection (select **several of these** that best fit your story, course, etc.)

- What topic does the course begin with? Why does it begin where it does? (*What is the thesis of the argument?*)
- What are the major topics covered in the course? (*What are the main points of the argument?*)
- How do you measure student performance? (*What are the key bodies of evidence?*)
- What topic does it end with? Why does it end as it does? (*Most scholarly arguments carry the intention to persuade. What do you want to persuade your students to believe? Or question? Or do you want them to develop new appetites or dispositions?*)
- In your field, or even in your own department, are there distinctly different ways to organize your course -- ways that reflect quite different perspectives on your discipline or field?
- Do you focus on particular topics while other colleagues might make other choices? Why?
- In what ways does your course teach students how professionals/scholars work in your field; the methods, procedures, and values which shape how knowledge claims are made and adjudicated within your field?
- How does your course connect with other courses in your own or other fields?
- To what extent does your course lay a foundation for others that follow it? Or build on what students have already (one hopes) learned in other courses? Or challenge and contradict what students are learning in your own or other disciplines?
- How, in general, does your course fit within a larger conception of curriculum, program, or undergraduate experience?
- What do you expect students to find particularly fascinating about your course?

- Where will they encounter their greatest difficulties of either understanding or motivation?
- How does the content of your course connect to matters your students already understand or have experienced?
- Where will it seem most alien, and how do you address these student responses in your course?
- Lastly, you might try playing with some metaphors for characterizing your course and its place in the larger curriculum or in the broader intellectual and moral lives of your students. Is your course like a journey, a parable, a football game, a museum, a romance, a concerto, an Aristotelian tragedy, an obstacle course, one or all or some of the above? How does your metaphor(s) illuminate key aspects of your course?

### **Exercise 1 – Review Prompts**

#### **Scholarly Teaching: Course Conception and Planning**

You should have received a copy of your reading partner's memo and syllabus. Please read the documents. As you review the material, please consider the following questions which will be the basis for the discussion when you meet with your partner. You should have completed the meeting by \_\_\_\_\_.

#### **PQP Questions:**

- a. What do you like about the memo/syllabus?
- b. What questions do you have about the memo/syllabus?
- c. What specific suggestions do you have for improvement?

#### **Specific Questions:**

- a. Does the memo provide you, as a peer, with a window on the choices and rationale that underlie the syllabus?
- b. How important is it to document this aspect of classroom teaching?
- c. Does the memo help you understand the author's teaching philosophy?

## Appendix B

### Exercise 2

#### Scholarly Teaching: Reflections on Classroom Practice - Online

##### Introduction

There are different strategies that can be used to “capture a classroom session”. Recording is one. Another is having a colleague visit a class and taking detailed notes. A third way (and the one we will use in this part) is to write a narrative/ reflective memo about a classroom episode/exercise/session that reveals something important about your effectiveness as a teacher."

I kept the words classroom and day in the prompt to potentially help frame the online classroom. Once you make your selection you likely will not refer to it as “a day”. As you consider what you will select from your online course, it may be a cluster of integrated content/activities. You may want to consider an activity related to a complex topic or an outcome that has not had ideal results. Or you may select a multi-step activity that works especially well or that needs to be refined. It could be an area you have struggled with in your online course. If you are teaching a hybrid, try to select a fully online component of your course. In the case of a hybrid, you may find you have to reference the in-class component your focus should be on what is happening “online” or integration (not solely the in-class activity). Reading through the prompts below before you make your selection may also provide ideas.

##### Classroom Practice

In writing your reflective memo, the following queries may be helpful. Do not feel that you must answer every question; these are only prompts to engage in reflection.

###### a. Choice of an online session

- Why did you choose to document this particular online episode/exercise/session?
- What is it meant to be evidence of? Is it, for example, a particularly compelling, insightful or artful rendition of a key concept? A new metaphor or demonstration or activity that you have developed to illuminate a topic which students perennially find particularly difficult? .....Or, in contrast to all of these, is it simply a “typical” day (i.e.

activity, series, process) in your class and, if so, why did you choose that basis for your sample?"

b. Context of the choice

- What context is needed to understand this class session? Where are we in the unfolding of the semester? What other topics are this session's topic situated within? How does it relate to what was discussed the day or week before and what is planned to follow?"

c. Summary of the session

- What were your goals for this day? Did the class session go as planned or deviate from your expectations? How so? Why? Did you change direction to take advantage of some new opportunity, get around an obstacle, to deal with a new circumstance?"

d. Self-evaluation

- What does this class sample say about your teaching? Does it show a characteristic style? A distinctive approach to the material? Would others in your field be likely to teach this topic/concept/whatever differently? Are you trying something new? Something you will continue to work at and improve? Do you like what you see?"

**Required Actions**

Send your reflective memo to your reading partner by \_\_\_\_.

**Exercise 2 – Review Prompts**

**Scholarly Teaching: Reflections on Classroom Practice**

By \_\_\_\_ you should have received a copy of your reading partner's memo. Please read the document. As you review the material, please consider the following questions, which will be the basis for the discussion when you meet with your partner. You will discuss this during our meeting on \_\_\_\_\_.

**PQP Questions:**

- a. What do you like about the memo?
- b. What questions do you have about the memo?
- c. What specific suggestions do you have for improvement?

**Specific Questions:**

- a. Where did the idea come from to use this particular teaching strategy?
- b. How important is it to document the classroom aspect of teaching?
- c. What are the appropriate and best criteria on which to judge classroom practice?
  - accuracy of the teacher's construct of the material
  - creativity and originality
  - thoughtfulness of the teacher's reflection or rationale
  - significance of that particular topic to the field
- d. On what other dimensions might one judge classroom practice?
- e. Might the standards/criteria differ if the teacher were teaching the course for the first time versus having several years of experience with it?
- f. Are there additional elements or different considerations of the points listed above because it is an online course? Relative to this memo, if you think of this as a student in an online course (or as an instructor of the online course) does it generate other reflection?

## Appendix C

### Exercise 3

#### **Scholarly Teaching: Putting the Focus on Student Learning - DL**

##### **Introduction**

For this exercise, reflect on your teaching in terms of student learning.

Choose an assignment/assessment -- that is, instructions for a student project, paper, problem set, classroom assessment, computer simulation, etc. -- preferably that you have some historical perspective on. This assignment/assessment should be one that you have designed to promote and/or elicit an important aspect of the learning you intend for students in one of your courses. Write a reflective memo in which you comment on what the assignment/assessment reveals about students' learning in your course. As you write your reflective memo, please respond to the following prompts:

1. Why did you choose this particular assignment/assessment to reflect on?
  - If you have also taught this course face-to-face – is this assignment/assessment (or a form of it) in both courses? Take a minute to reflect on similarities and differences of the face-to-face vs. online version and how you assess learning, especially noting differences (if applicable).
  - How is it important to your overall intentions, course design, the conception of your field, and the way you want students to understand it?
  - Are there distinctly different formats or foci you could have chosen for this which would have highlighted different dimensions of the idea or the field?
2. Why did you structure the assignment/assessment in the way that you did?
  - How does its particular question, problem, or application reveal differences in student understandings or interpretations of a critical concept you are teaching?
3. What, in particular, do you hope your students will demonstrate in their work on this assignment/assessment? What are your expectations?
4. What does your assignment/assessment tell you about how students are constructing the ideas that are central to the course and to your teaching goals?
  - What misconceptions do they have about these ideas?
  - How do you identify and address student errors and misinterpretations?

5. On what standards do you judge student work on this assignment/assessment?
  - **Do you use a rubric?**
  - How do these standards compare with those you would use in a more introductory/advanced class?
6. Do you change your assignment/assessment based on student performance?
7. What thoughts do you have about improving your assignment/assessment as a consequence of completing this reflective exercise?

### **Exercise 3 – Review Prompts**

#### **Scholarly Teaching: Reflections on Classroom Practice**

By \_\_\_\_\_ you should have received a copy of your reading partner's memo. Please read the document. As you review the material, please consider the following questions which will be the basis for the discussion when you meet with your partner. You will discuss this during our meeting on \_\_\_\_\_.

#### **PQP Questions:**

- a. What do you like about the memo?
- b. What questions do you have about the memo?
- c. What specific suggestions do you have for improvement?

#### **Specific Questions:**

- a. Where did the idea come from to use this particular teaching strategy?
- b. How important is it to document the classroom aspect of teaching?
- c. What are the appropriate and best criteria on which to judge classroom practice?
  - accuracy of the teacher's construct of the material
  - creativity and originality
  - thoughtfulness of the teacher's reflection or rationale
  - significance of that particular topic to the field
- d. On what other dimensions might one judge classroom practice?
- e. Might the standards/criteria differ if the teacher were teaching the course for the first time versus having several years of experience with it?

- f. Are there additional elements or different considerations of the points listed above because it is an online course? Relative to this memo, if you think of this as a student in an online course (or as an instructor of the online course) does it generate other reflection?