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Enhancing the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning at Georgia Southern University: The Impact of the Faculty Learning Community Program on Participating Faculty

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Towards the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning:

Do Faculty Learning Communities Matter?

Results of a First Year Program.

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Acknowledgement
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Faculty Learning Community (FLC) Program and its impact on scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) at Georgia Southern University during its first year implementation. Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed using the modified Kirkpatrick’s model that examined reaction, learning, behavior and results within individual, group, and community contexts. The sample consisted of 32 participants, 10 facilitators and 11 FLCs. Reaction to the program was overwhelmingly positive: 94% of participants found the experience valuable; 97% would recommend participation to a colleague. Learning was a pivotal part of FLC experience. Learning from other members within the FLC scored the highest (3.8/5), while the impact on the understanding of and interest in the SoTL scored moderate (3.25/5). In terms of behavior and results, findings are less conclusive. However, 41% reported doing publications or presentations and 9% would like to do it in the future.

Key words: faculty learning community, assessment, scholarship of teaching and learning, faculty development
Introduction

The benefits of Faculty Learning Communities have been documented for the past two decades as a means of faculty development (Cox, 1999, Richlin and Cox, 2004, Lenning and Ebbers, 1999). However, the question of their effectiveness for the individual in addition to the group and the community appear not to have been examined to date. This paper makes such an attempt by examining a faculty learning community program from three contexts: the individual, the group, and the community. The research questions focused the study on the effectiveness of the Faculty Learning Community (FLC) Program in its first year of implementation and its impact on scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) at a regional university.

A Faculty Learning Community (FLC) is a cross-disciplinary faculty and staff group of 6 to 15 members who engage in an active, collaborative, yearlong program with a curriculum about enhancing teaching and learning and with frequent seminars and activities that provide learning, development, transdisciplinarity, community building and the development of the scholarship of teaching (Cox, 2004). There are two types of FLCs. The cohort based FLCs address the need of one particular group of faculty and staff, while the topic-based FLCs address a special need, issue or opportunity (Cox, 1999). During the past years, an increasing number of FLCs have developed throughout the U.S. A total of 308 FLCs at one hundred thirty-two institutions were reported operating in 2003-2004. The reported FLCs varied significantly by budget, activities, participants and frequency of meetings (Richlin and Essington, 2004). The majority of them, two hundred forty three (243), were topic-based. The highest number of FLCs was reported in Ohio (65), Indiana (31) and California (28). Miami University (MU) had the longest running program where a cohort FLC began in 1979.

As one approach that engages the community in the cause of student and faculty learning and of transforming our institutions of higher education into learning organizations (Cox, 2001), FLCs are a particular type of community of practice and encompass multi-disciplinarity and community (Wenger, McDermot, Snyder, 2002; Cox, 2004). Documentary evidence suggests that effective learning communities have important benefits for students (higher academic achievement, better retention rates, greater satisfaction with college life, improved quality of thinking and communicating, a better understanding of self and others, and a greater ability to bridge the gap between the academic and social worlds) and faculty (diminished isolation, a shared purpose and cooperation among faculty colleagues, increased curricular integration, a fresh approach to one’s discipline, and increased satisfaction with their students’ learning) (Lenning and Ebbers, 1999).

Of particular interest to this study are the findings reported by Cox in the annual survey of FLC participants that ranged from one year to 20 years of implementation. In a self-report rating of pre-existing items, the participants rated the impact of their participation on a variety of feelings and attitudes. Across all communities, the responses indicated that FLCs highly increased their interest in teaching and learning, expanded their perspectives about teaching outside their discipline area, and increased their comfort level in being a part of the university. Responses also indicated a low impact of the FLC on increasing technical skills in teaching across a variety of different learning communities. Faculty members participating in FLCs were tenured at a higher rate than non-members, became more aware of different learning and teaching styles, became more service oriented, and changed the curriculum (Cox, 2004). FLCs have been reported to influence the SoTL in participating faculty. SoTL was one of the categories that Boyer introduced in
"Scholarship Reconsidered", the other three including scholarship of discovery, integration and application (Boyer, 1990). It refers to "learning continuously in order to understand one's field of knowledge and stimulating others to do the same, creating new teaching methodologies" (Boyer, 1990) or "includes both ongoing learning about teaching and the demonstration of the teaching knowledge" (Kreber and Cranton, 2000).

Scholarship of teaching involves two activities:
1. Scholarly teaching - whose purpose is to affect the activity of teaching and resulting learning.
2. A resulting scholarship - a formal, peer-reviewed communication (Richlin and Cox, 1994).

FLCs provide an excellent structure to help faculty members develop both these activities, which relates to the deep learning within FLCs (Richlin and Cox, 2004). In fact, Hutchins and Shullman (1999) state that a scholarship of teaching requires a kind of going "meta" in which faculty frame and systematically investigate questions related to student learning - the conditions under which they occur, what it looks like, how to deepen it, and so forth - and do so with an eye not only to improving their own classroom, but to advancing practice beyond it. An important factor related to growth towards SoTL is the length of faculty involvement in FLCs over years of participation. Productivity of refereed presentations or publications increased with repeated participation in FLCs (Richlin and Cox, 2004). In a study of 271 faculty participating in FLCs at MU in 2002-03, fifty-three percent (53%) of faculty who participated a second year in an FLC reported the dissemination of SoTL nationally. This number grew to seventy-seven per cent (77%) of faculty who were active in FLCs for three or more years, and to eighty-three percent (83%) of the faculty who were active for four or more years.

The literature indicates that FLCs progress through a developmental three-phase Continuum of Growth toward SoTL (Weston and McAlpine, 2001). Phase I of the model included concerns about teaching; phase II refers to participants’ dialogues about teaching with colleagues, across disciplines, gaining a sense of community, followed by Phase III, where participates engage in SoTL. Cox refined the continuum to incorporate an accelerated progression articulated in a ten-step process (Richlin and Cox, 2004).

Several gaps in the literature are understandable in light of Faculty Learning Communities’ recent emergence as an approach to faculty development and the subsequent limited number of empirical studies. Our search of the current literature found no recent reports of the impact on faculty in the last half of the 2000s using multiple communities and no large scale study of whole university implementation of FLCs in their first year of implementation.

**The FLC Program at Georgia Southern University**

In the fall of 2006, the Center for Excellence in Teaching (CET) at Georgia Southern University (GSU) initiated a FLC Program. Although no FLCs existed previously, the program attracted seventy seven participants who voluntarily committed to become part of the twelve FLCs for the entire academic year, out of 719 full-time faculty and administrators (Georgia Southern University Fact Book, 2006-2007). Three FLCs were cohort-based and nine FLCs were topic-based. It is important to mention that a separate FLC tackled the issue of SoTL.
The topics of the FLCs are listed below:
- Assessing Student Learning
- Evidence-Based Teaching and Learning
- Teaching First Year Students
- Information Literacy
- Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)
- Academic Integrity
- Teaching Critical and Creative Thinking
- Service Learning and Civic Engagement
- Department Chairs as Academic Leaders - cohort
- Chemistry Teaching Innovations - cohort
- Experiential Learning
- Mathematics Modeling - cohort

CET facilitated and coordinated the formation of FLCs. To join a FLC, a faculty member or staff submitted a registration form to CET indicating preferences for particular topics. The requirements for participation were to commit for one year, participate in FLC meetings and dissemination and prepare an end-year report. Each FLC was responsible for scheduling meetings, setting own goals and objectives, decide on dissemination and submit a case record one (mid-year) and case record two (end-year) to present their work and outcomes. A Forum at the end of the year was organized by the CET where each FLC presented its findings to their peers.

The goal of the FLC program at Georgia Southern University is to build a university-wide community through teaching and learning. Among the stated objectives are to involve a significant number of faculty and staff in the initial year, to learn more about how, why, when and where students learn best, to increase faculty collaboration across disciplines and to emphasize that teaching is serious intellectual work (CET website).

**Research Questions and Sample**

The purpose of this mixed method study was to address the following research questions:
1. What was the effectiveness of the FLC program at GSU? Evaluation and assessment are critical for the success and the sustainability of any program. For the FLC Program at GSU this is particularly important, since it was a first year experience.
2. Did the FLC program impact the development of SoTL among the participants? If FLCs can be successfully used to encourage teaching scholarship at other institutions, a program of this proportion can be a valuable tool to enhance the SoTL at GSU given its new designation as a Doctoral-Research Institution.

Of the total participants (n = 77) in all the FLCs, 32 participants returned the end-year report. Since one participant took part in 4 FLCs and submitted a report for each FLC, hereafter the total number is computed using 35 end-year reports. FLC participants were represented by faculty and staff from 6 colleges and other parts of the university (see Table 1) that were very diverse in terms of their length of stay at GSU, as well as rank.
Table 1. Participants’ characteristics, by college.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>End of year reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College of Science and Technology</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Liberal Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Business Administration</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Informational Technology</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Education</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Health and Human Sciences</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (CET and Library)</td>
<td>8 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of respondents were Assistant Professors and were new to GSU (1-5 years). See Charts 1 and 2.

Chart 1. Participants’ characteristics, rank at GSU.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank at GSU</th>
<th>Assistant</th>
<th>Associate</th>
<th>Professor</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Temp Instructor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temp. instructor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assistant - 13 Associate - 9
Professor - 4 Staff - 5 (3)
Temp. instructor - 1

Chart 2. Participants’ characteristics, years at GSU.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years at GSU</th>
<th>1-5</th>
<th>6-10</th>
<th>11-20</th>
<th>20+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temp. instructor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1-5 years - 12 (3) 6-10 years – 6
11-20 years – 12 20+ years - 2

The sample also consisted of 10 facilitators and 11 FLCs that submitted case records.

Research Methodology and Data Analysis

This is a mixed method study using qualitative and quantitative data. Data collection methods included:
1. Thirty five participant end-year reports at a 45% response rate. The reports were obtained from CET and names coded to preserve confidentiality of the participants.
2. Ten interviews with facilitators. The list of facilitators was provided by the CET; facilitators were contacted by email. Participation was strictly voluntary and participants could terminate the project at any time. Since one FLC had no facilitator, the interview was with the person serving as a contact person to CET. The interviews were transcribed and sent to facilitators for review to make sure that the information was recorded correctly.
3. Eleven mid-year case records (case record one) and four end-year case records (case record two). Every FLC completed the case records as a group. Case record one was submitted in December, while case record two was submitted at the end of the academic year.
Qualitative data were entered into the NVIVO software program for analysis. To allow for a comprehensive organization of data and the identification of common themes emerged, one researcher identified the common categories for each question across all participants and FLCs. If a statement fit into multiple categories, it was placed in multiple categories. An "other" category was created for statements that could not be placed in the created categories or could not form separate categories. The evaluation also included actual statements and their number for each category. In the data presentation section, the number in parenthesis indicates the number of statements, unless noted otherwise. The placement of statements was later verified by a second researcher. Likert scale questions answers were entered in an Excel spreadsheet and averages were computed.

**The Assessment Model**

An assessment model was chosen that conforms to three principles of authentic assessment as presented by Hubbell, Clark, and Beach (2004). They are as follows:

1. Faculty members are required to be actively engaged in the process. At GSU, every FLC member set own goals and as part of an FLC contributed to the elaboration of the goals for the group.
2. Assessment should take place in a variety of carefully planned ways before, during, on completion of, and following the FLC experience. At GSU, assessment took place during the program (mid-year case records), on completion (end-year reports and case records) and following the program (interviews with facilitators and CET Director).
3. Assessment is within both an individual and social context. This study of the FLC program was designed to measure its effects on the individual, the FLC group as a unit, as well as the community. To reflect the individual and social contexts of FLC evaluation, a modified version of the Kirkpatrick Model of program evaluation was use to evaluate the effectiveness of FLCs and their impact on SoTL (Kirkpatrick, 1998).

The original Kirkpatrick Model entails four levels as follows:

**Level 1: Reaction.** Evaluation at this level measures how those who participate in the program react to it, or what Kirkpatrick calls the "measure of customer satisfaction".

**Level 2: Learning.** At this level, a program can accomplish three things - change attitudes, improve knowledge and/or increase skills as a result of attending the program.

**Level 3: Behavior.** This level evaluates the extent to which change in behavior has occurred because the participant attended the program.

**Level 4: Results.** This level is based on the final results that occurred because the participants attended the program. They are usually stated in the final objectives of the program.

We modified the model by adding two additional contexts to involve each FLC as a unit and the community at large. The modified framework enables the evaluation of four levels within the following three contexts:

1. The individual: encompasses the participants in the FLC (including the facilitators).
2. The group: encompasses each FLC as a group.
3. The community: refers to the effects of the FLC Program on the community in which the program took place, i.e., the GSU community.

Kirkpatrick’s model was also modified by adapting the definitions of learning, behavior, results for the group context and results for community context. To reflect
the effects of the program on each individual FLC group, learning at the group context encompassed what we learned about the challenges of the facilitation process and major issues and concerns that the FLCs struggled with during the program. Table 2 below represents the framework of the evaluation model that includes levels, contexts and specific questions used to evaluate each level/context.

Table 2. The Modified Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical framework</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reaction</td>
<td>Participant end-year reports (content analysis of Qs. 1-6) Facilitators’ interviews- Q. 1</td>
<td>Facilitators’ interviews (Q. 2, and the additional info) Case records CR 1. Q. 4; (content analysis)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Participant end-year reports (content analysis of Qs. 9-10; 18)</td>
<td>Facilitators’ interviews (Q. 2, and the additional info) Case records CR 1. Q. 4; (content analysis)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>Participant end-year reports (content analysis of Qs. 12-16) Facilitators’ interviews-Q. 3 &amp; 6.</td>
<td>Facilitators’ interviews- Q. 5</td>
<td>Case records (content analysis) CR 1. Q. 6; CR 2. Q.5 &amp; 7-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>Participant end-year reports (content analysis of Qs.8 &amp; 17-19)</td>
<td>Direct results based on the objectives of each FLC from the case records (content analysis) CR 2. Qs.2 &amp; 4, CR 1. Qs. 2 &amp; 3</td>
<td>Results based on the goals of FLC Program (summary of content analysis)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within the individual context, we looked for actual changes in the behavior of participants. However, most models of behavioral change view intention as a good predictor of volitional behavior (McKenzie, Neiger, Smeltzer, 2005). For this reason, we also considered not just the change in behavior per se, but rather the intentions and the actions identified as needed by the participants in the FLCs both at the individual and group contexts. The data from the case records were compiled considering every FLC as a unit of study and reveal the common themes expressed by the FLCs.

Within the group context, the fourth level, results, was evaluated from two viewpoints:
1. Direct results as progress toward stated goals. They are examined in the group and community contexts because they represent the goals accomplished by the FLCs as a group and the FLC program as a whole.
2. Indirect results as results that evolved due to the impact of the FLC Program on the community, but were not included in the stated objectives of the program. They were examined in the community context.

**Data Presentation**

**Level one: Reaction**

**Individual context - participants**

Reaction was evaluated based on the first 6 questions from the participant end-year reports that focused on the extent to which participants found the experience valuable and why, and what they liked the least and best about it. Of the total number of participants who registered for the program, 35 end-year reports were returned to CET and used for analysis.

The majority of participants (94%) evaluated their experience as “valuable” and 2 (6%) did not know. The participants valued most the discussion and sharing that happened during FLC meetings (18) and the interdisciplinary approach (13). These two categories are followed by learning (9) and collaboration (9). Some participants also felt that they received support from other members (4). See Box 1 for all categories and selected examples of statements.

**Box 1. Total statements - 53**

**Discussion and sharing**

18 statements. Examples: “Sharing of strategies and techniques for more effective leadership”, “A chance to discuss an important issue with faculty in other parts of the university”

**Meeting other faculty and staff across campus**

13 statements. Examples: “Meeting faculty from other departments but all with a same teaching goal”, “The opportunity to meet other faculty members across campus who are interested in this topic”

**Learning**

9 statements. Examples: “Learning from my more experienced colleagues”, “Learning about new techniques, tips and tricks”

**Collaboration**

9 statements. Examples: “Working with colleagues on pedagogical issues”, “The opportunity to work with faculty from other parts of the university on a potentially very valuable initiative that the university is likely to appreciate”

**Support**

4 statements. Examples: “Support for conducting this type of research”, “Support from other department chairs”

*Other 5 statements*

* This category contains statements that could not be placed into the categories above and could not form a separate category.

Seventy seven percent of participants would like to continue their participation in the FLCs, either the same FLC (60%), another FLC (11%) or would like to stay in the same FLC and join another one, as well (6%). Moreover, an overwhelming majority of participants (97%) would recommend a friend or a colleague to participate in a FLC. Major reasons for that would be the opportunity to
interact with colleagues (14), to share and learn (10) and the interdisciplinary character (7). For example, they voiced such statements as, “It is an excellent venue to share ideas and learn from others”, “The experience encouraged interactions and facilitated collaborations among the faculty members”, “A major benefit is the ability to meet and interact with colleagues from outside my college”.

Other comments from participants referred to the overall valuable experience of the FLC (3) that their colleagues need to experience if they have time (3) and are interested in the topic (3). Some of the statements in these categories included, “The benefit to students in the long run is the most important reason for participating”, “Because it’s valuable to have these conversations about issues of teaching” and “It is worthwhile, but time consuming”.

Despite the overall positive reaction to the program, participants disliked certain aspects. These 43 statements were classified into 7 categories. Most of all they disliked organizational issues, such as “problems in scheduling and paperwork involved” (15). This was followed by the time required to participate (8) and lack of focus in the discussion (7). Respondents wrote “More research and busy work than I expected” and “It took us forever to get started and decide on what we wanted”. The other statements mentioned group dynamics (4), pressure for a deliverable, where too much time was devoted to product development (3), size of the FLC, either too small or too big (3) and other (3).

Nevertheless, eighty six percent of participants believe that the FLC program should be ongoing. They consider that FLCs build interdisciplinary collaborations (17), allow participants to learn (9) and are an opportunity for faculty development (6). Some of the statements in these categories included:

“I think the FLCs represent excellent possibilities for faculty collaboration”
“Knowledge and experience sharing between colleagues produces a greater community”
“Knowledge sharing to help build experience and share mission”

Individual context - facilitators

Most of the facilitators (7 interviewees) enjoyed their experience and considered their participation valuable, although only 3 volunteered for the position. In the remaining group, 2 were asked to be facilitators, 3 volunteered when nobody else wanted to fill the position, one group rotated the facilitators and one had no facilitator. Some of their comments included “It was a good, very good experience. I really enjoyed it”, “I enjoyed meeting faculty from other departments and colleges”, “Lots of responsibility. I cannot say it’s fun. It was a good experience”.

Level two: Learning

Individual context – participants.

Learning at the individual level was evaluated based on 3 questions in the end-year reports and examined changes in attitudes and knowledge improvement in individual participants.

A Likert scale question estimated the impact of the FLC on participants, where 1 was the lowest impact and 5 the highest impact. Consistent with findings in the literature, participants viewed learning from other members within the FLC (3.8) as having the highest impact on them. A moderate impact was associated with the view of teaching as an intellectual pursuit (3.3), understanding of and interest in the
scholarship of teaching (3.2) and interest in interdisciplinary research (3) and teaching (3.1). Lower impact levels were associated with awareness of ways to integrate teaching and research (2.8), research and scholarly interest in an individual’s discipline (2.8) and understanding of the role of a faculty member at the University (2.3).

Thirty four percent of participants (34%) indicated that the FLC had no contribution on their understanding of different teaching and learning styles, since the FLC had a different focus. The other 66% provided 23 statements with an equal number of statements in 3 out of 4 categories: gained new ideas and opportunities, learned about each other’s style and learned about one aspect of learning. The fourth category was an “other” category with 2 statements. See examples of selected statements in Box 2.

**Box 2. Total statements - 23**

| Gained new ideas and opportunities | 7 statements. Examples: “Sharing with others has opened areas of opportunity for me to apply in my courses/research. I am a longtime advocate of the scholarship of teaching and learning, thus the FLC reinforced that interest”, “I have gotten ideas of new things to try” |
| Learned about each other’s styles | 7 statements. Examples: “Learned more about different styles of faculty”, “We all took the time needed to explain our research ideas and to listen thoughtfully to each other. In this way, we learned about each other’s different teaching and learning styles” |
| Learned about one aspect of learning | 7 statements. Examples: “I learned a bit about learning theories”, “I learned a vocabulary to discuss something I understood before” |
| *Other 2 statements | |

* This category contains statements that could not be placed into the categories above and could not form a separate category.

We also examined the attitude change in participants as a result of their participation using a Likert scale question where 1 meant no change, 2-little to moderate change and 3-moderate to significant change. The most pronounced change (2.2) was seen in two areas: appreciation of teaching and learning as an intellectual pursuit and reflective practice. Participants also reported becoming more inspired (2.0). Equally lower values (1.9 each) were reported for enthusiasm about teaching and learning, feeling more comfortable/confident and feeling revitalized.

**Group context – FLC groups**

Learning at the group context provided insights about the facilitation process, including challenges in facilitation and major issues and concerns that FLCs struggled with during their activity. This information is useful for organizers and facilitators, since they can learn about what worked and what did not within the group. We utilized two data sources for analysis:

1. Facilitators’ interviews that identified the challenges of facilitation
2. FLCs case records that recorded key issues and concerns in each FLC

The three overlapping challenges that emerged from both sources (44 total statements) included problems scheduling the meetings and time constraints (13 total statements), focusing the discussion (12 total statements) and the size of the
group (7 total statements). See Box 3 for overlapping categories and selected statements.

### Box 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitators’ interviews</th>
<th>Case records from FLC group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time / Scheduling</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 statements. Examples:</td>
<td>7 statements. Examples:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Timing was an issue, not having time to plan and organize&quot;, &quot;It was a struggle to meet: conferences, classes&quot;.</td>
<td>&quot;We did have trouble coordinating schedules throughout the year&quot;, &quot;Definitely scheduling - we are all overstretched&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lack of focus/direction/purpose</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 statements. Examples:</td>
<td>8 statements. Examples:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;We had a topic, but no purpose - spent a lot of time defining what we were looking for&quot;, &quot;I believe our FLC was one that struggled to understand our purpose&quot;.</td>
<td>&quot;We spent some time spinning in the mud trying to arrive at what experiential looks like&quot;, &quot;We also had a very difficult time agreeing on our focusing&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size of the group and participation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 statements. Examples:</td>
<td>3 statements. Examples:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;It was also a small group, only 6&quot;, &quot;There were only 5 members&quot;.</td>
<td>&quot;Group size- is ours too small?&quot;, &quot;Participation of all members. While a number of individuals initially signed up for the FLC, determining who the committed individuals were took some time&quot;.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Other 3 statements

No challenges 3 statements

* This category contains statements that could not be placed into the categories above and could not form a separate category.

In addition to that, facilitators indicated that different agendas (3) and pressure for a deliverable (3) were among two other categories of issues that were challenging. For example, they voiced such statements as, "I have enough other products in my discipline-would be nice to have a purely discussing group, no necessarily outcome/product-just sharing" and "People came with their own agendas".

While timing and scheduling were by far the most cited challenge for facilitators, most of those interviewed (7 facilitators) said that their involvement in this role was not overwhelming. When prompted to give an overall impression of their experience in the FLC, facilitators stated that FLCs gave them an opportunity for interdisciplinary interaction (5) and a place where good discussions (2) allowed them to learn (4). Moreover, some facilitators believed that FLCs have a research potential (2) stating that "FLCs can contribute to research and there is a great possibility that they can shape recommendations as to the changes in the classroom".

### Level 3: Behavior

#### Individual context – participants.

To evaluate behavior in the individual context, we analyzed questions on participants’ attendance, work with students and changes in teaching or work because of FLC participation. This allowed us to identify changes that occurred, as well as any intent to change. We think that attendance is a proxy for the intent to change and represents part of the scholarship of teaching by "changing the status of the problem in teaching from terminal remediation to ongoing investigation" (Bass, 1998). Despite scheduling and timing problems, respondents reported exceptional program attendance across all FLCs. The majority of participants (94%) attended
most/all sessions and only two participants attended less than 50%. Among the reasons that caused participants to miss the FLC meetings (25 total statements) were other meetings (14), conferences (4) class conflicts (4) and illness (3).

Only seven participants (about 20%) worked with students in relation to a project as compared to 20 participants who indicated no involvement in such a project. However, eight participants are planning to do so in the future.

Over 70% of participants reported changes in their teaching or work due to FLC participation and these changes are listed below in Box 4.

### Box 4. Total statements - 24

#### Better assessments
- 4 statements. Examples: “With one assignment I want to emphasize the political/social implications more fully”, “Produce a practical guide to faculty on how to develop engaging low probability of plagiarizing assignments”.

#### Administrative
- 3 statements. Examples: “We have revamped the thinking process behind faculty searches”, “I was better able to provide team building interventions to my department”.

#### Developed websites
- 3 statements. Examples: “We created a website and resources to share with faculty and students”, “Web-based library instructions”.

#### Got new ideas
- 3 statements. Examples: “Continue to experiment in the classroom using ideas gained from the FLC”, “Got some ideas which I will try out in the next year”.

#### More collaboration
- 3 statements. Examples: “Continual interdisciplinary collaboration”, “I will share examples of teaching with others”.

#### More reflective
- 3 statements. Examples: “I am thinking more about ongoing reflection on the effectiveness of my teaching and students’ learning”, “I need to rewrite my presentations and incorporate more thinking into them”.

#### Incorporation of active learning
- 2 statements. Examples: “I plan to make some changes in fall classes in terms of syllabus introduction and structuring lectures with active learning problem sets”, “I have incorporated more group activities in my classes after hearing success stories form other faculty”.

#### Introduced new modules
- 2 statements. Examples: “Inclusion of information literacy module in GSU 1210 course”, “I used models we discussed when I taught my classes”.

*Other 1 statement

* This category contains statements that could not be placed into the categories above and could not form a separate category.

Overall, forty six percent (16 participants) mentioned that their effectiveness changed after FLC participation. Six participants cannot say at present, and 10 participants believe that it did not change while 3 did not provide any comments.
On the other hand, facilitators consider that they benefited more from discussion (3) by serving as facilitators, had more control over FLC activity (3) and were more involved (3). Two facilitators mentioned that this was an important leadership role among peers (2) associated with a lot of responsibility (3).

Some participants felt that the FLC program worked well for them (7), but others would like to see changes (30) to make the program better. The majority of changes are of organizational nature and included changes in FLC composition and size (9), more independence for FLCs in configuration and tasks (5), less paperwork (5), training for facilitators (4) and streamlining the assessment process and sign-up (2). The second group of statements called for less product orientation (3) and provision of incentives for participation (2). Some of these statements are provided below: "More emphasis on conversations rather than on producing a body of work" and "I suggest if CET could set up additional programs, including funding supports and awards, to attract more faculty members focusing on learning and teaching at GSU".

**Group context – FLC groups.**

Mid-year case records indicated that most FLCs were planning to disseminate their work by making presentations (6), creating a website (4) and a brochure (2) or other. At the end of the year, the analysis of case records two indicated 2 statements for presentations, and one each for a brochure, presentation at the Forum and other presentation.

Facilitators and the FLC groups agreed with individual participants on some of the support desired. Two of these overlapping categories were mentioned most often and included the need for facilitating skills (6 statements from facilitators and 1 from case records) and provision of resources for products developed by FLCs (5 statements from facilitators and 2 from case records). Probably due to their role within the FLC, facilitators also identified the need for more guidance for FLC activity such as "It would be good to spell out what these groups need to accomplish" and "In the future have suggestions for facilitators on how to focus on topic and facilitate" (6). They also mentioned space/scheduling (3) and incentives for FLC participation for tenure and promotion purposes (2). FLCs also mentioned support from administration and CET (2) such as, "We would like to see support from member(s) of administration for the importance of the topic", "I think Alan's "SoTL at GSU" proposal is the best support we could ask for!"

Asked about things that would make the FLC experience better, FLCs focused their attention on topics placed into 4 categories. Three categories related to the group process in which FLCs as wish for more cohesion (2), better focusing of discussions (2) and more participants (2). Out of them only one was of organizational nature and included less evaluation forms (2). See Box 5 for the categories and selected statements.

An interesting perspective emerged from the FLCs about the name for the faculty learning community. Two statements in particular attracted our attention: "It was called "Faculty Learning Community", so it did not include staff. Call it something else: educational or academic" and "We have a lot of good staff on campus and administrators who feel excluded just by the name of the community, because of the name including FACULTY only".
Box 5. Total statements - 10

Less evaluation forms
2 statements. Examples: “Less forms to fill out for the FLC during the year as they take up valuable meeting time”, “Fewer assessments”.

More cohesion
2 statements. Examples: “Clear cohesion as a group from the beginning of next year”, “We would like to have some of the meetings (once a month) to take place off campus”.

More focused
2 statements. Examples: “More defined sense of purpose”, “A review of effective methods for teaching information literacy in a university setting would ground our efforts for developing the tutorial and learning modules”.

More participants
2 statements. Examples: “More members - We think that the experience of the group would be enhanced by having representation from all colleges”, “The only thing I can think of is more people who are interested. Five was great, but 10 would be better!”

*Other 2 statements

* This category contains statements that could not be placed into the categories above and could not form a separate category.

Level four: Results

Direct results - Individual context

Participants applied for particular FLCs because they had concerns about teaching and learning. In the end-year report, eleven respondents thought that their concerns were answered and twenty one thought that their concerns were answered partially. Three respondents did not remember their initial concerns.

Despite the feeling that FLCs were pressured to deliver a product, 63% of participants developed an FLC related project that fit into one of the following categories: presentations (11), resource tools including a webpage or a brochure (10), or publications (2). Twenty three percent of participants did not develop a project and the other 14% did not provide an answer. Twelve participants (34%) reported one SoTL related project each, which means that the majority of scholarly output in the program was related to SoTL. Another 4 participants were planning to do so in the future either individually or as an FLC.

When asked if FLC participation influenced the sense of belonging to an academic community, the majority of participants (71%) answered affirmatively, citing as a main contributing factor the ability to meet faculty from different parts of the campus. Some participants (2) felt that FLCs served as an important factor in the appreciation of SoTL on campus. Participants reiterated the fact that it is beneficial to belong to a community (3). Statements to this question were organized into 4 categories and selected examples are presented in Box 6. Eight percent of participants did not believe that their sense of belonging was influenced by FLC participation and the statements from the other 21% were inconclusive.
Box 6. Total statements - 16

Facilitated cross campus connection
8 statements. Examples: “Very beneficial for connecting people across campus”, “I have been looking for ways to bring faculty together from across campus to share intellectual stimulation and explore issues of common concern”.

Sense of community is beneficial
3 statements. Examples: “It was extremely helpful”, “This is a benefit”.

SoTL appreciation
2 statements. Examples: “Increased my understanding of colleagues who may serve as good mentors in the scholarship of teaching in the future”, “This was a great team of reflective thinkers who did not want to just ‘do’ something, but to honestly appraise the scholarship of teaching and learning within each one’s discipline”.

*Other 3 statements
* This category contains statements that could not be placed into the categories above and could not form a separate category.

Direct Results - Group context

In the mid-year case record, each FLC set its own goals and objectives for the year that were classified into four categories. A considerable number of statements (10) involved development of a product and included resources for faculty such as WebPages (5) and assessment-survey (2); presentations (2) and a publication (1). FLCs were also interested in exploring certain teaching concepts (8) such as “student assessment” or “innovations in teaching chemistry and their impact on student learning” and discussing and sharing teaching ideas with colleagues (7). Examples of the latter include: “Discuss various Information Literacy teaching models, such as The Big 6® and other models that we identify” and “Share experiences of implementing new teaching concepts in our classes”. As a group, FLCs also believed that the program will impact the GSU community by improving teaching and learning on campus (5), will provide an opportunity for interdisciplinary collaborations (3), will increase the awareness of special topics on campus by providing information (5) and some references were made to the FLCs as a valuable for SoTL on campus (1 statement) and a way to improve reflectivity (1). See Box 7 for categories and selected statements.

At the end of the academic year, the following were reported as impacting the GSU community: improved teaching and learning through the development of new course modules (1), a tutorial (1), and a website (1); increase in awareness (2) and presentations at conferences (2).

Based on FLCs own evaluation of their results, most goals were partially met (4), some were fully met (2) and one not met (1). Statements such as “Our goals were to meet with each other to discuss service-learning (which we fully met) as well as to gather information about service-learning and share it” and “We set very ambitious goals and I don’t think we expected to fully meet everything” are representative of the statements submitted.
### Box 7. Total statements - 17

**Improve teaching and learning**
- **5 statements. Examples:** "Applied teaching methods will improve student learning, ultimately raising the ability of students on campus", "the GS community will benefit from higher success rates in entry-level mathematics courses".

**Provide information**
- **5 statements. Examples:** "One of the FLC earliest tasks involved reviewing the various definitions of Information Literacy. We felt this step was critical to moving forward with any of our efforts to study the topic and to disseminate our results with others across campus", "By providing information on the current state of service-learning at Georgia Southern University".

**Interdisciplinary approach**
- **2 statements. Examples:** "We are engaging in an interdisciplinary exchange about teaching Mathematics", "FLC has led to interdisciplinary connections to support other faculty members' research who are not even on the committee".

**More reflective**
- **1 statement.** "The FLC members choose the direction of each meeting; reflecting upon the implications for the topic of evidence-based teaching and learning".

**SoTL value**
- **1 statement.** "FLC has heightened awareness of the importance and value of SoTL, leading the Family Sciences program to host "the" SoTL conference for Family Sciences".

*Other 2 statements*

* This category contains statements that could not be placed into the categories above and could not form a separate category.

Only 4 FLCs completed and returned the end-year case records to CET. Given their limited number, the results at the group level are inconclusive.

**Direct results - community context**

Direct results of the FLC program indicated success in reaching some of its stated objectives. It allowed seventy seven participants to come together for a discussion, which represents roughly 10% of GSU faculty and staff. The FLC format brought an atmosphere of discussion and sharing, which facilitated participation and input from faculty and staff representing 6 different colleges and a variety of rank and years. They got involved as facilitators, learned about teaching and learning, learned from each other and reported developing a sense of belonging to an academic community. A major topic that emerged during data analysis dealt with the interdisciplinary nature of the FLCs and their potential for faculty collaboration. Also, among the highest impact on FLC participants was emphasis that teaching is serious intellectual work.

**Indirect results - community context**

We believe that the FLC program brought forth some unintended results. We called them indirect results, since they were not included in the objectives of the FLC Program, but evolved because of the FLC effort. Some of these results are related to the "SoTL Commons" Conference organized at GSU in the fall of 2007. The GSU faculty submitted 16 proposals. Ten proposals were accepted and seven presenters were former FLC participants. Moreover, fifty GSU faculty volunteered to serve as co-
chairs during the conference, indicating a high interest for SoTL among the GSU faculty.

The other indirect result relates to the participation in the 2007-2008 FLC Program. While no data were available yet, 84 faculty/staff signed up for the 11 FLCs and most of them (54) are new members.

**Conclusion**

This paper addressed the effectiveness of the FLC Program at the GSU and its impact on SoTL development among its participants. It also represented an attempt to use the modified Kirkpatrick’s model as an alternative evaluation tool for a FLC Program. The qualitative and quantitative data collected from multiple sources and structured according to the model showed that some aspects of the FLC Program were more effective than others.

The evidence indicated that participants’ reaction to the FLC program was overwhelmingly positive. Although a relatively small number of reports were submitted (45% response rate), the high percentage of positive responses can be considered representative. The majority of faculty and staff (94%) valued their FLC experience and would recommend it to their colleagues and friends (97%). Participants (86%) considered that the program should be continued on the GSU campus because it builds interdisciplinary collaborations, allows participants to learn and is an opportunity for faculty development. The data indicated that although some improvements could be made, they mostly related to organizational aspects of the program, such as scheduling, paperwork involved and problems with focusing the discussion; such concerns could be attributed to a first year experience. As a program’s success depends in a big part on positive reaction, the first year experience can be considered a very effective initial stage for the FLC Program.

The second level in the evaluation model, learning, was also effective. The theme of learning, emerged throughout the data analysis, confirmed the findings of Cox for a high potential for learning within the FLCs (Richlin and Cox, 2004). The FLCs Program provided faculty and staff with an opportunity to learn about certain aspects of teaching and learning; discuss and share attitudes and knowledge and learn from each other (3.8/5). Participants started on the pathway of scholarship of teaching since they came together because they had concerns about teaching and learning (Kreber, 2001), and became interested in SoTL (3.2/5). Essential information for future programs was provided in the group context data. The facilitators of future FLCs would benefit from training in group process skills, particularly in guiding discussions and in articulating the purpose of the group. To promote effective group process, program organizers need to be more specific about the purpose of FLCs and to provide workshops to teach facilitation skills to help facilitators focus the discussion.

Data at the Behavior level were less conclusive. Participants overall had excellent attendance and reported a variety of changes in their teaching or work. Among them were better assessments, more active learning methods and increase in reflectivity. A limited number of participants plan to work with students in the future or develop a SoTL project. Facilitators reported to have benefitted more from their participation by being more involved and having more control over FLC activity. The groups had the intention to disseminate their work through presentations, websites and brochures, but data is inconclusive given a low response rate for case records two. Dissemination happened through the Forum at the end of the year, but
attendance was poor and hardly extended beyond FLC participants. Both, at the
individual and group contexts several things were identified as necessary/desired to
improve the program. Participants would like to see more resources allocated for
their products, incentives for participation in their tenure and promotion review as
well as support from administration.

A majority of respondents developed a product at the end of their
participation, which support previous findings (Richlin and Cox, 2004). Most of them
were scholarly teaching activities such as websites, brochures and teaching modules.
Among the scholarly output reported were presentations or publications (not
reported if peer reviewed). About a third of them were related to SoTL projects. A
number of GSU faculty involved in the program presented at the SoTL Commons
Conference. Many FLCs focused on reviewing literature, which is one way in teachers
can implement the scholarship of teaching (Cross and Steadman, 1996). The findings
of this study also expand on previous findings related to the growth toward SoTL.
Based on the existent data, FLC participants were somewhere in the phases I and II
of the Continuum of Growth toward SoTL (Weston and McAlpine, 2001). They
exhibited concerns about teaching (phase I), but also got involved in a dialogue
about teaching with colleagues, across disciplines, gaining a sense of community
(phase II). Move to the next phase (phase III) when participants involve actively in
SoTL occurred on a smaller scale. However, one way to become a more scholarly
faculty is to move from novice to expert by knowing more about teaching (Smith,
2001, Dreyfuss and Dreyfuss, 1986). The FLC program of this study provided an
excellent environment for such growth interactions. It promoted faculty
collaboration, contributed to improved teaching and learning, provided a sense of
community and brought forth some SoTL appreciation. A longer involvement in FLCs
will increase productivity as well (Richlin and Cox, 2004).The FLC program was also
indirectly responsible for a high number of GSU staff serving as co-chairs at the SoTL
Commons Conference and the reenrollment of participants in the FLC program for

Several elements made the FLC program at GSU unique and do not appear to
be associated with previous research findings. Other FLC initiatives started on a
small scale (no more than 4 FLCs (Cox, 2004). Georgia Southern University, an
organization with no previous FLC and no SoTL culture, had 12 cross-disciplinary
FLCs in its first year of implementation and involved 10% of its overall faculty and
staff from across campus. This number in itself can be considered a huge success of
the program, which can be attributed to the support and dedication of CET.

Several characteristics of the FLC program at GSU appear to contribute to the
development of SoTL on campus. They include ongoing dialogue about teaching and
learning with colleagues, learning from each other through discussion and sharing,
interdisciplinary collaborations, community building, presentations at SoTL Commons
and a high number of faculty and staff in repeated program. These traits of the FLC
program could place it at the heart of the “teaching commons” an emergent
conceptual space for exchange and community among faculty, students,
administrators, and all others committed to learning as an essential activity of life in
contemporary democratic society (Huber and Hutching, 2005).

**Future research**

Future research on FLC can examine other variables, such as products of
participating faculty that include instructional changes and the subsequent impact on
students in their classrooms. The Kirkpatrick’s model can be easily adapted to add a
new context (students) for future evaluations. We would also like to address the
growth of productivity as associated with length of participant involvement in FLCs
(Richlin and Cox, 2004), group composition as related to junior and senior work, to
build on the work of Smith (2001) and Fayne and Ahrens (2006). Another area of
future research would be university support and barriers for SoTL, elements of
institutional change process associated with FLC, and the growth of SoTL in colleges
where members participate in FLCs.

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