

Beyond Satisfaction: Assessing the Goals and Impacts of Faculty Development

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Beach, Andrea, Mary Deane Sorcinelli, Ann E. Austin, and Jaclyn K. Rivard. *Faculty Development in the Age of Evidence: Current Practices, Future Imperatives*. Stylus Publishing, 2016. 256 pages.

Condon, William, Ellen R. Iverson, Cathryn A. Manduca, Carol Rutz, and Gudrun Willett. *Faculty Development and Student Learning: Assessing the Connections*. Indiana UP, 2016. 172 pages.

Let's start with some self-assessment. Which of these statements describe the ways you assess the effectiveness of your faculty development efforts, which might typically include teaching assistant (TA) education, new faculty orientation, pedagogy seminars, workshops, reading groups, brown bag discussions, mentoring, or online repositories:

- A. We count participants to track numbers served
- B. We survey participants to track their satisfaction
- C. We assess the increase in the knowledge/skills of participants
- D. We document the change in the behaviors/practices of participants
- E. We document the increase in learning of those served by participants
- F. We assess changes in the teaching culture of the institution

If you're like the majority of US and Canadian faculty developers recently surveyed, you're doing pretty well using approaches like A and B, you're perhaps using less-than-optimal strategies (such as quick self-reports) in your occasional C and D assessments, and you're doing very little or none of E and F, which to be sure are "exponentially more difficult to accomplish" (Beach et al. 109). Indeed, despite our daily efforts in faculty

development in this “age of evidence,” as Andrea Beach, Mary Deane Sorcinelli, Ann E. Austin, and Jaclyn K. Rivard term it, you and I are likely to be giving thoughtful advice to faculty about accumulating evidence in their own assessment processes while facing significant challenges ourselves in assessing the impact of that advice. Does our faculty development work? It’s hard to know. Fortunately, William Condon, Ellen Iverson, Cathryn A. Manduca, Carol Rutz, and Gudrun Willet have scaled the exponentially difficult mountain and come back with *Faculty Development and Student Learning: Assessing the Connections*, so we have some powerful indications that it does.

You might not even think of yourself, precisely, as a faculty developer: maybe you’re just a regular WPA who happens to educate the TAs or run portfolio review workshops. If faculty development is just one of a myriad of responsibilities for you, then you mostly need to know that these two books exist and what their key takeaways are—the way you may keep Alice Horning’s “The Definitive Article on Class Size” or Patrick Hartwell’s “Grammar, Grammars, and the Teaching of Grammar” on hand for when you need to have *that conversation again* with someone at your institution, or the way you might have a copy of Diana George’s *Kitchen Cooks, Plate Twirlers, and Troubadours* or Charlton et al.’s *GenAdmin* on the shelf to remind yourself that *it’s not just you* but that you belong to a vibrant community of practice. If faculty development is or becomes more central to your work, then you should read and probably own both of the books reviewed here, each of which represents significant data gathering and astute analysis by researchers and scholars at the top of their game.

TAKEAWAY #1: OUR WORK WORKS

The first major takeaway of these studies is that, with world enough and time, we can demonstrate that faculty development improves student learning (especially when we gather and track student writing). At the end of a four-year intensive “Tracer Project,” Condon et al. have documented how extended, multifaceted, locally rooted faculty development improves student learning, by evaluating Washington State University’s (WSU) Critical Thinking Project (CT) and Carleton College’s WAC and Quantitative Inquiry, Reasoning, and Knowledge (QuIRK) projects (11). The authors draw on a model they term the “Direct Path” (28) to establish the connection between increased student learning (as alluded to in item E, above) and increased faculty learning about teaching. The Direct Path model proposes that “faculty development does indeed lead to faculty learning, which translates to changes in classroom instruction that impact student learning” (28).

The details of the study, which used both quantitative and qualitative measures and gathered data across at least four years' worth of faculty development participation at each site, are too complex to review fully here (though if you're at all interested in educational research, you'll find the study design both fascinating and inspiring). To help give a sense of the "exponential" quality of this undertaking, though, I will highlight a few key components. Tracer Project researchers assessed whether faculty learned what was intended in their faculty development workshops at Carleton by analyzing years' worth of workshop exit surveys along with interviews of 47 faculty. Researchers at both institutions seeking to measure the effects of faculty development on teaching assessed faculty assignment prompts and conducted faculty interviews (at WSU, participants included 140 high-participating and 28 low-participating faculty), and Carleton researchers also observed and evaluated faculty class sessions. Since both institutions have longstanding student portfolio requirements, student learning was measured through assessment of student writing. When WSU rubrics that revealed clear gains for WSU faculty who participated in extended faculty development—and gains for their students—turned out not to be sensitive enough to capture significant differences among Carleton faculty's assignments and among Carleton students' writing, researchers switched to a paired-comparison method for those documents (blind ranking of an intervention document against a matched control document) pioneered by Haswell that did document gains. Finally, it's important to note that the longitudinal data allowed researchers to capture how faculty learning and integration of concepts deepened and spread over time, and how student learning improved over years rather than only weeks of experience (this is all laid out in careful detail in chapter three of Condon et al.).

In principle, this remarkable study is replicable; however, it's clear that few individual WPAs or faculty developers will be able to match it for the numbers of faculty and student documents, interviews, and observations gathered and assessed; for the length of time over which effects were traced; for the rich triangulation of data across types of faculty, students, and institutions; or for the scholarly rigor with which comparative and evaluative analyses were applied. What we can do, as Beach et al. remind us, is to assess what we can within our current resources and then refer to other comprehensive studies to show the existence of causal links that we are unable to trace (114).

And fortunately we can now all cite the Tracer Project's central results with confidence:

- Faculty who participate in extended faculty development translate that learning into their course materials and approaches more often and more successfully than faculty who do not, even when a whole institution is ostensibly involved in the project of instructional improvement (Condon et al. 70, 106, 109).
- The salutary effects of extended, focused faculty development on faculty practice not only persist over time, but continue to improve for those faculty participants (who implement more advanced strategies over time) and expand in scope to reach additional students non-participant faculty to build a culture of faculty improvement (as faculty extend strategies to more of their own courses and recommend approaches to colleagues) (Condon et al. 50–51).
- Students of faculty who participate in extended faculty development perform better in tasks related to the development initiative (e.g., critical thinking at WSU, writing and quantitative analysis at Carleton) than students from faculty who do not (Condon et al. 100, 107–109).

At WSU, for instance, assignment prompts and student writing from 28 faculty with low participation in faculty development were assessed as consistently less proficient in meeting CT objectives than assignment prompts and student writing from 100 faculty who had participated at length in either workshops or portfolio assessment (Condon et al. 100). Moreover, only 3 of 50 CT faculty interviewed did not demonstrate any additional innovation or extension of the strategies they had learned (Condon et al. 51). And at Carleton, not only was student writing from high faculty development participants ranked better by faculty evaluators than student writing from other faculty (paralleling results at WSU), but the students also recognized their learning gains: “the likelihood that a student would choose a paper from a given faculty member’s course” to represent his or her best writing in his or her junior portfolio “was in direct proportion to the number of faculty development events the faculty member had attended” (Condon et al. 109). The Tracer Project has demonstrated a Direct Path from extended, focused faculty development to student improvement, and confirmed the “large leveraging effect” of faculty development initiatives (50)—and those results should give all of us motivation and opportunity to seek ways to sustain and improve our faculty development efforts.

TAKEAWAY #2: OUR WORKSHOPS NEED WORK

A second takeaway from these studies is that successful faculty development includes—and requires—much more than workshops. The impressive results of the Tracer Project, unfortunately, do not mean that

you or I can now argue that our September brown bag lunch discussion about responding to student writing will by itself have a beneficial effect on student learning. That brown bag chat is in good company, to be sure; such one-shot workshops are still pervasive in faculty development efforts across higher education, as demonstrated by Beach et al. Their study has two parts: an extended survey of 385 faculty developers in the US and Canada from a wide range of institution types, complemented by structured interviews with 120 participants who are directors of campus faculty development centers (hereafter referred to by a common catchall term, centers for teaching excellence or CTEs), both of which data sets closely parallel information gathered in their 2006 study (17; see also Sorcinelli et al.). In both parts, Beach et al. asked about current structures and practices, faculty development priorities, and future goals for faculty support. According to the surveys, short workshops remain by far the most frequently used form of faculty support offered by CTEs across all institutional types; they also topped the list of what CTE directors identified as their offices' "signature approaches" (78). Next most frequently mentioned in both the survey and the interviews are one-on-one consultations, also likely to be isolated learning events (78).

These discrete options are convenient for busy faculty and can spark further interest in pedagogical learning, yet Beach et al. find their prevalence troubling, since research demonstrates that short-form interventions are "less likely to provide the sustained support needed as instructors strive to change aspects of their work" (78; as evidence, they cite Chism et al.'s and Henderson et al.'s reviews of recent faculty development research). Perhaps recognizing such limitations, CTE directors chose not to elaborate much about their workshops or consultations during their interviews; they were much more likely to give details about faculty learning communities, discipline- or unit-based programs, and long-form institutes or retreats (81–83). Faculty learning communities also topped the list of programming directors hoped to expand (Beach et al. 85). These recognitions of the value of long-form faculty development match the recommendations articulated by Condon et al., who argue that faculty learning needs to be iterative, extended, and focused on "providing faculty with the tools to continue innovating" after the formal support concludes (120). While the lunch discussion about grading might be lively, we owe our colleagues—and we will get our best returns on investment from—the kind of high-impact learning we provide for our students: extended, problem-based, multimodal, peer-engaged, active and reflective.

We may also benefit from rethinking a centralized, direct-instruction model as the sole vector for faculty support. While CTE directors and scholars acknowledge the power of faculty development extended over time,

Beach et al.'s study shows an increase in centralization of faculty development efforts that may limit the ways that CTEs can extend faculty support across institutional boundaries. The study's authors note the political advantages of having faculty development move "from the margins toward the core of the institution" (Beach et al. 42); WPAs are certainly familiar with the benefits that can accrue from program work "coordinated by an identifiable, centralized unit with professional staff" (40). Such centralization, though, might also contribute to what Beach et al. see as an unexpectedly low incidence of CTE collaboration with other units (37).

The effects of that kind of mission isolation are particularly important to consider given the results of Condon et al.'s more context-focused inquiries. They document a crucial yet often overlooked network of faculty development opportunities that are currently camouflaged as program or unit assessment, curriculum planning and development, and unit-based initiatives—what they call "routine, non-programmed learning" (8) that can add up to an institutional culture of faculty development. These deliberate efforts to identify not just a Direct Path model for faculty development but also a richly contextualized picture of faculty learning can help us see more diverse areas for faculty development growth. Condon et al.'s signature example of this decentralized faculty development comes from faculty participation in portfolio assessment. At WSU, for instance, each of the 40 faculty interviewed about their service as raters of students' mid-career portfolios could point to significant improvements in their own assignment design that resulted directly from their assessment experience (Condon et al. 59), even though no overt efforts were made to frame the work as faculty development. These results were echoed by Carleton faculty in their interviews about portfolio rating; researchers also point to the ways in which routine activities such as promotion reviews and accreditation-focused assessments are likely contributing to a culture of faculty development at Carleton (23).

Moreover, Condon et al.'s review of this broader picture, in which faculty development is defined as "as any activity that provides faculty and staff with new ideas for teaching . . . or with tools to . . . improve their current methods" (18), offers a way to rebut the myth that faculty (especially at large universities) don't really care about improving their teaching. The researchers were pleasantly surprised, for example, that out of 148 responding faculty at WSU, only 3 reported that they had not attended a single event that they construed as supporting their learning about teaching. As a result, the researchers' comparison group had to be formed from "low participators" rather than "non-participators" (17). Even if a somewhat greater portion of faculty in the 65% who didn't choose to take the WSU survey

were uninvolved in faculty development, the data still provide a strong counterpoint to the “disinterested faculty” story. Keeping this broad view helps faculty developers move forward in several ways. If we underestimate the pedagogical learning potential of a portfolio assessment or a curriculum committee, we may under-pitch our next faculty development efforts by assuming our audiences are more resistant or less informed than they really are. And I find myself wondering: if an annual program review or peer evaluation sequence is, on its own, providing support for faculty learning, what else might those faculty accomplish with even the smallest of nudges toward more deliberate, reflective consideration of pedagogical approaches?

Both sets of researchers thus argue that faculty developers should collaborate with other units and seek ways to track the “hidden” network of faculty development experiences offered in departments and programs in order to best meet faculty needs. Beach et al. identify “faculty development in disciplines” as an “emergent theme” in CTE directors’ responses that should be pursued (76). A number of directors, for instance, saw unit-based assessment initiatives as an important opportunity for faculty learning. One community college leader noted the need to “Increasingly move toward program-level curriculum development support (including the assessment of program learning outcomes)—which also leads to just-in-time faculty development with all members of academic units (not just those who would otherwise come to the Centre)” (97). Similarly, a director at a comprehensive university explained that “the culture of the academy is what’s/who’s down the hall” and predicted an increase in faculty development designed “in a distributed model with support in the departments” (102). Beach et al. conclude, echoing Condon et al., that we need to “envision faculty development as everyone’s work” drawing on “the expertise and knowledge from a range of offices” and institutional units (143–44). Together, the studies not only demonstrate that faculty development produces a strong return on investment, but call on faculty developers to look beyond the borders of the single workshop to create—and/or recognize—extended, localized, routinized opportunities that support individual faculty learning and help build a wider culture in which faculty improvement is “in the air” (Condon et al. 89) and not just at the lunch table.

TAKEAWAY #3: OUR WORK TAKES WORK

A third takeaway is that efforts in faculty development face significant limitations, even in well-resourced institutions and programs, and require persistence and ingenuity from faculty developers. Neither of these books is inclined to blind optimism: scholars and participants alike

acknowledge how difficult faculty development in postsecondary education is, how challenging the leadership and oversight of faculty learning is, and how taxing the assessment of these efforts can be. Faculty learning isn't magically any faster or more linear than student learning, and faculty even at teaching institutions like Carleton can still be surprised at the amount of ongoing pedagogical learning they can be invited to engage in (Condon et al. 83). Productive faculty development programs can be set aside when external funding dries up (as was the case with WSU's four-year FIPSE-funded CT project) or dismantled altogether (as was the case with WSU's Center for Teaching and Learning with Technology, which reorganized and then disbanded to make room for other university endeavors) (Condon et al. 21). They can also be mandated to serve primarily as support for external objectives such as directives from accrediting bodies, as a plurality of community college CTE directors worried about (Beach et al. 32). Meanwhile, CTEs face some of the same leadership and sustainability challenges that WPAs have recognized: nearly half of CTE directors are 55 or older, three-quarters of them are women, and very nearly all of them are white, suggesting that we need to pay more explicit attention to expanding pathways into the profession as a way of encouraging a more diverse and sustainable community (Beach et al. 129). There is little room here for thinking, "Well, it's all fine for *them* to recommend actions; *they've* got it easy"—and thus a lot of room for bucking up and moving forward.

Because we need to move forward. Condon et al. directly acknowledge the fundamental role that financial resources play in indicating institutional priorities for faculty development and compensating busy faculty for their time, even if we assume that large numbers of faculty truly want to improve their teaching (119). And both sets of authors point to the ways in which institutional reward structures—in hiring, promotion, and program recognition, for both tenure-line and contingent faculty—have the power to sustain or dissipate faculty efforts to improve as teachers. Those sorts of institutional changes don't happen without partnerships that can apply ongoing pressure from multiple vectors. And they don't happen without evidence.

Perhaps counterintuitively, I find myself energized by the gaps these books reveal in my own and my institution's faculty development practices. Our small CTE hasn't built many partnerships with other academic units, but it's encouraging to discover that my efforts this past year to construct faculty development programming with our school of business are not just a randomly fortuitous connection but should—according to the best research in the field—become a model for other programming. I'm not desperately seeking minions; I'm joining a national movement to foster nascent efforts

in localized faculty learning in order to help sustain a university-wide culture supporting excellent teaching. (Yes, that's the ticket!) Likewise, I can now reframe the moment a decade ago when my co-researchers and I first experienced how difficult it was to measure the impact of even a full-semester composition pedagogy seminar on TAs' principles and practices, compared with the multitude of factors influencing their teaching (for a look at the graph that still gives us shivers, see Reid et al. 43). It's not just that I can better recognize some of what we were up against in light of the current research. More to the point, if I can rely on a study like Condon et al. to support my arguments about that final link (yes, good faculty development does improve student learning), I discover that I'm more willing to look for ways to build out the first half of the chain with richer assessments of what faculty take away from our programs.

TAKEAWAY #4: WE HAVE OUR WORK CUT OUT FOR US

Finally, these books confirm not only that WPAs often operate as crucial actors in institution-wide faculty development efforts, but should endeavor to become more visible in these roles. I have a vivid "aha!" memory of the first time I connected the work of WPAs to the work of CTE directors, after spotting Doug Hesse make the move from one office to the other and so catching a glimpse of a possible path for my own career. Yet although I continue to regularly encounter CTE directors who have come out of writing programs, I haven't seen that connection identified in more general faculty development literature. Indeed, while 42% of respondents to Beach et al.'s survey said they had collaborated with writing *centers*, and 30% said they knew of a writing center that was supporting faculty development, other writing programs remain invisible in the survey, and overall, the researchers report that respondents "did not perceive much relevant programming emerging from other units on campus" (Beach et al. 36–37). Writing programs could easily be among the stars of the unit-based collaborations that both sets of researchers value; moreover, WPAs have specific contributions to make to school-wide faculty development.

Beyond our substantial experience in actual faculty development programming, I'll note three of those possible contributions here, but I encourage you to consider other ways your resources, programming, and expertise align with what is or should be your school's effort to support extended, distributed, assessable faculty development. First, Condon et al.'s study affirms that WPAs often hold the keys to an institution's largest learning-focused dataset, in our access to and experience assessing student writing. At the most concrete level, there simply would have been no Direct Path

for the Tracer Project to measure without the huge repositories of student portfolios at WSU and Carleton. (Condon et al. state directly, “If a campus does not have an archive [of student course work] already, it must start one” [43].) It would also have been difficult for the project to proceed without the expertise of composition professionals: we know better than anyone else what it takes to successfully prompt, instruct, and especially assess student writing, and the ongoing shift from assessing students’ localized, declarative knowledge to measuring their thinking and reasoning capabilities across multiple disciplines nearly always means that writing will be involved.

Moreover, WPAs often come to outcomes assessment understanding it as a learning opportunity rather than only an administrative exercise, making us crucial partners in the upcoming decades. Beach et al.’s argument that our current environment is “the age of evidence” for faculty developers—an age influenced strongly by institutional, professional, and political demands for assessment of student learning—speaks to the need for campus leaders who can bridge the gap between external demands and internal motivations (Beach et al. 4–7, 12). As one research university CTE director puts it, they are “seeing a greater interest in data that can inform discussions of course/curriculum revision, and I think we need to be able to help faculty think through, collect, and analyze such data while also making sure we have good data about the impact of our own services” (Beach et al. 96). Whether we’re contributing to student outcomes assessment as an end itself, as a site for faculty learning, or as a site for the assessment of faculty development efforts, composition scholars often have significant advantages to offer CTEs, since our scholarship on data-based program assessment is rich, often nuanced, and increasingly attentive to institutional assessment challenges such as racial bias, contingent faculty status, and local vs. national outcomes.

Finally, Beach et al. draw on a growing body of research positioning faculty developers generally and CTE directors specifically as “change agents” in the larger institution who hope to be “perceived as champions of the faculty [and of student learning] and not as the handmaids of the administration” (147; see also Schroeder). That sort of language resonates strongly with me, as I expect it does for other WPAs. Our professional conversations regularly focus on the challenges and opportunities we find as we advocate for institutional change. In addition, although our programs can be marginalized in terms of resources and visibility, they are often also among the few all-campus entities already in operation, connecting faculty and students from across disciplines even as other isolating forces push toward more of a siloed or even a bunker mentality. Perhaps your own professional

path won't take you into a formal position in a CTE, but as a WPA you are uniquely qualified to become one of your CTE's strongest allies. If you haven't yet built strong connections with faculty development colleagues, you should; if you currently work with them on some joint projects, you should be able to use the research from these studies to demonstrate the value of additional contributions you could be making. If Beach et al. engage with this study a third time in the 2020s, I surely would like to see them report on scores of CTE directors talking about their wildly productive collaborations with their local WPAs.

IN CONCLUSION: THE ACTUAL REVIEWS

A colleague and I were recently talking about the preponderance of “good news” book reviews in academic journals, and the ways in which that trope may compromise some of the integrity of the genre. Given that conversation, I've wondered if I should manufacture some point of reproach of *Faculty Development and Student Learning* so that I can convince you I'm still in possession of my critical faculties. But beyond a mild yearning for an index, I just don't have any notable critiques. The study reported herein is meticulously designed and explained, and has fault-lines or omissions only to the degree that any measure of causality in institutional learning does—challenges due to what Beach et al. refer to as “the complex and longitudinal nature of changes” in faculty behaviors (113). The book also serves as a thorough synthesis of relevant scholarship specifically on the WSU and Carleton programs and also on faculty development assessment overall.

Condon et al.'s data analysis is dense but carefully structured and not at all unreadable; moreover, their qualitative analysis of how a culture of faculty learning can develop in an institution showcases teachers as learners in ways that are compelling and even uplifting. Even their explanation of adding a new assessment strategy partway through a major project (something I'm always telling graduate students they must not do) is persuasive. Of course they needed to switch from an open rubric to the Haswellian paired-choice ranking as a response to local conditions; how could we expect to separate A-plus faculty and students from the A-plus-plus faculty and students at a highly selective college except with finely tuned assessment practices? In sum, this is a book we need: a set of credible, data-based answers to vital questions facing us all. So if you find yourself seated near me at a conference or meeting in the next few years, you'll likely see me pull the book cover up on my tablet screen and show it to yet another person I think should read it.

Faculty Development in the Age of Evidence doesn't set out such a Herculean task, and it is perhaps not so directly relevant to the daily work of

WPAs; it thus shines a little less brightly when set next to the report from the Tracer Project. In the authors' efforts to help the CTE community see itself clearly in the current moment, I found them erring on the side of comprehensive summary of their large data set when I sometimes hoped for more consideration of causality, analysis of institutional complications, or recommendations for next steps. But that response may also reflect my own status as a relative newcomer to the community: when I look at the data, I have less context to help me assimilate all the details. And I do appreciate the care with which the researchers recruited and then attended specifically to responses from a range of institution types, from high-research universities to community colleges to small liberal arts colleges, so as not to paint all the pictures of faculty development with a research-intensive brush.

In addition to their thorough documentation of who faculty developers are now and what we are doing, I'm impressed by their concluding discussions of the future prospects of the profession. Although I've been finishing this review during a week in which Scott Adams' *Dilbert* comic strip has lampooned organizational forecasting as "guessing plus math," Beach et al. move thoughtfully beyond guessing, and their analysis has implications for faculty developers and WPAs alike. Because this study replicates a study from a decade earlier, they are able to temper predictions from current participants with analysis of how past predictions have turned out. Some of those predictions were fairly accurate (the notion that assessment of student outcomes would rise in importance); some areas of concern seem to have evolved in ways better than expected (a rise in online learning has sparked a concomitant rise in discussions of online pedagogy rather than leading only to conversations about technological tools); some goals remain consistent if not moving toward full implementation as fast as we might have hoped (we're still waiting on that paradigm shift from workshops to communities of practice) (Beach et al. 90–93). Thus I find their current recommendations—for broader scope and more scholarship in faculty development, for shared responsibility and ongoing attention to questions of diversity and representation in faculty development—well grounded in evidence and worth striving towards as I consider my own pedagogy education goals. Indeed, these books both give me hope that the work we do supporting faculty, difficult as it can be to quantify, is productive in both immediate and distant contexts; they also make me glad to be part of a broad communal effort to support faculty learning across disciplines and institutions. Wherever your faculty development practices next lead you, I hope you find that the results of these studies give you satisfying context and community for your work, too.

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