The Center for Teaching and Learning: What’s It All About?

In the summer of 2016, I was asked to assume the position of director for two offices: The Office of Faculty Development and the Office of Online and Blended Learning. My mission was to work through the academic year to merge these two offices into one: A Center for Teaching and Learning. That shift officially took place May 1, 2017.

Now that the sign on our door is different, Armstrong’s faculty might wonder how else our work will change. In the shadow of consolidation, they might also wonder what will remain the same. So this episode outlines the CTL’s goals for the upcoming year, addresses some questions about how consolidation will affect our work, and answers some questions about how we can help our faculty.

Our goals: I accepted this directorship because I really like the idea of helping my colleagues be more effective at and happier in their work. I consider it a blessing that my entire job revolves around just that. But an ever greater blessing is that I now work with a team whose areas of expertise not only enable me to support our faculty but also help me to become a better teacher. We converse often to come up with ways to be of service to the Armstrong campus. In the next episode, you’ll meet the other staff members of our office, but for now, I’ll give you some examples of the assistance our office provides:

- Training for faculty who wish to teach online.
- Support for online faculty who wish to enhance the interactivity or accessibility of their e-courses (simple things like putting in a link or adding captions to a video to more complex things like examining the design of an electronic course)
- Support for faculty who wish to submit their online courses for QM review
- Summer fellowships and workshops for faculty who want to add to their teaching/learning skill set
- Opportunities to apply for faculty development initiatives such as the Gignilliat summer research fellowship or the Governor’s Teaching fellowship
- Workshops specifically designed for new faculty

This is just a sample of the services we provide, but we publish a weekly electronic newsletter to keep faculty informed of all that’s going on in our center.

Even when we were operating as two offices, our center offered the sources I just listed, and of course we’ll continue to offer them as we move forward as a unified office. But our unification enables us to work as a team a little more easily and because of that, we have some pretty cool things going on in Solms hall:

- Webinars and “appy” hours to introduce faculty to new teaching/learning tools to make instruction more efficient or interactive; we’re planning to offer them online and face to face to suit our faculty’s various needs. We’ll also offer them at odd times to better accommodate faculty who need assistance outside of the typical workday hours.
- The innovation studio is a recent addition to our center, and we’ve set it up so that we can help our faculty create and edit instructional videos to use in courses, whatever the modality. The studio includes a digital camera and mic, a teleprompter, a green screen, PC’s and Macs so that we can assist faculty in various ways.
• Speaking of those instructional videos, they were a significant part of our summer fellowship on flipped and blended learning, which took place in the month of May. A baker’s dozen of our faculty participated in a week-long course of instruction on how to flip classes, use those flipped strategies in a blended course, and create electronic instructional tools to facilitate flipped and blended learning. Then over the next month, faculty created learning modules for a flipped or blended course, and part of those modules were instructional videos. So even though our innovation studio is pretty new, it’s already been christened by a cohort of faculty.

• Of course, this podcast is another way we’re reaching out to faculty—not only to promote the ways we can help you but also to stimulate conversations about quality teaching & learning, service, and research & scholarship on the Armstrong campus.

But what about consolidation? How will that affect the CTL? The short answer is the same one you’ve heard across campus: A lot is unknown, but I can say this with confidence: Our staff have been working well with the staff at the CTL on the Statesboro campus. They have been congenial to us, and they’ve invited us to join them in their initiatives so that we can offer comparable programming to all faculty. They are also agreeable to our desire to ensure faculty development programming reaches the Liberty Center campus. So already the consolidated university has staff members who are enthusiastic about working together.

I can also assure you that our OWG has already had several recommendations accepted by the CIC. Although none of them have gone to implementation, the CIC has approved a structure for the consolidated CTL. It will be called the Centers for Teaching and Technology (CT2) and Armstrong’s CTL will be one arm of a three-pronged CT2 structure.

The CIC has approved our recommendation that the centers on the two campuses conduct needs assessments for all campuses and to establish a unified mission, vision and goals according to the results of that needs assessment. The CIC has approved our recommendation that we continue to provide programs such as new faculty orientations, training for online faculty, accessibility training—many of the initiatives we’ve already been offering—we can continue to move those programs forward.

What we don’t know right now is specifically who will do what or who will be in charge—but few of our offices know that anyway, so we will find out as the CIC can get to those details. But suffice it to say that the Armstrong campus will have faculty development. We will have it on this campus. And we will provide it to the Liberty Center campus as our resources allow and as their faculty schedules can accommodate it. I have a feeling that as the Liberty Center grows, bringing faculty development to them will get easier.

So that’s a quick introduction to our Center for Teaching and Learning. In our next episode, you’ll meet our staff members and hear from them what projects they’re working on. Please continue to download and listen to Teach Strong. In future episodes we plan to discuss many different teaching and learning topics, and we plan to feature the innovative work of many of our faculty. Until next time, goodbye.