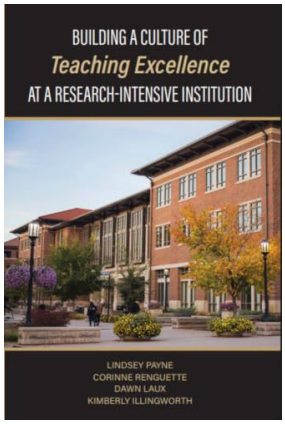
PURDUE UNIVERSITY | Mitch Daniels School of Business

Creating a Culture of Teaching & Learning Inside an Individual School

By Cara C. Putman and Kelly Blanchard

Chapter Six in Building a Culture of Teaching Excellence at a Research Intensive Institution



The *Framework for Teaching Excell***Creating a Culture of Teaching & Learning Inside an Individual School**

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ence at Purdue University emphasizes creating "an environment and adopt[ing] pedagogies that allow students to meet learning outcomes and achieve their full potential as learners." Furthermore, "[a]ll instructors strive for excellence. . ." (See Chapter 2). At the Daniels School of Business at Purdue University, we have wrestled with the question of how to create a culture of excellence inside the broader school. How can we create structures that encourage faculty to develop their teaching prowess and identities? Asking the question was only the first step to creating a culture of teaching and learning.

At the time of this writing, the Daniels School of Business has nine departments, with 204 faculty spread across three groups: 113 tenure-track faculty, 58 clinical/teaching faculty, and 21 lecturer/staff teachers. There are also three visiting faculty, four limited-term lecturers, and four post-doctoral faculty. This is a diverse group of faculty spread across the school.

In this chapter, we will explore first, what a community of practice is. Then we will explore how we created space for a culture of teaching excellence inside the Daniels School of Business. Following that we will explore how it has been received by faculty as we bring the *Framework* to Daniels. Finally, a brief roadmap of how we can maintain momentum toward teaching excellence with practical strategies and next steps as we bring a university initiative and to the school level is provided.

What are Communities of Practice and Can They be Effective in This Context?

Communities of practice have long been one tool for facilitating faculty development and enhancing teaching practices. A community of practice is a group of people "in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor" and "who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly." (Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Communities of practice share three items: a domain of shared interest, a community of engaged members, and a repertoire of practice that can be more or less formal. Communities of Practice are becoming more popular as a way for faculty to come together and discuss teaching and learning. These groups tend to be organized from within the organization, providing an opportunity to meet the unique needs of faculty in large and smaller groups.[1]

In communities of practice, individuals learn through a shared practice with other members and the focus is on the collective or group rather than the individual (Fuller, 2007, as cited in Annon et al., 2018), with its principles firmly placed in the need for knowledge to be

[1] For example, this is how the University of Alabama defines what Communities of Practice are not:

> CoPs are not formal UA committees, teams or governance groups. In those settings, major objectives are generally pre-established by management and/or administration members, with corresponding structures, goals and deadlines. Goals within each Community of Practice are negotiated by its members – who participate because they personally identify with the subject matter and the objectives they endeavor to accomplish together. This makes the value of each CoP very much tied to the specific utility it represents to the individuals who participate. Communities that struggle to realize this utility over time may retire – and that's ok! Creating a CoP should always be seen as an experiment.

presented in an authentic context, and that social interaction and collaboration are present (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

The Unique Context at the Daniels School of Business

There are many opportunities at Purdue to participate in building teaching excellence. However, as we considered how to bring the *Framework* to the Daniels School of Business, we realized that many of our faculty lacked two key components to access those tools: time and awareness. Our teaching faculty teach 18 credit hours spread over two semesters. If they teach only undergraduate classes and different sections of the same class, that may be a manageable load, dependent on class size. But many of the faculty teach undergraduate (primarily three-credit) and graduate (primarily one- and two-credit) classes across different modalities (face-to-face, hybrid, and online). This can create extra work for the faculty as they try to keep class content fresh and current. Add in current challenges such as managing innovations like artificial intelligence, and teaching is more than a full-time engagement. However, the faculty with the 18-credit teaching load also carry a nine-credit service load, which means many are running centers or graduate or undergraduate programs in addition to teaching. They may see teaching in the university context as a vocation, but it is still a daunting workload. This doesn't consider those teaching twenty-four credits a year and carrying a three-credit service load. Many times, teaching faculty feel like they are drowning under a grading burden while teaching higher class-size courses.

When it comes to awareness, despite emails and personal invitations to participate, a year and a half into the endeavor, some of our faculty still said they were unaware of our community of practice. Some of that falls to us, as there was a bit of an assumption that if you weren't interested in the first iteration you might not be interested in future versions. However, part of

the unawareness comes from the volume of email communication people receive. Other programs utilize paper invitations in addition to email, and we plan to do the same in future semesters to raise awareness in a more tangible way to the opportunity to participate in this specialized community.

We also wanted to create a culture within our school that facilitated a community within the faculty who desired to have that here. As articulated by one of our lecturers, there was a divide between the layers of faculty that could be hard to penetrate.

> Prior to the SoTL, book clubs and (Assistant) Dean Sullivan's *Teaching Excellence Task Force*, being a Lecturer was a much lonelier job. Out of politeness, I refrained from talking too much with TT faculty about teaching, since they needed to focus on research. Unless it was something specific, I did something similar with other teaching faculty, out of respect for their time and how busy we all were with our classes. (B. Van Kammen, personal communication)

This lecturer's experience mirrors that of many faculty, and the experience has been emphasized post-pandemic when it became difficult to identify when fellow faculty were in the office for casual hallway conversations that could happen more organically pre-lockdown. This reluctance to approach those perceived as being at a different level is not unique within our school. Communities of Practice can foster "an alternative, more egalitarian or horizontal support structure." (Annon et al., 2018) However, when the authors proposed a monthly lunch for faculty to meet around scholarship of teaching and learning ideas, it was well-received by the teaching faculty.

The Structure of Our Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Community of Practice

Beginning in the Fall 2022, we began hosting lunches once a month each semester, an average of three to four times per semester. Faculty who teach in undergraduate programs were invited to attend. From the beginning, the faculty who attended were largely from the clinical and lecturer ranks with occasional tenure-track faculty members joining based on the topic.[2] Lunch was provided, but these could be brown bag lunches to lower the cost.

The first two to three semesters, the meetings were structured largely as faculty reading groups. In part, this was modeled on faculty reading groups that the first author had participated in for several semesters that were part of an initiative of the Center for Instructional Excellence at Purdue. In general, only a handful of Daniels faculty intermittently participated in those, and we wondered if more would participate if the perceived costs of meeting at different points on campus were removed. It would also give a focus to the early stages of the Community of Practice. Faculty who participated would receive lunch and a book focused on excellent pedagogy to add to their teaching toolkit while also building connections with other faculty inside the school. While there are benefits to interacting with faculty across campus, we knew our faculty needed to connect with each other first.

To start we focused on the *Educator* aspect of the *Framework* and selected books like *Small Teaching* by James M. Lang (2021), *How Humans Learn* by Joshua R. Eyler (2021), and *Make It Stick* by Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel (2014). These books served as a starting point for discussion around important scholarship of teaching and learning ideas as faculty explored how to strive for excellence in learner-centered education. We quickly learned that using these

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[2] This experience mirrors that of other programs. *See* Wilson, Alex, et al. (2020). "Using a Community of Practice in Higher Education: Understanding the Demographics of Participation and Impact on Teaching." *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 32(1), 39–48; Cox, M. D. (2011). Communities of practice can also have great impacts to support early-career academics. *International Journal for Academic Development*, *18*(1), 18–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2011.599600.

books with assigned chapters served as a springboard for directed conversations, enabling faculty to share ideas, challenge ideas, and ask for help about challenges they were experiencing or questions they had. They also facilitated collaboration among participants as we explored how to add more active-learning and engaged activities to our classrooms. The way troubleshooting and problem-solving occurred as faculty brought their unique challenges to the group inspired more collaboration.

The Community of Practice created a group of faculty who were, in *Framework* terms, *Educators*, those poised to use a variety of tools to engage learners in inclusive, motivating, and relevant learning. Yet they might also be poised to become *Explorers*, faculty members who proactively incorporate innovative instructional techniques for a variety of learners. As they did this, they might also be prepared to contribute to the scholarship of teaching and learning. It was also fascinating to watch these faculty become aware of a new area of research as they had the opportunity to meet across areas and share what they taught and what they were interested in or working on. Because most are teaching faculty, research is not a requirement of their positions. However, that does not mean that they aren't exploring questions in a way that could lead to publication or conference presentations that add to the work of the scholarship of teaching and learning. [3] Many simply weren't aware that was a body of research in the academic world.

These conversations also gave leadership insight into challenges or barriers to success for these members of the academic community. Those conversations then provided insight that allowed the administration to develop solutions to questions that existed. Often there was an information gap blind spot. The information might be available, but if you don't know where to

[3] This semester we are launching an open format conversation for faculty who want to take the next step and present what they are doing at Scholarship of Teaching and Learning conferences or in articles. This is the logical next step of creating this community and is being led by another clinical faculty member.

look, that becomes a barrier to access. One common theme included student integrity and how faculty handle assessments and tests in an era of easy access to artificial intelligence (AI). A related theme was integrating AI in a way that prepares students for job readiness while also maintaining academic integrity. There were also concerns related to test integrity for large sections and staying on top of new content while also teaching multiple (and often large) sections each semester. Add in ongoing pedagogical concerns like how to engage students in the classroom and get students to want to attend class, and the conversations included valuable topics that covered an array of evergreen concerns for faculty.

In addition, we also wanted to create a culture of *Explorers* at the Daniels School, those who were participating in professional development opportunities and becoming vocational experts in the art of teaching. To accomplish this, we invited various members of the Center for Instructional Excellence to these lunches to provide easy access and awareness of different programs and fellowships that exist on campus. This led to additional participation in programs like IMPACT, a semester-long development program for faculty to redesign or build courses with an emphasis on backwards design, and other programs the university supports for faculty development. That is a good thing for faculty excellence in teaching and for student experience in the classroom. These monthly meetings have created a community of practice that impacts current teaching faculty. While not everyone has the time or inclination to participate in these programs, each semester we have faculty participating in IMPACT, which improves courses and teaching at Daniels. We also have seen more applications and participation in other university-internal fellowship opportunities.

A recurring theme among faculty has been the opportunity to connect with colleagues, which facilitates opportunities for *Enthusiasts* to provide career guidance and interdisciplinary

collaboration to occur. Faculty have found value in coming together with others in similar positions, which allows for the sharing of ideas and challenges. This also leads to opportunities to brainstorm and "leverage ideas for experiential learning" (L. Rosokha, personal communication). In addition, it allows each of us to see that there is a wide range of ways to approach the same challenges or situations with students, leadership, and administration. This monthly gathering has helped to remove the sense of isolation that can exist when faculty encounter closed doors and feel unsure whether or who to reach out to when they have questions. Regardless of rank, there is a need for space to connect and learn (C. Harper, personal communication). As one member put it,

> "I've appreciated the opportunity to hear about others' teaching practices. Some of the most fruitful conversations have focused on how to use AI ethically and efficiently in the classroom, as well as how to approach student evaluation in more meaningful and effective ways." (L. Rosokha, personal communication)

These monthly connections have also provided a way for faculty to then connect at a deeper level after the meetings. Some have leveraged it to create mentoring moments or relationships.

> "I participate in the monthly luncheons and have built mentoring relationships through the people I've met at these lunches. While the topics are intriguing and helpful, I more so go to meet other teaching faculty, as we do not really have alternative opportunities to connect like this. These connections are invaluable in improving my teaching practices. For instance, I met someone at a luncheon who shared with me how they track participation more objectively and transparently, and I have since incorporated this into my courses." (N. Schneider, personal communication)

This reflects a deep need that many faculty have, to forge deeper relationships with other faculty. Many are willing to brainstorm and share ideas, but a place for this to happen organically must be created to foster the experience. The perceived (and at times real) power differential can make it difficult for teaching faculty to approach others when they have a question or concern. Faculty are willing to mentor, but they often don't know who needs help. Time constraints are also real, so having a more informal network that doesn't require formal structures can facilitate opportunities for the transfer of teaching ideas and strategies from *Exemplars* to others in a natural way. This community of practice has lowered perceived or real barriers and made it easier for faculty to connect, build relationships, and have additional informal conversations when those are helpful.

There is a recognition from the faculty that even the casual exchange of good ideas at these lunches is beneficial to those who attend (B. Van Kammen, personal communication). As one faculty member put it:

> Getting ideas to innovate in my classes is a tangible benefit from attending these meetings, but it almost seems secondary to the cathartic effect that comes from talking to other teachers. I could go on and on with examples. (B. Van Kammen, personal communication)

The other thing that we are beginning to see is a growing interest from faculty in attending scholarship of teaching and learning conferences. As they realize they are doing good work in their classes, and as they hear from some of us who are presenting at regional, national, and international conferences, it is generating interest in doing the same thing themselves. This vision-casting of what is possible to do as teaching faculty is an additional benefit as we create a culture of Explorers at the Daniels School of Business. This will only enhance what is happening

in the classroom at our school because the faculty will need to be thoughtful about studying what they are doing in order to present at the conferences or write for journals.

Moving forward: Strategies for Building to Continued Teaching Excellence

The lunches are only one aspect of a robust community of practice. They are a low-stakes way to get faculty together and start the conversation and culture about what the scholarship of teaching and learning is and how to work toward becoming a teacher who is excellent, an exemplar, an explorer, and an experimenter. There is so much more that can be done to build on this foundation. A few additional things that we have done or are doing at Daniels in some capacity include the following:

- Mid-semester course evaluations with review. Faculty can sign up for a mid-semester student evaluation. This provides anonymous student feedback on the course while there is still time to make some adjustments based on the information. In various semesters, that has been paired with the opportunity to have more experienced faculty review your evaluations with you and potentially attend your class. Many newer faculty have welcomed the opportunity to have this in-the-moment mentoring that can be tailored to specific concerns that may be raised in those evaluations. There is a collaborative nature to this approach and offering this more systematically when there isn't a problem could make it more well-received when corrective action needs to be taken because something isn't working in the classroom. This process most closely ties to the concepts of developing *Exemplars* and *Enthusiasts* who are more engaged with students and more effective in the classroom.

- Mentoring in the classroom. This has largely been done on an ad hoc basis, but there has been expressed interest in developing a more formal program for this. A formal program could include a regular practice of visiting each other's classes to provide feedback – not for purposes of assessment, but to provide constructive, formative feedback (O. Senicheva, personal communication). The authors have found this to be particularly helpful to teaching faculty members who have a specific area they would like to develop ideas or request assistance. The flip side of this is that faculty can also sit in on other teachers' classrooms to watch how they teach their classes. This is often quite helpful for newer teachers, but there is currently no formal process for it (C. Harper, personal communication). As one faculty member put it:

  "The thing I keep thinking about is getting a network of teachers that watch one another teach and offer constructive advice to one another. Like you could talk to another person in your field, right after you leave the classroom, and exchange ideas for 'how to do this part of the lecture better?' or 'why do you think they're not getting this concept?'" (B. Van Kammen, personal communication)

Again, a mentoring process most closely ties to the concepts of developing *Exemplars* and *Enthusiasts* who are more engaged with students and more effective in the classroom. This would allow the mentor and mentee to engage in a targeted manner on specific concerns.

- More SOTL programming. There is interest in creating SOTL-specific programming to help teaching faculty learn how to publish their teaching-based work. The lunches have focused on tools and topics that help with immediate

teaching practices, so this more specific area would be the next logical step to fill that gap about how to move to sharing the good work and innovating we are doing with the rest of the academic world in our disciplines. There is also a growing interest in an interdisciplinary writing group, which could further help with turning what we are already doing into publishable articles. Both are logical next steps in helping faculty see the value in what they are doing in the classroom and has the corollary of potentially helping the school and university see the value in this area of work, as well. The top conferences and journals are anonymous and peer-reviewed, making them competitive and selective. Those who engage in this area will become Explorers as they contribute to the scholarly field of teaching and learning.

- Facilitating a better forum for sharing materials between participants (X. Wang, personal communication). Something as simple as a Teams channel could provide a way to share information in a more permanent platform with those faculty who participate in the community of practice and allow them to formulate subgroups within it. Want to go to the Original Lilly Conference? Great, let's work on a proposal together. Thinking about writing an article? Let's get you connected with the writing group. This is a tool that could further build connection and community by providing a more permanent repository for key information and sharing of ideas. While this may not directly tie to any of the specific areas in the *Framework*, it will help us to grow to be more effective in all of them.

Individually, none of these is a revolutionary idea. However, when pooled together, these ideas will continue to move the culture of the school in the direction of teaching excellence.

Conclusion: A Community of Practice is a Strong Way to Build Community Among Faculty and Move Toward Teaching Excellence in an Individual School

Creating a community of practice around the concept of teaching excellence and the scholarship of teaching and learning was not as difficult as we would have anticipated. There was a foundational group that was hungry for community and a forum to share ideas and experiences. As we have changed the topics from semester to semester, that group has grown. Faculty know who to approach when they have questions and who can be a resource for them in this space at our school inside the university's larger ecosystem. The *Framework* provided structure as we evaluated what to bring to the larger group. While we started with books to provide context and format, this most recent semester, we explored the role of artificial intelligence in the classroom through a partnership with libraries and others on campus. This is an example of relying on *Enthusiasts* as we build a place for *Experimenters* in our school. We acknowledge that we also have to work with department heads and deans to ensure that faculty are not penalized as they experiment because faculty are well aware that student evaluations often are lower in the semesters that innovations are attempted, but it is exciting to watch faculty collaborate and discuss ideas they have for exploration in their classes. The result is more engagement from faculty both in our community of practice and in the offerings across campus. Ultimately, this is better for students as they engage with *Exemplars* who are also *Enthusiasts* about their subjects.

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