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Incorporating Best Practices of Highly Effective Teaching into Common Core-Aligned College Courses

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Abstract

While aligning the Common Core Standards with Eastern Kentucky University's General Education and Teacher Preparation courses has been the main focus of Curriculum Alignment for Retention and Transition at Eastern (CARTE), another way we responded to Senate Bill 1 was to identify ways in which to teach this new alignment at the college level. Our solution was to partner with Kentucky's Council on Postsecondary Education to create a website on best teaching practices and to task each of our Professional Learning Communities with adapting the best teaching practices to its specific discipline (e.g., teacher prep). The result was the creation of Best Practices for Highly Effective Teaching Module Resources, a section of the website of the Kentucky Core Academic Standards for Postsecondary Education. By going beyond the Senate Bill 1 mandate, the website for best practices of highly effective teaching and learning is one more way that Kentucky has positioned itself as a leader in the common core alignment process.

Keywords: Senate Bill 1, best practices, Common Core Standards, aligned college courses, highly effective teaching.

Introduction

In 2009, the Kentucky General Assembly passed Senate Bill 1 (SB1) that necessitated Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) aligning the K-12 Kentucky Core Academic Standards with key University courses in General Education and Teacher Preparation. To that end, we developed the Curriculum Alignment for Retention and Transition at Eastern (CARTE) to coordinate this process. Another focus of CARTE was responding to SB1's charge to develop a pedagogical approach that would support the teaching of the aligned standards.

Challenge

The Characteristics of Highly Effective Teaching and Learning (CHETL) were developed for secondary teachers, and the process of assessment for learning is aimed at individual student improvement, something not typically part of higher education pedagogy. What was needed, then, was the creation of a CHETL for higher education, a method of distribution, and a way of applying it to each of our content areas—teacher preparation, mathematics, English, natural sciences, social sciences, and communications.

Solution

The role of the professional learning community and the embedded PLC process is discussed in our companion article; therefore, we will instead focus on our development and distribution of what we called Highly Effective Teaching and Learning (HETL).

When we first wrote our grant to the CPE for CARTE, we planned four products, two of which are relevant here:

- on-line modules will be created to assist other faculty and adjuncts with alignment to standards and
- faculty will utilize instructional strategies that facilitate student success and increase retention and graduation rates.

In order to aid our embedded professional learning communities, we created a BlackBoard site that became the repository for important documents. As we began work on CARTE at Eastern, through communication with the CPE and our counterparts across the state as well as

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attendance at CPE workshops, we became aware that what we were doing on our campus was being accomplished in different ways around the state, and we needed to think of the entire commonwealth, not just our campus. In particular, we began talking with our CPE liaison, Jillian Starman, and through her attendance at our meetings, we realized the importance of instructional methods.

At one of our meetings, we hatched a plan with Starman to create a state-sponsored website on the best pedagogical practices. Gradually, we began to see the website as a method of synthesizing the two planned products: on-line modules and the utilization of instructional strategies. Our first step was researching the best practices of instruction in higher education. As a Teaching & Learning Center (TLC), we had been involved in such research for years. In fact, we had not only done the research, but we had put it into practice in the classroom, demonstrated it at workshops, created an experimental program at Eastern called LEAF (Learning Environment for Academia's Future) that provided us with an incubator classroom to test the research, and published numerous articles and books on the subject (e.g., we have written seven books in the "It Works for Me" series for New Forums Press).

Starman used her extensive educational background to engage in supplemental research. Through numerous conferences and emails, we finally were able to create "Best Practices for Highly Effective Teaching Module Resources," a section of the website of the Kentucky Core Academic Standards for Postsecondary Education (http://kycorestandards.org/teaching.aspx).

We separated the content into four segments:

- The Connection Between Senate Bill 1 (2009) and Highly Effective Teaching Practices;
- Research Supporting Highly Effective Teaching Practices;
- Characteristics of Highly Effective Teaching; and
- Best Practices in Action.

Future Strategies

Currently (Summer 2012) at CARTE we have 100% of the General Education and Teacher Preparation syllabi aligned and our six professional learning communities (PLCs) in place; where we go from here is clear. Starting in the fall, all of the PLCs will be tasked with adapting the best practices of highly effective teaching to their disciplines. While some teaching strategies are domain-general, others are domain-specific and best left to actual practitioners to determine.

In addition, we have a plan for continuing to build the website. The CPE also sponsors a statewide organization, the Faculty Development Workgroup (FDW). At our annual meeting this summer, the FDW discussed the best ways of maintaining and updating the website. Having the PLCs at Eastern as well as groups at other institutions also submitting materials to the website will assure the perpetuation of ownership.

By going beyond the Senate Bill 1 mandate, the website for best practices of highly effective teaching and learning is one more way that Kentucky has positioned itself as a leader in the common core alignment process.

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