

Introduction

In January 2020, a focus group was conducted with faculty who taught College 001 during fall 2019 to obtain their thoughts and opinions about the experiences of the course. The focus group lasted approximately 2 hours and consisted of 6 faculty members from varied backgrounds.

Results

Faculty Institute

1. Think back to your experiences with the faculty institute now that you have completed teaching College 001. How well did the institute prepare you to teach College 001?

- Helpful especially with new curriculum—might be lost otherwise.
- Helpful since faculty could tell students that they themselves did the activities.
- In comparing to previous years' institutes—this had a greater focus on curriculum which was useful. Getting walkthrough of case studies was appreciated.
- Helpful in preparing for each class during semester since they could recall how certain activities were simulated during the institute.

2. What was one thing you learned during the institute that made the biggest impact on how you taught College 001?

- College 001 has a very structured curriculum, but faculty reported that being informed of academic freedom made them feel more comfortable making relevant changes for themselves and/or students.
- Never taught using problem-based learning so training in that and the case studies were helpful.

3. How useful were the topics covered during the institute?

- Incredibly, each piece was meaningful.
- Would have preferred covering more things that they would be doing in class (i.e., Canvas, going through curriculum, role-playing classroom/student situations) instead of breakout sessions since faculty may be familiar with some topics due to counseling background.

4. Were there any topics that you felt were not useful?

- A non-counseling faculty member suggested that separate sessions for counselor and non-counselors. In response, a counseling faculty said that covering those topics were a good refresher for counselors, but it also gave them a role as a mini-facilitator since they could clarify things for others who may be less familiar. However, some of the articles were old since they've been to prior institutes; suggested fresh set of resources for continuing faculty.

5. What changes would you recommend to make the institute more effective or useful?

- Faculty reported having issues with Canvas. Felt like Canvas was a "high pressure learning curve" at the beginning of the semester and had to learn Canvas with the students. Canvas was much more advanced than previously—more technical issues with publishing/links which affected

students. Faculty discussed a half-day or full-day during institute for Canvas; not everyone could attend the follow-up session during semester.

- Was not in the “system”, so did not know how to help students who were trying to register/enroll in the course during first few days.
- Lots of content for College 001—knowing what the signature assignments and deliverables are (i.e., what will be used to assess the student learning outcomes) will help with preparation.
- Time to review and discuss the lesson plans as a group could help faculty communicate the lessons in a way that is meaningful to students.
- Teaching how to do think-alouds and deliver the content itself. Seeing a lesson delivered and how activities could be embedded with it.

6. Other than the faculty institute, what has influenced your College 001 teaching practice?

- Faculty agreed that students have an influence on the direction of the class and they would adapt based on the dynamic of respective section(s). This informed how to use class time, address missing assignments, or how materials were covered (e.g., connect materials to students’ interests/discussions/current events).
- Shadowing College 001 previously, 5 years later, still has an influence. Being able to observe a classroom, participate in smaller student group discussions, and seeing how a respected faculty member prepared for the class, adjusted during class, and applied academic freedom.
- Talking with other College 001 faculty who currently teaching the course (e.g., bouncing ideas, getting insight on how certain aspects are going, how others are doing certain things, etc.).

Faculty Support

7. How supported did you feel while teaching College 001?

- Faculty agreed that they felt extremely supported. More so than any other instructional positions. Any time faculty had a question, even at odd hours, email responses were prompt.
- Very supported. Could lean on other faculty who had teaching experience, especially as a first-time faculty, on various matters (PCC Connect, payroll, technical).
- Would feel more supported if they knew the signature assignments earlier—at the first day of the semester at the latest.
- Amount of support an individual faculty may want is there—whether a lot or a little.

8. Is there anything that would have helped make your teaching experience better?

- Don’t think so, love teaching the course.
- New curriculum and brand new class, so having the institute, materials, Canvas shell, and book earlier. There is never enough time to prepare for this class; this is not anyone’s full-time role.
- More opportunities to engage with one another.
- Being intention of giving students more background of what the class is and why they are taking it (maybe during Jam?). All students are told is that it is a Pathways requirement and it is tied to priority registration, but not why.

College 001 Curriculum

9. How would you define problem-based learning?

- *(Note: there was approximately a ~20 second pause before a response, noticeably the longest delay in response out of all questions during focus group session).*
- Give students a problem and give them building blocks. As students work through finding the solutions for the problem, they are learning along the way on their own. Faculty is the facilitator and going along as students are moving forward with the solution.
- Students have rich knowledge in topics that the instructor may not (e.g., gentrification in Los Angeles), so instructor is learning from students.

10. How central was problem-based learning in how you taught College 001?

- Extremely valuable especially with case studies and gave students an opportunity to take on role as self-advocate and/or as a counselor/coach.
- Students figured out, without being told formally that it was “problem-based learning” why they were learning what they were learning in class and how it was applicable to their lives. One faculty member reported that their students were using the resources that the faculty member covered in class and that students were sharing other resources with one another.
- Everything faculty do involves it: jumping from group-to-group, asking questions and working through assignments with students. By just following the lesson plan (e.g., case studies), course was already in that format.
- It was integrated into course by just how the curriculum is designed, but one faculty noted that did not feel like they executed it as well as they would have liked to; “I was mediocre at best.”
- Hard to split time across multiple groups since class was quiet and each individual group needed a lot of attention (a faculty member said that they may get success coaches or people who want teaching experience to support in the future). Conversely, some sections had very sociable students, and it could be difficult for groups to stay on task.
- Too much group work and students, at times, wanted to learn in a more traditional format.

11. Consider the student learning outcomes or SLOs of College 001. How do you think the case studies helped or hindered your students achieve the student learning outcomes?

- *(Upon request, the moderator read the College 001 student learning outcomes.)*
- Regarding SLO #2 (critical reading strategies), the case studies did both. The repetition of using the same reading strategies in multiple, different contexts (i.e., case studies) could be helpful, but also was a hinderance, especially for students who felt reading strategies were “silly and rote.” Overall, repetition was more beneficial than not.
- By design, the class was written to ensure that SLOs are achieved. One faculty member noted that they could have weaved certain topics (e.g., study strategies) into case studies better in their respective section and that they realized later in the semester that going over the final assignments at the beginning helped clarify the purpose of the assignments for students.
- Some faculty had to remove some assignments that may have been connected to SLOs because all the group work wasn’t effective for the students in their respective sections. One faculty spent less time on the third case study and had students work on other things (i.e., interview skills, resume/CV building) that students wanted to do instead.

- Faculty agreed that it was hard to assess who achieved the learning outcomes due to the nature of group work. Faculty reported that the evaluation sheets did not always reflect what they saw when observing students working together (or not) or based on what students would say to them in private 1-on-1 conversations. In one section, evaluation sheets were adapted to “Who is the MVP of your group?” to provide better insight on the group dynamics for the faculty and because students started calling the evaluations “snitch sheets.”

12. How did your knowledge of equity-mindedness impact your teaching practice?

- Faculty understood that this is a seminar college and students are learning habits of successful students—students need time and space to make mistakes. Flexible with students by accepting late work and allowing students to revise assignments for a better grade, but communicating to students that not all faculty will be as flexible.
- A lot; never know what student comes into class with. Gave students the benefit of the doubt.
- Set tone early that the class is a community, where there is shared knowledge, that students should keep other students accountable, and that students be effectively communicating/sharing/listening with one another when students share personal stories.
- Because of the training covered during the institute, one faculty seemed to feel more comfortable having discussions about equity/inequities with students as it related to course materials, student outcomes, etc.
- Many faculty took steps to minimize issues of technology access. Faculty shared multiple stories of going the extra mile, and taking creative measures with policies to ensure that students had accessed course materials and utilized technology. However, one faculty member ended up printing articles out for students and collecting them back to be reused. Suggestion for better access to laptops or iPad carts for all classes.
- Tried to be their authentic self—one faculty shared their own personal stories. These stories allowed students to relate with faculty and ask questions, but also served to highlight that everyone’s story is different and where people may end up can be surprising.
- Suggestion that case studies could provide more depth to help facilitate discussions about educational equity in a more clear and structured manner.

13. How useful was Yosso’s community cultural wealth framework as a framework to help students identify their strengths during their first semester of college?

- Love Yosso; brought Yosso in other classes they teach as well.
- Faculty reported that the Yosso text opened various discussions with students (depending on the section) about privilege, being a self-advocate, the value of students’ own strengths for their success in college, and classroom norms for respectful discussion.
- Some students took it too literally (e.g., linguistic capital only meant knowing multiple languages), but the repetition of going through it at the beginning of each case study helped students understand the concepts by the end of the semester.
- Faculty wanted more support on why they were using Yosso, especially since it is not a text from their domain of expertise. Faculty reported that it might have been helpful for the institute to talk about why this text is important and relevant to the course/the field since it is not always clear for all instructors, especially during the institute.

- One faculty learned about Yosso in graduate school and loves using it even in their counseling sessions with students: “This is a way of looking at yourself... a reframe for your whole life and your experiences... [in systems that use a deficient-minded approach].” Helping students see themselves in a more asset-based lens is huge.

Open-Ended Responses

14. Describe your experiences with the library visit/information literacy?

- There were mixed experiences with the library visit for faculty. Issues with librarian preparation, student engagement, and/or classroom management during library session. One faculty member had two sessions, one described as “good” and the other described as “a complete joke.” Another faculty reported that, the librarian cried and left the room because of the students.
- Faculty also reported to make attempts to prepare the librarians and students by working on establishing questions in advance; results were still mixed.

15. Describe your experiences with the reading journals?

- Students did not like the book, so it was a struggle; “Students hated the journals.”
- Faculty reported removing or substituting reading journals in their section. In one section, 3 reading journals were removed. In others, reading journals were adapted to be based on other readings students were doing or a movie that was shown by the faculty member.
- Without knowing signature assignments early, faculty did not know what they could take out, since some reading journals were tied to student learning outcomes.

16. Would anyone like to add anything about the book?¹

- Faculty reported that students “hated” the book or thought it was “b.s.” Two faculty members indicated that they had students who lived in the neighborhoods referenced in the book and their students did not always feel like the book matched their lived experiences.
- Book felt like a detour from the rest of class.
- The class could be impactful without the book; would prefer articles interesting to students that could still meet learning outcomes of the course.
- Book opened broad discussions on topics such as gentrification.
- The content of the short stories is abstract/hard for students. One faculty reported it was hard to explain why the book was important, especially with a counseling background and never having taught it before.
- There have been good books in the past that were interesting students; this book didn’t get the same reaction as in the past.

17. Describe your experiences with the conference?

- One faculty member indicated it was largely good and that they were more prepared this year Got to pieces sooner; liked having it later.
- Many faculty agreed it was hard to teach after the conference since the assignment is “such a culmination of the course” and it was hard to grade them in general since students “go so far with that experience.”

¹ This question was asked out of order and was reworded from the protocol due to the flow of the session.

- Students were “grouped out” because there were so many group work assignments. Students were not working on the assignment with groups until near the deadline. One faculty felt embarrassed of their section’s performances this year.

18. Describe your experiences with the success coaches?

- Faculty interaction with success coaches were minimal across the board. In most instances, coach would show up once or not at all to class. Communication from both parties seemed like it could have been improved.
- Faculty discussed how to incorporate coaches more systematically; one idea was to integrate coaches into the curriculum (e.g., having a specific/scheduled class day for coaches could come in/present on a topic during the semester, video/virtual introduction for students).

Final Questions

19. How has teaching College 001 affected your approach to and/or understanding of working with community college students?

- College 001 faculty are either new faculty members so they can use what they learn for classes they teach afterwards or experienced faculty that are being introduced new things. Faculty agreed that it was hard not to incorporate the things that worked well and have it trickle in other classes taught. For example, posters, gallery work, modular approach and scaffolding techniques, and case studies were cited. One faculty member indicated that they use what they’ve learned in every other class they teach: whether it was content from College 001, activities that were done, group presentations, reading strategies, white butcher paper to facilitate group work, and/or equity-mindedness.
- Referenced different reading strategies for students having difficulty with reading in courses in counseling sessions with students.
- Institute is professional development and has changed them as a person and an instructor.

20. Is there anything else you’d like to discuss that you believe would help improve the College 001 experience for students and/or instructors?

- The use of interview skills and resume/CV-building for students in the class. Instead of doing the final case study presentation, one faculty member did mock group interviews and resume building. Doing this felt more like a final exam since it was a novel assignment (compared to a third case study); would do this or something similar again.
- Different book.
- Early access to Canvas and information on signature assignments related to SLOs.
- Group work overload for students and faculty.
- Less group work or have less time-intensive case studies (1-2 week(s) instead of 4), and incorporate more individual/small assignments. Appreciate how in the past, the modules (mindset, metacognition) were separate; part of students’ learning experience was connecting modules together and gave faculty more flexibility.
- Spread the assignments that are big parts of students’ grades throughout the semester.
- In the past there was more flexibility on what assignments faculty could take away.
- Although one faculty reported liking Freire and tried to break it down, students hated it. Conversely, another faculty liked it and used experiences in LAUSD as an example.