**TEACHING GROUPS**

**PURPOSE**
Teaching groups provide instructors in multi-section courses the benefit of meeting with peers to discuss instructional ideas and give curriculum support. These groups meet on a regular basis to share lesson plans, discuss teaching challenges/successes, and revise curricula throughout the semester.

**DESCRIPTION**
Teaching groups provide an often-untapped source of professional development. In reviewing research on ways to improve college teaching, Keig and Waggoner (1994) conclude that the most effective approach to improving instruction is learning from one’s colleagues. They state, “In short, college teaching will improve when faculty members support each other with expertise that is uniquely theirs, apart from what students, teaching consultants, and academic administrators can contribute to instructional improvement.”

In the teaching group meeting, course objectives are clarified and aligned, assessments are reviewed, curricula are refined, and instructional ideas are demonstrated. This kind of coordinated effort is one of the very few means that an academic program has for alignment and quality control.

**Benefits**
Doctors, lawyers, and other professionals consult with one another regularly and engage in ongoing professional development. Teaching groups allow the professional educator similar opportunities with the following benefits:

- **Time savings.** When teaching groups are run effectively, participants can actually save instructional preparation time as participants share teaching plans, distribute responsibilities, and draw on individual expertise.

- **A learning community with a shared focus.** With shared learning outcomes, instructors can compare and contrast the different means by which colleagues achieve those outcomes. Learning communities are a rich resource for instructional ideas.

**Teaching Group Structure**
Teaching groups generally include four to six instructors who meet on a periodic basis for an hour. In this meeting, the goal is to debrief on the past week(s) and prepare for upcoming lessons. Participation in teaching groups is optional. As instructors see the benefits of the collaboration, however, the teaching team often becomes the one meeting they don’t want to miss. The focus of the meeting is on saving time—not making extra work. The group briefly debriefs on the past week and prepares for upcoming lessons. These efforts capitalize on the scant preparation time available.

- Classroom observation around a common curriculum. Teaching group colleagues regularly observe each other’s instructional approaches and techniques through classroom visits.
- General faculty development. The teaching group provides unique opportunities to discuss teaching and learning generally. The meetings are typically intellectually stimulating and insightful. Where appropriate, a colleague can even offer in-service presentations to help others brush up on areas that aren’t their specialty.
- Mentoring of new faculty. In addition to the expertise and advice available to all instructors, teaching groups provide valuable instructional resources for instructors teaching the course for the first time. Those with experience teaching a course are able to pass their insights to newer instructors. As instructors rotate in and out of Foundations courses, for example, teaching groups provide for continuity.

- Real-time course development and curriculum revision. In discussing shared concerns, team members can respond to course problems and revise the curriculum as a team much faster than they would individually.


©Copyright 2016 BYU–Idaho
Role of Teaching Group Leader

1. Coordinate multiple sections of a course. In addition to the delivery of multiple sections, the team leader will manage the learning outcomes and assessments associated with the course.

2. Facilitate teaching group meetings. Team leaders develop a safe environment and a culture of openness among the team so that they are comfortable allowing classroom observation.

3. Develop faculty. Team leaders develop mentoring opportunities for instructors and observe young faculty when possible.

4. Improve course curriculum and teaching strategies. Because of their deep involvement in the course, the team leader has leadership over the course curriculum. Teaching plans and learning activities can be continuously improved under their supervision.

sample Agenda

1. Debrief previous week(s) (15 minutes)
   - What worked well?
   - What would you change?
   - Curriculum suggestions?

2. Upcoming lesson plan discussion (15 minutes)
   - One person distributes a lesson plan for the following week to discuss or demonstrate.
   - Discussion around intricate/substantive issues.

3. Lesson plan discussion (15 minutes)
   - One person shares a lesson plan for a class two weeks away.
   - Discussion around intricate/substantive issues.

4. Open questions (5-10 minutes)

TIPS

- Use common learning outcomes. Without shared learning objectives, the ability to discuss instructional strategies can be limited.

- Keep meetings short. Limit yourself to an hour or less to keep the meetings productive.

- Share responsibility. Take turns presenting lesson plans and distributing curriculum development assignments.

- Use a common lesson plan template. It is easier to discuss content with a common framework.

PITFALLS

- Philosophizing. Stay focused primarily on practical lesson preparation. Be cautious not to get distracted by tangents that take time.

KEY ARTICLES


OTHER RESOURCES

- Lesson Plan Tool
- Lesson Plan Template

Examples

I-Learn
Many groups have used I-learn to post teaching plans and additional readings, slide decks, etc. Discussion boards can also be used for additional discussion outside of regular meetings. The following screenshot is an example of the I-learn course used for the Family Foundations Course.

http://www.byui.edu/learning-and-teaching/instructional-tools