

# New Faculty Orientation To Teaching

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## Abstract

*New college faculty are expected to teach effectively with little or no formal training. A new professor who is initially interested in teaching can become discouraged if support to develop teaching skills is not provided. Orientation to college teaching can provide information on effective teaching and provide instructional support. This paper describes how one new faculty orientation program was designed, developed, and carried out. In part, the success of the program was based on participant involvement throughout the stages of the program. Their involvement helped insure that the program met their needs and expectations.*

The focus of graduate school training for the potential college teacher is on developing subject matter competencies. New faculty are expected to learn how to teach later, while "on the job." Considering the pressures on new staff to obtain grants, to develop research programs, and to advise undergraduate and graduate students, it is not surprising that many let learning about teaching become a low priority. Even a new professor who starts out being interested in teaching can become discouraged.

One way new faculty can receive the support and encouragement to develop teaching competence is through an orientation to college teaching. An orientation program is an opportunity for new faculty to learn about some of the elements of effective teaching, to become aware of the instructional resources available on a campus, and to discuss common concerns and experiences. Such programs, however, require participants to relinquish time just prior to classes, which is often difficult. If new faculty feel pressured to attend the sessions they may not learn much, thus reducing the effectiveness of the program. This paper describes the way one new faculty orientation program was designed, developed, and carried out, and shows how new faculty were involved throughout the stages of the program. Involvement facilitated the learning and motivation of new staff members and diminished the feeling of pressure and discomfort caused by the timing of the sessions.

New faculty in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Michigan State University participated in a four-day orientation program before classes began in the fall of 1979. The Assistant Dean of Student and Academic Affairs requested and supported the program. An instructional developer was charged with creating and carrying out a plan for the orientation. The program had two goals: first, to increase the participants' awareness of the elements of effective teaching; and second, to provide

information on the instructional resources available on campus to assist participants in becoming more effective teachers. To attain these goals, we believed that new faculty needed to attend, participate, and implement what they learned.

Involvement of staff members in the New Faculty Program began at the planning stage. The instructional developer conducted individual interviews with 14 department chairpersons. In the interviews the developer wished to identify new members, to clarify what chairpersons would like new faculty to know, and to indicate what chairpersons perceived new faculty would want to know. The interview also provided the opportunity to discuss the purpose of the seminar with the chairperson. The department heads were strongly supportive of the program and encouraged their faculty to attend.

After interviewing chairpersons the developer interviewed, in person and by phone, 23 new faculty members. She explained the purpose of the seminar and collected background information on the faculty members' teaching, research, and extension responsibilities; their research interests; and their teaching experiences. She also asked what they would like to learn about teaching and about instructional resources on campus.

A frequency count of the needs-assessment data from the chairpersons and new faculty was then compiled and ordered. The topics most frequently mentioned were course design; lecture design and delivery; course, instructor and student evaluation; delivery methods; media techniques and student motivation. Requests about services included media, library, computer, test scoring, and instruction. Based on this information we made a tentative agenda.

Involvement of the new faculty continued through the development stage. The instructional developer called the remaining 25 new faculty members to determine if the agenda would meet their needs and if they had additional ideas. She asked new faculty from different departments in the college to help with each part of the program. She based her selection on what the new faculty members seemed most interested in during the needs-assessment interviews. After resource people were selected to address the topics selected by new faculty she arranged a meeting with the resource person and the new faculty member. During the meeting this team determined the important concepts to be included and discussed how the concepts might best be presented. She also asked the new faculty member to introduce the topic in an unusual way. They discussed possibilities and the new faculty selected one. She also asked the new faculty member to help evaluate the session.

The four-day program focused on developing teaching skills in the classroom. The first day began with a welcome by the Assistant Dean of Academic and Student

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Affairs. The presentation emphasized the importance of developing effective teaching skills to help students learn. Next, three new faculty members who were recognized as effective teachers discussed effective teaching. After a brief statement about how they make teaching decisions, they gave examples of what they did in the classroom. Participants responded by asking a series of questions. The session illustrated that the faculty had a wealth of information and valuable experiences.

A few weeks prior to the workshop we gave the participants the option of taking the Myers-Briggs personality inventory. During the afternoon of the first day we heard an interpretation of the results. The presentors and participants talked about personality preferences and how they might influence how people teach and learn.

On the second day an evaluation specialist talked about how faculty could evaluate a course and rate themselves as instructors. Later they learned about advising students toward their academic and career goals. The overview of advising helped remove some of the mystery of forms and procedures.

Lunch with Dean Anderson, Dean of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, provided an opportunity for the new faculty to ask pertinent questions. A list of questions for the Dean was collected on the first day by a new faculty member and presented to the Dean in the afternoon. This arrangement allowed the Dean to formulate comprehensive answers to the questions and deal more directly with faculty concerns. During the afternoon session two instructional development specialists discussed the variables to consider when designing a course.

On the third day we focused on media selection and techniques. Two media specialists discussed and illustrated different ways information can be presented to help students learn. We also provided a packet of university resource materials to help faculty determine where and how to get things done. During that afternoon and the following morning we provided an opportunity for faculty to present a short lesson and to receive feedback.

On Friday afternoon a communication and management specialist talked to the faculty about how to manage their goals and time — a fitting end to a busy week.

Involvement of staff members during the seminar helped insure the smooth flow of activities. The new faculty member assisted the presenter when necessary. He or she provided a unique attention-getting introduction, which linked the presentation to the real-world concerns of the audience. For instance the evaluation session was introduced with examples of student evaluations of instructors, adding a touch of humor and raising questions about how to interpret and respond to such feedback; the student advising session began with a role-play of a typical initial student-advisor encounter; the media session was initiated with well chosen examples of poor, but typical instructor-made transparencies; and the time management session was introduced with a story of a

time management dilemma. Such introductions made the program more credible and provided an opportunity for new faculty to be recognized among their colleagues.

All participants continued to be involved during the evaluation of the seminar when they filled out an evaluation form. The instructional developer contacted faculty members who assisted with each part of the seminar to assess the session's effectiveness and to identify what should be continued or changed next year. The most valuable part of these contacts was the suggestion of new ideas to incorporate in future sessions.

Follow-up of the program is under way. Participants are developing and requesting meetings to exchange ideas and to talk with resource people. A number of faculty want to meet periodically just to talk about teaching. They feel that although they discuss their research with colleagues, they seldom discuss teaching. Specific follow-up sessions have been arranged to discuss the use of the Myers-Briggs personality inventory with their students, and to provide an opportunity for spouses to respond to the inventory. One group of faculty has organized a session on thesis advising, a second group has initiated a meeting to discuss and learn more about managing their goals and time, and a third group is planning sessions to discuss innovative ways to teach basic taxonomic information and conduct laboratory classes. Although sessions are initiated by a subgroup (i.e., a department), all new faculty are invited and many do attend. The instructional developer is making individual contacts with new faculty to help them develop programs, to assist them in refining their instructional skills, and to help them evaluate their teaching.

## Results

A summary of the data indicated that new faculty rated the program "very good." The majority of participants stated that they acquired a considerable amount of information, thought the program was very worthwhile (when comparing the amount of time spent to the amount learned), and found it very enjoyable.

The participants considered most beneficial the Myers-Briggs interpretation, Media Selection and Use, Time Management and Evaluation of the Students, Course and Instructor, and having the panel of new faculty talk about getting started in teaching. Recommendations for next year included consolidating the program to two days and setting the date of the sessions a few weeks earlier.

## Summary

While most faculty receive no formal training in instruction, support can be initiated through an orientation seminar. Such a seminar can help faculty to be more aware of some of the elements of effective instruction, to begin to develop teaching skills, and to help new faculty locate instructional resources. We believe that the effectiveness of a faculty orientation is increased if the participants are actively involved while the program is being planned, developed, implemented, evaluated, and continued through the year.