60-Second SoTL
Episode 62 – Professional Learning Needs of University Teachers

(Music)

0:10

Jessie L. Moore:
What do university teachers say they need from professional development related to teaching and learning? That's the focus of this week's 60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning. I'm Jessie Moore.

(Music)

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In "Self-Identified Learning Needs of University Teachers: Recommendations for Generic and Role-Based Professional Development," Karin Brown, Sara Petchey, Katarina Mårtensson, and Kai Niebert share recommendations for faculty developers, drawing on 7 years of open-text statements made by 863 participants in professional development programs for teaching staff at a European research-intensive institution specializing in engineering and natural sciences. Their research appears as an open-access article in the Journal for Academic Development.

1:00

The researchers sought to understand what learning needs professional development program participants identify for themselves and how their needs vary based on their roles. They focused on three programs: one for professors who may be tenure- or non-tenure track, representing 95 of the study's participants; one for senior scientific staff who tend to be permanent employees and might focus explicitly on teaching, representing 184 of the study's participants; and one for doctoral teaching assistants on fixed-term contracts, representing 584 of the study's participants.

The research team examined open-text statements made by all 863 participants from across these three programs. The statements focused on participants' personal learning needs, a goal, or a question about teaching and learning. The team qualitatively analyzed the statements to inductively identify reoccurring needs and then completed a quantitative analysis to determine which needs were most prevalent.

1:57

Five themes emerged across all three academic roles, with participants seeking professional learning related to student engagement, course development, specific teaching methods, assessment, and student diversity. Examining these themes by role, professors were much

more likely to express interest in professional learning about course development, senior scientists were moderately more likely to seek academic development related to student engagement, and doctoral teaching assistants were very slightly more likely than the other groups to want professional learning related to specific teaching methods, including the use of questions and project-based and problem-based learning.

The authors offer additional details about the specific needs identified by each group in the open-access article.

2:42

Based on their analysis, the researchers offer eight recommendations for professional developers, balancing development of core pedagogy offerings relevant to all university teachers with tailored offerings for specific roles:
1. Develop professional learning offerings focused on student engagement, course development, specific teaching methods, assessment, and student diversity.
2. Communicate student engagement as a central goal of most faculty development initiatives for teaching.
3. Offer role-specific professional development related to specific teaching tasks.
4. Support professors in including doctoral teaching assistants in course development activities.
5. Capitalize on doctoral teaching assistants' strong interest in formative assessment.
6. Ensure professional development on assessment isn't limited to summative assessment and instead also includes formative assessment, peer assessment, and self-assessment.
7. Ask participants what their learning goals are to guide program offerings. And
8. Provide professional development on generating and facilitating effective discussions.

The overarching takeaway? Faculty development shouldn't be "one size fits all." Listening to university teachers' self-identified needs helps institutions create programs that are both relevant and motivating.

To learn more about this study, visit our show notes for a link to the open access article.

4:02

(Music)

4:13

Jessie Moore:
Join us next week for another snapshot of recent scholarship of teaching and learning on **60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning**. Learn more about the Center at www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org.

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