

Enhancing Active Learning Through the Use of Technology **Rowan-Cabarrus Community College (RCCC)**

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The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) developed by the entire RCCC community has as its goals the increase and support of active learning opportunities using technology in instruction and in the learning support centers. Equal time was initially spent on researching both active learning and technology to create the plan, and great emphasis was placed on turning RCCC from a teacher-centered to a learning-centered community college.

Initially, academic year 2005-2006 was dedicated to fine-tuning the details of the faculty professional development requirements, and finding the impressive amount of funding needed to replace obsolete existing technologies, while equipping all classrooms to give instructors access to technology that would enhance the active learning in their classes.

The professional development to implement the QEP was planned to start small and increase year by year, so that by the fall of 2010, only new faculty would lack this training. Participants were chosen with a mix of 20% curriculum faculty proportionately distributed across departments, and 10% of the learning support center staff. Cohort I was formed for academic years 2006 and 2007; Cohorts II and III would follow in 2008 and 2009 respectively. The development plan stipulated a five step cycle for all cohorts: (1) training, (2) individual implementation, (3) reflection on the efficacy in the individual's circumstance as documented by an Individual Development Plan (IDP), (4) revision, and (5) reimplementation. After the first year, it was planned that Cohort I would receive continued professional development, and would mentor the members of successive cohorts.

In retrospect, RCCC was probably over-focused at first on the sheer magnitude of the technologies available; and training for Cohort I was technology-intensive. Focus group research in early 2007 revealed that, despite level-of-competence-with-technology surveys of the faculty and staff involved, it appeared that there was no way to focus the training to benefit the majority of the participants; Cohort I was either expert or novice in the use of technology. Cohort I believed that the training needed more structure, and the IDP was both difficult to understand and too time-consuming to complete. Program and department heads did not seem aware of the impact of the training on the instructors. The cycle needed to be fine tuned.

At that point the QEP evolved because of the experiences with Cohort I. Rather than dealing with "active learning" as an entire discipline, the focus was narrowed considerably to emphasize collaborative (cooperative) learning. Cohort II will receive 32 hours of professional development with the *Foundations Course* of the Johnson & Johnson Cooperative Learning Program,* with half of it occurring before the start of the fall 2007 semester. Cohort I has been invited to receive this training as well; and some have accepted. Contact with other members of the cohorts, both in small and whole-group encounters will be strongly encouraged. It is anticipated that implementing these changes in the fall and evaluating the results in the spring will help maintain QEP momentum.

The professional development for Cohort III will be finalized in early 2008. Assessment of the efficacy of the Cohort II professional development will impact on offerings to Cohort III.

While the focus has slightly shifted, the institution's goals remain unchanged. Rowan-Cabarrus still intends to increase and support opportunities for active learning through technology. What has been learned is that continuous communication, intensive faculty professional development and the commitment and interest of the entire college community are imperative for success.

* <http://www.co-operation.org/>