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Transforming Teaching Culture through an Interdisciplinary Faculty Teaching Exchange Program

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Transforming Teaching Culture through an Interdisciplinary Faculty Teaching Exchange Program

The transient higher-education landscape is re-defining the culture of teaching and learning across campuses in the US university systems. With these changes comes the need to preserve the core and fundamental aspects of the educational systems, which promote exceptional instructional quality and teaching effectiveness. Various universities have developed faculty teaching development programs that help instructors teach better, such as peer review of teaching and variations of it [1, 2, 3]. The trend across these programs is towards colleagues helping each other improve their teaching abilities. The focus of these programs is to improve teaching by finding ways to help each other improve the quality of collective contribution to students' learning [4].

Faculty teaching development programs are not intended to replace student evaluations but to complement them. The authors of [5] state that although students are the most appropriate judges of day-to-day teacher behaviors and attitudes in the classroom, they are not the most appropriate judges of the accuracy of course content, use of acceptable teaching strategies in the discipline, and the like. Many teaching and learning issues do transcend disciplines; and peers can be leveraged to discuss particular identified areas, or to solicit feedback on new experimental teaching methods.

One research model, developed by the University of Montana's Pedagogy Project [6] suggests that having one's teaching "evaluated by peers – with no punitive strings attached – can open the door for supportive conversations, greater teaching effectiveness, and problem solving." The goal of this paper is to present a campus effort to foster a collaborative voluntary faculty teaching exchange. The focus of this program is to overcome the punitive stigma surrounding the traditional role of classroom observations as part of faculty evaluation processes, encourage open and ongoing exchanges to enhance teaching and ultimately increase student learning, shift the focus of peer observation from evaluation to learning, and finally to build professional community and improve the quality of teaching and student learning.

Campus setting

The Kansas State University system has four campuses, including Salina, where the College of Aviation and Technology is housed. The college has a student population of more than 800 students. Some key characteristics of enrolled students are that 75% are male, 70% are first generation students, and 80% are Kansas natives. The campus offers sixteen undergraduate programs related to Aviation, Engineering Technology, Family Studies & Human Services, and Technology Management majors. There are more than 80 faculty members of whom 80% have full-time appointments. The primary focus of the campus is to foster teaching excellence and effective student learning.

Each year the Teaching and Learning Center at Kansas State University Manhattan facilitates a well-developed Peer Review of Teaching Program¹. While several members of the K-State Salina faculty have participated in this year-long professional development initiative, the 140 mile round-trip distance makes participation difficult. Considering the cross-disciplinary nature of the campus, the need and desire expressed for faculty collaborations, an interdisciplinary team of faculty members on the K-State Salina campus- developed a voluntary Faculty Teaching Exchange program, inviting colleagues from across ranks and disciplines to observe one another's classrooms every semester. This initiative is supported by a grant from the K-State Teaching and Learning Center.

Faculty Teaching Exchange Program

Research has shown that regular classroom observations combined with meaningful faculty dialogue, data analysis, and high quality professional development can have a positive impact on instructional quality and college culture [7]. This pedagogical research study was designed to assess whether or not a collaborative teaching exchange program might impact the culture of teaching and learning on a remote interdisciplinary satellite campus.

Methodology

Both full and part-time faculty members were invited to participate as Classroom Hosts and/or Classroom Observers. An orientation session was scheduled to present the program, and explain the responsibilities and benefits to participants. An IRB consent form was collected to be able to use the data collected for research. Data collection methods included pre and post surveys, common rubrics, reflective analyses of classroom observations, follow-up discussion documentation, and focus group/social lunch sessions². This program started in Fall 2014 and has now completed a year. The timeline is illustrated in Figure 1. A calendar of open host classrooms and a list of participants as Hosts/Observers were provided to all participants. Department heads were also provided information about the initiative, intended to reinforce a culture of collaborative discourse over teaching and learning. This program was enthusiastically supported and encouraged by administrators of the campus. The preliminary results of Fall semester participation was presented to the campus before the Spring semester started, to motivate more faculty members to participate and also to provide information on the progress of the program.

¹ <http://www.k-state.edu/tlc/programs/prtp/>

² Invitation, Calendar, List of participants, Pre- and Post survey, Note-taking rubric are available in appendix

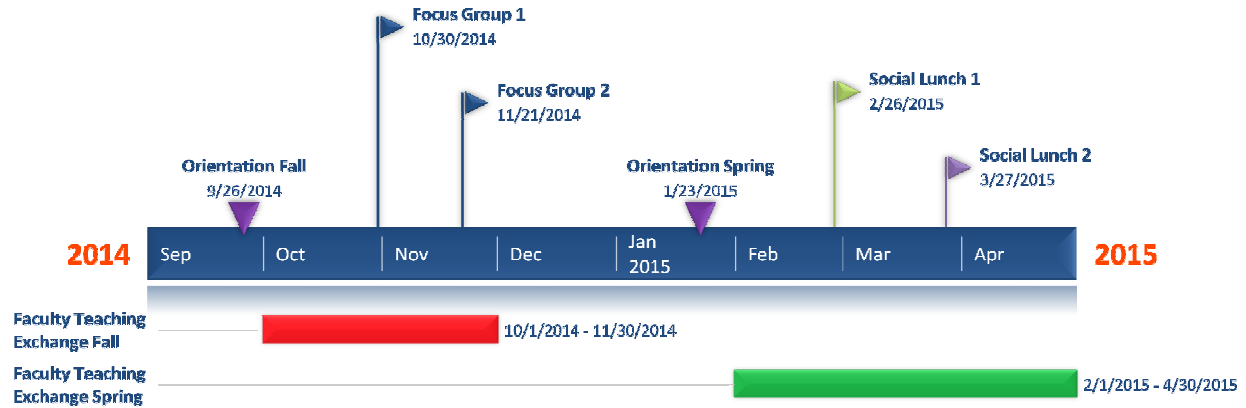


Figure1. Timeline of the voluntary Faculty Teaching Exchange Program

Responsibilities and Benefits to Participants

Responsibilities of a host are to collaborate individually with faculty observers, to schedule mutually agreeable times for classroom observations. Benefits to hosts include receiving written reflective analyses from each colleague who observes their classroom, as well as opportunities to dialogue about classroom practices/challenges. Hosts could decide whether or not to share observers’ reflective analyses in their annual evaluation packets, and/or tenure and promotion package as applicable.

Responsibilities of an observer are to select a minimum of three host classrooms to observe, schedule visits with each host, observe classroom sessions, take notes on a prescribed rubric, then submit a typed reflective analysis over each observation. Observers also needed to document at least one follow-up discussion with a host classroom instructor. Benefits to visiting faculty are opportunities for interdisciplinary classroom observations, reflection, and dialogue about best teaching practices. In addition, since observers needed to invest time in documenting their visits and follow-up discussions, they could qualify for a \$50 professional development credit from their department if three visits and one dialogue were documented.

Structured Documentation and Discussion details

Observers had the primary responsibility of documenting their visits and follow-up discussions. A structured feedback process was key to ensure the success of this program and for data analysis. Documentation composed of note taking organizer template (see Figure 2), reflective analysis questions to consider, and one to two page typed reflective analysis shared with the host. Feedback documentation format³ such as rubric and reflective analyses were designed to encompass objectives such as, 1) Asking reflective questions which are program specific; 2)

³ Documentation format can be found in the appendix

Providing constructive, positive, and developmental feedback and suggestions for encouragement and growth; and 3) Sharing helpful insights/ideas.

<p><u>Teaching Style</u></p> <p>What traits and characteristics did you observe that affected the classroom experience?</p>	<p><u>Student Engagement</u></p> <p>Were the students engaged? What strategies did the instructor use to engage students?</p>
<p><u>Teaching Methodology</u></p> <p>What methods of teaching did the instructor employ to help the students understand course content?</p>	<p><u>Reflective Analysis</u></p> <p>What questions, comments, or revelations occurred to you while observing this class?</p>

Figure 2. Note-taking organizer

Data Analysis

Participation

Participation in the voluntary faculty exchange program over Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 was 17%. The participating thirteen faculty members represented ten disciplines, namely, accounting, aviation, chemistry, communication, computers, economics, english, psychology, sociology, and social work. Eleven of them had more than ten years of teaching experience. The distribution of participation across ranks and their roles as participants can be seen in Figure 3.

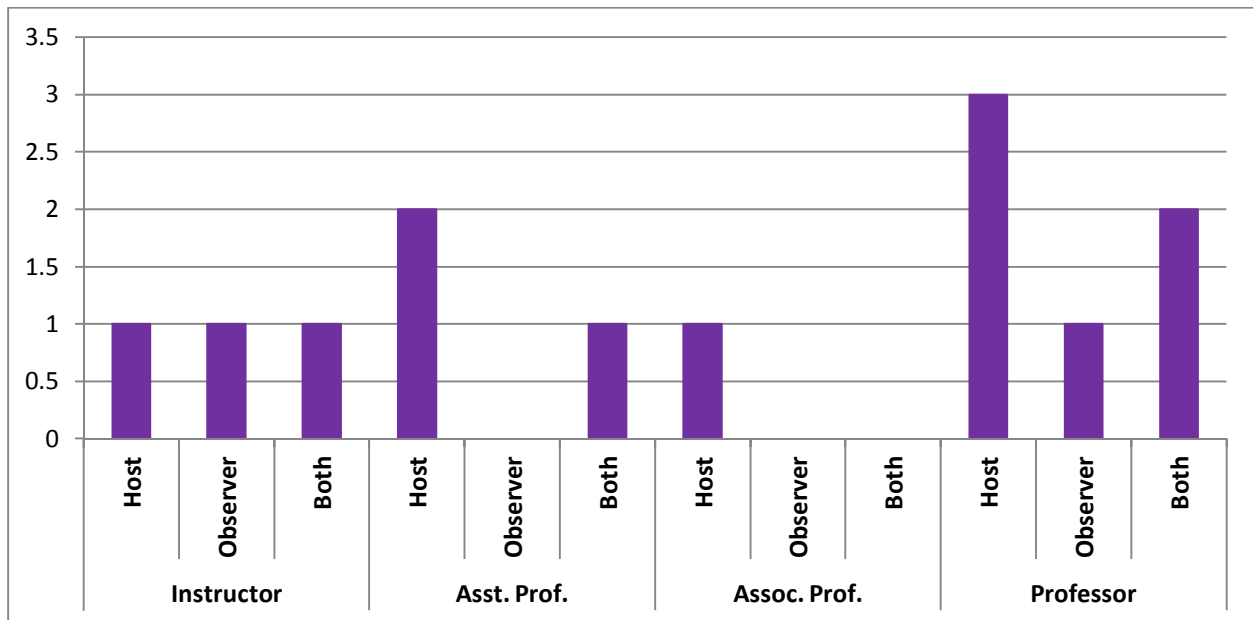


Figure 3. Participation across ranks

Some interesting observations in Figure 3 are that Professors dominated the program as participants, and generally played the role of host. The role of host was most popular probably because this role does not entail documentation and any other additional time commitments.

Pre- Survey

Participants in the program were requested to fill a one-time pre-survey to get information on the frequency of their prior participation in the roles of hosts and observers, and their experience being observed and having observed. Figures 4 and 5 show information provided by twelve participants.

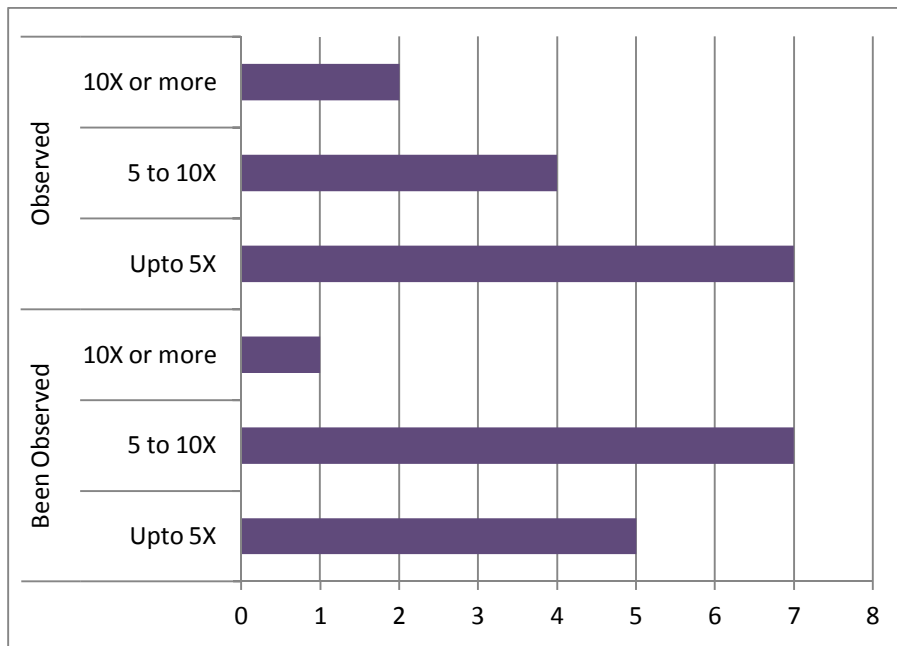


Figure 4. Frequency of being hosts and observers

The participants of the program were actively involved in being hosts and observers prior to this program. Prior participation varied from formal/required/summative evaluation to informal/formative/collaborative observation functions. Their experiences were varied as well with most being moderately comfortable and finding the process moderately helpful. This set a good stage to differentiate our program with a structured process of documentation and expectations of collaborative culture of teaching and learning.

		Observed		
		Very Helpful	Moderate	Not Helpful
Being Observed	Comfortable	5 ⁺ ,3 [*]		
	Moderate		6,7	
	Uncomfortable			1,0

Figure 5. Past experience as a host and observer where ⁺ # of responses for row variables and ^{*} # of responses for column variables

Reflective Analyses

Observer documentation and follow-up discussions resulted in cultivating a team culture focused on student learning, and building a collaborative teaching-learning continuous exchange process. Specifically observer offered perspective on teaching effectiveness. For example, whether the student responses are a result of instructors' actions, nature of the particular course being taught, or the stage of the semester when the observation took place. A common theme that emerged from the reflective analyses is that teaching is not a personal, private practice, with isolated and unique problems, but is a collaborative, mutual process in which invitation, collaboration, and peer support result in a culture of innovative teaching practices, and a relaxing and stimulating environment.

Post-Survey

Participants in both semesters Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 were requested to fill post-surveys to gauge their experience of participating in this program. Eleven out of twenty participants filled and returned the post-survey. Without exceptions, all respondents were willing to continue being part of the Faculty Teaching Exchange program, and were willing to recommend the program to other colleagues.

Lessons and Challenges

Lessons

The format of the program changed from Fall 2014 to Spring 2015 based on recommendations of participants. Though the core of the program remained intact in terms of the broad structure and documentation, certain changes were made such as replacing calendar with host/observer contact information. This enabled participants to directly contact each other and set up visitation schedules. This also suggested increased conversations between hosts and observers. A static calendar distributed at the beginning of the semester removed the flexibility of scheduling effective sessions due to unforeseen events. However, a calendar provided a definitive structure and served as a reminder when it was easy to get occupied with other teaching, research, and service commitments. Another change was to replace focus group sessions with monthly social lunches. The intent was to have an informal and fun event for participants to share their experiences with a larger group. Lastly, four observation requirements were modified to three observations and a follow-up discussion.

Based on feedback from two iterations, we learnt that a defined structure is important with a calendar which could be set up as a dynamic interacting tool between participants. The tradeoff of imposing structure is losing some amount of flexibility but if it leads to an overarching vision of increased engagement and motivated participation, structure has its benefits. Structure includes follow-up dialogue documentation and having focus group discussions.

The report card for the two semesters look pretty similar in Figure 6. The number of participants increased marginally as the program entered its second semester. Some participants dropped out and were replaced by new ones who wanted to give it a try. An incentive of \$50 was awarded to two observers in both semesters. A defined focus group seemed to have gathered more participants relative to an informal social event. Follow-up discussions were effective in continuing the interaction between the host and the observer outside of the classroom and resulted in a two-way dialogue.

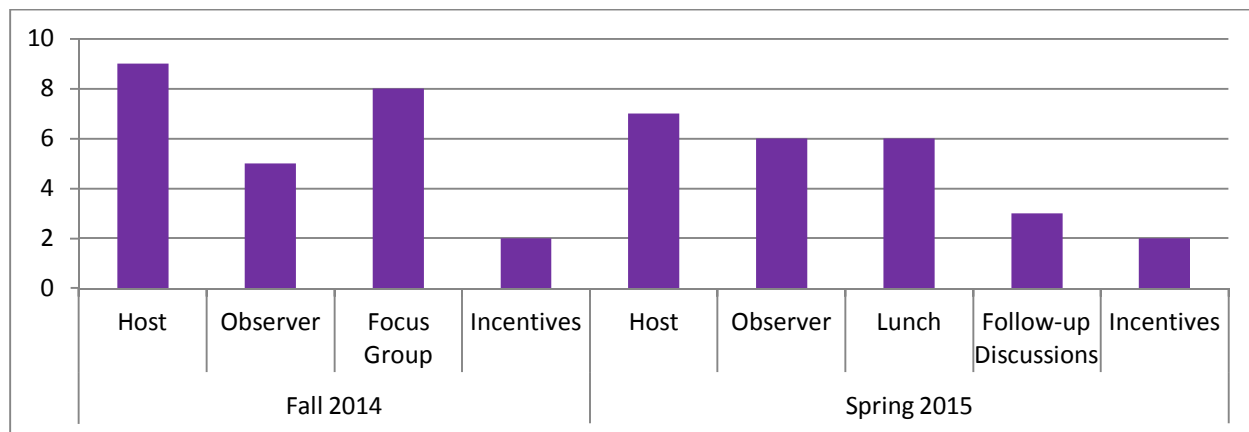


Figure 6. Participation and format changes across Fall 2014 and Spring 2015

Challenges

Like any program which advocates a change in the culture, pedagogical model takes time for adoption. With the demands of teaching, research, and service faced by all faculty members, it truncates the amount of time available for effective participation, reflective documentation, and thorough debriefing through follow-up discussions and participation in focus group/social events. Since the observer is only in the class one day, at the most twice, the intellectual arc of the course can get missed. Another challenge is there could be exchange fatigue where faculty members may exhaust classrooms that can be observed and hosted depending on the participation rates. Some faculty members may find the expectations of three classroom visits and follow-up dialogue, a deterrent and may not be motivated to commit their time and efforts towards a structured program. They may be more willing to participate in a voluntary, low-stake, continuous informal process without much expectations.

Conclusion

The primary objective of the voluntary Faculty Teaching Exchange program is to develop a culture of collaborative, interdisciplinary discourse to enhance teaching effectiveness and student learning. It can be complemented with student evaluations for annual evaluation/promotion & tenure. This paper describes this program and discusses the lessons learnt and challenges faced from its implementation over a one year period.

This is an ongoing program and the results indicate that faculty members view this program not only as a faculty development initiative but also as a common ground to understanding what works for others and what could be adapted to their own classrooms. Data shows there are increased participation, awareness, and support for this program. We hope the data presented will serve as a Segway into a larger discussion in the literature about future possibilities with Faculty Teaching Exchange programs and how such programs can be adapted to changing teaching and delivery methods.

References

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7. Anderson G., Effective Classroom Observations: An Alternative Approach That Supports Faculty & Improves Student Success [cited May 23, 2015]. Available from: <http://www.innovativeeducators.org/Classroom-Observations-That-Supports-Faculty-p/3255.htm>

Appendix

K-State Salina Faculty Members

are invited to participate in a new pedagogical initiative

The Faculty Teaching Exchange

During **October & November 2014**

*Faculty may **choose** to participate as a:
Host Instructor, Classroom Observer, Or Both.*

	Host Classroom Instructor	Visiting Classroom Observer
Responsibilities	<i>Select specific days/classes during October & November 2014 when observing faculty members may elect to sit in and watch you teach individual sessions of a class.</i>	<i>Select four open classroom times from the calendar, observe four entire class session, take notes on a prescribed rubric, and type up a reflective analysis over each of your four observation sessions.</i>
Benefits	<i>Hosts will receive written reflective analysis from each colleague who observed in their classroom. Hosts may decide whether or not to share observers' reflective analyses in their annual evaluation packets.</i> (Credit on annual evaluation)	<i>Learn from observing and reflecting on teaching methods of colleagues in live classroom environments. Analyses will ONLY be shared with Host classroom faculty members.</i> \$50 Professional Development Credit from your Department. (Credit on annual evaluation)

Participants will be required to complete Pre & Post Surveys, sign IRB Informed Consents, and attend both the Orientation and Focus Group Discussion(s).

Introductory Orientation

**Friday, September 26
In TC 108 at 3:30 p.m.**

Focus Group(s)

**Thursday Oct. 30 and/or Friday, Nov. 21
In TC 108 at 3:30 p.m.**

Discourse with colleagues regarding your experience and the pros/cons of this type of Teaching Exchange.

This initiative has been funded by a grant from the K-State Teaching & Learning Center.

AVT 440 – Air Carrier Operations – Spilchal – AC 141	ECON 110 – Macro Economics – Joseph - TC172
AVT 445 – Aviation Law – Spilchal – AC SBE101	ECON 120 – Micro Economics – Joseph TC166
BUS 251– Financial Accounting – Brockway - TC 118	ECON 530 – Money & Banking – Joseph – TC 166
CHEM 110 – Introductory Chemistry – Oh - SSC 205	FINAN 450 – Principles of Finance – Brockway – TC 107
CMST 317 – C# Programming – Kinler – TC172	PHIL 105 – Critical Thinking – Ackerman - TC120
CMST 450 - Systems Analysis & Design – Kinler - TC 172	PSYCH 110 – General Psychology – Matthews – TC 151
ENGL 200 – Expository Writing II – Moritz – TC 107	PSYCH 505 – Abnormal Psychology – Matthews – TC 105

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUE SDAY	WEDNE SDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Faculty Teaching Exchange	October 2014		1	2	3	4
5	6 11:30 BUS 251 2:30 FINAN 450	7 8:05 CMST 460	8	9 9:30 ECON 110 1:05 ECON 120 3:55 CMST 317	10	11
12	13 9:30 PSYCH 505 11:30 BUS 251 11:30 PSYCH 110 1:30 CMST 103 2:30 FINAN 450	14 9:30 ECON 110 11:30 ECON 530 1:05 ENGL 200 2:30 AVT 440	15 9:30 PSYCH 505 10:30 CHEM 110 11:30 BUS 252 11:30 PSYCH 110 2:30 FINAN 450	16 9:30 ECON 110 11:30 ECON 530 1:05 ENGL 200 2:30 AVT 440	17 10:30 CHEM 110 11:30 BUS 251 1:30 CMST 103 2:30 FINAN 450	18
19	20 10:30 CHEM 110 11:30 BUS 251 1:30 CMST 103 2:30 FINAN 450	21 8:05 AVT 445 8:05 CMST 460 11:30 PHIL 105 1:05 ENGL 200 2:30 AVT 440	22 9:30 PSYCH 505 10:30 CHEM 110 11:30 PSYCH 110 1:30 CMST 103	23 8:05 AVT 445 11:30 PHIL 105 2:30 AVT 440	24 9:30 PSCYCH 505 11:30 PSYCH 110	25
26	27 9:30 PSYCH 505 11:30 PSYCH 110	28 9:30 ECON 110 11:30 PHIL 105 1:05 ECON 120	29 9:30 PSYCH 505 11:30 PSYCH 110 1:30 CMST 103	30 3:30 Faculty Teaching Exchange Focus Group TC108	31 9:30 PSYCH 505 11:30 PSYCH 110 1:30 CMST 103	

CMST 103 – Intro to Program Design – Harding – TC 115

K-State Salina Faculty
are invited to participate in the
Spring 2015
Faculty Teaching Exchange

*Faculty may **choose** to participate as
Host Instructors, Classroom Observers, Or Both.*

	Host Classroom Instructor	Visiting Classroom Observer
Responsibilities	<i>Collaborate individually with faculty observers to schedule mutually agreeable times for classroom observations, during the months of February, March, & April 2015.</i>	<i>Select a minimum of 3 Host Classrooms to observe, schedule visits with each host, observe classroom sessions, take notes on a prescribed rubric, then submit a typed reflective analysis over each observation. Conduct & document at least 1 follow-up discussion with a Host Classroom Instructor.</i>
Benefits	<i>Hosts will receive written reflective analyses from each colleague who observes their classroom, as well as opportunities to dialogue about classroom practices. Hosts may decide whether or not to share observers' reflective analyses in their annual evaluation packets.</i>	<i>Visiting faculty will experience opportunities for interdisciplinary classroom observation, reflection, and dialogue about best teaching practices. \$50 Professional Development Credit from your Department. (if 3 visits & 1 dialogue are documented)</i>

***New participants will be asked to complete Pre & Post Surveys, sign IRB Informed Consents.
All members of the Teaching Exchange are invited to attend monthly social events.***

Introductory Orientation

Friday, January 23, 2015
Gutierrez Restaurant

Monthly Social Events

Thursday, Feb. 26, Noon @ Martinelli's
Friday, March 27, Noon @ Olive Garden
Thursday, April 30, Noon @ Longhorn

This initiative has been funded by a grant from the K-State Teaching & Learning Center.

2015 Faculty Teaching Exchange Participants *

Name	SP15 Classes	Discipline	Host	Observer
Ackerman	Multiple Sections of Critical Thinking	English/Philosophy	✓	✓
Behan	Middle Childhood Adolescence Families & Poverty	Family Studies	✓	
Brockway	Financial Accounting Principles of Finance	Accounting/Business	✓	
DeGreeff	Public Speaking I and IA	Communication	✓	
Fisher	Intro to Sociology	Sociology		✓
Genereaux	Networking I, Digital Media 1, Social Media Technology	Digital Media	✓	
Guzek	Macroeconomics Info Tech for Business	Business/Economics		
Harding	Intro to Problem Design, Web Dev. Proj., Adv. Topics CMST COT 706 Graduate Course	Computer Systems	✓	✓
Hartman	General Calc. & Linear Algebra College Algebra, Intro Statistics	Math	✓	✓
Joseph	Micro & Macro Economics COT 706 Graduate Course	Economics	✓	✓
Kinsler	Senior Project, Advanced Data Base, Fluid Mechanics, Software Arch/Design	Computer Systems	✓	✓
Ley	Gas Turbines	Aviation		✓
Markham	Teaching on Manhattan Campus Spring 2015	Family Studies		✓
Matthews	General Psychology, Psychology of Religion	Psychology	✓	✓
Moritz	Expos Writing I & II Humanities thru Arts	English/Humanities	✓	✓
Oh	Chem 110 and 111 COT 706 Graduate Course	Chemistry	✓	✓
Splichal	Aviation Law Corporate/Bus. Aviation Mgt.	Aviation	✓	
Zajac	Physics 113	Physics	✓	✓

*Responses received as of 23 January, 2015.

Faculty Teaching Exchange Observation Rubric

Please make thoughtful and formative comments in each of the four areas.

What did you like? What did you learn? Helpful suggestions?

<p><u>Teaching Style</u></p>	<p><u>Student Engagement</u></p>
<p><u>Teaching Methodology</u></p>	<p><u>Reflective Analysis</u></p>

Instructor's Name _____ Observer's Name _____

Course Being Taught _____ No. of Students _____

Number of Students _____ Classroom Location _____

K-State Salina Faculty Teaching Exchange

Reflective Analysis

Things to consider and reflect:

1. How did the personal traits and characteristics of the instructor affect the overall classroom learning experience?
2. What methods of teaching did you observe this instructor using to deliver course content? Which these methods seemed most effective? Why?
3. What strategies (if any) did I observe the instructor using to keep students engaged with course content?
4. What problems (if any) occurred during the classroom session I observed? How did the instructor handle these problems? Did it seem effective?
5. How similar (or different) is this instructor's class to my own classes (e.g. academic discipline, student demographics, physical space, group dynamics, etc.)
6. What have I learned from observing this class that I might adapt for use in my own teaching?
7. If I could ask this instructor one question about the teaching, what would it be?

University Rank or Current Position _____

Discipline(s) in which you teach _____

Years of College Teaching Experience

0-5 5-10 10-20 20 or more

How many times have you observed colleagues teaching in their classrooms, prior to this survey?

0-5 5-10 10-20 20 or more

Would you say that your past classroom observations have been:

_____ Very helpful with your own teaching practice.

_____ Moderately helpful with your own teaching practice.

_____ Less helpful with your own teaching practice than expected.

How many times has a colleague observed you teaching in your classroom, prior to this survey?

0-5 5-10 10-20 20 or more

How would you classify your past reactions to having colleagues observe your classroom teaching?

_____ Very nervous and uncomfortable.

_____ Moderately nervous, but comfortable.

_____ Neither nervous, nor uncomfortable.

What forms of feedback have you received from colleagues who have observed your classroom teaching?

What types of feedback would you like to receive from colleagues who observe your classroom teaching?

Are you interested in participating in the **K-State Salina Faculty Teaching Exchange** as:

_____ A Host Classroom Instructor _____ A Classroom Observer _____ Both

University Rank or Current Position _____

Discipline(s) in which you teach _____

Years of College Teaching Experience

0-5

5-10

10-20

20 or more

What role did you play in the K-State Salina Faculty Teaching Exchange during the Spring 2015 semester?

_____ Host Classroom Instructor _____ Classroom Observer _____ Both

How many different classroom sessions did you observe during the Spring 2015 semester? _____

How many different disciplines did you observe during the Spring 2015 semester? _____

How helpful were your classroom observations with development of your own teaching practice?

(on a scale of 0-5 with 0 as no observation, 1 as least helpful and 5 as most helpful.)

How many different colleagues observed your classroom teaching during Spring semester 2015?

How would you classify your reaction to having colleagues observe your classroom teaching? _____

(on a scale of 0-5 with 0 as did not observe, 1 as uncomfortable, and 5 as extremely comfortable)

How helpful was the feedback you received from colleagues who observed your classroom ?

(on a scale of 0-5 with 0 as did not receive feedback, 1 being least helpful, and 5 being extremely helpful)

Would you be willing to continue this type of faculty teaching exchange to other colleagues?

Yes

No

Would you recommend this type of faculty teaching exchange to your colleagues?

Yes

No

How many Networking Luncheons did you participate in? _____ Was the dialogue helpful? _____

Please share ideas/suggestions for improving the Faculty Teaching Exchange experience in the future.