**Strategy #2 Recommendations**
**Teaching & Learning Advancement Team[[1]](#footnote-1)**

The Teaching & Learning Advancement Team was created to help advance the strategic plan goal of fostering academic and co-curricular innovation. This team is investigating ways to engage and inspire faculty, staff, and students by creating a supportive environment for intellectual inquiry and educator development. This environment—both cultural and physical—must be student-centered, committed to teaching excellence, and dedicated to meeting the needs of learners.

Applicable Vision Statement Elements

[1] Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA) will have a distinct and stellar reputation based on the transformational learning experiences we provide for all our students in an exceptional setting. We will not use the term "transformational" lightly. We will be deeply committed to providing high impact, experiential learning for all SFA students.

[4] We will achieve financial sustainability by meeting tough choices head-on and making smart decisions about the future of the university. We will diversify our revenue streams, allocate our resources strategically, increase our private funding, and achieve meaningful enrollment growth. We will invest in our people and achieve appropriate levels of compensation, reward, and recognition. Professional development for faculty and staff will be seen as an investment and not an expense because our people are the greatest asset we have.

[5] We will be an innovative university. We will reach our students where they are and prepare them for life-long learning and career responsiveness in the twenty-first century. We will use cutting-edge teaching techniques and advanced research methods both inside and outside the classroom. We will be a forward-thinking university that not only is responsive to the realities of higher education but also is a leader in academia. Technology will be appropriately and sensibly infused throughout the campus in our classrooms and operations. It will facilitate-not drive-how we teach and work together.

**Strategy #1:** Enhance existing classroom spaces and use to support effective teaching.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Strategy #2:** Enhance effective instruction by strengthening educator development offerings and providing resources to those taking part in teaching as a scholarly endeavor and those seeking to improve their teaching by engaging in evidence-based teaching.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Rationale: Effective teachers are not born; they are made. Effective teaching requires a willingness to change when necessary and to engage in constant self-evaluation; the examination of research related not only to one’s discipline but to the topic of teaching and learning; and opportunities to share ideas and discuss strategies with colleagues across campus and around the world. A commitment to research-based educational development, to fostering a culture that values a commitment to teaching excellence, and to supporting those who approach teaching as a scholarly endeavor and/or engage in evidence-based teaching is paramount to ensuring improved student learning outcomes.

**Action Step #1:** Offer programming delivered by professional staff, faculty, and guests to provide educator development opportunities.

Purpose: As educators, we should always strive not only to stay abreast of current research relevant to our specific disciplines but also, because a significant portion of our duties pertain to teaching, to stay abreast of current research and best practices in teaching and learning. The institution should constantly offer faculty the opportunity to attend workshops, seminars, and events that help them develop as educators. These opportunities should be largely coordinated through one office.

**Task #1:** Utilize results from past survey to craft new educator development opportunities on campus that vary in subject and time commitment required. (Re-survey faculty each year.)

Explanation: In November of 2014, the Center for Teaching & Learning conducted a survey asking for faculty input on a variety of issues related to educator development. We recommend that this information be used to make data-driven decisions about what new educator development opportunities to offer.

Resources Needed: Access to survey results, team to recommend educator development offerings.

Immediate Targets: Add at least two new offerings in Fall 2016 based on survey results.

Long-Range Targets: Add at least two new offerings each semester.

Impacted Departments: Center for Teaching & Learning and those engaging in evidence-based teaching practices.

**Task #2:** Solicit individuals with specific experiences/applicable knowledge to deliver this educator development. (These can be SFA faculty, knowledgeable staff, invited guests from other institutions, etc.)

Explanation: The creation of research-supported educator development opportunities should be coordinated through a single unit but should not be the sole prerogative of one entity or a small collection of individuals. To foster a community of teachers and to ensure variety in subjects and days/times, we must utilize the knowledge and expertise of our own faculty, staff, or others outside our institution.

Resources Needed: Faculty, staff, guests willing to lead educator development sessions. Possibly minor compensation for these individuals for their time in developing and delivering sessions.

Immediate Targets: Identify and solicit a minimum of two SFA faculty to contribute to educator development offerings (e.g. workshop, Reading Circle, etc.) in Fall 2016.

Long-Range Targets: Identify and solicit individuals outside of SFA to contribute to educator development offerings, notably nationally- and internationally-known contributors and experts.

Impacted Departments: Center for Teaching & Learning

**Task #3:** Communicate university-sponsored educator development opportunities to interested parties and department/college administrators via an online hub. (See also Action Step 4.)

Explanation: Developing and delivering a variety of informative, research-based educator development sessions does no good if the faculty don’t know about, value, and attend these sessions.

Resources Needed: A listserv

Immediate Targets: Develop hub/listserv by end of Fall 2016.

Long-Range Targets: Continually post to hub/listserv indefinitely.

Impacted Departments: Center for Teaching & Learning

**Action Step #2:** Provide resources to support those taking part in teaching as a scholarly endeavor and those seeking to improve their teaching by engaging in evidence-based teaching.

Purpose: If we want faculty to focus on being more effective teachers, we need to provide the resources to enable them to do so.

**Task #1:** Provide resources that allow faculty the time necessary to focus on improving teaching or advancing teaching- and learning-related scholarship. Time resources may include (but are not limited to) a course release, a release from service obligations, etc.

Explanation: Advancing one’s teaching or taking part in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) requires time. Given the numerous demands on faculty—particularly service—the university must provide a means for ensuring faculty have time to take part in such activities. Faculty receiving time releases must also prove that such releases have been productive.

Immediate Targets: By Spring 2017, increase by at least at least one per college the number of course releases available to support improvement of teaching and/or the advancement of teaching- and learning-related scholarship. The process for receiving these releases should be transparent and the list of recipients communicated.

Long-Range Targets: The number of course releases available to faculty focusing on improving teaching or advancing teaching- and learning-related outcomes should continue to grow at a reasonable rate and funding for this should be a top institutional priority. Additionally, in Spring 2017, a committee should conduct an evaluation of policies related to faculty teaching loads (specifically, consider similar programs at SHSU, UT-Tyler, and PVAMU) and make recommendations for adjustments to current loads.

Impacted Departments: Office of the Provost, various academic departments

**Task #2:** Provide funding that supports improvements to teaching or advancements in teaching scholarship. Funding resources may include (but are not limited to) support for travel to attend teaching-related professional development seminars, support for development of a teaching-related project, support for teaching-related materials, etc.

Explanation: The TLA Team recognizes that improving one’s teaching and/or advancing teaching and learning scholarship may require resources beyond SFA. In those cases when travel, external educator development opportunities, course materials, etc. are necessary, the university should mobilize resources to provide this support.

Immediate Targets: Beginning in Fall 2016, faculty should be able to apply for mini-grants to support teaching-related development expenses such as travel, educator development seminars away from SFA, course materials, etc.

Long-Range Targets: After several years, at least 30% of funds related to supporting teaching-related development supports those individuals presenting or serving as leaders in teaching-related events.

Impacted Departments: Any department providing funds

**Task #3:** Provide other resources necessary to support teaching as a scholarly endeavor or evidence-based teaching. Such resources may include (but are not limited to) software, services, and subscriptions to teaching- and learning-related journals.

Explanation: Support for teaching and learning can also be had through resources such as the library. Faculty need a vehicle for requesting less-common (though no less vital) support items such as journal subscriptions.

Immediate Targets: Review current journal subscriptions to identify gaps in SoTL-related journal subscriptions or other subscriptions that would support teaching and learning experiences.

Long-Range Targets: Continue building resources that support teaching and learning.

Impacted Departments: Ralph W. Steen Library, assorted other departments

**Task #4:** Provide human resources that will aid in teaching-related endeavors. Such resources may include (but are not limited to) the hiring of student-workers and graduate students.

Explanation: In order to focus on teaching, faculty need support for minor tasks and/or to overtake small duties.

Immediate Targets: By Spring 2017, have a committee establish process for faculty to apply for student-worker assistance and establish criteria to be met to receive this assistance.

Long-Range Targets: By Spring 2017, hire at least two student-workers to be used to this end. At the end of Spring 2017, evaluate the effectiveness of having this resource available to faculty, then determine continuation.

Impacted Departments: Center for Teaching & Learning

**Action Step #3:** Foster a faculty community dedicated to teaching and learning so that faculty across campus can benefit from a network of colleagues that values and actively pursues better teaching and improved student learning.

Purpose: Building a community that values evidence-based teaching and scholarly engagement in teaching and learning requires creating a network of colleagues who can serve as a resource and an inspiration for other teachers.

**Task #1:** Solicit faculty to share their knowledge of a particular tool/technique/methodology with other faculty.

Explanation: Faculty need the opportunity to share what they have learned about specific teaching tools, techniques, and methodologies and also to learn from other faculty with such knowledge. We recommend the creation of a cadre of faculty application specialists willing to conduct instructional sessions on their technique/tool of knowledge and to engage in thoughtful conversations with other faculty about the benefits of such tools/techniques.

Immediate Targets: Recruit individuals to share their knowledge in Fall 2016 and work with them to develop individual educator development sessions. Begin hosting sessions and working with individual faculty in Spring 2017.

Long-Range Goals: Develop an annual rotation of faculty application specialists.

Impacted Departments: Center for Teaching & Learning

**Task #2:** Develop faculty teaching fellows program to identify those faculty with exceptional commitment to teaching and learning who are willing to serve in a leadership role.

Explanation: These individuals will be called upon to enhance teaching effectiveness, particularly at the undergraduate level; participate in seminars and workshops on teaching effectiveness; mentor other faculty interested in teaching and learning; foster research on effective college teaching and learning; and promote a sense of community among teachers. Being named a faculty teaching fellow should be among the highest honors for teaching at SFA, with only one or perhaps two fellows named each year.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Immediate Targets: Have a committee develop application process, competitive review process by end of Spring 2017.

Long-Range Targets: Name first faculty teaching fellow in Fall 2017 or Spring 2018.

Impacted Departments: Any department with faculty desiring to be part of the program.

**Task #3:** Foster interdisciplinary collaborations between those interested in pursuing teaching as a scholarly endeavor or in practicing evidence-based teaching.

Explanation: In an era in which students are required to develop skills whose applicability spans disciplines, it is imperative that faculty work with and learn from colleagues in other disciplines.

Immediate Targets: Develop opportunities for faculty across disciplines to come together and discuss their teaching. These could be events such as idea swaps, lunch-and-learns, etc.

Long-Range Targets: Because of these interdisciplinary interactions, faculty begin to co-teach across disciplines, engage in cross-disciplinary research, and/or craft and submit/present teaching-related research/content.

Impacted Departments: All departments, potentially; Office of Research & Sponsored Programs; Center for Teaching & Learning.

**Action Step #4:** Develop a repository of resources for those faculty interested in learning more about research related to teaching and learning.

Purpose: Acknowledging that many faculty may be interested in teaching and learning as a scholarly endeavor but may not always be able to attend events, a repository of resources is needed to provide up-to-date information on research, new ideas, and best practices.

**Task #1:** Solicit several faculty to serve as an editorial team for a teaching and learning blog, each for a period of one year. These faculty would be responsible for crafting at least two posts each semester to contribute to the blog.

Explanation: By having multiple posts each semester from faculty from a variety of disciplines, we will create a resource for those interested in teaching and learning but who may not always have time to attend multiple educator development activities.

Immediate Targets: Develop blog infrastructure and recruit faculty in Fall 2016. Launch blog in Spring 2017.

Long-Range Targets: Maintain blog indefinitely.

Impacted Departments: Center for Teaching & Learning, any department with faculty desiring to be editors.

**Task #2:** Provide a means for faculty to submit links to teaching and learning-related articles for publication on the blog. This means would also provide a vehicle through which faculty could submit information related to teaching and learning acquired at a conference.

Explanation: The blog should be a community resource, and thus all faculty should be welcome to submit items for publication.

Immediate Targets: By conclusion of fall 2016, develop form through which faculty can submit ideas for publication.

Long-Range Targets: N/A

Impacted Departments: Center for Teaching & Learning, any department with faculty desiring to submit links.

**Task #3:** Develop a listserv on which interested parties can exchange ideas, pose questions, or share opportunities for colleagues to observe them demonstrating new ideas, techniques, tools, etc. in the classroom.

Explanation: A listserv delivers a quick and easy digest of information to the email inboxes of interested parties.

Immediate Targets: Set up listserv in fall 2016.

Long-Range Targets: Maintain listserv indefinitely.

Impacted Departments: N/A

**Task #4:** Develop a calendar of educator development events for each semester and distribute to faculty at the start of each semester.

Explanation: A list of educator development activities requires advance planning and provides faculty a list of opportunities that they can plan for throughout the semester or as their schedules allow.

Immediate Targets: Continue to develop educator development offerings throughout Fall 2016 and Spring 2017, distributing list of offerings no later than one week into the semester.

Long-Range Targets: For AY 2017-2018, plan educator development offerings one year in advance and notify faculty of offerings by September 2017.

Impact Departments: Center for Teaching & Learning, any faculty desiring to attend professional development.

1. Contributing team members include Dr. Lauren Brewer (Psychology), Dr. Cala Coats (Art), Dr. Randi Cox (History), Dr. Jennifer Gumm (Biology), Dr. Heather Olson Beal (Secondary Education & Educational Leadership), Dr. Nikki Shoemaker (Accounting), Mary Smith (Center for Teaching & Learning, Team Lead), and Megan Weatherly (Center for Teaching & Learning). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Strategy #1 was presented in January 2016, and implementation is underway. For more information, please refer to the [details in the Strategy #1 document](http://www.sfasu.edu/strategicplan/203.asp). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Teaching & Learning Advancement Team acknowledges that some action items in this strategy may necessitate the re-evaluation of the programs of the Center for Teaching & Learning. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The model discussed among the committee members was [UT’s Academy of Distinguished Teachers](https://ugs.utexas.edu/academy). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)