Topic: Module 4: Week 1 Discussion Date: April 16, 2008 7:50 PM
Subject: Re:Training faculty members Author: Burnham, Colleen

"Everyone with the passion and credentials to educate students should be valued for what they bring to the [board] table." Excellent sentence, Michele :-) !

As I alluded to in my own post, this particular discussion topic has really hit a nerve for me. It's driven me to talk about the hierarchy, passion, credentials, missions, etc with almost anyone who'll let me catch their eye ;-)

My entire professional career has been centered in training and assisting staff, faculty, and students as they try to figure out how to cite, paste, post, write, "do stats", "run rats", follow protocol, upload, download, dub, convert, design -- the list is endless :-) My greatest strength is that I love to learn -- from everyone :-) My second greatest strength is, apparently, that I am able to put up with faculty. Unfortunately, both positions that I've held were designed [back in the day] for work study students, with a premise that, really, all the faculty need is someone to check the cable, or turn on the copy machine. That original designation seems to haunt the "modern day" technical support person regardless of the level of faculty development that the positions are expected to fulfill, or the credentials that the person brings to the table.

Every "trainer" I have ever met is a person I consider an academic professional, a person who is working in higher education not only because there is call for the particular positioning, but because they are scholar-learners at the core, that is, they enjoy learning and mentoring. I'm not talking about faculty turned trainers. These are the professional administrative staff members who have been charged with teaching the ins and outs of using/incorporating "electronic stuff" into existing curricula to faculty and or students. Most do not carry faculty status, let alone managerial designations, yet all are expected to "smile sweetly" and produce the answer to questions about almost everything that has anything to do with the academic experience. Many are servicing custodial to presidential, troubleshooting home and campus issues 24/7.

A consistent and troubling [reported] theme is the inherent lack of respect given to trainers by faculty members. Just yesterday, for example, a member of our faculty pointed out to me, in a meeting to which I had been invited because of my expertise, that I am not a teacher and so couldn't possibly understand the terminology that was being used – "any real teacher already knows what we're talking about". [I'm resisting the urge to write nasty thoughts ;-)] The point that I think needs to be acknowledged is that faculty frequently do respect the hierarchy that they recognize. That, regardless of any professional expertise demonstrated, a staff member is often only a staff member in the eyes of many faculty members. The trick is working with that perception effectively.

I will arrogantly tell you that I am apparently successful when it comes to "putting up with" faculty arrogance :-) Students call me an angel; faculty report to my supervisor that they love that I always work my magic with such a "delightful smile". I will also admit to you that I do a lot of "wall punching" out in the smoking area where no-one can see me ;-)

I don't want to make this editorial about me – really! I suspect that a positive "defense mechanism" in response to the phenomenon is the constant researching and learning that must be maintained by we trainers that only makes us better at "offering evidence" of that expertise that many faculty members depend on daily. I'll wrap up with the positive thought that a faculty member (whom I consider a colleague) spoke almost exactly the same sentence to me this afternoon that Michele typed in her post :-). He also reminded me that without all of those non-faculty members of any campus community, the community would cease to exist (and that he'd never be able to figure out how to run that E-Prime "thing" ;-)).