ORIENTING A SERVICE FOR TEACHER SUCCESS: ONE MODEL OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Four years ago, the Office of Instructional Development (OID) was created at Dawson College as part of a major restructuring in the Academic Sector. Broadly speaking, its mandate is to support the academic mission of the college by promoting effective, high-quality instruction through a range of teacher support services and evaluation activities. In keeping with this mandate, the OID decided to conduct a faculty-wide needs assessment to develop an action plan that would attempt to meet the teaching support needs of Dawson's faculty. This was a comprehensive undertaking and it was conducted in consultation with other academic institutions across Canada who have attempted similar formalized procedures, and also with the local expertise of Dawson professionals and institutional researchers. This article outlines the steps that were taken to develop the plan and it situates our methodology within the frameworks of educational, systems thinking, management theory and strategies.

It is hoped that this Action Plan may serve to be a model for others and for ourselves in subsequent years and/or that it will continue the discussion about best practices of teacher support across the entire CEGEP network.

CONTEXT

In order for an Educational Development Office to be successful, it must "ensure congruence between needs, goals and outcomes in faculty development programs" (Meurer & Morzinski, 1997, as cited in Schonwetter, 2007). As such, goals and objectives must be reflected upon and made public so that offices and departments within the larger institution may be able to work together to meet the needs of both students and faculty members. Part of this process at Dawson College occurs during the naming of yearly objectives by the Director General, the Academic Dean and subsequently by the Sector Deans.

In 2007, the Dean of Instructional Development, Barbara Freedman, outlined the following three goals:

1. to carry out an institutional assessment of the services to be provided by the Office of Instructional Development with a view to the identification, prioritization and allocation of resources, and as a prelude to implementation in 2008-2009;

2. to oversee an intra-service review of the delivery of classroom support (*e.g.*, pedagogical equipment, technical support to teaching) and make recommendations for improvement, as appropriate;

3. in the context of the Strategic Plan, to establish a framework for demonstrating the effectiveness, transparency, and the accountability of the Office of Instructional Development.

Conducting a needs assessment about the kinds of teaching support faculty members would like to have at Dawson College, and using these data to create an action plan speaks directly to these ends. This procedure also emphasizes the establishment of congruence with institutional and faculty values in a transparent manner.

Prior to conducting the needs assessment and using it as the basis to create an action plan, the OID operated intuitively, based on our observations and interactions with faculty members. We emphasized the following areas for faculty development:

1. teaching for student-centered learning (including addressing the shifting characteristics of Dawson students);

2. integrating technology into 'traditional' teaching and learning settings;

3. new faculty development activities (*e.g.* orientation sessions and workshops).

While faculty members who participated in these services/events expressed their satisfaction, nevertheless knowledge about these services, and about the OID in general was limited. Furthermore, and in keeping with Kirkpatrick's Model for evaluation of the effectiveness of training programs (1994), the OID wanted to evaluate not only how satisfied faculty members were with our services, but whether or not these strategies are effective in supporting faculty members in their

endeavours to use new pedagogical resources/technologies (Kirkpatrick's level 2 [learning] & 3 [transfer]). To that end, the needs assessment process afforded an opportunity to identify existing deficiencies in our services and how to rectify them, as well as an opportunity to identify our strengths and the ways in which we can build upon them to develop and systematize a proactive plan to meet the needs of our faculty. Finally (in the context of the 2010 Needs Assessment) the OID will provide a method for evaluating the effectiveness of our new system of supporting faculty.

◗ ON CREATING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY DEVELOPMENT

The OID based its model on the Kalish and Sorcinelli (2007) cyclical model of conducting a needs assessment: "Question, data, analyze, change, question…" (Kalish & Sorcinelli, 2007). Using a combination of Kaufman's (1998) model which was undertaken by the Indiana Department of Education in 2003 and following the advice of Rouda & Kusy (1995), the OID model includes five stages ranging from the creation of the data collection tool(s) to feedback on the implementation process. Please refer to the "2007-2010 Needs Assessment and Action Plan Process Model" table.

2007-2010 Needs Assessment and Action Plan Process Model	
STEP	**STAGE AND STEPS TO BE TAKEN**
	Stage 1: Needs Assessment Data-Gathering Tool(s)
1	Identify the voices that need to be heard in the Needs Assessment.
2	Determine the goals of the OID and how they align with those of the larger Dawson context.
3	Determine assessment methods and instruments.
4	Pre-test data-gathering tools with a pilot group – make changes to tools as appropriate.
5	Administer data-gathering tools.
	Stage 2: Analysis of Data
6	Analyze data.
7	Generate themes from within the data. Perform a gap analysis and identify existing strengths.
8	Generate a report and present it to OID members.
	Stage 3: Development of Action Plan
9	Use the report to create an action plan to address the wants/needs of the college.
10	Distribute the report as appropriate.
	Stage 4: Implementation of Action Plan
11	Each staff member chooses 1 to 3 courses of action from the Action Plan for their yearly objectives.
	Stage 5: Review of the Action Plan
12	Gather and review feedback towards the end of each academic year about the services offered by the OID. (We decided to use an open-ended, one-question email to all faculty members for this purpose.)
13	Tailor services accordingly where appropriate.
14	2010: Report on what has been achieved over the past 3 years.
	Stage 1: Needs Assessment Data-Gathering Tool(s)
15	Fall of 2010: conduct a new Needs Assessment to reflect the ever-changing pedagogical needs of our faculty. (Please refer to Step 1 above.)

As shown in the table, the OID Needs Assessment model recurs every three years. The initial needs assessment was conducted this past academic year and goals were then established through the development of an action plan. Implementation of our Action Plan took place in the Fall of 2008, and on-going formative feedback about our services will be collected and used throughout the three-year period. We also plan to send out a yearly email with the following open-ended question(s): *Please let us know how you think we are doing. What is working well? What do we need to work on?* This model allows the OID to get a multi-layered look at how faculty members' needs are being met. It may also allow us to understand issues that we can then address. This is based on the work of Kirkpatrick (1994). For example, after workshops we plan to ask participants to complete a mini-evaluation (5-10 questions) where they will be asked both for their reaction to the workshop and how they will be able to transfer what they have learned to their classrooms. Although this type of evaluation does not provide data pertaining to the long-term results of each workshop, we have attempted to incorporate this type of evaluation into each assessment by sending follow-up "postcards" or "calling cards." The idea behind the postcard is that participants fill out a postcard about what they have learned and would like to try. These will be mailed to them later in the year. Alternatively, workshop participants can send the presenters (members of the OID) a calling card telling them how they would like to use something they saw in a workshop and either asking for a follow-up visit after they have done so or asking for the support they would need in order to make the project work. Participants have to specify the date they would like the follow-up.

DATA-GATHERING TOOLS

Data were divided into two different forms: primary and secondary. Primary data included qualitative and quantitative responses derived from surveys

and from semi-structured interviews. Secondary data included Section VI of Program Evaluation Documents (The *Quality of Teaching Methods & Student Supervision*) from the 2005, 2006, 2007 evaluation of Dawson programs which reports both teachers' and students' perceptions about their teaching and learning experiences. Issues presented in the on-going evaluations of OID members in 2006-2007 were also examined in order to assess how the OID has been serving its clientele to date and methodologies that have been tried in order to meet their needs. Using these data, we then performed a 'Gap' analysis (Rouda & Kusy, 1995) by comparing our existing services to the expectations/needs of the Dawson community.

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Based on the themes which emerged from the focus group interviews, the survey tool was created using the Schonwetter & Taylor (2006) model. It was piloted and tested for clarity with a small group of faculty members. All Dawson faculty members were then surveyed electronically (using Dawson's Customized Registration & Survey Form System). One month after initial email contact, they were also mailed a hard copy of the survey which they could return to the OID through internal mail.

DATA RESULTS

The total response rate of the survey represented 20.8% of Dawson's Faculty and this compares favourably with the 14.8% faculty response rate in the Schonwetter & Taylor 2006 study. A combination of the survey data, the focus-group data, as well as the data accumulated from secondary sources

creates a reasonable representation of the Dawson community and can be interpreted for the purpose of creating proposals for the Dawson teaching community. The data suggest that the OID consider the following in order to best meet the needs of the Dawson community.

GENERAL ISSUES	SPECIFIC INITIATIVES	DIRECT SUPPORT TO FACULTY
Awareness of Services: Examine OID methods of publicity so that all faculty members will be aware of the full range of services that are offered together with their associated scheduling variations. **Scheduling:** Re-examine the scheduling and timing of OID events and schedule events/workshops at the end of the year and at the beginning of the Winter term.	**Collaborations:** Examine ways of developing teamwork activities or collaborations in which teachers learn from each other; and/or ways for College services work together to make a presentation on a single theme. **Mentorship:** New faculty members would like continued support throughout the year, beyond New Faculty Orientation. Investigate ways of supporting this need while also supporting the initiatives that are already taking place. **Student Literacy Concerns:** Investigate collaborating with the appropriate College Services and faculty members to address methods of dealing with this issue.	Faculty members expressed a desire for direct support in the following areas: • classroom management • student assessment • development of course materials • teaching innovation / educational research • teaching with technology

As previously discussed, prior to the needs assessment, the OID emphasized specific areas of faculty development. The first and second areas are represented in the 'Direct Support for Faculty' and the third in 'Specific Initiatives'; and, the data and resulting themes illustrate a need for the OID to significantly expand its services and to do so in collaboration with our partners across the college in a transparent and well-publicized fashion.

▶ THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ACTION PLAN

After the needs assessment data were analyzed and categorized into the themes illustrated above, the entire OID staff met with a view to developing and implementing specific initiatives to respond to faculty needs and, in doing so, to create the Action Plan. Each OID member outlined areas in his/her dossier that spoke directly to the needs expressed by faculty members. These ideas were then consolidated and consequently, the Office of Instructional Development's Action Plan (OIDAP) outlines the results of the 2007 Needs Assessment and specific proposals for action during the next three years.

As mentioned earlier in this article, Dawson College bases its management style on an objective-setting model. The strategies and actions in the OIDAP will form the basis of the objectives and work plans of OID staff members during this period of time. In practice, this means that each OID staff member will choose his/her personal yearly objectives based on the OIDAP and report on these actions throughout the

three-year period. Please see the table below for a sample of how the data from the Needs Assessment study informs each OID member's concrete plan of action.

Please note that this table represents only a sample of the OIDAP and is intended to be a working document.

OBJECTIVES		
3.2 EXPAND SUPPORT SERVICES OFFERED TO NEW FACULTY MEMBERS		
Actions to be Taken	**Responsibility**	**Status (action taken / when)**
3.2.4 Advertise/advocate the use of the online course Pedagogical Basics for Teachers (PBT).	Teacher Support Group (TSG) Educational Consultant in Instructional Development	• Article in *Profweb* – Sept. 8, 2008 • Lunchtime Series Workshop – April 2008 • Promotional brochures given out –Fall 2008 • Award ceremony – Dec. 2008
3.2.5 **Increase the New Teacher Orientation Sessions from 1 to 3 per term.**	TSG	Fall 2008
3.2.6 **Organize several informal tours of Dawson College for new faculty members at the beginning of the term and provide an overview of services available to teachers at this time.**	TSG	Aug. 26, 2008 Sept. 3, 2008
3.2.7 **Contact Chairs/Coordinators at hiring time to advertise for each of the above events in order both to welcome them and to avoid duplication of services (*via* telephone and email).**	Educational Consultant in Instructional Development	On-going as appropriate
3.2.8 **Gather helpful materials and tips from teachers, Chairs, Coordinators and staff and make these available in the most useful format possible.**	TSG	• Creation of the *Teachers' Guide to Technology-Related Services at Dawson College* – Sept. 2008 • Creation of the book, *Bringing Course Frameworks to Life* – Fall 08-Winter 09
3.2.9 **Organize informal round-table tea-time discussion groups for all faculty members with a view to exchanging teaching tips over tea/coffee. Offer these round-table discussion groups at a variety of times in order to accommodate varying schedules.**	TSG	• Peer Exchange Program – launched Oct.3, 2008 • Lunchtime Workshop Series (on-going) • Faculty Walk & Talk Discussion Groups
3.2.10 **Put the issue of mentoring for new faculty members on the New Chairs/ Coordinators workshop agenda to submit these proposals for possible discussion.**	TSG	Survey all Chairs and Coordinators about existing mentoring initiatives and what they perceive their Program/Department needs to be. – Dec. 2007
3.2.11 **Act as liaison between new teachers and mentors when requested to do so.**	TSG	Peer Exchange Program – launched Oct.3, 2008
3.2.12 **Develop a New Faculty Members section of the OID website.**	TSG	In development – Fall 2007

This small sample of the OIDAP illustrates the way in which the OID's program of support has significantly expanded in scope. For example, prior to the OIDAP, the support services offered to new faculty members included the New Teachers' Orientation, an event that was followed by a wine and cheese party. This single session was in addition to the rest of our program of support for new faculty and it was mostly administrative in nature compared to the three practical and hands-on sessions.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

Success of the Action Plan implementation will be measured through yearly feedback mechanisms and a yearly review by the Teacher Support Group (TSG) of the Office of Instructional development. Furthermore, the TSG will ask for feedback from faculty members by means of satisfaction surveys during our workshops and/or at the end of our programs for faculty members. We will also use the following qualitative and quantitative indicators to analyze the success of OIDAP for the period 2007-2010:

- an increase in faculty member participation in the 2010 data-gathering stage;
- increased lines of communication between OID services, faculty members, and other Dawson service providers;
- increased collaboration with individual faculty members, departments, programs and other Dawson service providers;
- faculty members' recognition of the OID's customer-service orientation.

These critical success indicators will be evaluated quantitatively by comparing 2007-2010 numbers to existing data; and they will be evaluated qualitatively through focus group discussions at the end of the 2010 period.

CONCLUSION

Studies such as this one are needed to understand how colleges can develop systematic programs of support that are most useful to their faculty members. By creating an on-going process of service monitoring, we offer relevant support aimed at meeting the pedagogical needs of our faculty members and we endeavour to do so in a way which translates into effective classroom practice.

The OID has decided to share this study with a view to contributing to a conversation about systematic programs of support to faculty members. Furthermore, the development of an action plan based on data from its intended participants could be applied in any organizational context with few modifications. We encourage readers to contact us with any questions and/or feedback.

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