

# **BUILDING AND SUSTAINING A COMMITMENT TO IMPROVING LEARNING THROUGH STAFF DEVELOPMENT: THE MIAMI-DADE COMMUNITY COLLEGE JOURNEY**

**Miami, Florida**

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Miami-Dade Community College began its commitment to staff development in the early 1970's under Carol Zion, Director of the Office of Staff and Organizational Development. Zion later provided national leadership in staff development as a founder of the National Council for Staff, Program, and Organizational Development. This report will focus on the special attention given to staff development at Miami-Dade Community College beginning with the 1996 initiation of the Teaching/ Learning Project which has since won several awards and national recognition for excellence.<sup>1</sup> From the beginning the project's central commitment was to improve learning for all students. While the initial focus began with faculty, it soon expanded to include all staff. This case study describes the development and recent operation of the Miami-Dade Faculty, Staff, and Program Development initiative and future plans, including some bold new directions. The program's history and its new directions hold several lessons for designing and implementing teacher learning in the workplace and community.

## **INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND**

Miami-Dade Community College (M-DCC) opened in September, 1960. It is a two-year, state-supported community college with six campuses and many outreach centers. M-DCC is nationally recognized as one of the largest and best community colleges in the United States. The college is governed by a seven-member District Board of Trustees and a college president. The president at this time is Eduardo J. Padron; the president during the initiation and building of the Teaching/Learning Project described

in this study was Robert McCabe. During 1995-96, enrollment for credit students at M-DCC was 74,060 and for noncredit students was 50,569. M-DCC offers the Associate of Arts Degree, Associate of Science Degree, and Vocational Credit Certificates in Business, Technical, Allied Health, and Public Service occupational areas.

The average age of students is 26, and more than 67 percent of students attend on a part-time basis. In terms of ethnic mix, 17 percent of students during 1995-96 were non-Hispanic whites; 22 percent were non-Hispanic blacks; 59 percent were Hispanic, and 2 percent were other. Given this mix of students, M-DCC enrolls the highest number of Hispanic students and the second largest number of black students among all colleges or universities in the United States. M-DCC graduated 5,268 students in the academic year 1995-96 and has awarded a total of 154,523 degrees since it opened.

With this student base, M-DCC employed 2,292 part-time and 3,526 full-time people in 1995-96. The faculty is made up of 807 full-time and 1,305 part-time employees. In terms of education, 94 percent of the full-time faculty hold advanced degrees and 21 percent have earned doctorate degrees.<sup>2</sup>

This case study focuses on one of the M-DCC campuses, the Kendall Campus, located in the southern part of Dade County in a suburb of Miami. The Kendall Campus enrolled a total of 52,912 credit and noncredit students in 1995-96. During the faculty, staff and program development initiative reported in this study, the campus has made the most concerted effort at building and sustaining the initiative.

## PROCESS BACKGROUND

The faculty, staff and program development initiative described in this study began in June, 1986 when then-president, Robert McCabe delivered a concept paper entitled *Organizing M-DCC to Emphasize Faculty/Student Performance* to a group of 120 faculty and administrators. The paper provided an outline for a multi-year, institution-wide project with a rationale defined this way:

*If we were to improve overall teaching and learning and encourage faculty to take a leadership role in the process, we would have to provide information and support, capture and share the expertise of excellent veteran faculty, raise the status of teaching as a profession, and reward the type of performance we say we value.*

By late Fall 1996, the Teaching/Learning Project had a project director and a 26-member steering committee. In January, 1987, four sub-committees had been put in place to focus on institutional values, the teaching/learning environment, faculty excellence, and new faculty. A total of 38 M-DCC personnel were directly involved in the project.

During 1987-88, the project focused on raising awareness, expanding involvement, and realizing initial outcomes. Information on the project was shared in several formats inside the college, among the community, and nationally. Two new steering committee sub-committees were formed with a focus on classroom feedback and learning to learn and faculty advancement, bringing nearly 60 college personnel directly into involvement with the project. External consultants helped with the work of the steering committee and sub-committees. The year's products included a statement of institutional teaching/learning values to be included in all college publications, a new orientation process for new faculty, availability of two new graduate courses on teaching and learning (effective teaching and learning, research in the classroom), two videotapes for faculty on

exploring classroom feedback and cultural differences in learning styles, and securing funding for 24 endowed teaching chairs.

In its third year (1988-89), the project acted on its recommendations and sought further involvement of college personnel. Four new sub-committees were formed focusing on part-time faculty, administrators' roles, support for faculty, and non-classroom faculty. The project now directly involved just over 100 personnel. Major outcomes of the year were a Statement of Faculty Excellence and the Faculty Advancement Policy Guidelines.

The Statement of Faculty Excellence served to "provide a common understanding of what it means to perform in an excellent manner at Miami-Dade Community College."<sup>3</sup> The Statement would be used as a foundation to assess potential new faculty, for annual performance reviews of existing faculty, to guide portfolio development and review for faculty tenure and promotion decisions, and to help faculty to judge their own performance and make decisions about professional goals and development.

The Faculty Advancement Policy Guidelines put the standards and their use into operating policy. The faculty was extensively involved in putting the advancement policy guidelines together, and the guidelines were passed by faculty referendum in April, 1989. By June, 1989, 33 endowed chairs had been funded.

The fourth year of the project focused was on revising and fine-tuning the work of previous years, based on the experience of the first year of implementation. A College-wide Student Feedback Questionnaire was pilot-tested to collect information based on the Statement of Faculty Excellence. The fifth year of the project, 1990-91 brought 48 additional college personnel into the project by forming two new sub-committees of the steering committee with a focus on support staff involvement and administrator advancement. These major milestones brought representatives of all personnel categories directly into

the Teaching/Learning Project. Another milestone during this year was the faculty and college executive committee's passage of the Faculty Advancement Procedures. This action institutionalized the professional development program envisioned for the Teaching/Learning Project. Two other milestones of the year included appointing Teaching/Learning Center Project Directors at all campuses and much more extensive pilot testing of a Student Feedback Questionnaire. The charge to the Teaching and Learning Centers was as follows:

1. Develop a core program, consistent College-wide, designed to implement the outcomes of the Teaching/Learning Project,
2. continue to provide the traditional, campus-specified, staff and program development opportunities, and
3. offer support for instructional design, including classroom research and expanded application of technology.<sup>4</sup>

During the sixth year, 1991-92, the focus was on implementing and revising the faculty advancement policies and procedures. For the first time, college decisions on performance review and tenure and advancement were made on the bases of the new procedures. Twenty-five endowed chairs were awarded to faculty members who were deemed excellent performers by their peers. Miami-Dade Community College was the first community college in the nation to use the idea of endowed chairs to recognize faculty performance. Each chair represented a contribution of \$45,000 from individuals, businesses, and civic groups and was matched by \$30,000 from the State of Florida. Chaired faculty hold their positions for three years and get a \$7,500 award annually. Also during 1991-92, the Statement of Administrator Excellence (parallel to that for faculty) was adopted by the M-DCC Board of Trustees.<sup>5</sup>

The seventh and eighth years of the Teaching/Learning Project, 1992-94, continued to focus on assessing the implementation of staffing and staff development policies and procedures, and moving closer to full institutionalization. Several of the Project's subcommittees stayed in place, playing a significant role in the troubleshooting, assessment, and revision process. Milestones during this year included:

- approving the Statement of Support Staff Excellence (making a full set for all categories of college personnel)
- testing an Administrator Feedback Questionnaire, similar in purpose to the student feedback questionnaire for faculty
- soliciting comments for improvement of the new faculty advancement procedures.

By the end of the year, accomplishments also included the first doctoral degree awards for the joint University of Miami-Miami-Dade Community Colleges doctoral program, voluntary participation of 78 percent of full-time faculty and 59% of part-time faculty in the College-wide student feedback program, and award of the seventy-fourth endowed chair. In addition, a national panel of higher education practitioners awarded the college the first Theodore M. Hesburgh Award for faculty development to enhance undergraduate teaching. With many of its products a part of the M-DCC culture, plans were being made to phase out the Teaching/Learning Project and continue institutionalization of its purposes and activities in other ways.<sup>6</sup>

The objectives of the faculty, staff, and program development initiative began as the Teaching/Learning Project were made very clear from the beginning. The three objectives were as follows:

1. To improve teaching and learning with a focus on the increasing numbers and needs of nontraditional students to provide them with a high quality education.

2. To make teaching at the College a professionally rewarding career by establishing high performance standards to challenge faculty and to enable them to take pride in their accomplishments.
3. To make teaching and learning the focal point of Miami-Dade's activities and decision-making processes.

The key features of the initial phase of the M-DCC faculty, staff and program development initiative were:

- declaring institutional values
- focusing on faculty excellence
- creating a supportive teaching/learning environment
- nurturing new faculty.

While several of the policies and procedures resulting from the Teaching and Learning Project became College-wide operations, a new organizational entity called the Teaching and Learning Center was put in place on four of the campuses, reflecting the high priority and paying special attention to faculty and staff development. The Center with the most intensive program emerged on the Kendall Campus, the focus of this case study.

### **TEACHING/LEARNING PROJECT**

The major features of the Teaching/Learning project at the Kendall Campus are described below.

#### **Declaring Institutional Values**

Early on, a decision was made to ground the Teaching/Learning Project in a set of institutional values focused on the importance of teaching and learning to the college's success. An emphasis on valuing individuals and learning led to a focus on changing to meet educational needs and improve learning. While these changes were being made, the college also focused on maintaining quality while assuring access for all individuals. Diversity and community partnerships are

valued as ways to broaden understanding and learning.

#### **Focusing on Faculty Excellence**

The Statement on Faculty Excellence serves as a base for the features of the faculty, staff, and program development initiative at M-DCC. The Statement (1990) defines the qualities and characteristics of excellent faculty in four categories:

1. Their own motivation and their ability to motivate others. Excellent faculty are dedicated and committed to education as a profession and the college's philosophy, are enthusiastic and project a positive attitude about students' ability to learn, and set challenging individual and collective performance goals for themselves and their students;
2. Their interpersonal skills. Excellent faculty respect others and their diverse talents; are responsive, available, and fair to students; collaborate with colleagues; and create a climate conducive to learning;
3. Their knowledge base. Excellent faculty are knowledgeable about their work areas, disciplines, and how students learn; integrate current subject matter and diverse perspectives into their work; and are well-prepared and well-organized; and
4. Their teaching skills. Excellent faculty apply principles of learning to the teaching and learning process; provide students with alternative ways of learning including cooperative learning opportunities; encourage independent thinking, intellectual curiosity, and analytical skills in students; give and accept constructive feedback; and provide clear and substantial evidence that students have learned.

Two of the statements clarify the definition of faculty excellence that applies to all M-DCC faculty, whether assigned primarily to classroom-based activities or non-classroom areas. All faculty are involved in teaching/learning and student success.

As noted above, the Statement of Faculty Excellence was approved by faculty and administration of the Faculty Advancement Policies and Procedures. The most recent edition of these Policies and Procedures states that they are “designed to encourage and support the professional development of faculty members, to align the College’s reward system with professional performance as defined by the College’s Statement of Faculty Excellence, and to ensure consistency and equity in the application of the policies and procedures.”<sup>7</sup> The policies and procedures address performance reviews, the performance portfolio, continuing contracts, promotion, endowed chairs, and a process to monitor and review the policies and procedures. A set of philosophical concepts provide direction for developing policies and procedures relating to faculty advancement.<sup>8</sup>

### **Creating a Supportive Teaching/Learning Environment**

Two of the major products of the Teaching/Learning Project make major contributions to a more supportive teaching and learning environment at M-DCC. These are the approved statements of excellence for support and administrative staff.

### **Statement of Support Staff Excellence**

The introduction to the Statement of Support Staff Excellence notes,

*No educational institution can hope to succeed in its mission to provide high-quality learning opportunities for its students without the total commitment of all its personnel....The critical role of faculty in the teaching/learning relationship is obvious. Not nearly as obvious, perhaps, but just as critical is the role played by support staff in the advancement of student learning.*

The qualities and characteristics of excellent support staff are described in five categories: Motivation, Professional Performance, Interpersonal Skills,

Knowledge Base, and Leadership/Supervision.<sup>10</sup>

### **Statement of Administrator and Professional Staff Excellence**

The M-DCC Statement of Administrator and Professional Staff Excellence<sup>11</sup> has a similar introduction and format to the statements for support staff. The qualities and characteristics of excellent administrators and professional staff are described in five categories: Leadership/Supervision Skills, Professional Performance, Interpersonal Skills, Motivation, and Knowledge Base.<sup>12</sup> M-DCC is currently working on the feedback system for staff in supervisory roles that will assist in improving the performance review process, assuring that the statement of administrator and professional staff excellence is enacted consistently and effectively.

### **Nurturing New Faculty**

Staff development for new faculty and staff takes the form of orientation sessions and a mentoring program. Both full and part-time faculty are included in the program.

### **Teaching and Learning Centers**

As a result of the Teaching/Learning Project, at one time each campus of M-DCC had an operating Teaching and Learning Center with a full-time director and identifiable staff and budget. However, of the original five, only two of the campuses now have Teaching and Learning Centers in place—Kendall and North. While numerous factors account for the elimination of the centers on the other campuses, the primary cause was a cutback in fiscal resources. Campus administrators had to make difficult decisions about which programs and staff to cut on every campus. As will be apparent in the following section on Future Directions, M-DCC is now moving to a College-wide staff development strategy, ensuring more consistent service on each campus. In 1996-97, the Teaching and Learning Center for the Kendall Campus (known as the Center for Faculty, Staff, and Program Development) defined its mission as follows:

*A comprehensive resource for professional development and performance excellence. The Center is a place where any employee with an idea can receive support, guidance and access to a network of internal consultants who can help the employee achieve campus goals and meet student needs.*<sup>13</sup>

The goals of the Center for Faculty, Staff, and Program Development on the Kendall Campus for 1996-97 focused on enhancing the effectiveness of faculty, staff, and administrators by providing leadership, consultation, and support for new initiatives for program development; curriculum and instructional development projects; integration of technology into the curriculum; and the use of new delivery systems for instruction and information.<sup>14</sup>

To guide the goals' planning and implementation, the Kendall Campus Center put in place a Center Advisory Committee with sub-committees in Academic Affairs, Administrative Training, and Support Staff Training. The Center employed a staff of about fifteen professional and support staff. Five staff members, including the director, are full-time. Some of the staffing consisted of faculty on temporary or part-time leave from teaching positions to work on projects in the Center. The Center had a budget of about \$450,000 from regular M-DCC funds and engaged in a wide variety of externally-funded training and development projects to enhance its size and funding.

The Kendall Campus Center described its services and resources as workshops/seminars, resource information, travel, instructional design and development, University of Miami and Florida International Courses/Programs, consultation, and instructional technology. Each category of services and resources included a wide variety of activities.<sup>15</sup>

The staff development program's impact can be seen in the 1996 Annual Report for the Center for Faculty, Staff and Program Development on the Kendall Campus of M-DCC. The report is organized by the

major "development goals" for 1996-97 summarized in the previous section. Illustrative accomplishments of the Center for Faculty, Staff and Program Development include: conducting 211 workshops on topics ranging from orientation for adjunct faculty, to team building, to teaching and learning on-line, to basic first aid for security officers; providing support for 16 curriculum and instructional development projects; instituting new programs that promote distance learning; promoting the expansion of departmental and faculty web pages; sponsoring 10 technology practicums for a wide range of departments; and scheduling a total of 614 events involving 13,344 people.<sup>16</sup>

Major new directions have been set forth for the M-DCC faculty, staff and program development for implementation during 1997-98. The new directions were developed by a Human Resource Development Reengineering Team in light of the profound impact of dwindling resources, a changing work environment, rapidly evolving technology, demands of external stakeholders, and changing workforce needs. The work of the Reengineering Team focusing on the human resources of the college (and described in a report entitled *Recommendations for Training and Performance Management*) included assessing current practices relating to training, supervisory training, and performance appraisal of professional and staff personnel; reviewing public and private sector programs; Internet searches; and obtaining feedback from one-to-one interview, town hall meetings, and focus groups of faculty, staff, and administrators.<sup>17</sup>

## **IMPLICATIONS**

Some important implications can be gleaned from the MDCC staff development program journey for designing and implementing teacher learning in the workplace and community. An important implication is the crucial importance of top administration's support for staff development initiatives. Administrators play a key role in securing adequate resources and encouraging participation. In addition,

the staff development initiative must spring from and remain accountable to its effects on learning and must include attention to all of the staff involved in particular topical areas related to student learning. The staff development effort must also have adequate resources to deliver what is planned and promised. As with student learning, staff development necessitates resources on a regular and dependable budgeting cycle. Another important implication is that in order for staff development to have the desired effects, the participants must be supportive. This support comes in part with participation in deciding what and how staff development will occur. The staff development effort must develop a reputation for quality through careful planning, by continuously monitoring impact, and by making necessary changes quickly. Improving an institution through staff development does not occur quickly. Rather, it requires a commitment of many years to put effective systems into place, remove disincentives, reach a critical mass of staff, and support programmatic change.<sup>18</sup>

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## REFERENCES

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## ENDNOTES

[1] Loumos-Kennedy, P. D. (1996, April). A study of faculty/staff development best practices. Unpublished doctoral project, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minnesota.

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[4] *Ibid*.

[5] Miami-Dade Community College. (no date). *Teaching/Learning project: Summary report 1991-92*. Miami, FL: Author.

[6] Miami-Dade Community College. (no date). *Teaching/Learning project: Summary report 1992-94*. Miami, FL: Author.

[7] Miami-Dade Community College. (1994, April). *Faculty advancement policies and procedures*. Miami, FL: Author, p. i.

[8] For further detailed information on the qualities and characteristics of excellent faculty developed as part of the faculty, staff, and program development initiative at M-DCC, see Miami-Dade Community College. (1990, April). *Statement of faculty excellence*. Miami, FL: Author.

[9] Miami-Dade Community College. (1993, April). *Statement of support staff excellence*. Miami, FL: Author.

[10] For further detailed information on the qualities and characteristics of excellent support staff developed as part of the faculty, staff, and program development initiative at M-DCC, see *ibid*.

[11] Miami-Dade Community College. (1992, May). *Statement of administrator and professional staff excellence*. Miami, FL: Author.

[12] For further detailed information on the qualities

and characteristics of excellent administrator and professional staff developed as part of the faculty, staff, and program development initiative at M-DCC, see *ibid.*

[13] Center for Faculty, Staff and Program Development. (no date). *Center for faculty, staff, and program development*. Miami, FL: Miami-Dade Community College, Kendall Campus, p. 1.

[14] For further information on specific goals for 1996-97 established for the Center for Faculty, Staff and Program Development on the Kendall Campus of Miami-Dade Community College, see *ibid.*

[15] For further information on the services and resources available at the Kendall Campus Center and the activities associated with those services and resources, see *ibid.*

[16] For further information on development goals for the Kendall Campus Center for Faculty, Staff, and Program Development and accomplishments in reaching these goals, see Center for Faculty, Staff and Program Development. (no date). *1996 annual report*. Miami, FL: Miami-Dade Community College, Kendall Campus.

[17] For further information on the work of the Human Resource Development Team at the Kendall Campus, see Human Resource Development Team. (no date). *Recommendations for training and performance management*. Miami, FL: Miami-Dade Community College.

[18] For further details regarding design implications of the Kendall Campus Center for Faculty, Staff, and Program Development, see Jenrette, M. S., & Napoli, V. (1994). *The teaching learning experience: Miami-Dade community College's blueprint for change*. Bolton, MA: Anker.