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The Development of a WMU Faculty Learning Community focused on Exploring Pedagogical Strategies in Graduate Education

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Project Objectives

The purpose of this Academy Leadership Academy (ALA) poster is to summarize the development of a WMU Faculty Learning Community (FLC) that will focus on pedagogical strategies in graduate education. This purpose of this FLC is to provide faculty from all disciplines the opportunity to discuss developmentally and disciplinarily appropriate pedagogies for graduate students.

What is a Faculty Learning Community?

(an [excerpt from WMU Office of Faculty Development Website](#))

A Faculty Learning Community offers a cross-disciplinary group of a small group of participants the opportunity to:

- meet regularly to study pedagogical topics of shared interest,
- delve into existing research on their common area of inquiry,
- design and pursue individual projects that require them to apply and test new ideas and information about student learning.

Learning communities offer a structured, intensive, and outcome-driven approach to faculty development.

[Learn about in-depth explanations of learning communities and the theory and research that drive them](#)

The Need for this Faculty Learning Community

There is a plethora of literature focusing on pedagogical strategies in undergraduate education. Much less discussed are teaching practices that support graduate student success. We recognize that some of the experiences facing graduate educators may be different.

The development of this Faculty Learning Community supports several of the goals and strategies in [WMU's Gold Standard 2020 Strategic Plan](#).

Objective 1.1: A learner-centered culture maximizes student retention and degree completion.

- Strategy 1.1.e. **Develop and operationalize best practices that promote persistence and degree completion of graduate students.**

Objective 2.3: Academic excellence will be maintained through the execution of best practices.

- Strategy 2.3.b. **Create and sustain a culture that supports the use of high impact practices for instruction** in all academic units.
- Strategy 2.3.c. Enhance opportunities for **instructional staff to engage in learning communities.**

Objective 2.4: WMU will be positioned as leader in quality graduate education.

- Strategy 2.4.d. Promote cross-discipline learning and research opportunities to **enhance the educational experiences of graduate students.**

What is this Faculty Learning Community and Who is it for?

The purpose of this [WMU Faculty Learning Community](#) is to provide faculty from all disciplines an opportunity to discuss developmentally and disciplinarily appropriate pedagogies for graduate students. We invite anyone who teaches graduate courses at WMU to join this learning community. We will meet regularly and share ideas and bring our questions related to teaching practices that support graduate student success.

How will this FLC operate?

How: Team learning is the heart and purpose faculty learning communities (FLC). Participants decide the topics for discussion, bring ideas, and determine outcomes and projects. Facilitators will start with a brief list of readings and topics, and then encourage members to contribute their ideas about exploring the subject and potential outcomes. The FLC will meet on a regular basis, as determined by members, (approximately 2x a month) during the 2018-19 academic year.

The Co-Faculty Facilitators are:

Ramona Lewis, Educational Leadership & David Paul, Philosophy

What are the benefits of participating in this FLC?

Benefits of participation/outcomes of involvement in the Faculty Learning Community:

- Share and learn innovative strategies for possible implementation in your graduate courses.
- Develop research questions to guide scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL) projects focused on graduate education.
- Join a community of people interested in a common topic.
- Fulfill scholarship, professional competence, or service needs.
- Create research projects, improve our teaching, and build our network of peers!



Some Data about Graduate Education at WMU

Graduate Enrollment at WMU 2014-2018

Fall 2014	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018
3,949	3,919	4,009	3,970	TBD

Number of WMU courses offered	Fall 2017	Spring 2018
5000 level	409	424
6000 level	911	880
7000 level	809	840

2018-19 number of faculty with full and associate graduate faculty status = 1299

Thanks to Malia Roberts in the WMU Graduate College for data points.

	Degree programs offered 2017-18	Degrees awarded F.Y. 2016-17	Degrees awarded since 1918
Master's	76	1,312	69,507
Specialist	1	4	564
Doctoral	33	131	3203

Helpful Resources

- Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education (journal)
- [Faculty Learning Communities](#) (website)
- [Lily Institute on Faculty Learning Communities](#)
- Cassuto, L. (2015). [The degree for quitters and failures](#)
- Cassuto, L. (2015) *The graduate school mess: What caused it and how we can fix it.* Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Council of Graduate Schools (2016) [Data sources: Four out of five: A closer look into master's degrees](#)
- Council of Graduate Schools (2017) [Master's degree requirements and the U.S. workforce](#)
- Gardner, S. K., & Barker, M. J. (2014). Engaging graduate and professional students. In S. J. Quaye & S. R. Harper (Eds.), *Student engagement in higher education* (pp. 339-354). Florence, KY: Routledge.
- Moore, M, Tatum, B. C, & Sebetan, I (2011) [Graduate education: What matters most.](#) *Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching*, 4(1) 65-77.
- Pearl, J. H. (2014). [The master's question](#)
- Semenza, G. (2015). [The unacknowledged art of teaching graduate students](#)
- Shulman, L. S. (2005) Signature pedagogies in the professions. *Daedalus*, 134 (3), 52-59.

Steps in Developing this Faculty Learning Community

The initials steps included:

- ✓ Develop the mission & purpose of this FLC
 - ✓ Conducting a literature search on topics related to pedagogy in graduate education
 - ✓ Reviewing literature about purpose and benefits of faculty learning communities
 - ✓ Benchmarking and outreach to other institutions who have had similar projects
- Determine the need for this FLC at WMU
 - ✓ Discuss idea with ALA colleagues, OFD, and faculty colleagues
 - ✓ Present idea to and gather feedback from:
 - ✓ Graduate College (interim dean Dr. Jacobs Byrd)
 - ✓ Graduate Studies Council
 - ✓ Office of Faculty Development (OFD)
- Once feedback and support was received from individuals above I met with OFD to: Set plan, timeline, explore co-facilitator options, and discuss marketing
- Marketing materials created and distributed
- Gather some basic data about graduate education at WMU
- Meet with co-facilitator and organize topics of discussion for first two meetings

Next steps:

- Attend kickoff event at Fall Convocation
- Recruit FLC members
- Determine meeting frequency and times
- Hold first meeting to set goals, vision, and establish rapport
- Begin FLC ongoing meetings
- Encourage members to consider outcomes
- Work with Michele Behr to develop WMU library topical research guide

How to sign up for this FLC? & Contact Information

The kickoff event is on Friday, Sept. 14 in the morning at the Fetzer Center as part of the Fall Convocation and Sixth Annual Teaching & Learning Bash. Learning community facilitators will be available at a table display with more **information and sign up sheets**.

To sign up or express interest: please visit the online sign up [form here](#) or email name, rank, department, and briefly mention why you are interested, what you hope to gain, and one topic you would like to discuss with FLC members.

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