



Assessment Spotlight: CHES Professional Development in Teaching and Assessment

Fall 2018

Associate Dean Mary Kay Meyer and Assistant Professor Caroline Fulmer teach in the College of Human Environmental Sciences (CHES). In 2017, the pair applied for and received OAA funding to attend the SACSCOC Summer Institute. They participated in the Faculty/Program Coordinators track, which featured an array of sessions on assessment and pedagogical approaches to improve teaching/learning. The experience energized Meyer and Fulmer (“so many good sessions”) and fueled a conversation that continued through the event and the trip home: “How can we best share this innovative information with our faculty?”

Knowing that the CHES strategic plan included annual faculty development goals, Meyer and Fulmer obtained support to offer a series of workshops related to teaching. After surveying CHES faculty to identify which potential topics were of greatest interest, they collaborated to develop three workshops based on SACSCOC Summer Institute sessions: *Measuring Teaching Effectiveness*; *Teaching and Assessing Critical Thinking*; and *Transparent Instruction*. The sequence was strategic, as they wanted to help faculty strengthen connections among teaching, curriculum, and assessment. The workshops were

spread out over the 2017-18 year, with each being offered twice. The response and attendance were enthusiastic.

In structuring their workshops, Meyer and Fulmer were careful to cover both theory and practice. For example, critical thinking—some flavor of which is a learning outcome in almost all degree programs—was the focus of their second workshop. They began by engaging participants in discussions about key concepts, but they knew discussion alone wouldn’t convey *how* to foster critical thinking through class activities. Thus faculty worked in small groups and used templates to design activities that they could apply in their own classes. The ideas were shared out so that everyone left with multiple activities that could support students’ critical thinking and feed into program-level SLO assessment.

Meyer and Fulmer were also intentional in designing post-workshop evaluations. In addition to asking questions about content and activities, they surveyed faculty to find out what had actually been done with the imparted knowledge—and “they told us!” In turn, faculty were given affirmation and encouraged to continue innovating. The impact of the workshops has already been apparent in several ways (e.g., stronger learning outcomes in course proposals; better alignment between course assignments and program outcomes).

One key takeaway from the CHES workshop series was “how eager our faculty are to make improvements in their teaching practices.” For Colleges wanting to address that need, Meyer and Fulmer suggested that replicating workshops from conferences is feasible, but it needs to be done strategically (make a plan and obtain support ahead of time). It also helps to have a partnership—both to share the work and to maintain the momentum: “Don’t be afraid to do it! We could have wasted our post-conference enthusiasm, but instead we used it for the greater good.”

