

Review Finds Promise in ACUE Course on Faculty Teaching

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by [Sara Weissman](#)

While professors spend years learning how to do their research, they're rarely taught how to teach.



But an [independent review](#) recently found promising results from a course in teaching practices for faculty, offered by the Association of College and University Educators (ACUE).

The review – co-authored by a committee of teaching experts from Princeton University, Macalester College, Clemson University and University of Massachusetts Amherst – analyzed 10 research studies conducted by ACUE over the past two years to measure how helpful the course has been for faculty and their students.

Each study focused on a particular cohort of professors and collected data based on the specific feedback each institution requested. Studies found that students did better in courses taught by faculty who took the course.

The success of the course isn't "faith-based," said Susan Cates, CEO of the Association of College and University Educators. "It shouldn't be faith-based. We should hold ourselves accountable to prove it, and that's what we've done and continue to do."

So far, 5,600 faculty members from more than 100 colleges and universities across 38 states have completed the ACUE Course in Effective Teaching Practices.

ACUE partners with individual colleges and universities, and each school chooses a cohort of faculty to take the course. Faculty members progress through 25 online modules, which include 208 research-based teaching techniques – on planning class discussions, engaging underprepared students and more.

During each module, faculty have two opportunities to come together to discuss what they've learned, and every week faculty write a reflection about one technique they've implemented.

At the end of the course, professors earn a Certificate in Effective College Instruction endorsed by the American Council on Education, a partner organization.

"Many faculty have been hungering for this type of information," said Dr. Laurie Dickson, vice provost for teaching, learning design and assessment at Northern Arizona University (NAU).

At her school, 85 faculty members have gotten credentialed. Next week, a new cohort of 35 professors will start the course, with another 35 on the waiting list. The school also started ACUE teaching circles for credentialed faculty to continue conversations from the course.



Faculty "recognize the need for more training in pedagogy and teaching," she said. But until this program, those skills haven't been packaged in a way that's "evidence-based" and "easily digestible."

A nationwide faculty survey included in the review found that 97 percent of professors said the course was relevant to their work. Nearly 100 percent reported that they continued using the techniques they learned after the course. Meanwhile, a seven-campus study found that faculty implemented or made plans to implement 90 percent of the teaching techniques taught.

Faculty who take the courses can be a self-selecting group. At NAU, many opt for the course because they already want to improve their teaching, Dickson said. But it gives her institution an opportunity to support faculty in treating "teaching as a scholarly pursuit."

Dr. Penny McCormack, ACUE's chief academic officer, said that's the goal – to not just train better professors but to "allow a culture to build" where teaching is valued by faculty and regularly discussed.

Seven of the studies reviewed included student data such as grades, course evaluations and student surveys. They found that students did better in their classes when faculty took the teaching course.

At Delta State University, for example, 19 percent more students passed their courses with credentialed faculty compared to students with un-credentialed faculty in the same disciplines. Average grades at City College of San Francisco and Miami Dade College went up when taught by professors who took the course.

The program isn't "focused on improving teaching just for the sake of improving teaching," said Cates. "We certainly find that faculty who go through the program are very enthusiastic about it, they feel positively about it, but that's not enough. The reason for institutions to do this is because it is actually driving better impact for their students."

The hope is to also improve retention and completion rates for underrepresented students. A study at Texas Woman's University found that there was a small gap between how many African-American

students completed their courses compared to their peers. The year faculty took the course, the gap closed across 113 classes.

But it's about more than the numbers, McCormack added. Underprivileged students often feel behind or out of place, but good teaching can increase students' confidence.

"If they're doing well in their courses and they feel like they belong, they're more likely to put the effort in and persist and meet those academic challenges over time," McCormack said. "We're seeing that for our students."

Going forward, ACUE leaders hope to expand the teaching credential program to more colleges and universities and brainstorm new ways to support professors after the course.

"You look at this data and it's kind of like when you have a clinical trial going – and you should stop the clinical trial because the control group ought to be getting the treatment, too," said Cates. "You're morally obligated to give it to the folks getting the placebo. I feel that way about what we're seeing from this. We know this works."

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