

Training Faculty in a Remote Environment: Remote Teaching Office Hours

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This past summer, the Remote Teaching Distance Education Working Group learned of many best practices for remote teaching from experts at 24 different institutions. However, in many cases, despite having over a decade of experience, these faculty, administrators, and Centers for Teaching

“Faculty receive guidance or assistance from other faculty better than they do from *any* staff member. This is just the way it works. You want to hear that another faculty member has used this tool or set up the course this way and these are the outcomes they got.”

- Drs. Halliday and Smith, Utica College

Excellence still struggled with how to best train faculty within their institutions. Workshops was the primary method of dissemination; however, all the colleges we interviewed described extremely low workshop attendance

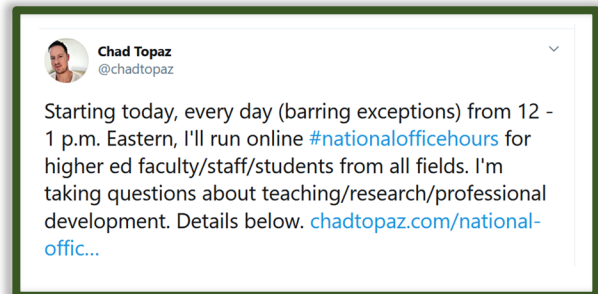
(Field) and challenges in campus-wide “getting the word out”. As pointed out by Dr. Halliday (Sr. Assoc Prov. Dean at Utica College) and Dr. Polly Smith (Senior Vice President for Market Innovation and New Ventures/Associate Provost for Online Education Services at Utica College), faculty learn best from their peers. Our problem became how to form workshops consisting of peer education.

Last summer, Dr. Chad Topaz (Williams College) began advertising “National Office Hours” on Twitter. Run on Zoom, Dr. Topaz would be standing by online at 12-1pm EST and discuss anything that faculty wished to discuss. What ensued were rich conversations ranging from how to best

support at-risk students to the best technology to use to achieve a desired outcome. Dr. Topaz’ National Office Hours were never empty and everyone walked away with something new. Based on the Dr.

Topaz’ success, we decided to try out a similar plan at West Point. Every Wednesday, the Dean’s Fellows were available on Microsoft Teams to field questions from faculty between 1615 to 1700.

Independent of attendance, the purpose was to provide a place for faculty to virtually stop by to pursue



knowledge enabling improvement in teaching techniques, modality integration, and pedagogy development. If no one showed up, nothing was lost. However, for faculty that showed up, they have now contributed to an evolving peer-sharing learning environment which continues to grow.

Unlike Dr. Topaz' National Office Hours, we "lightly" seeded office hours with loose topics. Topics are crowd sourced from previous office hours and faculty council meetings. For example, one week, we had a cadet panel anonymously share their remote learning experiences and insights. Another week, we had faculty share innovative examples of remote teaching that worked well. We requested that no presentation exceed 3-5 minutes so faculty could remain personally engaged and participate in the discussion and with the majority of the time allotted for questions and answers.. At one of the West Point Remote Teaching Office Hour sessions, faculty even spontaneously shared screens to demonstrate Teams features to each other.

Every Remote Teaching Office Hour session had more than 20 faculty attend with faculty represented across disciplines coming from STEM, the Humanities, and the Department of Physical Education. Support staff from CEP and the Library have attended or presented and instructors from the USMA prep school have participated. Taken together, a surprising but very pleasant outcome is the community that was developed through Remote Teaching Office Hours.

As faculty, we are always invested in the well-being, health, and education of our cadets. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have spent more hours ensuring that our cadets have a sense of belonging and community. It is easy to forget that all human beings need community and social interaction. Teaching remotely has made our hallways a little quieter and it has become more challenging to see each other face to face; however, Remote Teaching Office Hours has not only provided a venue for sharing information to improve remote teaching but a reminder that we are indeed One USMA.

References

Field, K. "How to Draw Faculty to Workshops? Make It Like a Game " *The Chronicle of Higher Education* October 21, 2018 2018. Print.