

DEFINING WHAT MATTERS

Guidelines for Comprehensive Center for
Teaching and Learning (CTL) Evaluation





GUIDELINES FOR COMPREHENSIVE CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING (CTL) EVALUATION

Calls to improve Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) evaluation began soon after the founding of the POD Network (Levinson-Rose & Menges, 1981). Recent scholarship confirms that challenges persist (Hines, 2009), and POD Network and Educational Development Caucus members report a great need for assistance with measuring CTL impact (Kolomitro & Anstey, 2017; POD Network, 2016). Therefore, building on the 2017 POD Conference theme, “Defining What Matters,” a learning community of 15 educational developers across four countries and multiple U.S. institutional types convened to develop educational development-specific CTL evaluation guidelines.*

One possible reason for CTLs’ struggles with evaluation is that many existing frameworks primarily focus on the measurement of individual change attributable to the CTL (e.g., teaching behaviors or student learning) (see, for example, Chalmers & Gardiner, 2015; Hines, 2017; Hurney, et al., 2016; Kirkpatrick, 1998; Kreber & Brook, 2001). While these are excellent frameworks for evaluating instructor-level change, our field is pivoting from an emphasis on 1:1 work or workshops to longer-term, systemic change initiatives (Beach, Sorcinelli, Austin, & Rivard, 2016; Gibbs, 2013; Schroeder, 2010). Indeed, in response to the 2017 POD Network presidential address activity prompt, “What are you most proud of?” larger-scale organizational or culture change initiatives were named frequently (Wright, 2017). Examples written by participants in the session include:

- My leadership of the CTL has played a key role in facilitating a culture change at our institution.
- Our undergraduate research initiative has created so many opportunities over the years to the point that it has now become its own center.
- We have taken a university mandate to reduce campus DFW rates and partnered with 3 different centers to lead faculty support and money for faculty time and grants.

Therefore, our evaluation guidelines need to reflect this shift.

CTL evaluation guidelines — framing principles, areas of potential impact, possible short- and long-term measures, contextual considerations — should align with educational development values and trends. These guidelines offer a lens that is distinct to our field and represent emergent directions in our work that are important to capture, particularly larger-scale change initiatives in alignment with college and university priorities. This tool should be useful to institutions and center professionals who wish to demonstrate their impact in these areas.

Our focus is on comprehensive CTL evaluation, rather than how to evaluate a particular type of educational development program. (A good resource on the latter topic is Hines, 2009.) However, for campuses that do not have a centralized CTL, a campus could use this tool to examine the distributed resources that support educational development, as well as needs for new resources.

FRAMING PRINCIPLES

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

- (1) These guidelines define evaluation as information used for local decision making, which can also make a CTL's work visible on campus.** In contrast, research is about creating generalizable knowledge that makes CTL work visible beyond a campus. Evaluation and research are distinct endeavors (Levin-Rozalis, 2003), and not all CTLs will have the resources, interest, or need to engage in research. However, research for the development of the field of educational development is important, and good resources for those who wish to conduct rigorous educational development research include Amundsen & Wilson, 2012; Condon et al., 2016; Kenny et al., 2017, and Kucsera & Svinicki, 2010.
- (2) Evaluation is a valuable activity in which all CTLs should engage,** for three reasons. First, for internal decision-making, CTLs should engage in a continuous process of formative evaluation, or low-resource activities like immediate participant feedback with reflection. Second, evaluation supports CTL decision-making and campus visibility. Finally, by evaluating our programs and using data to inform iterative improvement, we are modeling a practice that is central to effective teaching.
- (3) Evaluation should highlight both strengths and areas for improvement.** While CTL evaluation should recognize “narratives of constraint” (i.e., honest assessments of areas in need of enhancement), “narratives of growth” are equally important to tell (O’Meara, Terosky, & Neumann, 2008). Some evaluation efforts may appropriately emphasize a center’s strengths, such as an annual report or resource requests. There is also value in transparency about areas in which a center can do better, as a way to model an effective practice for teaching development.
- (4) Although evaluation is important, the educational and service missions of CTLs must remain primary.** This means that some approaches may be “off the table” because of resource constraints or ethical questions (e.g., in some cases, a comparison group may not align with a CTL’s mission). In light of both our educational mission and resource constraints, CTLs may want to prioritize evaluation methods that serve dual purposes as effective educational development tools. For example, a post-workshop question that asks participants one thing they might change about their teaching also helps cement commitment to implementing ideas in the classroom.

CONTEXT SENSITIVITY

- (5) Effective evaluation is “a contextually bound practice [that] allows for diversity”** in application and presentation (Montrosse-Moorhead & Griffith, 2017, p. 596). Likewise, effective CTLs are responsive to campus context (Beach et al., 2016; Kezar & Eckel, 2002). Therefore, evaluation approaches must be flexibly applied, guided by the questions raised by a CTL’s key constituencies, as well as institutional priorities and resources.

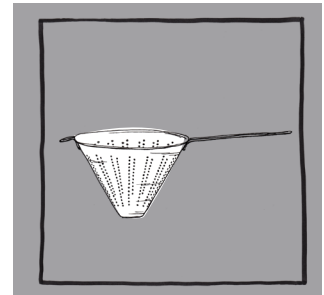
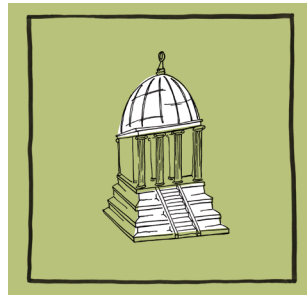
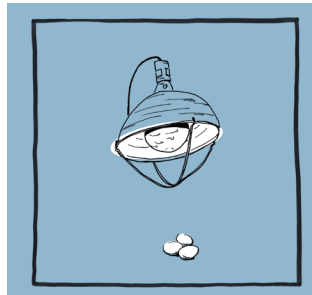
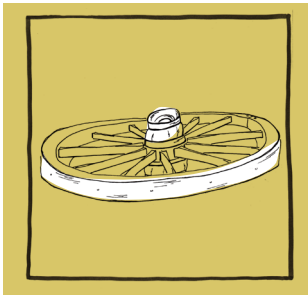
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METRICS

- (6) CTL evaluation metrics need to reflect commonly held values and understandings of our field,** e.g., community, connectivity, inclusion. For example, although participant counts are often dismissed as “non-rigorous,” this indicator may best capture our field’s emphasis on networks (Little, 2015) and offer valuable information for CTL planning. Indeed, Beach et al. (2016, p. 37) note that “one of the hallmarks of a networked faculty development enterprise is collaboration across campus to reach a range of audiences.” Likewise, rather than speaking dismissively of “the usual suspects,” we might instead regard repeated engagement as an important metric of impact because of our field’s value of community-building and leadership development.
- (7) CTL evaluation approaches also need to use a range of types of evidence and methodological approaches** because educational development professionals work across and with different disciplines. A “utilization-focused” evaluation approach, a term developed by evaluation scholar Michael Patton (2008) that looks at intended use by intended users, also suggests the value of methodologies that speak to varied audiences.
- (8) Short-term (i.e., “This year, I will see...”) and long-term (i.e., “In 10 years, I will see...”) indicators are needed.** With the shift in educational development towards systemic change initiatives (Beach, Sorcinelli, Austin, & Rivard, 2016), one important implication is that large-scale change initiatives often take many years to come to fruition. Therefore, a staged evaluation approach will better capture the evolution of those changes.
- (9) While achievement of student learning outcomes is one possible impact of CTL work, they are not the only metric by which CTL impact should be measured.** Because documentation of student learning impacts may not reflect the core objectives of all CTLs — and because this investigation is resource-intensive (for a summary, see Wright, Horii, Felten, Sorcinelli, & Kaplan, 2018) — this is a contextually-bound metric that should not be required of all centers.

CTL EVALUATION GUIDELINES

What follows is a flexible, four-part lens for evaluating key possible dimensions of a CTL's work — hub, incubator, temple, sieve — derived from a heuristic developed by others to categorize the literature on purposes of higher education (Stevens, Armstrong, & Arum, 2008).

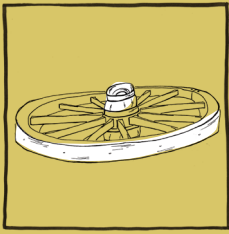


Although many CTLs will see all of these dimensions in their work, no one CTL should have to encompass all of these functions, and some CTLs may see other dimensions. Educational development is often embedded in a highly variable campus ecosystem where other units or individuals may take on some of these roles. Additionally, CTLs may evolve over time to prioritize certain areas over others.

Below are four dimensions of CTL work that could guide a comprehensive evaluation plan, along with non-exhaustive examples of short- and long-term indicators. Each dimension also includes examples of how CTL evaluation may be contextually sensitive, with four sample questions and illustrations for each:

- Who are the CTL's key constituencies?
- What is the context and mission in which the CTL is embedded?
- What are the resources available to the CTL?
- What is the structure of educational development on campus, e.g., is there a centralized CTL and/or more distributed models, such as individuals with this charge, disciplinary-based centers, or disciplinary-based education researchers (DBER, Bush et al., 2016)?

These questions are offered as examples; other features of context may certainly also be important.



HUB

"We make connections between people who would not otherwise be connected. We have a view into the university that's unique and can build on that to support initiatives and work towards cultural change."

Definition: The hub role was named most frequently by attendees at the 2017 POD Network presidential address activity, in response to the prompt, "What are you most proud of?" In this capacity, CTLs serve as a forum, in the ancient Roman sense, as a place for exchange of ideas and where collaborative actions can occur. Actions that happen when CTLs play a hub role include adaptation, translation, redistribution, and cross-pollination — all of which reflect the importance of transcending disciplinary boundaries, elevating collective voices, including all voices, and amplifying voices typically unheard. Additionally, CTLs serve as hosts or facilitators of important institutional initiatives, which they may also lead or co-lead, and they highlight the work of others in the teaching and learning realm. Key values employed in this work are inclusion and collaboration. The institutional visibility of a CTL increases with this role, and the hub function has grown with the prevalence of campus-wide engagement in campus initiatives (e.g., diversity & inclusivity efforts, reforming general education, or STEM education).

Possible indicators to consider for documenting activity/achievement in this area:

In one year:

- In how many collaborations across campus, especially around key institutional initiatives, did your CTL engage? Are there ways that the CTL includes less visible populations, or voices from those with less authority, in programmatic or policy-related initiatives?
- Are there documented instances when the CTL disseminated examples of excellence in teaching and learning, so that they became more visible, or translated a project in one area to a parallel version adapted to another area?
- What networks were created when there was CTL involvement in projects that bring people together from different disciplines to work toward a common goal? How many cross-disciplinary teams or projects were developed in response to CTL programs?
- In what ways have CTL services (e.g., learning communities, year-long learning experiences) brought colleagues together to explore teaching and learning?

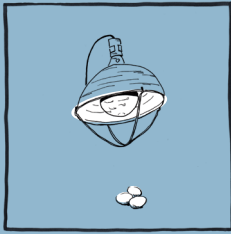
Over several years:

- Are there increases in the number and extensiveness of collaborations between the CTL and other groups on campus? In addition to breadth, are there examples of deep engagement with particular departments or units? Do partners experience positive relationships, climate, and expectations (RCE) with the CTL (Greenwald & Zulowski, 2018)?
- Is the CTL recognized as a "go-to" unit for convening diverse offices to work on a project or issue, as measured by the number of requests that come to the CTL (even those that go beyond the boundaries of its scope and mission)?
- Is there an increase in resources given to the CTL to advance its work over time (e.g., subawards from grants, FTE for assessment of collaborative initiatives)?

Examples of context-specific considerations for this aspect of CTL evaluation:

What is the context and mission in which the CTL is embedded?

Mission, as well as institutional and cultural context, can significantly impact how this function is evaluated. For example, CTLs at research-focused institutions may wish to measure contributions to products such as institution-wide grants (e.g., co-PI, evaluation support), while those at teaching-focused institutions might track participation in arenas such as SoTL groups and faculty learning communities. Further considerations also may include internationally variable expectations for instructional or professional development in higher education, e.g., mandatory certification or responsiveness to government mandates. For example, in the UK, the National Student Survey, which measures students' satisfaction across higher education, often prompts reactive efforts to "fix" assessment, feedback, or curriculum design issues.



INCUBATOR

“Many of our faculty participants from intensive, year-long programs have taken important admin positions and can now influence their department or the whole university in the US and internationally.”

“Seeing TAs grow in their role.”

Definition: The incubator role, rooted in educational development’s traditional focus on nurturing and engagement, was named second most frequently in 2017. As incubators, CTLs prioritize fostering growth and development, cultivating individuals and communities, nurturing relationships, promoting transformation, and creating a sense of belonging. Integrated CTLs — or those also charged with student academic support, writing, service learning, digital learning, and so forth (Kelley, Cruz, & Fire, 2017) — also may see key roles in fostering these outcomes for students, writers, community-engaged practitioners or other relevant constituencies. Essential for this function are the values of confidentiality, safety, autonomy, and collegiality. Together, these values create a foundation for near-term connection-building, as well as sustained development and growth over longer periods of time. This foundational function remains a vital wellspring of institutional transformation for today’s CTLs, while honoring the traditional role of the teaching center as a source of individualized service.

Possible indicators to consider for documenting activity/achievement in this area:

In one year:

- What is the breadth of the CTL’s “reach” on campus (e.g., number of individuals encountered, quantity of departments touched, range of disciplines reached, number of committees served)?
- Is there positive participant feedback for events, and do comments suggest themes of care, collegiality, safety, growth, and connection across difference?
- Are there “usual suspects”? What is the frequency of repeat attendance/participation in events and stated reasons for returning?
- Is the CTL involved in mentoring or supporting others in mentoring roles, in areas of teaching and learning? Does the CTL encourage graduate students or faculty to engage with the center (e.g., advisory board, consultants, liaisons, or fellows) or to take on future educational development roles?

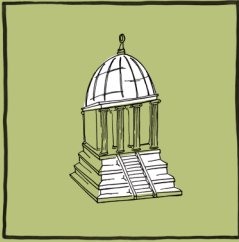
Over several years:

- Is the reach of the CTL growing, by individual and unit? Within units, has the number of CTL participants reached a critical mass (ACE & POD Network, 2018)?
- Is there an increased sense of institutional belonging for those who use CTLs, as measured by campus climate data?
- Are faculty members who go through CTLs getting tenure and promotion? Taking on roles that impact teaching and learning (e.g., curriculum committees)? Moving into positions of leadership?
- What is the degree of instructor involvement in CTL work (e.g., leading workshops, serving as fellows, serving on advisory boards, bringing colleagues to events)?

Examples of context-specific considerations for this aspect of CTL evaluation:

Who are the CTL’s key constituencies?

At a small college, it may be important to track growing faculty participation in and leadership within the CTL. At some institutions, adjunct or part-time faculty are a numerically larger group and their needs must be met and nurtured so that all feel a part of the larger effort. At larger institutions, students are served consistently by staff, and it is this staff that has a great opportunity to influence success rates. Some integrated CTLs offer academic support services, suggesting students are a key constituency to measure. In summary, a context-appropriate measurement will reflect the constituencies most important to measure, in alignment with the CTL’s mission.



TEMPLE

"We are a sanctuary on campus where people can come to talk about and think about teaching and learning."

Definition: The secular temple metaphor for CTLs functions in two ways. First, the temple provides legitimacy, credibility, authority, and even recognition for instructors through support of teaching, learning, and educational development. As a site of legitimation, the temple function of CTLs establishes teaching as an ongoing scholarly endeavor, worthy of professional development. Second, the temple is a sanctuary, a space where campus teaching and learning communities can find hope and inspiration, as well as an institutionally-sanctioned space for exploring pedagogy. This function is a more radical departure from past CTL definitions, raising educational development to a respected and visible place within an institution's culture.

Possible indicators to consider for documenting activity/achievement in this area:

In one year:

- How many instructors or university staff rely on the CTL for institutionally recognized support?
- How many and what type of CTL services/programs play a selective or legitimizing function (e.g., teaching recognition event, competitive grants program, teaching certificates, SoTL communities)?
- Based on a qualitative analysis of "affective" components of CTL evaluation responses, do themes of trust, hope, and inspiration emerge?
- Do institutional messages (e.g., leadership talks, institutional incentives) encourage instructors or university staff to participate in CTL activities?

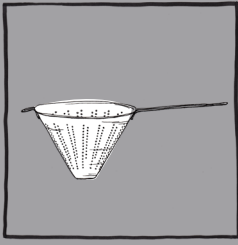
Over several years:

- Based on interviews or case studies, are there narratives of teaching development, where indicators and stories of learning (both students' and instructors') attribute the CTL for helping to inspire pedagogical growth (Wenger, Trayner, & de Laat, 2011) and legitimate time spent on teaching?
- Are there examples where an enduring, deep engagement with a department or other campus unit results in behaviors or practices that recognize the CTL's role on campus (e.g., sending all new faculty for an instructional consultation)?
- Are there changes in key policies affecting teaching on campus (e.g., tenure and promotion, documentation of professional development or teaching effectiveness)?
- Is the CTL named in strategic plans, self-studies for reaccreditation, and other institutional documents?

Examples of context-specific considerations for this aspect of CTL evaluation:

Where does the CTL fit in the campus ecosystem in relation to institutional priorities?

A campus's organizational milieu can significantly impact how this function is evaluated. In contexts with a more distributed model of educational development, the location of the legitimacy and recognition function may not be housed in a CTL. Other aspects of CTL organizational structure — reporting lines, budget, and rank or status of its leadership — are highly variable by campus and may shift the evaluation of this dimension by shifting the institutional power that a CTL has available.



SIEVE

We “read the research and share the best.”

Definition: The sieve function reflects vetting roles that a CTL might play. Essential for this function is the value of evidence-based practice. Evidence about student learning and teaching effectiveness currently plays a greater role in educational development as institutions strive to adopt data-driven priorities. CTLs act as sieves that both “filter in” and “filter out” as needed in different contexts. CTLs are looked to as sources of expertise about the research basis for educational practice and work with instructors and academic programs to implement these ideas and grow innovations. At times, CTLs may even play a helpful role in “slowing down,” or opposing, a new pedagogical initiative by bringing in research, asking questions about key goals, or gathering feedback from key campus constituencies. Interestingly, this role was selected least frequently by 2017 POD Conference attendees, perhaps because of the hesitancy many CTLs have in taking on an evaluative role, or difficulty saying “no.”

Possible indicators to consider for documenting activity/achievement in this area:

In one year:

- What are the number of new resources produced/curated by a center and the number of times they are accessed?
- How many times, and in what ways, does the CTL respond to requests for educational research on a topic?
- How many mission-focused areas of programming does the CTL offer, and what is the evidence basis for these? Is there alignment between CTL offerings and needs assessment data? Does the CTL have intended and achieved faculty learning outcomes for programs: “what faculty will know, do, and find valuable as a result of their participation in center programming” (Hurney et al, 2016)?

Over several years:

- Do program offerings change -- or even stop -- in response to new research or a campus-based needs assessment?
- Do faculty interviews or promotion and tenure dossiers attribute change in practice to CTL evidence-based programs or resources?
- Is there evidence of raised institutional awareness of evidence-based practices in teaching and learning (e.g. new policies or practices that have an explicit research basis)? Are there examples of how the CTL fostered innovative teaching and learning ideas, through practices such as competitive grants, intensive collaboration, and publicizing exemplars’ work?

Examples of context-specific considerations for this aspect of CTL evaluation:

What are the resources available to the CTL?

CTLs with fewer human and material resources will need to prioritize differently than centers that are more amply resourced. Large CTLs with many personnel may be better able to create scholarly works and campus resources. Smaller CTLs may find it more efficient to vet resources created by other centers or to develop them in collaboration with other centers. Quantitative indicators of activity/achievement such as number of resources produced will not be comparable between small and large CTLs. However, other indicators, such as analysis of resources created, might possibly be compared across institutions with very different resources. The presence or absence of a school, college or faculty of education may influence the sieve function of a CTL, such as the extent to which they collaborate on research projects or external funding proposals and how their specific expertise is valued.



APPLICATION

This document establishes comprehensive CTL evaluation guidelines, or principles, metrics, and contextual considerations that centers can use for the purposes of decision-making or making their work visible on campus. We end by offering advisement on the pragmatics of planning a CTL evaluation, using the hub-incubator-temple-sieve lens. Although CTL evaluation planning is our primary focus, other potential applications include needs assessment, identification of strategic directions for a center, annual report planning, and interpretation of existing feedback and data about the center.

For established and well-resourced CTLs, we recommend that a selection of short-term (one-year) metrics in all four areas are feasible to capture and valuable to document. However, some CTLs will likely need to make choices based on its unique set of constraints, which might include center priorities, evaluation activities, and allocation of resources. For example, a new CTL engaged in relationship-building will wish to focus on the hub or incubator metrics. CTLs seeking a very efficient approach might look holistically at the metrics, because there are some areas of overlap, such as attendance or resources, that can address multiple questions at once.

For longer-term (over several years) evaluation, we would encourage a more selective approach, one guided by long-term planning. A comprehensive evaluation matrix (Wright, 2011), learning outcomes grid (Hurney, Brantmeier, Good, Harrison, & Meizner, 2016), and integrated data approach (Plank, Kalish, Rohdieck, & Harper, 2005) are possible tools for planning a long-term CTL evaluation strategy. We advise centers to be selective in which questions they address, perhaps doing a “deep dive” in a different quadrant every year.

While we offer these guidelines as a resource for the educational development community, we acknowledge that CTL work is highly context-specific and users should adapt as needed. We highlight four examples of how context might shape data collection or interpretation, but there are most certainly others. Likewise, while the hub-incubator-temple-sieve lens applies to many dimensions of educational development work, other possible heuristics could apply. In conclusion, because of two key purposes of CTL evaluation — visibility and decision-making — educational developers need to be able to use evaluation approaches that are rooted in the values and practices of the field. We encourage feedback on your use of this tool by emailing podoffice@podnetwork.org.

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