Survey of Faculty In-Service

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The faculty in-service program has been around for ten years at this institution and has never been evaluated in the past by any internal or external evaluators. The primary goals of the program are to develop and support faculty in the areas of technology, systems applications, pedagogy, and mentoring. The program objective in the area of technology is to assist and develop faculty in their use of technology in the classroom, as well as its use in automating manual processes like grading and taking attendance. Systems application development and support allows faculty to use college-wide computer systems. By providing development and support in pedagogy, the program assists faculty in keeping their teaching skills updated with new methods.

The faculty in-service program supports approximately thirty full-time faculty members. At the beginning of each semester the faculty development staff, which consists of four full-time employees, with the assistance of key administrators, arranges in-service days for the faculty to attend. This training is created based on administrators’ ideas of what is needed in terms of development for full-time faculty. Generally, the faculty is not consulted about the content of the in-service training. The faculty development staff creates the schedule and distributes it to the faculty before they attend the training. There is currently no way to assess the usefulness of these sessions. Administrators have asked for an evaluation of this program so that they can justify its existence. They also want to streamline the training sessions to make them more cost effective. Placing all faculty in training for five days is very expensive. Assessing the program and customizing it to their needs will make the program better for everyone.

The administration has requested the development of a survey to assist them in determining if the faculty in-service program is meeting its objectives. One of the first steps in
developing this survey is to define the problem that will be addressed in the survey and to clearly define the survey’s objectives (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). The literature indicates that a researcher should choose a broad topic for a survey, and then focus on specific objectives once the design has begun (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). It is also very important to be aware of the language that is used when wording questions and of the overall length of the survey (Dunn, 1999). When wording questions, make sure that the words being used are at the appropriate level for the intended audience. If the survey is too long, most people will toss it away. If it is too short, it may not provide enough information.

Step two deals with selecting a sample for your research once the problem is defined and the objectives are clearly stated (Gall et al., 1996). In this case, the sample for the survey is the entire full-time faculty staff. Since the institution is very small, employing only 30 full-time faculty members, the sample needed to include everyone so that there would be no bias or favoritism. Since the current faculty in-service program is mandatory for all members of the full-time faculty, the questions would be relevant to all of them.

Step three deals with designing the questionnaire format. There are many factors that influence how well a survey will be received by a respondent (Gall et al., 1996). During the literature review, this researcher found different sources stating information that was very similar pertaining to designing the format of a survey. One of the key guidelines for developing a winning questionnaire is to keep the survey as short as possible while organizing the items so that they are easy to read and complete (Gall et al., 1996). Choosing the proper question type is also very important. Researchers should try to avoid asking leading questions that may hold a positive or negative opinion. The questions should be clear and concise. When using scales, like the Likert scale, be sure to define the meanings of the range of numbers clearly, allowing for an
option of Not Applicable or No Opinion. Also categorize similar questions and keep them together within the survey (Bentley College, 1999). Fraenkel and Wallen state that the data in a survey can be collected in four basic ways: by administering the survey to a live group; by mail; by telephone; or by doing face-to-face interviews (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). Each researcher may choose the method that is appropriate. This researcher chose to develop the survey using an Internet survey tool call Zoomerang. The Market Tools Company of Sausalito, California maintains the website on which the Zoomerang software runs (Market Tools, 1999).

Step four deals with pretesting the questionnaire (Gall et al., 1996). During this phase this researcher also tested for construct validity. “Construct validity addresses how well a researcher’s operational definition of some variable captures the true nature and theoretical meaning of the variable” (Dunn, 1999, p. 178). As part of the pretesting of this survey, this researcher asked two colleagues to give their opinions on its content. One of the colleagues was the Dean of Instruction. She has a Masters degree in education and is pursuing a Doctoral Degree in Educational Administration. This Dean is instrumental in designing the faculty in-service program. She made some changes to the wording of two of the survey questions so that it did not sound biased. She also asked that an additional question about allowing her to see the results of the survey, be added at the end. The other colleague that was asked is a professor in the area of social science. She has her Masters degree in psychology. After reading over the questions, she made changes to the wording of two questions and asked that the Likert scale include a selection for Not Applicable for one question. Once the changes were made, the survey was placed online and pilot tested with five faculty members. The pilot test was performed to check the validity of the questions and to ensure that they were not ambiguous.
The results of the pilot showed that the questions were indeed valid, since there were no large discrepancies with the answers.

Steps five and six deal with precontacting the sample, writing a cover letter and distributing the survey (Gall et al., 1996). In these steps, the researcher will write a cover letter or meet with the intended survey sample to explain the purpose of the survey, emphasize the importance of the research topic, and ask for the cooperation of the sample group in returning the survey (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). This researcher addressed the full-time faculty at a meeting held just prior to the launch of the survey. An explanation of the survey was given along with a request for completion of the survey. The researcher also guaranteed that the survey was completely anonymous and that the administration would not know anything about individuals’ answers on the survey. An electronic mail message was sent to each full-time faculty member with a personalized note, again, explaining the purpose of the survey and asking for it to be completed.

The final step is to follow up with anyone who did not respond to the survey during the initial request (Gall et al., 1996). This researcher sent a follow up electronic mail message to non-respondents, reminding them to complete the survey. The survey closure date was also given. Because most of the faculty members have left campus for the summer, there was only a 50% return rate with this survey. Better planning could have increased the return rate. A majority of the respondents indicated that the survey results should be sent to the Dean of Instruction.

By design, the faculty in-service program is ongoing. To really test the validity of the survey, this researcher would have to make sure that a longitudinal design was used for the survey. The longitudinal design allows a researcher to survey the same sample group more than
once (Dunn, 1999). This would be helpful in determining if the in-service program sessions were meeting their objectives since the faculty could be asked to rate the effectiveness of the sessions after they attend them. By measuring repeatedly, the researcher can see how attitudes and opinions change across time further adding to the validity of the questions (Dunn, 1999). This type of measurement would also allow the researcher to change the survey to reflect variables that change over time.

Looking back at this project and after reading a lot on the subject of surveys, this researcher feels that more time should be taken when developing survey questions. To obtain the measures that will really mean something, time and thought need to be taken in every aspect of the development of the survey. A survey that is haphazardly thrown together will result in missed data, or even misleading data collected from the sample. Questions about the survey’s validity will then be challenged. When doing another survey, this researcher will take more time in finding experts who can assist in the development of questions on the subject. After evaluating the responses to the survey, this researcher will not be as reluctant to ask specific questions about the program the next time a survey like this is developed. Please see Appendix A for a copy of the Faculty In-Service Survey and Appendix B for a copy of the results as presented by the Zoomerang software.
Appendix A

The pages that follow show the introduction to the survey as placed on the Zoomerang web site and a hard copy of the Faculty In-Service survey.
Appendix B

The pages that follow show data from the Faculty In-Service survey as reported by the Zoomerang web site.
References


