

Integrating Your New Faculty to Reinforce a Liberal Education

**Abigail Ruby Crew
Colorado Mountain College**

**Kathryn Regjo
Colorado Mountain College**

**Karla Hardesty
Colorado Mountain College**

**Beez Schell
Colorado Mountain College**

Recognizing a need to pivot new faculty onboarding from a two-day “information download” to a more meaningful and pedagogically sound delivery of information, the provost invited the Academic Support Division to reimagine new faculty orientation for 2022. Through collaboration, an asynchronous Learning Management System course shell was quickly created to “flip the classroom” to deliver best-practice content to new faculty in a space where they were able to interact with their LMS teaching technology (Canvas) as a student and establish relationships with their new faculty cohort while discussing teaching philosophies, DEI pedagogical practices, and authentic assessment. This prioritized faculty connection and a sense of belonging for the in-person orientation and ensured the notion of liberal education was woven into all our various programs as a dual mission, Hispanic Serving Institution. This new structure afforded new faculty across all disciplines and modalities to receive consistent onboarding to foster student success.

Keywords: new faculty orientation, professional development, faculty communities

INTRODUCTION

New faculty orientation (NFO) programs can be an important introduction to a college or university by defining expectations, providing support for technical issues, and welcoming faculty members to their new environment (Herdklotz & Canale, 2017). That said, “NFO is a frequently missed opportunity to immerse incoming faculty into the campus culture, instill campus values, facilitate new faculty success, and introduce change agendas” (Beeton et al., 2022, p. 9). These missed opportunities occur when colleges and universities continually revert to a “firehose” programming approach whereby new faculty are bombarded with information from numerous sources (Caldwell-O’Keefe et al., 2020). Employing such a programming approach for new faculty can interfere with opportunities for new faculty to interact meaningfully and build lasting relationships.

Miller (2021) reviewed new faculty orientation materials from the websites of 182 universities and found there to be a strong reliance on one-day programs that host a variety of speakers from different offices. Of note, these orientations were rarely designed from an outcomes-based approach. Miller recommended that to be effective, new faculty orientations should include longer activities that last an entire semester or academic year. In addition, these programs might include virtual as well as in-person opportunities to learn about the institution, the students they serve, and the offices and other tools that the institution provides to help faculty be successful. Similarly, by focusing on the “whole” faculty member, Tracy and Gutiérrez (2019) developed a new faculty program that involved active participation and social interaction to co-create the program’s design.

Keeping in mind the importance of the information above and considering that onboarding new faculty looks different in 2023 than it did a decade ago, we ask the seemingly impossible of faculty: to master a new platform, multiple modalities, and up to five different preps, all in a matter of days. Recognizing that this process is far from ideal for our new faculty, not to mention the students they then teach, we asked ourselves as an institution how we could do better; we needed to rethink our former new faculty onboarding of a two-day “talking heads” orientation.

Invited by the provost, the Academic Support Division re-imagined faculty onboarding through collaboration with instructional designers, assessment directors, faculty, and administrators. New Faculty Orientation was reinvigorated with ongoing, more meaningful, and pedagogically sound delivery of information.

By sharing this pilot onboarding model, we offer an opportunity to explore an innovative approach at other institutions that facilitates institution-wide collaboration for NFO; integrates liberal education components into faculty professional development; demonstrates how diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging can be embedded in professional development and pedagogy; models learner-centered pedagogical practices in professional development; and infuses the institution’s mission and vision in professional development.

REIMAGINING NEW FACULTY ONBOARDING

As a dual-mission, Hispanic Serving Institution, our faculty teach in various disciplines across multiple modalities and programs, spanning 11 campuses over 12,000 square miles throughout the Rocky Mountain region of Colorado. In 2022 we had a unique opportunity to onboard a fifth of our faculty by bringing on 20 new individuals for the fall semester in a pilot of re-envisioned new faculty orientation.

Beginning this work with the foundational principles of empathy and respect, we recognized a few key acknowledgments were necessary to generate an outcome of more connected and prepared faculty. These included offering a three-credit stipend for each new faculty’s time and effort in advance of their contract beginning, offering credit for service to the college for faculty mentors, and creating the space for connection and collaboration.

The onboarding stipend equivalent to three credits compensated new faculty to engage in this deeper orientation before the official start of their contracts. The supplemental duties expected with the stipend were participation in training and onboarding activities in an asynchronous new faculty onboarding Canvas shell, participation in a two-day, in-person orientation, and preparing their initial courses in advance of regular employment as a contract faculty, commencing a month before the start of classes.

The asynchronous course, delivered through our learning management platform, was quickly created by the Academic Support Division to “flip the classroom” to deliver onboarding content to new faculty in July and August before the fall semester. The shell allowed for new faculty to establish relationships in a cohort fashion through discussions of teaching philosophies, DEI pedagogical practices, High Impact Practices, and authentic assessment to embed equity, all while familiarizing themselves with the Canvas LMS and with college policies and procedures most salient to new faculty during their onboarding process. The following modules were created for this shell:

- Module 1: The What, The How, The Why, and Most Importantly, the Who
- Module 2: Culturally Relevant, Inclusive, and Asset-Based Pedagogy

- Module 3: High-Impact Practices (HIPs)
- Module 4: Assessment of Student Learning
- Module 5: Universal Design and Accessibility
- Module 6: Syllabus and Course Design for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)
- Module 7: Libraries
- Module 8: All things CMC
- Module 9: Center for Instruction Design and Access (CIDA)

Training through the asynchronous course began one month before the start of classes, with the expectation of completion by the start. A minimum of 30 hours was required to complete all the modules and tutorials. In addition to course participation in the LMS module discussions, new faculty were expected to simultaneously design their courses and implement the strategies, tools, and templates they learned in the NFO course. Additionally, new faculty were assigned to experienced faculty mentors for additional support and networking. The mentoring component of NFO allowed veteran faculty to honor their “service to the college” expectation while connecting with new faculty and sharing best practices in their discipline.

In-person orientation, held at the college’s most central location the week prior to classes starting, was also re-envisioned, with a focus on relationship building. Having the precursory shell helped both the college and new faculty prioritize personal connections and a sense of belonging during the in-person NFO. The two-day “Heart and Soul of CMC” session was based on the principles of *The Courage to Teach* by Parker Palmer. See the full in-person schedule in the Appendix. The outcomes were to: prioritize a sense of belonging by establishing relationships through a learning community; familiarize new faculty with the dual-mission Hispanic Serving Institution of CMC; and embed student learning, engagement, belonging, and success at the center of all pedagogical practices.

Both the asynchronous course and in-person orientation seated liberal education into the fabric of teaching and learning at the institution by infusing high-impact practices, authentic assessment, and our institutional learning outcomes as core components of the onboarding process. As such we honored the AAC&U’s definition of a Liberal Education as “an approach to undergraduate education that promotes the integration of learning across the curriculum and co-curriculum, and between academic and experiential learning, in order to develop specific learning outcomes that are essential for work, citizenship, and life” (2023). While our faculty teach across various disciplines, from career and technical education to business, STEM, social sciences, etc., this effort ensured faculty received a consistent orientation to foster a learner-centered environment grounded in inclusive teaching practice.

We also offered “just in time” check-ins with the new faculty throughout the semester. Check-ins consisted of monthly virtual meetings to facilitate ongoing collegiality and connection as well as fielding questions, concerns, and relevant information as needed. For example, we reviewed how to submit no-shows and grades and how to connect students with resources and services like tutors and librarians. We also connected new faculty with the Vice President of Academic Affairs to fully outline our definition of “service to the college,” which is a component of their contract. We sought feedback at these check-ins about what would be most helpful in future iterations of NFO.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES AND IMPROVEMENT

In addition to the feedback gathered at check-ins, we sought formal feedback and gathered data immediately following the New Faculty Orientation in-person component. Multiple faculty reported that learning about High Impact Practices significantly impacted their first course at our institution.

Faculty feedback through an anonymous survey helped us measure our outcomes and determine the success of our new model. Survey ratings were as follows:

- Average rating 9.86: Through the in-person NFO, I met and personally connected with colleagues and faculty. (1=not at all to 10=objective met and exceeded)

- Average Rating 8.86: The in-person NFO helped me identify the components and meaning of the dual-mission Hispanic Serving Institution of our institution and how it influences my role as faculty. (1=not at all to 10=objective met and exceeded)
- Average Rating 9.14: At the in-person NFO, I explored the institution's focus on student learning, engagement, belonging, and success at the center of all pedagogical practices in my new role. (1=not at all to 10=objective met and exceeded)

Faculty comments after the initial pilot include the following:

“While I found all the modules helpful, I learned the most from Universal Design and Accessibility and Syllabus and Course Design for DEIB. These provided practical resources I immediately incorporated into my course and Canvas materials.” - New English faculty member

“I found both the Canvas course and the in-person orientation so helpful, and such a great introduction to the CMC community. I feel totally supported and excited to start this new journey!” - New Business faculty member

“There wasn't anything I would necessarily change or eliminate from the in-person schedule! I thought the presentations and activities were well-balanced, and I appreciated the interactivity. I also loved the chance to connect with folks at the dinner and happy hour-it was an opportunity to decompress and talk more informally.” – New Communications faculty member

Based on feedback and our own evaluation and perceptions, we have been able to make improvements for future semesters. In January 2023, with a smaller cohort of new faculty, we facilitated an abbreviated version of the fall NFO, again using an asynchronous course for online training, assigning experienced faculty mentors, and hosting a one-day in-person orientation. We also invited the NFO alumni from fall to share out with our abbreviated January NFO cohort as well.

CONCLUSION

Without the recognition of the “problem” and the opportunity for improvement, we could not have been able to reconfigure faculty onboarding. We are grateful for the allocation of resources, both time and money, to recognize and reward the participation of new faculty and the efforts and expertise of the employees at our institution. We share this work in hopes of being able to demonstrate a new faculty onboarding framework that leverages both asynchronous learning in conjunction with in-person gathering for the purpose of creating a model pedagogy that emphasizes the importance of belonging.

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APPENDIX

CMC New Faculty Orientation Agenda: “The Heart & Soul of CMC” – Full Schedule

Purpose: We believe a healthy learning community depends on prioritizing positive relationships as well as building and supporting a sense of belonging.

Outcomes: New faculty meet colleagues and explore the dynamics and critical supports offered in the CMC community by identifying and exploring.

1. The components/meaning of the dual-mission Hispanic Serving Institution of CMC and how it influences their role as faculty
2. The CMC focus on student learning, engagement, belonging, and success at the center of all pedagogical practices in their new role

Schedule:

9:00–10:30am: Session #1 Welcoming and framing

- The Heart & Soul of CMC: Vice President of Academic Affairs
- Agreements & Permission Slips: Assistant Dean of Planning, Assessment, and Improvement
- The Courage to Teach: Faculty Senate President and VP
- Voices from the Field: NFO Alumni

10:45–11:15am: Session #2 Who we are and why we do what we do

- Welcome to Team CMC: College President
- Operations and Policies: Chief Operating Officer & Chief of Staff

11:30am–12:30pm: Session #3 Lunch & Learn

- Relationships: Deans, Assistant Deans of Instruction, Program Directors, Vice Presidents

12:45–1:30pm: Session #4 What it means to be an HSI Translanguaging & Familism

- Dean, School of Business and Professor, Teacher Education

1:45–2:30pm: Session #5: Work session: Course design and Canvas support

- Instruction and Learning Administrator and Learning Systems Administrator
- Assessment Support: Associate Dean—Planning, Assessment, and Improvement
- Compass (HIPs/ePortfolio/TILT): Assistant Dean of Academic Planning, Assessment and Improvement

2:45–3:45pm: Session #6 Panel and Q+A

- Facilitator: Assistant Dean of Academic Planning, Assessment, and Improvement
- Panelists: Executive Director, Strategic Initiatives; Vice President, Student Affairs; Registrar; Librarian; Virtual Tutoring Coordinator; New Faculty Alumni; Program Director for ESL/HSE; Executive Director, Human Resources

3:45–4:00pm: Conclusion

- Reflections and Wrap-up: Senate Vice President