

## **The Making of a Teaching Center: Insights from the Frontlines**

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*This article provides a detailed roadmap for the process of establishing and launching a center for teaching and learning (CTL) at a large research university, with particular emphasis on strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and organizational development. Drawing from our firsthand experiences, we document key decisions and milestones in creating our institution's CTL, the UA Teaching Academy, including securing administrative support, determining organizational structure and funding models, and building campus-wide partnerships. The development process highlights the importance of strategic alignment with institutional priorities, thoughtful faculty governance, and evidence-based decision-making. By sharing specific insights about the establishment process, structural decisions, and early implementation challenges, this article aims to provide practical guidance and insights for institutions seeking to establish or enhance their own CTLs.*

### **The Making of a Teaching Center: Insights from the Frontlines**

Over the past decade, institutions of higher education have increasingly prioritized student learning and success through the use of evidence-based teaching practices (Beach et al., 2016). From the first center for teaching and learning (CTL) founded in 1962 to the rise of more than 1,200 centers in 2020,

CTLs play a key transformational role on college campuses, particularly in advancing teaching excellence and the use of evidence-based practices (Wright, 2023).

Several factors in contemporary higher education highlight the need for a unit focused on teaching and learning. The increasingly diverse student body requires faculty support in adapting their teaching to meet the needs of various learners and to create inclusive learning environments (Benito-Capa et al., 2017; Wright, 2023). Additionally, the skills gap between college graduates and employer expectations necessitates faculty development in pedagogical approaches that foster essential skills such as communication, teamwork, and critical thinking (Hart Research Associates, 2015). Furthermore, the rapid pace of technological change and the need to address future job requirements call for a focus on developing students' learning skills and adaptability (Benito-Capa et al., 2017). Finally, as online education continues to expand rapidly in higher education, instructors should consider shifting their perspective from a deficit-based view of online learning to one in which faculty can successfully enhance students' learning experiences and provide meaningful knowledge-building (Kaufmann & Vallade, 2022).

As such, CTLs are positioned to play a critical role in teaching and learning (Sorcinelli, 2002), as they can create a collaborative community that supports faculty in employing effective teaching methods, particularly when faculty lack preparation and training in this area (Dickens et al., 2019). Many faculty members desire to improve their teaching practices and look for opportunities to do so (Beyer et al., 2013), and research shows that this professional development can lead to improvements in faculty teaching practices and student learning (Condon et al., 2016). Additionally, from an institutional perspective, CTLs can provide centralized assistance and resources and promote a culture centered around effective teaching and learning (Dickens et al., 2019).

Establishing a CTL can be a significant challenge, and few have documented the process in detail. Most published articles on CTLs tend to focus on specific programs or initiatives, such as developing an online teaching certification program (Gallardo-Williams et al., 2023) or creating an active learning institute (Aebersold, 2019), rather than the overall process of establishing a new CTL from idea inception to full operation. However, it is important to learn about and share the process of establishing a CTL for

several key reasons.

First, a detailed account of the development process, including the practical aspects and lessons learned, can provide valuable insights and guidance for other institutions looking to establish or enhance their own CTLs (Andurkar et al., 2010). This point is especially critical given the increasing importance of CTLs in supporting faculty success, student learning, and institutional effectiveness in the face of challenges such as increasingly diverse student bodies, skills gaps between graduates and employer expectations, and the need to adapt to rapid technological change (Benito-Capa et al., 2017; Gallardo-Williams et al., 2023). Furthermore, documenting and evaluating the work of a new CTL can demonstrate its value to an institution's stakeholders and justify the investment of time and resources (Upcraft & Schuh, 2002; Schmid et al., 2021). Finally, a comprehensive overview of the process of establishing a CTL, with sufficient programmatic details and context, can contribute to the scholarship of educational development and enhance our collective understanding of the characteristics that make CTLs effective (Schmid et al., 2021; Stes et al. 2010). Despite these compelling reasons, public sharing of the establishment process occurs infrequently. This article aims to address that gap by providing a detailed account of how one institution brought a fully functioning CTL from idea to reality.

### **Why a CTL?**

Recent literature highlights the significant role CTLs play in furthering the success of the academy in relation to their work supporting faculty, students, and university administration (Wright, 2023). The majority of current CTLs nationwide take a “hub” approach on university campuses with the aim of being centrally linked to both people and resources (Wright, 2023).

This model of community-based learning and collaborative networks supports a robust teaching culture with a primary focus on student learning, followed by faculty success, innovation, culture, and scholarly work (Wright, 2023). In comparison, a decade ago, CTL work centered on support of institutional mission, followed by teaching and learning, innovation, and instructor outcomes (Schroeder, 2010).

This significant shift in CTL scope and focus from 2010 to the present day

reflects the strategic role CTLs play in bringing together large numbers of faculty for professional development around learning outcomes and student success (Wright, 2023). In turn, this investment in the development and deployment of research-based teaching practices leads to better faculty retention, as well as more job satisfaction and academic accomplishment (Wright, 2023).

In addition to a learner-centered focus, key principles identified by Sorcinelli (2002) and Cruz (2018) should be considered to establish a successful CTL. They include the strategic positioning of a CTL under Academic Affairs for direct access to leadership, a clear and well-defined CTL mission that aligns with the institutional goal and vision, transparent governance, and continuous meaningful engagement with faculty and administrators from the time the need for a CTL is identified (Cruz, 2018; Sorcinelli, 2002). The literature also indicates that an effective CTL requires stable funding, suitable technological resources and support, a dedicated space, and ample staffing (Cruz, 2018).

CTLs provide a unique opportunity for both new and tenured faculty to collaborate, share knowledge, and reflect on teaching best practices (Cruz, 2018). CTL events serve as both an educational and social platform, bringing interdisciplinary faculty together for open discussion around the subject of teaching excellence. As Brenner et al. (2024) note, CTLs create a collaborative culture of practice by identifying and supporting faculty teaching and learning needs, meeting those needs by providing workshops, consultations, and events, as well as innovative teaching and learning opportunities.

To sustain communities of practice, effective CTLs offer both long-term programming and shorter workshops to support faculty development (Brenner, et al., 2020; Schmid et al., 2021). CTL programs that strategically design programming to incorporate theory and research-based teaching practices can best address immediate faculty needs through peer learning, new approaches, ongoing reflection, and assessment (Brenner et al., 2020; Schmid et al., 2021). Programs that capitalize on foundational knowledge and the development of practical skills show greater evidence of long-term change in teaching practices (Schmid et al., 2021).

In evaluating CTL programming practices, Hines (2015) emphasizes the importance of moving beyond simplistic assessment toward a results-oriented approach. Rather than analyzing faculty participation and

satisfaction, comprehensive, deep program evaluation requires examining long-term goals and objectives that align with institutional missions, programming, staffing, and the process used to collect and analyze outcome data (Hines, 2015).

These practices and principles underscore the growing importance of CTLs in developing teaching excellence, faculty professional development, and institutional effectiveness in higher education. By supporting a learner-centered focus aligned with the values of the teaching profession, CTLs stand to address challenges and create learning environments that promote student success.

## **Establishing a CTL**

### *The Development Process*

The evolution of teaching excellence initiatives at research institutions often requires institutional commitment, a review of existing structures supporting online education and learning innovation, and the ability to restructure based on teaching excellence needs at the

institution. The support of senior leadership is also crucial, as a well-resourced and positioned CTL can positively affect a significant number of faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students each year (Wright, 2023).

At our institution, the University of Alabama (UA), the faculty senate and senior faculty members had previously advocated for a campus-wide teaching center through formal proposals to the Board of Trustees. However, initial efforts stalled due to fundamental questions about organizational structure—specifically, whether to adopt a centralized or decentralized model—and institutional positioning.

In the fall of 2021, however, plans for the creation of a CTL began to take shape. The development of our university's CTL progressed through five distinct phases, each marking

significant advancement in the center's establishment, as seen in Table 1. This paper examines our institution's approach to establishing the UA Teaching Academy through careful planning, stakeholder engagement, and evidence-based decision-making.

*Building the Case for a CTL*

A significant shift occurred in fall 2021 with the arrival of a new provost whose background included experience with one of the nation's pioneering teaching centers, established in 1962 at the University of Michigan—Ann Arbor. This leadership transition proved pivotal, as the provost prioritized the creation of a CTL based on direct experience with the transformative potential of such centers. This leadership transition also catalyzed initial discussions with key stakeholders, including the university president and faculty senate, moving beyond previous unsuccessful efforts to establish a campus-wide teaching center.

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Table 1  
**Key Milestones in UA Teaching Academy Development**

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Phase	Date	Milestone
Phase 1	Fall 2021	New provost arrival; initial stakeholder discussions
Phase 2	March 2022	Online Education and Academic Innovation Committee convened
	September 2022	Board of Trustees approval
Phase 3	November 2022	UA Teaching Academy Ad Hoc Committee formation
	Jan – May 2023	Development of mission, structure, and framework
Phase 4	August 2023	Faculty director hired
	October 2023	Operations director hired
	November 2023	UA Teaching Academy Advisory Committee formation
	Fall 2023	UA Teaching Academy launch and initial programming
Phase 5	April 2024	UA Teaching Academy and Innovation Lab ribbon cutting

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*Establishing Strategic Partnerships, Governance, and Funding*

Critical to the process of planning for a CTL was the establishment of strategic partnerships across campus. Throughout the process, the provost conducted extensive outreach with key administrative and faculty bodies, including the Faculty Senate, Department Chair Council, Associate Deans

Research Council, and the Council of Assistant and Associate Deans. This comprehensive engagement strategy ensured broad institutional buy-in, helped gather valuable feedback to shape the CTL mission, vision, staffing, and programming, and supported the alignment of teaching excellence initiatives with various academic units' needs and expectations. The extensive committee work is described in more detail in the section on designing a CTL.

**Table 2**  
**Strategic Partnerships and Roles**

<b>Stakeholder Group</b>	<b>Role in Development</b>	<b>Type of Input/Support</b>
Office of Academic Affairs	Administrative Oversight	Strategic positioning and institutional alignment
Faculty Senate	Advisory and Advocacy	Program needs and faculty perspective
Department Chair Council	Implementation Support	Departmental coordination
Associate Deans Research Council	Strategic Planning	College-level integration
Council of Assistant and Associate Deans	Strategic Planning	Academic unit coordination
Online Education and Academic Innovation Committee	Strategic Planning	Framework development and needs analysis
OTIDE	Resource Support	Funding and operational infrastructure
College Deans	Faculty Selection	Committee nominations and resource support
UA Teaching Academy Ad Hoc Committee	Program Development	Mission, structure, and initial program design
UA Teaching Academy Advisory Committee	Ongoing Guidance	Program oversight and strategic direction

*Faculty Governance*

A distinctive feature of planning for a CTL was its emphasis on inclusive

faculty governance. The selection of Online Education and Academic Innovation Committee members through nomination from college deans ensured broad disciplinary representation and faculty buy-in. This cross-disciplinary team spent a full semester developing the UA Teaching Academy's strategic framework, demonstrating the institution's commitment to thoughtful, faculty-driven planning rather than rushed implementation.

### *Funding*

The funding model for the UA Teaching Academy exemplifies strategic resource allocation within academic institutions. While initial planning discussions centered on potential funding through Academic Affairs, the final funding structure leveraged the financial ecosystem within OTIDE (Office of Teaching Innovation and Digital Education). This funding model ensures stable financial support while maintaining the UA Teaching Academy's focus on its core mission of advancing teaching excellence without the pressure of revenue generation.

### **Designing a CTL**

When designing a CTL, it is important to consider best practices while also making individualized decisions to match the unique needs and strategic initiatives of each institution (Sorcinelli, 2002; Wright, 2023). Developing a CTL requires leaders to carefully gather information, assess needs, and make informed decisions to determine how the CTL can influence building community on campus, connecting faculty, and establishing meaningful collaborations between disciplines (Wright, 2023). The following sections highlight important steps our institution took when designing a CTL, including crafting a mission and vision, determining a personnel structure, developing programs and services, and assessing campus needs.

### *UA Teaching Academy Ad Hoc Committee*

In November 2022, the provost selected faculty members to serve on the UA Teaching Academy Ad Hoc Committee. Faculty members were chosen



from among the recommendations of UA's deans and represented most of the university's 12 colleges and schools. The inclusion of entities across campus helped ensure widespread buy-in and support.

From January 2023 through May 2023, the UA Teaching Academy Ad Hoc Committee created the mission and vision, strategies and aims, personnel structure, and programs and services. The Ad Hoc Committee established subcommittees for each major area.

### *Mission and Vision*

A key component of the design process for the new UA Teaching Academy included the creation of the center's mission and vision to help guide the unit's structure, development, and programming. When drafting potential versions of the mission and vision, the mission and vision subcommittee considered the university's strategic plan, which includes the institution's overarching mission and vision, to ensure alignment across the organization. The subcommittee also continued the provost's discussions with strategic partners and stakeholders throughout the university and the broader community to identify the most pressing issues a CTL could address.

The subcommittee's analysis revealed a clear campus-wide need for a centralized resource dedicated to teaching excellence and pedagogical innovation. Building on this finding, they developed a mission that positions the UA Teaching Academy as both a resource hub and catalyst for change, focused on promoting evidence-based instruction and creating supportive learning environments. At the heart of this mission was the goal of nurturing a culture of scholarly teaching, where faculty would be encouraged to systematically examine their teaching effectiveness, engage in peer review of teaching practices, and integrate innovative approaches into their instruction.

The vision extended beyond individual support to emphasize building a vibrant community where faculty could share insights, explore new teaching methods, and develop expertise that would enhance both their professional growth and the broader educational mission of the university. By aligning these objectives with both faculty needs and institutional priorities, the mission provided a strong foundation for the UA Teaching Academy's

development and helped secure widespread campus support.

The Ad Hoc Committee voted to determine a final version of the mission and vision as follows. The UA Teaching Academy's mission is to offer valuable resources to instructors, provide consultation on pedagogical matters, and create a culture of scholarly teaching. The vision includes supporting initiatives related to student success, faculty retention, and institutional effectiveness, in addition to emphasizing the role of technology in enhancing teaching and learning based on insights from evidence-based practices.

### *Programs and Services*

The programs and services CTLs offer make up the primary support provided to an institution's faculty. For the UA Teaching Academy, the Ad Hoc Committee formed an additional subcommittee to focus on the design of the initial programs and services, with the goal of creating a resource hub that serves all instructors across campus to promote high-quality instruction, student engagement, and learning. The committee used the mission, vision, and campus needs as a foundation when determining the initial long- and short-term programs and services, which is in line with CTL programming recommendations from the academic literature (Brenner et al., 2020). Additionally, the committee focused on growing a culture of scholarly teaching and in turn, measuring the impact of those initiatives on instructional quality and student outcomes (Hines, 2015).

The UA Teaching Academy's initial programming considerations were in line with Wright's (2023) four-part framework for CTL programming: Hub-Incubator-Temple-Sieve. The UA Teaching Academy adopted elements of both the Hub and Sieve approaches, seen as the most effective for comprehensive faculty development (Wright, 2023), while incorporating select aspects of Incubator (grow ideas and people) and Temple (rewards and recognition) strategies. The Hub model is focused on interactive, community-building activities, while the Sieve approach emphasizes assessment and evidence-based practices. This strategic combination of approaches enabled the UA Teaching Academy to serve its large and diverse faculty population while maintaining focus on evidence-based practice and community building.

To begin, the committee first conceptualized consultations, observations, and student focus groups to help meet the immediate needs of instructors seeking specific support. The committee recognized that this one-on-one support would not only help instructors, but it would also provide the UA Teaching Academy with information from instructors and students on the use of evidence-based teaching practices and areas of need across campus to inform future programmatic decisions. The committee also designed teaching seminars and coffee talks as part of the center's initial programming, both of which would bring instructors together to discuss a specific teaching topic, creating the foundation for our community of scholarly teaching. The emphasis on providing support and building a teaching community aligns with the UA Teaching Academy's mission and vision and serves as platform for designing and launching additional programming for our institution.

#### *Personnel Structure*

Another critical step in designing a CTL includes determining the personnel structure, which plays an important role in how the CTL functions. Sorcinelli (2002) notes that most CTLs are relatively small with limited personnel, even in larger institutions. The UA Teaching Academy's organizational structure was carefully designed to ensure its effective functioning. The subcommittee examined personnel across other CTLs to help determine a structure that would work best for our institution. Among the considerations were placing a full professor at the highest level of CTL leadership and adding key support personnel with faculty status (Wright, 2023). The personnel structure is summarized in Table 3.

The decision to have two directors (a faculty director and a director of operations) was made to leverage the unique strengths and expertise needed to drive the UA Teaching Academy's mission. The inclusion of both faculty and staff leadership roles follows evidence that dual leadership structures support CTL effectiveness (Wright, 2023). At the UA Teaching Academy, the Faculty Director and Director of Operations are the unit's day-to-day leaders who directly manage the team. The subcommittee strategically decided to have two directors to solicit expertise in pedagogy and program management and to allow each director to appropriately dedicate their time

to their respective focus area. The Faculty Director has a dual faculty appointment and drives the vision and pedagogical framework of the UA Teaching Academy. This person uses their expertise to guide and oversee the implementation of programs. The Director of Operations, a full-time staff member, focuses on the day-to-day management of the unit, overseeing budgets, personnel, and program coordination. Having personnel in the three distinct leadership roles allows for a comprehensive approach to the academic, advancement, and operational aspects of running a successful CTL. These staffing decisions also reflect research on successful CTL operations at research institutions (Schmid et al., 2021).

In addition, the UA Teaching Academy has a team of instructional consultants who support faculty, instructors, and graduate teaching assistants through various UA Teaching Academy programs. The committee created the instructional consultant role as a dual faculty appointment between the UA Teaching Academy and the faculty member's home department.

This decision was made to promote a collaborative, peer consultation model, whereby the instructional consultants have teaching experience to draw from and some common ground with fellow instructors. This also aligns with Sorcinelli's (2002) advocacy for strong faculty involvement and ownership to effectively respond to fellow faculty members' needs. The instructional consultant team is responsible for designing, facilitating, and implementing the UA Teaching Academy programs.

#### *UA Teaching Academy Advisory Committee*

The UA Teaching Academy Advisory Committee was then established to guide and support the center's initiatives. Comprised of representatives from across the faculty community, the committee's specific work involves ensuring the UA Teaching Academy promotes teaching excellence, assesses and documents teaching excellence, encourages the scholarship of teaching, collaborates and connects with other campus units, and creates a culture to support teaching and learning. Development of this faculty governance structure reflects best practices for establishing faculty buy-in (Dickens et al., 2019).

## **Key CTL Development Principles**

Throughout the UA Teaching Academy development process, several key principles emerged as critical to successful CTL establishment, including strong institutional champions, strategic alignment with institutional priorities, faculty ownership, and research-based decision making.

First, strong institutional champions proved essential, particularly through the leadership of a new provost who brought direct experience with CTL success. This championship was strategically leveraged through early engagement with Faculty Senate leadership, regular presentations to college deans and department heads, and the formation of key committees. The Online Education and Academic Innovation Committee and subsequent Ad Hoc Committee, with their broad college representation, helped establish crucial early momentum and buy-in.

Strategic alignment with institutional priorities proved fundamental for securing resources and support. The UA Teaching Academy's positioning within OTIDE enabled a sustainable funding model through revenue-generating programs, while establishing dual reporting lines to both OTIDE and Academic Affairs ensured broad institutional reach. This structural alignment, coupled with explicitly linking the UA Teaching Academy's mission to the university's strategic teaching goals, helped secure both financial and administrative support.

Faculty ownership throughout the establishment process emerged as another critical success factor. The faculty-led Ad Hoc Committee's role in developing the center's mission and programming created authentic faculty engagement from the start. This was further strengthened through strategic personnel decisions, including dual faculty appointments for instructional consultants and the creation of both a Faculty Fellows program and Faculty Advisory Committee. These structures helped ensure continued faculty leadership in the center's evolution.

Evidence-based decision making guided the development process at multiple levels. Benchmarking against peer institutions' CTL structures informed organizational decisions, while analysis of campus teaching needs through stakeholder meetings shaped programming priorities. Additionally, implementation of assessment measures from launch created accountability and data-driven improvement cycles.

## **Launching a CTL**

### *Creating Campus Buy In*

The Ad Hoc Committee's comprehensive work on mission, structure, and programming laid extensive groundwork for the launch phase. A comprehensive communication and outreach plan was launched to build institutional awareness and faculty engagement, as well as to establish the UA Teaching Academy as a responsive campus partner. This included the building of a UA Teaching Academy website, coordinated media coverage through multiple campus communication channels, and strategic announcements that highlighted the UA Teaching Academy mission and objectives.

A series of introductory meetings and listening sessions were also held with faculty and administrators across academic units. These interactions served not only to introduce the UA Teaching Academy's resources and services but also to gather valuable input from potential faculty partners about their pedagogical needs and aspirations.

### *Initial Offerings*

#### ***Consultations, Observations, and Student Focus Groups.***

At the launch of the UA Teaching Academy as a fully staffed unit in January 2024, priority was given to offering instructors one-on-one consultations, teaching observations, and student focus groups. This provided opportunities for the UA Teaching Academy leadership and instructional consultants to make individual connections, gather insights on teaching and learning challenges, and provide immediate support throughout the larger faculty community.

Individual instructor requests were captured on the UA Teaching Academy website or via email to the Director of Operations, who then assigned the instructor to an instructional consultant. After having an initial meeting to discuss the instructor's priorities, challenges and concerns, the instructional consultant completed the observation or student focus group (depending on the instructor's priorities) or scheduled a longer, more

comprehensive consultation (depending on the instructor's needs). Instructional consultants and the instructor then worked together to develop collaborative plans to determine evidence-based strategies that met the unique needs and desires of each instructor.

These initiatives were also chosen because they provided empirical evidence of the current teaching practices and student experiences on campus, as well as insight into the use of evidence-based teaching practices across campus. The information also helped us identify challenges and patterns across campus, which informed topics for some of our early programming (e.g., teaching seminars, coffee talks).

### **Measuring Impact**

To determine the impact the UA Teaching Academy has on the community, UA Teaching Academy leadership determined that it would be crucial to gather data from instructors and students across campus following consultations, observations, and programming. By gathering this data early on, the UA Teaching Academy could make more informed decisions about the programs and resources needed to support instructors and enhance student learning outcomes.

We designed surveys, semi-structured interview protocols, and focus group questions to use with instructors and students, soliciting information specific to the UA Teaching Academy programs and to teaching and learning at our institution. As we continue to collect data from these measures, we will determine the effect our programs have on instructors and students across campus and use feedback to make improvements and changes moving forward.

### *Formalizing the Programming*

In Spring 2024, the UA Teaching Academy team further expanded the center's programs and services to include professional development and academic scholarship. The goal is to offer a diverse portfolio of programs to attract a range of instructors with differing interests and needs from across campus. In conjunction with increasing scholarly expectations for professors at our institution (including non-tenure-earning teaching faculty), the UA

Teaching Academy designed programs to promote the creation of scholarly work centered around teaching and learning.

The formal programs and services, outlined in Table 3 and described below, aim to support faculty in implementing scholarly teaching and learning projects, promote the implementation of evidence-based teaching practices, and assist with individuals' professional growth and development.

**Table 3**  
**Programs and Services**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Program/Service</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>
Individual Support	Consultations	One-on-one support for course design and teaching practices	All instructors
	Observations	Classroom observations with feedback	All instructors
	Student Focus Groups	Gather student feedback on teaching and learning	Instructors requesting feedback
Professional Development	Teaching Seminars	Monthly sessions on specific teaching topics	All instructors
	Coffee Talks	Informal, monthly peer discussions on teaching practices	All instructors
	<i>Faculty Fellows</i>	Two-year intensive teaching development program	<i>Selected faculty</i>
	<i>GTA Training</i>	Teaching preparation for graduate assistants	<i>Graduate students</i>
Scholarship Support	<i>SoTL Writers Group</i>	Support for teaching/learning research	<i>Selected faculty</i>
	<i>Mini Grants</i>	Funding for teaching innovations	<i>All instructors</i>

**Monthly Teaching Seminars.** Each month of the academic year, the UA Teaching Academy hosts a teaching seminar open to instructors across



campus. Invited speakers (regional and national) engage the audience on a specific topic related to teaching and learning, such as student engagement, building community in online courses, and the ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI) for teaching and learning. This creates an opportunity for instructors with various backgrounds to gain knowledge, ask questions, and network with colleagues.

**Coffee Talks.** The UA Teaching Academy also offers monthly coffee talks designed to serve as a less formal opportunity for instructors to gather and share ideas with peers. Our instructional consultants facilitate guided discussions centered around a specific topic (e.g., online courses, large lectures, getting students to read). The coffee talks were designed to allow instructors to openly share challenges, strategies, and ideas, creating a community of colleagues beyond the boundaries of departments or colleges.

**Faculty Fellows.** The UA Teaching Academy offers a Faculty Fellows Program designed to deepen instructors' understanding of excellence in teaching and learning and to provide hands-on support with course design and revision. Each cohort consists of up to 12 faculty fellows who participate in this competitive program for two years. Upon completion of the program, fellows are expected to use what they learned and continue to support instructors' use of high-quality instructional practices across campus.

**Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) Training.** In partnership with the Graduate School, the UA Teaching Academy provides training for GTAs. The GTA training covers a range of topics, including instructional methods, assessment, and instructional technology. Although some entities within our institution have facilitated their own GTA training in the past, this new training aims to standardize GTA preparation across campus and support GTAs in implementing evidence-based teaching practices in their courses.

**Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Writers Group.** As part of our scholarly initiatives, the UA Teaching Academy facilitates an annual SoTL Writers Group consisting of up to 12 participants per cohort. This group supports instructors in systematically researching instruction and student learning in higher education. Throughout the academic year, the SoTL Writers Group meets monthly, and the UA Teaching Academy team provides participants with guidance in designing, facilitating, and writing about their scholarly projects. Each participant is expected to plan their project during the fall semester, implement their project during the spring

semester, and write and submit a manuscript for potential publication in a peer-reviewed journal over the summer.

**Mini Grants.** The mini grants program awards small grants of up to \$1,500 to instructors to fund an instructional enhancement and the subsequent evaluation of said enhancement. Instructors are expected to implement an evidence-based strategy into their teaching practices to improve student outcomes in a traditional, online, or hybrid setting.

### **Insights**

The CTL development process revealed interesting challenges that merit consideration. The compressed timeline for launching the UA Teaching Academy created a complex dynamic wherein multiple critical activities needed to occur simultaneously. The team found itself developing foundational programming, conducting extensive stakeholder engagement, and building operational infrastructure concurrently. This simultaneous development model, while demanding, fostered an organic, iterative approach that allowed for real-time adjustments based on emerging needs and stakeholder feedback.

While rapidly developing programs and services, the UA Teaching Academy kept the process transparent through consistent communication updates and inclusive decision-making processes. This approach helped stakeholders understand and participate in the development process while acknowledging the iterative nature of the implementation. The strategy proved effective in maintaining institutional trust during the rapid development phase.

While the team effectively utilized benchmarking data, the compressed timeline limited opportunities for direct observation of established CTLs at peer institutions. Such site visits could have provided valuable insights into physical space utilization, program implementation, and operational strategies. Institutions planning similar initiatives might benefit from incorporating site visits and extended conversations with experienced CTL directors into their planning phase.

The design of the UA Teaching Academy offers valuable insights for institutions considering similar initiatives. Unlike many CTL launches documented in the literature, this implementation benefited from

extraordinarily strong institutional support. The presence of widespread buy-in from administration, faculty, and staff, combined with secure financial resources, eliminated many of the traditional barriers often associated with designing teaching and learning centers.

### **Future Directions**

As the UA Teaching Academy looks ahead, several key priorities emerge for its future development. Evaluation will be a critical component, with plans to assess the unit's impact on teaching effectiveness, student learning outcomes, and faculty satisfaction. This will involve collecting data through surveys, focus groups, interviews with faculty and students, and analysis of student performance metrics. The results will inform continuous improvement efforts and demonstrate the value of the center to the institution's stakeholders.

Expansion of the UA Teaching Academy's reach and services is another future direction. This may include increasing the number of teaching fellowships, diversifying professional development offerings to meet the evolving needs of faculty, and extending support to graduate student instructors. Collaborations with other units on campus, such as the Office of Institutional Research and the Center for Instructional Technology, can help to amplify the UA Teaching Academy's reach and leverage shared resources.

In line with recommendations from Benito-Capa et al. (2017), the UA Teaching Academy plans to expand the scope of its faculty development initiatives beyond pedagogical skills. This may include continued support for research skills, leadership development, and work-life balance programs. By offering comprehensive support for faculty professional development, the UA Teaching Academy aims to help faculty become well-rounded academic professionals who can better serve students and contribute to the university's purpose and goals.

Dissemination of best practices and research findings related to teaching and learning will also be a focus for the UA Teaching Academy. This can involve encouraging and supporting faculty to engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning through expansion of our SoTL Writers Group, hosting conferences or workshops, and publishing in relevant journals. This can also involve collaboration with other units on pedagogical research

grants. By contributing to the broader conversation around teaching excellence in higher education, the UA Teaching Academy can establish itself as a leader in the field.

## **Conclusion**

The establishment of the UA Teaching Academy demonstrates how strategic planning, strong institutional support, and thoughtful organizational development can lead to the successful launch of a CTL. By providing a detailed account of the development process - from initial concept through implementation - this article offers insights into the complexities of establishing a teaching center at a research university. The UA Teaching Academy's experience highlights several critical success factors: the importance of senior leadership support, the value of inclusive faculty governance, the need for sustainable funding models, and the benefits of strategic partnerships across campus.

The development process also revealed that while compressed timelines present challenges, they can create momentum for rapid progress when coupled with transparent communication and stakeholder engagement. Key takeaways from the UA Teaching Academy's experience emphasize the importance of strategic alignment with institutional priorities, adaptability in program development, and faculty-centered decision-making. These insights can serve as guideposts for other institutions navigating the planning of their own CTLs, particularly at research-intensive universities where building support for teaching excellence initiatives requires careful attention to institutional culture and faculty needs.

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