

Supporting Community College Faculty across the Disciplines

Robin Lightner—Psychology; Faculty Development

1. From your perspective, what are the two things that your disciplinary professional organization or discipline-based NSF-funded project does particularly well in support of your work as an educator? Please be specific about how this activity works and why it is effective. Add web links if available.

The discipline of psychology supports teaching in a few different ways. First, the APA has developed a set of suggested [learning outcomes for undergraduate education](#). These outcomes create coherent, standard goals for curricula from schools across the country. The outcomes specify skills that students need with the major, and this provides a framework for individual courses as well as for the design of programs. [The Society for Teaching of Psychology](#) is a division of the APA that sponsors two national conferences a year, a listserv, website for resources, and sessions at regional conferences.

A second strength of the discipline comes from its approach to assessing what works in teaching. It has a robust scholarship of teaching and learning that is displayed in the journal [Teaching of Psychology](#). The discipline contributes a number of strengths to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning which relies on social science research methods. These include operationalizing variables, study design, and statistical methods. Many of the top contributors in faculty development were trained in research methods in psychology.

A third strength of the discipline in its contribution to the work of two-year college educators is the body of knowledge produced by the subfields related to college teaching, for example, from Educational Psychology. Across the field, psychologists are aware of the work for example from top scholars such as Clyde Steele on [stereotype threat](#) (the salience of stereotypes can impact performance), Carol Dweck on [theories of intelligence and motivation](#) (beliefs about the innateness of intelligence predict achievement), and Barry Zimmerman on [self-regulation](#) (the iterative process of setting goals, monitoring performance, and adjusting from feedback). Instructors in psychology frequently put these concepts to use in the design of their courses. Additionally, the subfield of Cognitive Psychology informs us about the topics such as attention, memory strategies, and the importance of context in learning new material. Not only do we teach some of this content into our classes, we use these lessons in the structure of our courses, and we integrate the concepts as we teach students study skills as part of our introductory level courses.

A fourth development that is changing the teaching of many psychology courses is the popularity of the [flipped classroom](#). In this model, content coverage is pushed outside of class in a variety of ways—narrated PowerPoints, web simulations, readings, etc. Students are held accountable for this background knowledge (for example through quizzes), and then they spend class time on more advanced, interactive application projects. One way of conducting a flipped classroom is by using the [team-based learning](#) methodology that includes the use of [IF-AT forms](#) and significant, forced-choice multiple choice questions with simultaneous reporting by groups. Another trend that facilitates the flipped classroom is the development of rich resources from publishers that have many online quizzing options, videos, and personalized study plans.

2. If you could propose (and obtain funding for) one new activity to engage community college instructors in professional associations and other discipline-based projects related to teaching and learning, what would it be? Describe the activity, explain why it is needed, and why it is not currently available.

Two-year college instructors are often uninvolved with their professional organizations because (a) they don't have time with classroom and service responsibilities, (b) professional development is not funded. These underpaid educators often have to pay for memberships and conference attendance out of their own pockets, (c) professional development is often not rewarded by their institution or part of their job descriptions. Work with professional organizations may not be part of promotion criteria or performance expectations, and (d) teachers at two-year colleges may feel marginalized, like unwelcome second-class citizens in the professional association comprised mainly of active researchers.

I do not have a plan to address these barriers, but here are a few brainstorms below to increase involvement.

- Local/Regional two-year college conferences/symposia/workshops for discipline specific teachers
- Grant funding for collaborations between research and two-year college faculty and students to serve as co-investigators
- When research is published on educational psych topics, journals could invite a response from a two-year college practitioner on how he or she might implemented a research finding
- Offer symposia at teaching conferences about topics that two-year college instructors are most interested in, e.g., teaching unprepared students, or working with students from poverty

These would require funding, coordination, and cooperation with larger research schools and for the collaboration to be a priority to the professional organization.

- Create a faculty learning community called, "The Best from the Fields" to support faculty as they learn about their own disciplines best practices. Two-year faculty are often more willing to participate in interdisciplinary faculty development than their four-year college counterparts and have unique contributions to make to the scholarship of teaching and learning ([Tinberg et al., 2007](#)). At our college, fairly low cost multidisciplinary faculty learning communities have been very successful on the topics of peer review of teaching, transfer of learning, developing SoTL projects, self-regulated learning etc. However, this point about increasing faculty members' connection to their own discipline can also be valuable. Perhaps colleges could start faculty learning communities where two people from several disciplines are invited to take part. Each pair brings in their own disciplinary best practices to inform the multidisciplinary group. Each member would attend a conference, find literature, and pairs would create a white paper on their disciplines' best practices—then people would share, borrow, and experiment. In order to be successful, this model would require funding for conference attendance, a facilitator's stipend or course release to coordinate and lead the group, and possibly for materials.