

# Leading Academic Change: An Early Market Scan of Leading-edge Postsecondary Academic Innovation Centers

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## Background

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*Academic change* is the term being used increasingly to describe universities' efforts to improve student success by creating optimally effective learning environments that simultaneously increase access, affordability, and quality of higher education for all those who want a postsecondary degree. Institutions are starting to see the vast potential of hybrid classrooms, shared courseware initiatives, open educational resources, competency-based education, learning analytics, and adaptive learning environments and they are seeking ways to scale and sustain these innovations.

Among the positive outcomes from these change efforts have been two interesting developments. First, there appears to be an increasing number of institutions that are reconstituting their "faculty development centers" and/or "centers for teaching and learning" to help lead their organizations in transforming and advancing student success through academic innovation and improved support for students and faculty. The second recent development has been what appears to be a sharp increase in the number of senior administrative positions in academic affairs being created over the last 2-3 years to lead their institution's academic change initiatives. These individuals hold titles such as *Assistant Provost Office of Academic Innovation*, *Vice Provost for Innovation in Learning and Student Success*, or *Associate Provost for Learning Initiatives* and are often filled by faculty leaders who have emerged as "change agents" among their colleagues. In some cases, they are managing a complex combination of instructional design and technology staff, faculty development centers, and data analytics units. And, while these individuals may be experts in innovative pedagogies supported by emerging technologies, many seem to be less well versed in the integration of these technologies or the organizational change theories and change management approaches that will be necessary to make innovations scalable and sustainable within their institutions. Individuals filling these newly constituted positions are seeking support networks and professional development opportunities.

It seems we may be observing the emergence of a new, interdisciplinary "innovation infrastructure" within higher education administration. However, little is known beyond anecdotal information about how these changes are being implemented.

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## Purpose

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The purpose of the Leading Academic Change project was, therefore, to begin exploring this trend using a 3-pronged approach:

- bring together a cross-section of academic innovation leaders to begin the conversation around academic change leadership during a 2-day **Leading Academic Change Summit**;
- conduct **Interviews with Innovative Teaching and Learning Centers** to learn more about how their centers are functioning and where changes are occurring; and
- based on our findings from the Summit and our interviews, design a **National Survey of Campus Centers for Teaching and Learning** to explore the larger landscape.

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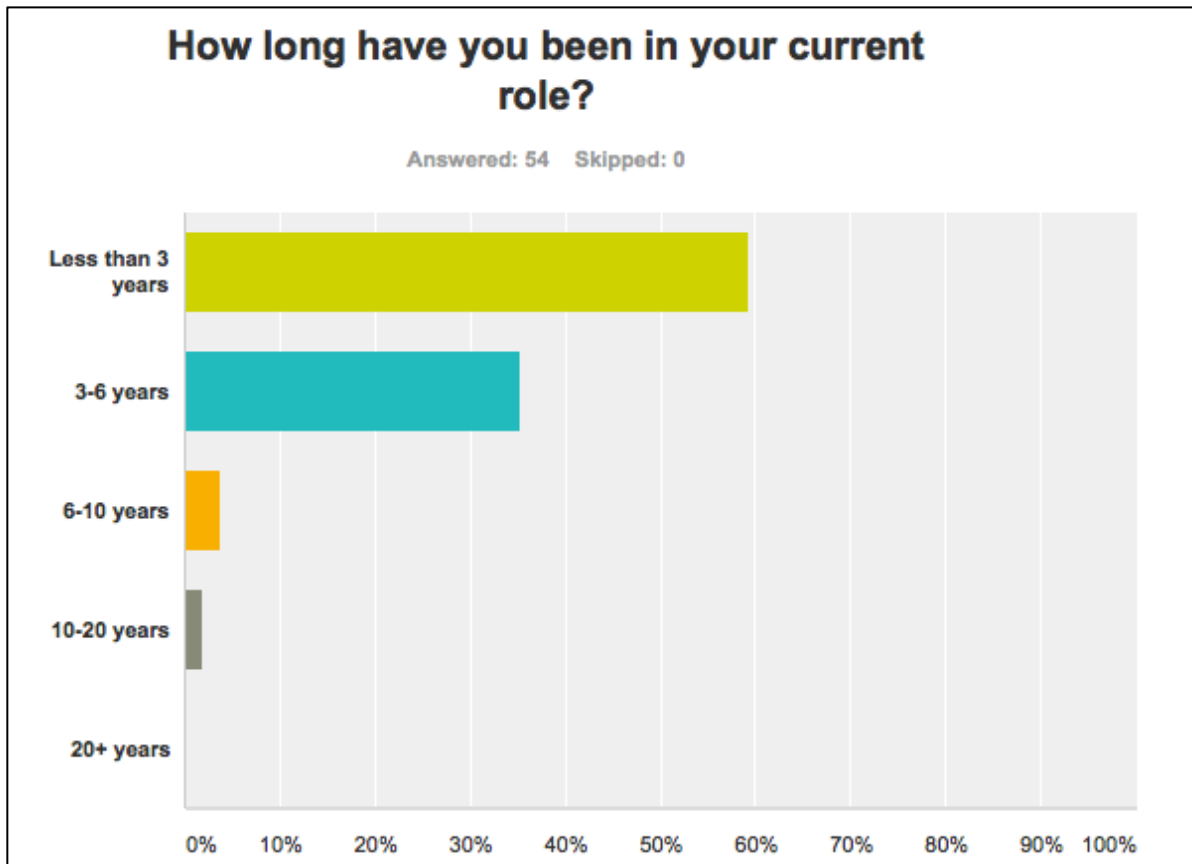
## Leading Academic Change Summit

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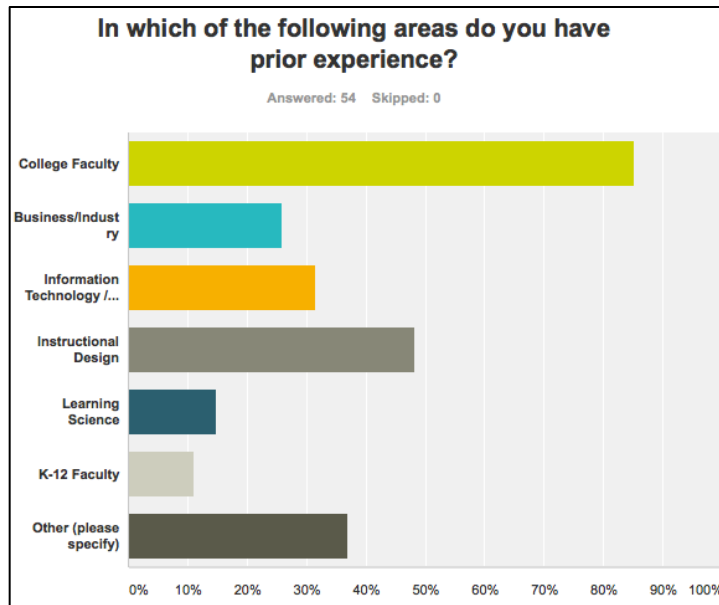
With support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the University System of Maryland's Center for Academic Innovation hosted the inaugural *Leading Academic Change Summit* on December 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014. The Summit brought together more than 60 academic innovation leaders, representing 2- and 4-year public and private colleges, universities, and systems as well as other guests from ACE, APLU, EDUCAUSE, Ithaka S+R, NASH, and NASPA. Invitees were selected based on the knowledge and experience of the project directors in consultation with other experts both at the USM Center for Academic Innovation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The highly interactive 2-day conference was a rare and exciting opportunity for this diverse group of higher education leaders to engage in discussions around how academic transformation efforts are unfolding on their campuses, explore common challenges, and identify promising practices. Among the learnings from the Summit discussions and the pre-/post-conference surveys were:

Almost all of the participants (94%) have been in their position 6 years or less and more than half (59%) for 3 years or less.

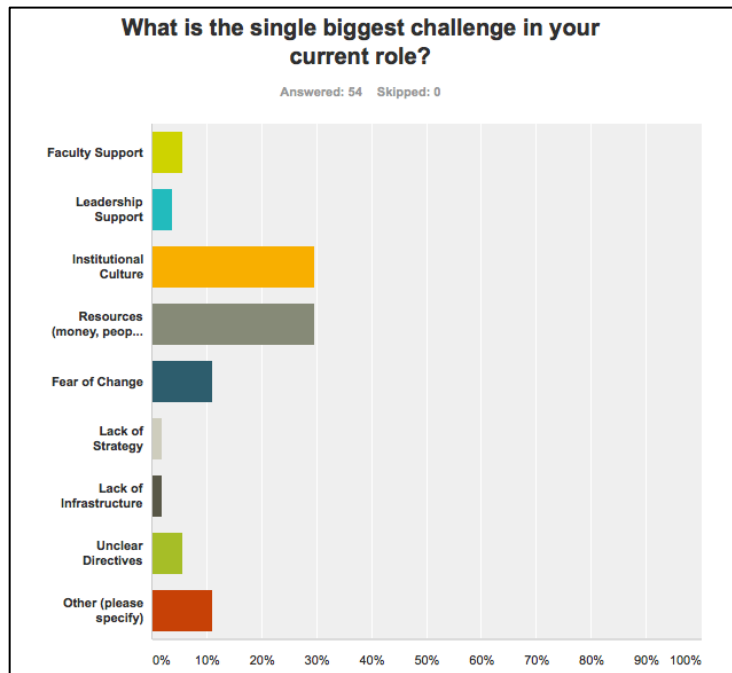


Most (85%) have college/university faculty experience.



More than three quarters (78%) report to the Provost/Academic Affairs VP (as compared with IT/CIO, chancellor/president, or student affairs).

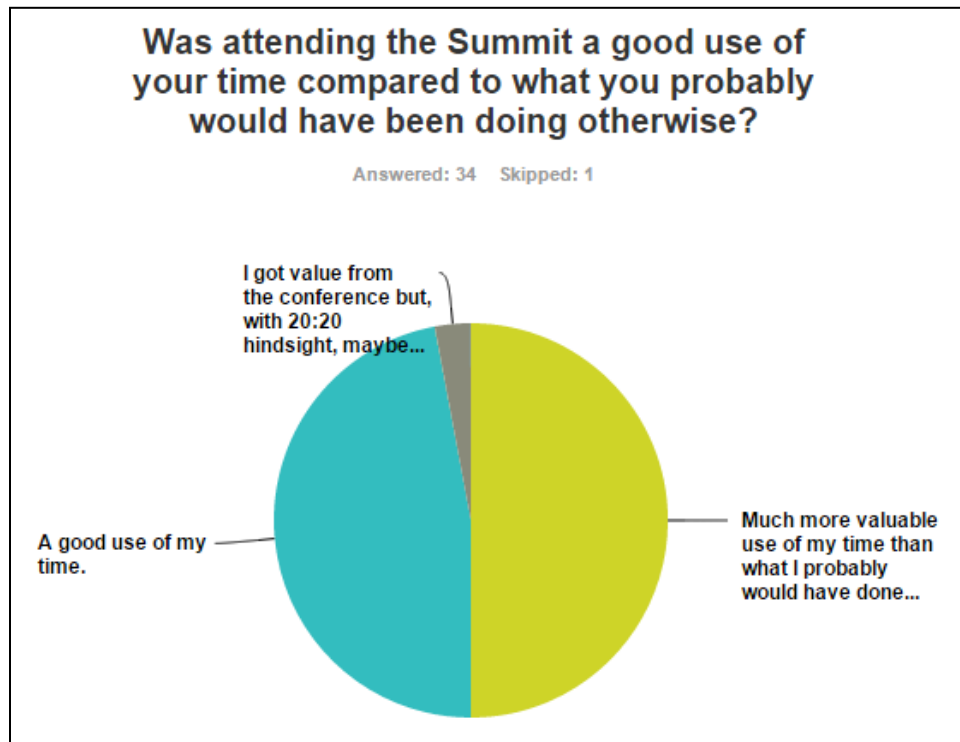
Navigating “institutional culture” is among the biggest challenges these leaders’ encounter (equal to “lack of resources”).



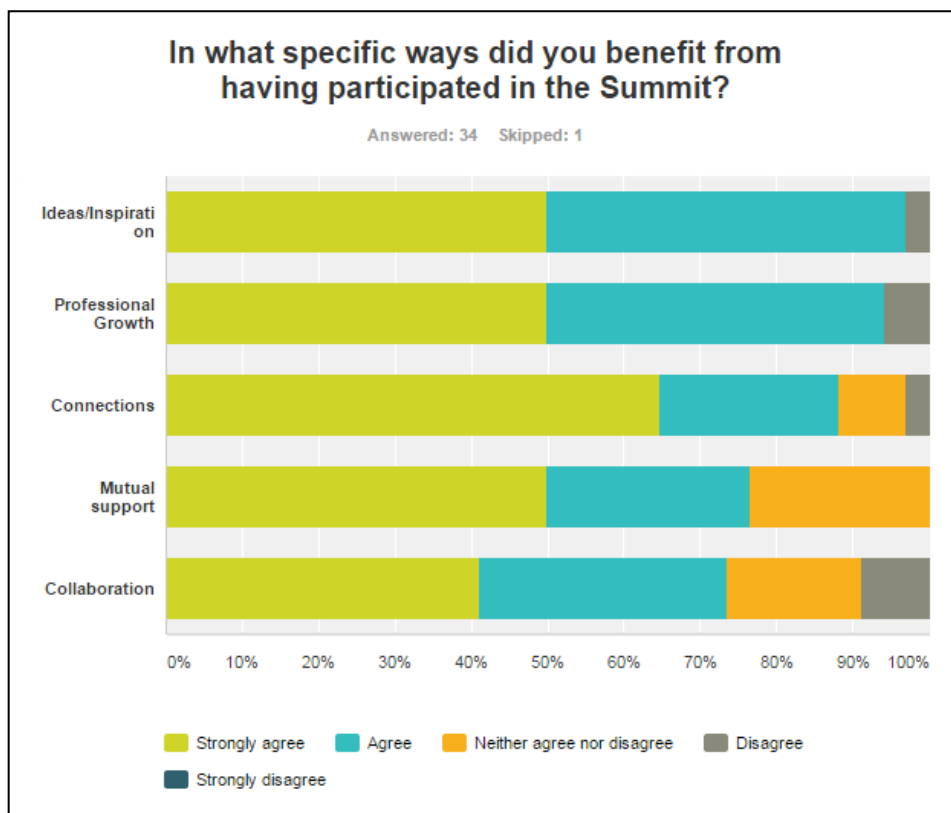
They are eager to learn more about theories and strategies for faculty engagement, boundary spanning, and organizational/cultural change. The top 3 reasons for attending the Summit (all 97% agreed or strongly agreed) were:

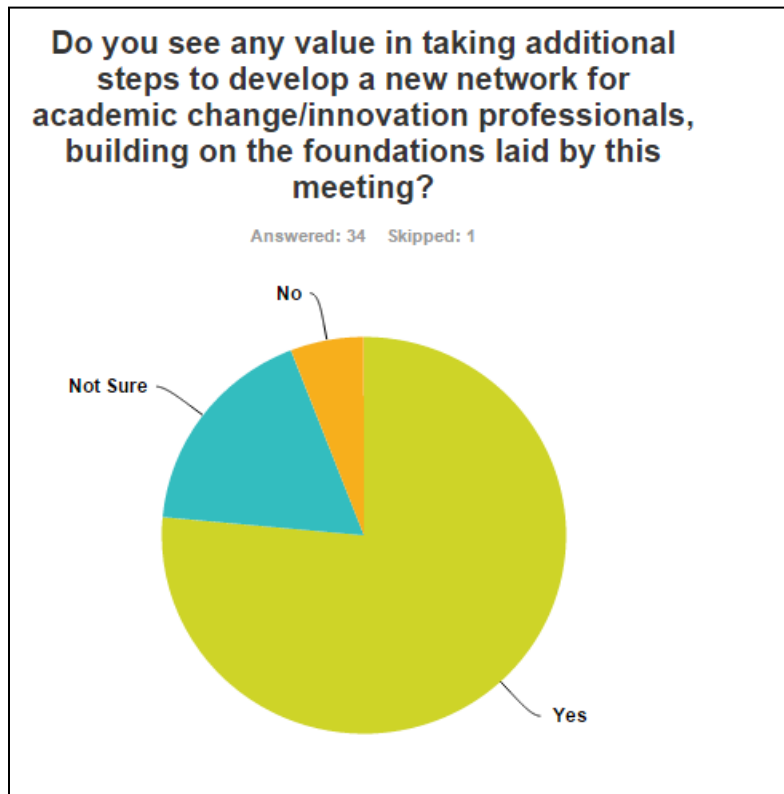
- Seeking ideas or inspiration to help them in their job.
- Advancing their thinking about leading academic change at their institution.
- Making/strengthening bonds with people who will help them do their jobs.

Ninety-seven percent of participants reported they thought the Summit was a good use of their time, and 50% of those stated that it was, in fact, a “much more valuable use of my time than what I probably would have done otherwise.”



When asked about the specific ways they felt they benefited from the Summit, participants’ top responses included making connections and mutual support.





Much of the conversation at the Summit seemed to confirm that these academic change leaders are eager to have interactions with colleagues for networking, inspiration, and collaboration, but existing networks and membership organizations are not sufficiently addressing their needs. Participants also confirmed the need for a new network in their survey responses, with nearly 77% confirming that there would be value in developing this new network.

Overall, Summit participants left energized and with a new sense of focus. Additionally, there continues to be interaction and communication among the attendees including the formation of at least one northeast regional group that is exploring collaborations around faculty teaching and learning innovation grants.

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### **Interviews with Innovative Teaching and Learning Centers**

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Also as part of the project, in October 2014 we engaged the services of Cynthia Jennings of The Black Bear Group to conduct in-depth interviews with a total of 17 particularly innovative academic transformation leaders to talk about the evolution of the teaching and learning centers at their institutions. The interview protocol and the list of targeted institutions were derived by the project directors in consultation with Ms. Jennings and experts at the USM’s Center for Academic Innovation and the Gates Foundation. Interviewees included representatives from a variety of institution types, including public and private, 2-year and 4-year, research intensive and liberal arts, as well as one public higher education state system. Interviews were conducted between November 2014 and early January 2015.

#### **Key Findings**

##### *Revisioning and Reorganizing:*

What used to be “centers for teaching and learning” are taking on much broader responsibilities and roles across campus, necessitating revisioning and reorganization. While the models

institutions pursue still vary quite a bit, some themes do seem to be emerging from these particularly innovative efforts.

For example, Stanford, the University of Maryland, and Purdue University have all recently completely reorganized and moved several functions –including their teaching and learning center– under a new Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning or similarly named position. Similarly, UT-Austin recently merged the university’s Continuing and Innovative Education unit into the Center for Teaching and Learning, creating a new kind of campus infrastructure for teaching and learning that includes both on-campus and off-campus academic innovations. At the University of Georgia, these mergers are breaking down political and budgetary boundaries that have existed in the past and prevented the kinds of collaborations needed to truly impact teaching and learning.

Another traditional boundary that appears to be getting increasingly fuzzy is that between academic and student affairs. Many “pedagogy centers” are also beginning to look at topics like student health and well-being and other student success areas. In some cases, like LaGuardia Community College, we are seeing the total merger of academic affairs and student affairs under the Provost.

But as new organizational structures are emerging, sometimes boundaries can be difficult to establish and/or maintain. In some cases, boundaries are blurred because institutions have retained their “legacy” structures. For example, the University of Connecticut has retained their Institute for Teaching and Learning while also having recently started a Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. The former is serving largely as their instructional technology unit now. Similarly, Georgetown has both a Center for New Designs and Learning and Scholarship (CNDLS), which focuses on teaching and learning, and the recently created “Red House,” which serves as an innovation incubator with a student success focus. These units along with the Center for Technology Innovation, the Center for Teaching Excellence, and the Center for Assessment Analytics and for Research are working in close collaboration to assure that they are all part of the conversation.

#### *Collaboratives:*

In fact, regardless of the organizational changes, most these efforts involve strong collaborations among various units on campus, including the library, instructional technology, facilities, and the like. Purdue’s center, for example, works very collaboratively, assigning “teams” to work with faculty on course transformation under their IMPACT program. American University also draws heavily upon collaborations with student affairs in programming on diversity and inclusion and their open educational resource initiatives.

Because most academic change units are in the tricky position of not being able to dictate change from the top down, several of these centers are exploring a “shared services model.” UT-Austin’s center, for example, works hard to “empower and facilitate structure” rather than impose strategies. In their center redesign, UT-Austin has made substantial changes aimed at giving resources directly to the leading faculty innovators on campus, essentially “deputizing” these leaders through the Provost’s Teaching Fellows program.

#### *Student Involvement:*

As the focus shifts from faculty success to thinking more about student success, many of these centers are involving students more directly in the work. For example, LaGuardia Community College actually employs students to help train the faculty. Stanford also works very closely with

students. In fact, under the Stanford center's umbrella are also student learning resources, the tutoring programs, the academic skills and coaching programs, the student resilience programs, and graduate teaching development.

#### *Technology's Role:*

Technology is often not the leading focus of most of these efforts, but rather viewed as a tool to potentially help achieve desired outcomes. UT-Austin, for example, has created an Associate Vice Provost for Learning Sciences position that oversees a Learning Sciences group that includes faculty developers, digital content developers, technologists, and a unified learning analytics infrastructure. Duke's center, which is the only one among the 17 that reports up through the library, works very hard to take faculty who come in wanting to test a new technology and get them thinking, instead, about transforming their course. This is also true for Carnegie Mellon's Eberly Center, which grounds any technical solutions in the desired learning outcomes.

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### **National Survey of Campus Centers for Teaching and Learning**

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In November 2014 we engaged the services of Kenneth C. Green of The Campus Computing Project to work with us on the distribution and statistical analysis of the *first known* national survey of campus teaching and learning centers. Survey items were designed and developed from our preliminary findings from the Summit and the interviews. We also sought the help of a variety of higher education experts from POD, the USM Center for Academic Innovation, and other experts at the Gates Foundation including Anne Keehn (grantor), Senior Fellow for Technology and Innovation and part of the Postsecondary Success Team, as well as Rahim Rajan and Greg Ratliff, both Senior Program Officers, Postsecondary Success, and Jason Palmer, Deputy Director, Postsecondary Success. See Appendix 7 for the entire survey with data tables.

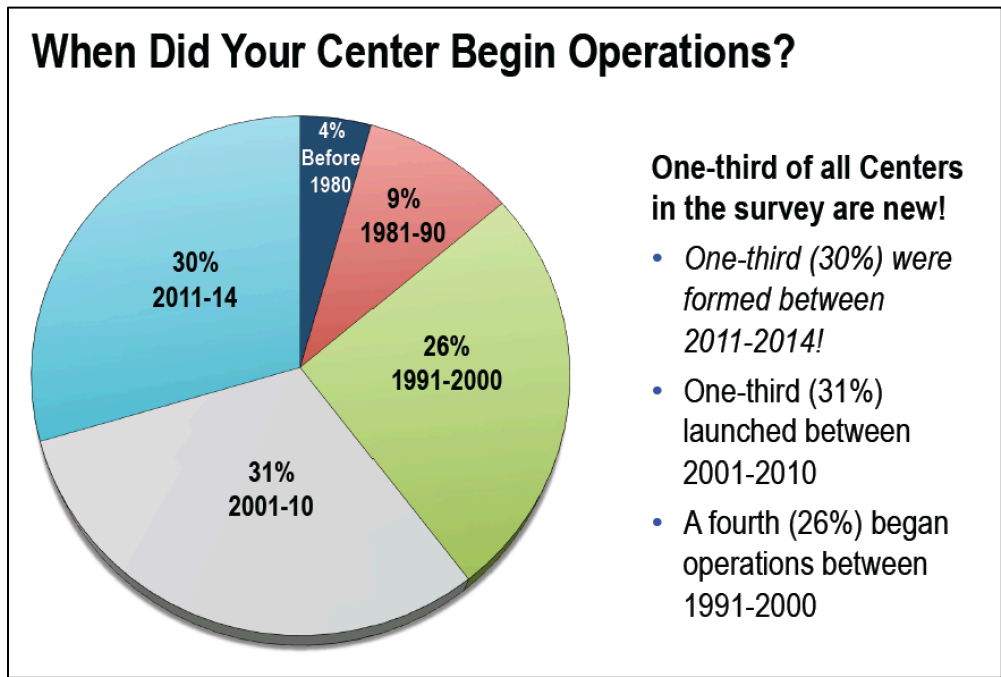
Given that there is no definitive "list" of U.S. higher education teaching and learning centers and/or their directors, we decided to employ an "open survey" approach. We invited those center directors we did know to respond while, at the same time, circulating the survey to the memberships of various technology-and-pedagogy-oriented higher education professional organizations with a request to participate or to pass on the link to an appropriate respondent. These open requests for participation went to various listservs at EDUCAUSE (the CIO, ELI, Blending Learning, Small Colleges, and Community Colleges lists), the Online Learning Consortium (OLC), the Council on Libraries and Information Resources (CLIR), and other professional organizations. We also received support from POD, NISOD, and the TLT Group to promote the survey with their members.

The survey was distributed in January 2015. In total, 163 center heads/directors responded, fairly evenly distributed among public/private, 4- and 2-year, research and comprehensive. While we were pleased with the participation level and the diversity of institutions represented given the difficulty in locating the centers and their directors, there are over 4000 colleges and universities in the U.S. and many more than 163 are likely to have teaching and learning centers. The findings reported below should, therefore, be considered to be illustrative, but not definitive.

#### **Key Findings**

##### *Center Launch:*

Many of these centers are new. One-third (30%) were formed between 2011-2014 with a second third (31%) having launched between 2001-2010.



*Director Background and Status:*

Three-fifths (58%) of the center directors who responded have experience as teaching faculty and two-thirds (64%) are holding some type of academic appointment while also serving as center director.

*Center Leadership:*

Most center directors have academic backgrounds and many also still retain faculty status (full-time or part-time). Three-fifths (58%) of the respondents have backgrounds as teaching faculty and two thirds (64%) have some type of academic appointment.

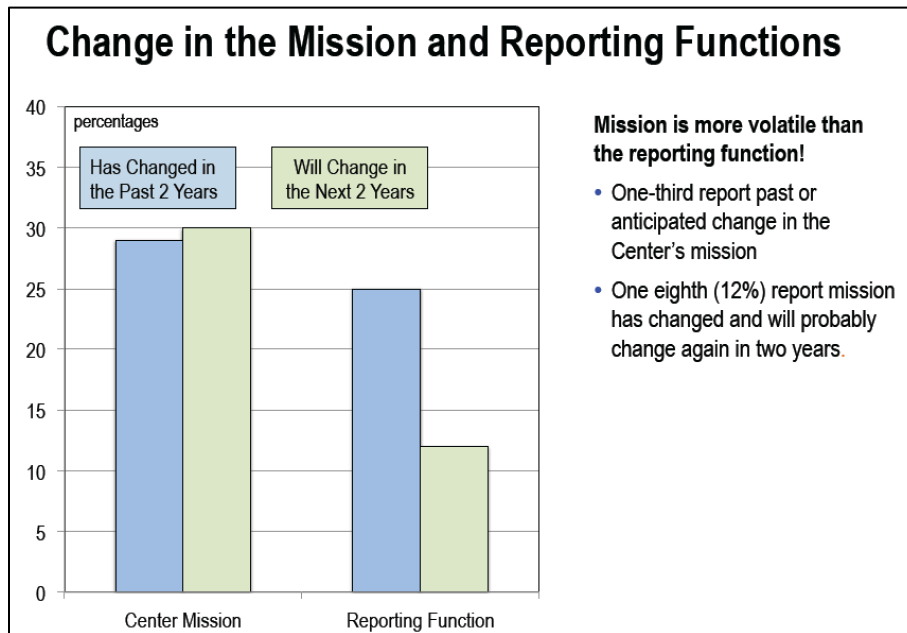
*Center Reporting Function:*

Most centers (81%) report up through the Provost or Academic Affairs Office. The remainder report to the CIO (6%), the library (2%) or “other” units such as a special learning or innovation office (10%).

*Changing Mission and Reporting Functions:*

Most of the centers have recently experienced a change in mission, with almost 60% of the center director respondents reporting either that their center’s mission has changed in the past 2 years or is likely to change within the next 2 years. Similarly, more than one-third of the responding centers have either recently undergone a reporting function change or anticipate one within the next two years.





*Number of Centers on Campus:*

Nearly half of all respondents reported their campuses have two or more similar centers supporting the institution's instructional mission.

*Budgets and Staff:*

While the majority of respondents indicated their budget has experienced little or no change over the last 2 years, the good news is that only one-fifth have experienced budget cuts and a third benefited from budget increases. However, there are big variations within sectors, with public institutions' centers generally seeing less modest budget growth than their private counterparts. Perhaps not surprisingly, larger universities have larger compliments of center staff than smaller institutions (approximately 10 as compared to 3-5) and also make greater use of student workers.

### Center Budgets

A/Y 2014-15	ALL	Public Univ	Public MA	Public 2-Year	Private Univ	Private MA	Private BA
Mean	\$522,507	1,116,854	355,708	267,605	1,097,148	129,194	71,086
Median	\$137,000	650,000	100,00	65,000	700,00	65,000	35,000
<b>Budget Increase or Decrease Over the Past Two Years</b>							
+ 8% or more	15	8	7	9	30	29	15
+ 3-7%	17	27	17	13	5	9	15
+/- 2%	51	51	52	48	55	48	60
- 3-7%	9	3	14	17	5	11	5
- 8% or more	9	11	10	13	5	7	5

**Center Budgets**

- Big variations within sectors
- Budget may not include personnel costs

**Budget Trends**

- Majority report little or no change
- Variations by sector regarding gains
- A third benefited from budget increases
- A fifth experienced budget cuts

## Professional Personnel and Staff

Average Headcount	ALL	Public Univ	Public MA	Public 2-Year	Private Univ	Private MA	Private BA
Professional Staff	6.4	10.6	4.1	3.5	9.4	7.2	2.2
Faculty Fellows	2.4	4.2	1.8	2.6	3.7	1.2	0.8
Admin Support Staff	2.3	2.3	1.2	1.7	3.2	4.6	0.8
Students Assisting Prof Staff	5.5	9.4	3.3	0.2	12.3	2.0	7.1
Students Assisting Adm. Staff	1.2	3	0.8	0.5	2.8	1.1	0.7

### Center Staffing Affected by Campus Size and Mission

- Universities have larger staff than other sectors, and also make greater use of student workers

### Center Priorities:

Center directors who responded indicated that their primary foci are on faculty engagement with students, course design/redesign (online/hybrid and face-to-face), and leveraging instructional/learning platforms for instruction. Other technologies and approaches such as adaptive, analytics, open educational resources, courseware, e-portfolios, competency-based learning, and badging were all rated as far lower priorities. This finding may also be reflected in the responding center directors' surprisingly low awareness or familiarity with third-party digital content providers.

## Current Priority of the Center's Activities and Initiatives

Scale: 1=low priority 7=high priority percentages	Low Priority (1-2)	Medium Priority (3-4-5)	High Priority (6-7)
Faculty engagement with students (high impact practices)	3	17	81
Course / program development or redesign for on-campus courses	9	34	57
Course / program development or redesign for blended / hybrid courses	12	37	51
Leveraging Cloud platforms for instruction (LMS, learning platforms)	24	30	46
Course / program development or redesign for fully online courses	25	34	42
Classroom / learning spaces design	25	41	34
Adaptive learning technologies	38	43	19
Learner / learning analytics	30	53	17
Improving academic advising	46	37	17
Use of ePortfolios	37	48	15
Competency-based learning	50	38	13
Assessment of prior learning	33	54	13
Open Educational Resources (OER)	40	48	12
Use of third-party digital courseware	44	44	11
Digital textbooks and course materials	41	50	9
Gaming and simulations	53	44	4
Digital Badging	67	30	3

### High Priority

- Faculty engagement with students
- Course design for on-campus, hybrid courses & online courses
- Leveraging cloud platforms

### Low Priority

- Adaptive technologies, advising, learning analytics
- OER, Digital curricular resources, Competency-based learning, Badging

*Usage:*

According to the center directors, pre-tenured, full-time faculty are the primary users of these centers. While lower numbers of engagement for tenured and part-time faculty may not be particularly surprising, it is disappointing to see that respondents reported very little use by graduate and undergraduate students. When asked what disciplines tend to make more use of the center, respondents indicated the highest levels of engagement come from the social sciences, STEM fields, and health sciences. The least engaged disciplines are business and education. Also, according to the responses, it seems the primary uses that faculty are making of the center resources and services are professional development for teaching and instructional design help.

percentages	ALL Institutions	Not App.
Full-time Faculty	38	3
Part-time Faculty	24	13
Academic Staff	15	33
Graduate Students	20	52
Undergrads	18	63

**Full-time Faculty Are the Primary Users**

- Highest numbers for full-time faculty
- Low numbers for part-time faculty not surprising
- Surprisingly low numbers for graduate students
- Little undergraduate activity (function of mission and marketing?).

*Effectiveness and Impact:*

Given faculty usage it is, perhaps, not surprising that the directors rate “improving teaching skills” and providing course redesign support as the most effective services their centers offer. When asked about their center’s impact, the directors indicated they thought they were having a modest positive impact on learning transformation and student success. When asked about the one thing their center could do better, the responses included engagement beyond full-time pretenure faculty, communication about services, and use of assessment (both to assess faculty progress and to assess the Center’s work).

## Perspectives on the Center's Impact

percentage who agree/strongly agree

The Center serves as an effective catalyst for a significant learning transformation in teaching and learning	71
The Center serves as a positive catalyst for modest improvements in teaching and learning.	92
The Center touches a large group of faculty and serves them well	61
The Center touches only a small group of faculty but serves them well	54
The Center serves as an effective catalyst for a significant transformation in overall student success.	45
The Center serves as a positive catalyst for a modest improvement in overall student success.	70
The Center's activities and services are well known and widely respected on campus	81

### Good but not great impact on

- Learning transformation
- Student success

### Outreach Strategies:

Directors are using a variety of strategies to encourage use of center resources –everything from financial and course release incentives to changes in promotion and tenure policies. Among those strategies rated most effective were departmental outreach and financial incentives. Least effective were efforts to promote learning science research (evidence), funding to present at pedagogy conferences, and providing professional accreditation support to the program.

## Outreach Strategies to Encourage Faculty to Use the Center's Resources and Services

Scale: 1=not effective 7=very effective percentages	Not Effective (1-2)	Medium Effective (3-4-5)	Very Effective (6-7)
Outreach to division and department chairs	11	56	33
Financial incentives to individual faculty	8	62	31
Support to present at teaching / pedagogical conferences	16	65	20
Support with accreditation requirements of professional programs	13	70	17
Course release time for faculty during the academic year	10	78	13
Use of learning science research to improve student learning	19	68	13
Changes to promotion and tenure policies that encourage teaching innovation	10	80	10
Financial incentives to academic programs / departments	8	86	7
Embedding support staff in academic units	10	83	7
Course release time for faculty during the summer months	10	84	6

### Very Effective

- Outreach to dept. chairs
- Financial incentives

### Not Effective

- Promoting learning science
- Conference support
- Accreditation requirements

### *Collaborations:*

When asked about collaborations, center director respondents indicated high levels of collaboration with campus units from within information technology and academic affairs and surprisingly low levels of collaboration with the library or directly with the academic departments. Still lower levels of collaboration were reported with academic advising, developmental education, and student affairs.

### *Key Obstacles:*

The key obstacles to academic innovation reported by the center directors are, perhaps, not particularly surprising including: faculty factors (time, workload, professional development, lack of reward, and outright resistance), institutional leadership concerns, and resource issues (inadequate staff, insufficient incentives). However, the directors also cited a lack of collaboration among faculty, lack of sound evidence supporting the benefits of academic innovations, and infrastructure issues among their roadblock as well.

This was the first known attempt to do a broad survey of teaching and learning center directors and we received a good deal of positive feedback from respondents for making this effort to reach out to them and learn more about their experiences. Overall, the survey results demonstrate the clear need to engage faculty in the work of academic innovation and illustrate some of the difficulties involved in doing so. The findings suggest the importance of supporting these teaching and learning center directors' efforts through stronger engagement with academic department as well as better messaging from the Provost around the importance of these centers as a key strategy to promote innovation. Additionally, training for center directors in how to manage change and affect organizational culture was among the top responses participants volunteered when asked "what key issues did we miss in the survey?"

## **Summary and Conclusion**

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There was a surprising amount of consistency in the data that we collected across this three-pronged project, all of which does seem to point to the emergence of a new, interdisciplinary innovation infrastructure within higher education administration. Overwhelmingly, this transformation is most apparent within Academic Affairs units, which may mark a shift in thinking about the role academic affairs can and should play in institutional efforts to increase effectiveness and affordability, particularly in relation to student success. And, increasingly, these efforts are taking on a highly collaborative tone, busting traditional higher education silos in order to progress and, in some cases, even bringing multiple units together under one "umbrella" position.

Centers for teaching and learning are clearly evolving at the same time, often providing the underlying structure necessary to support academic change more broadly. These centers' missions are shifting from a reactive "faculty development" focus to a more proactive "teaching and learning transformation" focus. Student success, not just faculty success, is now a priority for most. And, as part of this mission shift, these centers' responsibilities are expanding to include program and curricular redesign, "next generation digital learning," assessment and analytics, facilities and use of instructional space, as well as advising and other student success initiatives.

Given their background and expertise, the individuals charged with leading academic change appear to be respected if, perhaps, somewhat isolated advocates. Their biggest challenge is

changing the institutional culture, but they may not be particularly well trained for the task or well supported in that role. In addition to lacking the evidence they need to demonstrate benefits to faculty for innovations, they face the continuing challenge of building strong alliances with academic departments.

This is a time of transformational and, perhaps, disruptive change in higher education. Public and private colleges and universities increasingly face calls for more transparent accountability, evidence of return on investment, and creative solutions to difficult problems including budget constraints, rising costs, and stagnant completion rates. Additionally, the changing character of our students in terms of their preparation, prior experiences, motivation, culture, age, and expectations of our institutions challenges us to seek new pedagogical models that capitalize on recent findings from the learning sciences as well as the capabilities of emerging technologies. As a result of these pressures, our higher education institutions are responding by creating a new, interdisciplinary “innovation infrastructure.”

This project has taken the first steps to shed some light on how these organizational changes are being implemented and who these new academic innovation leaders are. But clearly there is more work to be done to support these leaders’ efforts to affect change within their institutions.