

Preface

Ideally, college would be an experience in which disciplinary experts who understand teaching interact with students who understand learning. However, the reality is that disciplinary experts often have little teaching preparation, and the students they try to help have even less preparation in how to learn. It is hard to imagine a more dysfunctional situation, and frustrations and failures abound on both sides. Faculty development arose naturally as a profession to help professors to succeed in such challenging situations, and faculty developers are the authors of this guide.

Most faculty developers are professors selected by virtue of their first achieving noteworthy reputations as successful teachers, and they come from every conceivable discipline. After taking on the assignment of development, these professors cultivate a second expertise in the vast literature about what produces better learning in college.

Knowledge about how to produce better learning is increasing at an explosive rate, with every discipline making new advances. Faculty development borrows from discoveries about learning in all disciplines. It also has its own journals, professional organizations, and conferences. It integrates diverse knowledge from varied sources, and its members perform research to generate new knowledge unique to faculty development. Faculty development is perhaps the ultimate interdisciplinary learning community of higher education.

Developers produced this manual primarily to minimize frustration and failures for students who expend great effort and large amounts of time and often obtain mediocre results. They may then believe that they lack the mental strengths needed to succeed, but it is more likely that such students fail or experience frustration because they do not know how to use their own brains effectively. Current knowledge about learning is very empowering and students need to share in it.

The developers who authored this manual recently founded a "learning across the curriculum" movement, wherein we encourage that a little bit about how to learn be incorporated in every college course, no matter what the subject. What is taught should stem from each instructor asking first: "What do I most wish my students knew about learning?" and then teaching that one thing. The chapters in this guide can serve as convenient resources in support of that effort.

We chose to unify the diversity of useful information provided in this guide through a few central unifying concepts that explain the relevance of each chapter in terms of what occurs in the brain during learning. Chapter 1 is essential reading, because it is key to all that follow.