Excellence in Action:
University Center for Teaching and Learning

The University of Pittsburgh is launching a hub for innovation to transform the ways in which faculty teach and students learn. Increasingly, successful outcomes in careers and in life require teamwork, core knowledge, global perspectives, adaptation to evolving technology, and diverse partners to produce creative solutions.

Pitt is using these principles to reimagine its own approach to teaching and learning in an endeavor that will build upon existing expertise in the science of learning to empower faculty as leading-edge teachers and to prepare students for lives of impact.

Through a new University Center for Teaching and Learning (UCTL), with a strategically arrayed set of affiliated resource centers and programs, Pitt is creating a University-wide enterprise to discover and apply the best practices and principles of effective teaching and learning in a rapidly changing world.

Features of this endeavor include:
• Agile Learning Spaces, including re-envisioned classroom design and technologies
• A Teaching and Learning Exchange to develop and share expertise and tools that advance teaching and learning in targeted disciplines
• A Course Incubator
• A Micro-Credentialing Program for faculty and grad students

University Center for Teaching and Learning
This new center will be a hub of innovation for teaching and learning research and applied science. It will be the operational and programmatic heart of the University of Pittsburgh’s focus on creating a robust teaching and learning environment. And it will work to ensure that best practices in the science of teaching and learning are incorporated and progressively advanced to meet the needs of today’s—and tomorrow’s—students.

Among the key features of this full-scale endeavor, coordinated by the UCTL, are:

Teaching and Learning Exchange
This hub of activity will work to improve discipline-based teaching, incorporating the latest research on effective approaches to teaching and learning in specific disciplines. The exchange will draw upon faculty research and expertise, as well as advance it, by sharing best practices, engaging more faculty, and communicating widely. This work will build upon the success of existing Pitt models: the Engineering Education Research Center, the Discipline Based Science Education Research Center, and the Peter M. Winter Institute for Simulation Education and
Research (WISER) in the health sciences, and new centers in other disciplines such as humanities, the social sciences, and nursing.

**Center for Diversity in the Curriculum**
Today, awareness and understanding of different perspectives and ideas is essential. This resource will ensure that the University’s curricula, inside and outside the classroom, offers diverse perspectives, inclusive of the world’s multidimensional fabric and thinking. Pitt will expand the scope and scale of what’s already in place, including programs to increase faculty awareness of diversity issues, capacity to develop course materials that reflect a diverse society, and capability to foster inclusive classroom and lab environments.

**Mentoring Center**
The faculty of the University of Pittsburgh is one of the University’s greatest assets. The Mentoring Center will serve as a central resource to support professional excellence by encouraging growth and development of faculty as teachers and scholars. By learning how to be effective mentors and mentees, faculty can strengthen their professional interactions and connections with students, helping to prepare students for success at Pitt and for lives of impact beyond campus.

**Center for Communication**
A key aspect in advancing teaching excellence is the ability of faculty members to articulate and communicate ideas and concepts in their disciplines—and to act as public intellectuals. This resource will help faculty communicate the significance of their work succinctly, not only for their students, but also for the media, the general public, and other audiences.

**Featured Programs**
In addition to the resource centers, the UCTL will deploy other programmatic strategies to advance teaching excellence. Among them:

**Course Incubator**
With a goal of fostering innovation and improving learning, this endeavor will bring together small teams of the right experts to transform the curriculum in targeted courses. A single team might include a faculty expert in the subject matter, an instructional designer, a tech wizard, and a learning sciences researcher. The task will be to innovate based on the latest research on teaching and learning and tech tools, such as virtual reality, if appropriate. Essentially: Envision. Innovate. Implement quickly.

**Micro-Credentialing for Faculty and Grad Students**
This program will enable faculty to pursue additional knowledge-unit credentials that enhance teaching skills. They would complete learning activities in areas such as pedagogy, professional development, technology, teaching techniques for large classes, and so on, and earn credit in the form of digital badges to recognize the
achievement. This resource can also be applied to enhancing the teaching careers of graduate students, an approach already in a pilot phase at Pitt.

**Assessment**
Assessing student learning in connection with assessing the effectiveness of teaching practices not only helps faculty refine and improve their courses but also helps students achieve stronger learning outcomes. This project will help to expand the portfolio of teaching-assessment approaches in use at Pitt, going beyond the standard teaching survey to include evidence-based teaching inventories, peer evaluation, classroom observations, and more.

*Note: The new University Center for Teaching and Learning will incorporate the former CIDDE (Center for Instructional Development and Distance Education) as well as additional professional staff and faculty.*