

Professional Development  
Cynthia J. Alby, Ph.D., Georgia College

I've taught for 30 years. I've devoted myself entirely to developing educators. I eat, sleep, and breathe it. I've worked intensively with extraordinary individuals from every one of your institutions through the state's "Governor's Teaching Fellows Program" for nearly 20 years. And I desperately want you all to hear three messages. Three messages. Five minutes of your time. Hear me out.

Just as chemists must study chemistry intensively to be accomplished chemists and trombonists must study music to an extraordinary depth to be accomplished musicians, so too **educators must *intensively study the intricate and complex art and craft of teaching and learning if they are going to be successful at educating***. And yet very few faculty ever have the opportunity to study teaching and learning to any real depth at all. We wouldn't toss a novice chemist into a laboratory and say "go." We wouldn't toss a novice trombonist into an orchestra and say "play." And yet that is what we routinely do with college faculty. A "lunch and learn" here and a 60-minute workshop there aren't going to cut it. Faculty need long-term, hardcore, interconnected instruction, support, and resources. Expecting them to somehow "pick up" this extraordinarily complex task on their own amidst the pressure to publish, serve, attend meetings, and fill out paperwork is absurd. **Nothing we do in higher education will have a bigger return on investment than intensive, high quality faculty development.** When you help one faculty member create an extraordinary course – that can double or triple the learning in that course. Many students will take that course. That course will be offered many times. That relatively small investment will affect hundreds, probably thousands of students, each paying a significant amount of money for that course. I see initiatives such as the Momentum Plan and LEAP as the perfect opportunity to beef up faculty development at our institutions.

As a system, through the Momentum and LEAP initiatives, we are asking faculty to do two exceptional things: 1) "heighten academic engagement" through the incorporation of concepts such as high impact practices and essential learning outcomes, and 2) weave in learning nudges related to concepts such as academic mindset and social belonging. This is worthy. This is wonderful. We have created a marvelous monster. It could change the face of higher education. But it is an *enormous* ask. **What we are asking of faculty is difficult for even the most accomplished faculty members.** This sort of thing is my area of expertise, and even I have had to work hard to wrap my mind around how implementation could work. I am beyond thrilled that leaders at the highest levels in this state are devoting such a tremendous amount of time and energy to these worthy initiatives. But at the system level, they can only do so much. They've done a lot; I've never seen anything like it. **But all this isn't going to amount to a hill of beans if we don't provide faculty with a significant quantity of time, space, and support to figure out how exactly these initiatives can be fruitfully incorporated into individual classrooms.** Because that is where all this happens. Lovely ideas raining down from on high change nothing. Change happens in individual classrooms with devoted faculty who know what they are doing. That is what we are endlessly forgetting.

And furthermore, randomly dropping HIPs, ELOs, and learning nudges into courses that are simply “run of the mill” won’t work. A course is like automobile design – you can’t incorporate new upgrades unless you understand how those will affect all the other parts. What might an instructor need to know about authentic assessment to assess any of these educational upgrades in a meaningful way? What student engagement strategies will be needed? How does the research on how to make information and concepts stick work into this? **An instructor who doesn’t have a basic, broad ability to design transformative courses is not going to be able to successfully incorporate these complex initiatives.** You can’t plant a lone flower in a dry yard and expect a riot of beauty or even expect the flower to live for long. But if we don’t provide faculty with the foundation they need, that is exactly what will happen. **Faculty development around these initiatives must be a part of broader faculty development around course design and quality teaching.**

In summary:

*In general*, educators need to intensively study teaching and learning to be successful at educating. Nothing we do will have a bigger return on investment than this.

When it comes to Momentum and LEAP *specifically*, what we are asking is very difficult. And where it succeeds or fails is in individual classrooms.

We can’t just explain these initiatives to faculty and say “go;” if they shoehorn them into run of the mill courses without a broad understanding of quality course design and how these initiatives fit into the larger whole, they will wither. But if we incorporate LEAP and Momentum-focused development with broader development, the explosion in excellence could be tremendous.

You can do it. We can help. Build it well, and they will come. (Home Depot meets Field of Dreams)

