

Organizational Positioning of CTLs_default

[00:00:00] **Chris Hakala:** I'm Chris Hakala from Springfield College.

[00:00:03] **Bonnie Mullinix:** And I'm Bonnie Mullinix and currently Co-president of Jacaranda Educational Development. I've been in a lot of different institutional settings and helped with establishing of two centers for teaching and learning and I've helped a couple of other institutions, consulting on setting up their CTLs.

[00:00:27] **Chris Hakala:** ... I think, ... first off what you're saying, Bonnie, what you've done and what a lot of us have done with regard to being in different centers and being in different contexts, I think really is what in part informs this topic about organizational positioning of centers.

[00:00:43] The more experience you have in different places and different structures, you come away with ideas on what makes more sense, and what is possible and what's not possible based on, as we have discussed, the context of the institution, the context of the center within the institution, the person running the institution, how you structure the center size, all of that.

[00:01:05] And I think that the topic is really a complex one because there are so many moving parts. I mean, for example, I'm at Springfield College. We're a small institution, but for a small institution, we have me as the center director. I have two associate directors. I have three instructional designers. I have graduate students. I have a couple of faculty fellows, all within the context of my very small center, which started when I got here. And we're really sort of moving around as we find where we are most effective at doing the things we need to do.

[00:01:37] **Bonnie Mullinix:** So Chris, what is your organizational positioning for your center now and, if you want, in the past as well?

[00:01:45] **Chris Hakala:** So, I sit in academic affairs, I report up through an Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs. But I have faculty status ..., I teach a course or two, I'm doing three this semester. I advise students I have a position within the psych department, but I also run the center full time. Thank you. And we sit in a place where we do a lot of administrative work. We do a lot of administrative work for new faculty orientation. We do administrative work

for committees, et cetera. So we are deeply involved in many aspects of the institution, including some pretty strategic commitments that I've co chaired. Things like the student evaluation systems, scholarship, et cetera. And so we have a lot of voice in the development of the institution, whereas I know in other places, it's not quite that way.

[00:02:37] **Bonnie Mullinix:** In most scenarios, The idea that you would have a direct line to either the provost, chief academic officer or an associate, depending on how big the institution is considered rather ideal there. So, I think you're fortunate in that respect and I know that's something that for a long time, and this is where I think we get a lot of good perspective... I know I've been a POD member since 1999 and I only missed out on two years where I wasn't at the POD conference. It's my fave. And that's mostly because I learned so much and people share so well and the idea that you have to know your own context and be grounded in it to figure out the right way to go. Is really important. I know one of the biggest things when we started the Center for Teaching and Engaged Learning at Furman was, I got to take my growing staff of people, we actually did a tour across the region. We went and visited a bunch of institutions and their centers, whatever, whether that was a center of one who was attached to a sort of institutional research, one person right in the provost's office, which was not an institution ... very conducive for faculty just walking into consult ... to others that were just setting up space that was particularly welcoming and had the library and had a drop in feel to it. And so, there was such variety and it was really wonderful to see both their organizational structure and the physical structure and the physical location.

[00:04:33] So the basement of the library is not always a great place to be, especially if you've got no windows. But if it's right smack dab in the center of campus, and it's a place where everybody ends up at one time or another, then it can be the most logical place, and it can give you the connection with librarians, which can be really helpful and if the tech and online stuff is also in contiguous space, if not together with your center, that can be really good too.

[00:05:08] So what is your relationship with other units on campus, even if they're not direct reports?

[00:05:16] **Chris Hakala:** So being small, I mean, we're 2300 undergraduates, maybe 1200 graduate students. We're pretty small. So we know we work with everybody. So the instructional designers and academic technologists who work in my center have dotted lines to it. So I have a really good relationship with it. We have dotted lines to academic success where we work with the folks, which by the way, I would argue if I had one thing to change, I would argue that

academic success and the teaching center emerged together because we're talking about different things, but we should be talking about the same things.

[00:05:50] And I think that's really important. I can't get that yet, but I'm working on it. And I think that there's a lot of people on campus that I get a chance to sit in the room with and talk with for a number of reasons, one of which is how the center's position. The other is, I think that a center director needs to be comfortable enough in their positioning at the institution that they serve a community.

[00:06:08] will invite those conversations that are really important. I tend to be pretty persistent about things with regard to if we're going to have a curriculum change, I need to know about it because I'm going to be tasked with helping faculty teach some of this stuff more effectively. So I need to be aware of what's happening.

[00:06:26] And so I think it's going to impact student learning. And so I've developed a lot relationships, but That's challenging at different institutions. My previous institution was larger and it was harder to get into those rooms because there was more levels I had to go through to get in there.

[00:06:43] And I think it comes back to, and it's a point that I really, I don't, I love your perspective on, and that is that there's two different camps about the positioning of the center and the people who work in it with regard to what their roles are on campus. I insisted when I was hired that I teach.

[00:06:59] Now, part of that comes from, I was a faculty member for many years before I entered in a teaching, so I was 25 years as a faculty member. I don't want to give up the classroom. But I also think having my foot in the classroom helps me understand the context of what the students are doing and how that all works.

[00:07:15] So, but people differ on this, so I'm curious what do you, what are your thoughts on that, Bonnie?

[00:07:20] **Bonnie Mullinix:** Okay, so. Help me keep track of this. I was starting to put notes in the chat because I want to speak to the following things that you touched on. One is the relationship of instructional designers and tech with a center because I think that's really important.

[00:07:39] **Chris Hakala:** Yeah.

[00:07:39] **Bonnie Mullinix:** Another is the relationship to student success, and the efforts on campus to do that and I have two or three. Observations, comments and structural opportunities about that one, but I'll start with your last one since you posed the question to me. And when you had first said this introducing yourself, I wanted to say something about this.

[00:08:01] So I thank you for coming back to it. The faculty status. Of faculty developers, educational developers has long been an interest of mine. In fact, I did some research 15, 18 years. There's a to improve the academy. There's a chapter on looking at and what came out of looking at the faculty status of faculty developers.

[00:08:27] And at that point it was, and I think it still is. Very mixed, but the bottom line that came out of talking with people and surveying them and so forth was less about what the actual reality was and the challenges with it and more about the importance of. Having directors and people working within a center engaged with teaching and being actively, preferably, faculty themselves.

[00:09:01] Why? Because faculty feel more comfortable talking with faculty. Faculty will, Well, are better. There's just an implicit trust. You can create that zone of safety a lot easier. You can relate the stories you tell are authentic and exactly where they are. So I think that's critically important. Even the communication, even the things that we're doing now with.

[00:09:29] David Curry concierge model is talking about how instructional designers can work effectively with faculty and half of, a big chunk of it is communication and interpersonal connection and when, because the instructional designers are not, cannot, are often the least likely to be positioned in faculty.

[00:09:56] So because of all that it becomes important and they get so
[00:10:00] tech laden that there's a lot of terminology that the faculty don't get. So there's just all sorts of reasons for how do you create a collaborative communicative environment. And I think it's helped really well by people who are in Centers for Teaching and Learning in particular having Faculty status and or at least teaching responsibilities as a recognized part of their time.

[00:10:26] How do you innovate if you don't have a sense of the students in the classrooms and the everything that you get when you're teaching? So yes, I'm a huge proponent. I think it's so important that I think I know I've tried in both of places that I've set up and or. Other places that I've consulted with people.

[00:10:48] I've tried to say this. You might want to consider this. This can be really important. I know they designed it as a full time staff thing, but you're going to want someone who knows about teaching and has been teaching and therefore probably should continue to teach. It doesn't have to be a full load, one or two courses a year can be fine, depending if you're a semester or quarter, but, keep your foot in the game and keep a connection, whether or not you want a connection with a single department or that becomes whatever. You can teach some classes without being deeply embedded in department politics to the exclusion of the rest of the institution.

[00:11:27] So that's a whole other ballgame. If I can go on to the integration of the online and or. Instructional design and or the tech support and the innovation support. I think that's a really interesting question. And I came up when I was at Monmouth University before we had a center for teaching and learning.

[00:11:49] We had a faculty resource center and the primary idea was to be able to get. Faculty to be able to use web CT and or to remember that. And then to figure out where we were going to transition to as web CT and do a very integrative process across get to get all faculty involved in helping to determine what should be the next thing rather than letting the.

[00:12:22] on high provost decide who was going to, what was going to be used. We had a very engaged process. So all of that was very good. But we also got to do some things that were really interested, interesting, having the tech folk, our first bright idea nomination award thing was around how we took.

[00:12:43] Our survey of what people wanted in the way of faculty development, teaching and learning workshops, what categories they wanted, and then which sessions they might like, and then build our workshops around. Which one's got the highest votes if there were five or six people adding in the scheduling factor.

[00:13:07] So we knew when the heck to schedule it and then build it into series that then could become faculty learning community. So it wasn't a one off session. It just gave us all sorts of possibilities. And then we had, we were using evidence. And information to drive what we were doing. And even though we were really small, we were able to do that.

[00:13:30] And by the end, we were every year. We could get our auto generate letters to the faculty. About what they attended, and so they had that just to put in their portfolios or share however they decided. So that was a really important thing. The so I but there can be places where. Especially with online, it becomes

the big behemoth, the exclusion of the center and or if it be if it's part of the center, everything about teaching and learning gets sidelined because all the resources have to go into the tech side.

[00:14:09] So it depends. organizationally, again, positioning of the CTL. There can even be times when it's important to have a relationship, but it's better to have the CTL on its own in some settings. And I think that's a really interesting I'll stop there with that one.

[00:14:32] Well, I mean, I'll just comment on the last thing you just said about the context and how The instructional design and the technology can overshadow some of the other teaching and learning initiatives. I think that one of the real challenges of a small institution is where do you put the most of your resources to drive home faculty.

[00:14:52] The impact on faculty and I think that different institutions, depending on how much they're leaning into online education I think you're going to do it differently. [00:15:00] I think that in general, anything that is going to look at what variables impact student learning. ought to have some tangential relationship with the center because the center can help inform that conversation, not drive the conversation.

[00:15:18] Ideas have lots of really good resources, but there ought to be Consistent voice about what this looks like. Consistent voice about what the impact is across these units. And that's why for my institution, it makes sense for us to have I. D. and academic technology as part of the center because we share that common vision.

[00:15:36] Other institutions are bigger. I think those pockets happen differently. But I also think that the way that The institution wants to frame. So I'll give you an example, the way they want to frame online education really matters. I was at as an institution where online education was handled by a separate but related institutions.

[00:15:54] They had a separate sort of entity that did online education, they had nothing to do with the main campus. In that case, it's less important because you're not going to have overlap in a place like mine where you're going to have overlap. If you're sending two different messages to the students, you're going to do a disservice to the students.

[00:16:10] So, so again, it comes back to your point about context. And that, to that, I'd love to hear your thoughts on student success, because this is something I am very interested in.

[00:16:19] when it comes to student success, I'm going to go back to 1 of the really wonderful. Design possibilities that was in the Center for Teaching and Engaged Learning at Furman University, which was a liberal arts. institution, undergraduate liberal arts, small ish. One of the things was in the design for the Center for Teaching and Engaged Learning was not only the Center for Teaching and Learning, But the Collaboratory, which was the student success place that had students in it and had people able to come in and do, whatever, working on their projects and working with faculty , especially if there was media or extra technology involved or whatever.

[00:17:10] So that was very that was a very cool. Aspect and just as an aside our faculty developers not only had faculty appointments and or relationships and teaching responsibilities, but they also had affiliations with. groupings of disciplines. So we had our humanities, we had our art and theater arts, we had our STEM person, we had our social sciences person, and so it was designed in a way that we would hire those folk and have immediate sort of connections and embedded and informed connections.

[00:17:52] So the, and then the International and community work was part of the gauge. So there was another center that was under this umbrella. So it was a didn't last very much longer after I departed and it's broken down into other things. So there can be challenges with combining things. But conceptually, I love saying that the other thing that was really one of my favorite places and I was not director of a center at all, but in a sense was working with Greenville Technical College with their developmental studies, their transitional studies students, and this was one of the big community technical colleges in South Carolina, but even our students, we had 3500 students and 125 faculty, only about, 15 to 20 of the more full time and everybody else was adjunct, but still that's a small college on its own and a very different kind of first generation population and the This was a title three grant and I got to work with 19 teams of faculty to redesign and re imagine the curriculum to bring in active learning and integrate technology and do that and we worked with teams that had both full time and part time faculty and we also had to Build the data system to collect all the data because they couldn't do it for what we needed to.

[00:19:27] It was just this immense undertaking in a centerpiece of that. Well, the curriculum development was going on. So was the building of a student. Success area just for developmental studies so that if the students needed help

with anything or access to computers or access to tutors or anything they needed, the space existed and the people were there to help them, which was probably The [00:20:00] I mean, I like to think that the curriculum and the engagement and I know that it did it impacted not only at the developmental studies, but as students and cohorts graduated into the next courses.

[00:20:11] They were taking. They were like, wait a minute. Where's, are we going to do something more active or they had the expectation that was part of what college and learning was about and so those expectations, I ended up working with another team of teams of faculty, so that they could redesign their courses at the next level up because the expectation was so.

[00:20:37] And without all of those pieces, working together, I think that's one of the missing pieces that's more challenging when you have long standing different places, and that there's long standing also less conversation. That doesn't mean it's not happening. That just means that it's really important.

[00:21:01] And it's easier to do, I think, when, like, we were dealing with the folk who were first coming in and learning, but yeah, so the lower level undergraduate or the developmental and or the first gen students is a great place to have that focus, but it's important all the way through. Right.

[00:21:21] **Chris Hakala:** Well, yeah, I mean, there's so much that you said, Bonnie, and we could talk for a long time on some of these topics, but one of the things that really jumps out at me, you mentioned it before, and I think it's germane in this piece, although you didn't mention it together, and that's space.

[00:21:36] And the notion that conversations happen when you have naturally and then some formal conversations and spaces for those to occur. And I think that too often institutions, you mentioned being in the basement of the library, but if you're in the center of campus, that makes sense. I think that colleges don't always, and universities don't understand that, that it's the informal stuff that really can drive a lot of really important initiatives.

[00:22:00] And when. You have a center that's academic success and a center that's the teaching and learning and they do have meetings, but they don't share space in some way, there's still things that happen on a daily basis that aren't communicated. I mean, I think that being near physically, even if you're not in the same building, but near physically the offices you want to interact with helps.

[00:22:20] And I think that as you look at a campus Center for Teaching and Learning being in the same building and in the same physical spaces as librarians and as other academic support services that you can communicate with is going to improve your ability to interact with them, but more importantly, improve the ability of those people when they're talking to students to be able to direct students the appropriate resources.

[00:22:42] And I think that's, it's not hard to do, yet we make it hard to do. I mean, higher ed is such a weird world, right? We move people around, we do these odd things without really considering the implications. And I think that's really important. The other thing that you mentioned about academic success and having that integrated that comes back to that comment I made before about the voice.

[00:23:00] And that is when you have an academic success group that's talking about studying in a particular way to students, but in a way that doesn't always get supported by what we know about teaching and learning outside of that because of our particular area of expertise. Sends a mixed message to the students.

[00:23:15] And so the faculty member might be designing a particular activity that looks this way. Students might be thinking it should look this way. And then you have a missed opportunity. So those conversations are important. And through no fault of anyone. It's just not talking the same language. Sometimes we're talking about the same things, but we're using different language.

[00:23:31] And so the students don't see that connection. So it really is. It's a matter of that communication piece. And I'll go to the end of my career saying that I know I talk too much. It's part of who I am. Yes, I will rather talk more to try to move the conversation along and get the best Things for our students and the best learning experiences, then sit back and just do about it.

[00:23:55] And so I mean, people know my super right. And if they're listening, if they listen to this, they'll they know this already. I'm going to talk to them, they're going to hear from me because I have things that need to happen to move along what I think is going to improve the student experience and so I will continue to talk to them until it happens.

[00:24:12] I did learn once the rule of three with provosts. Yes, three times by the third time they're sick of it and they just say yes, he's going to ask a bunch of times you got to space it out right you got to give them time to feel right they said no but then eventually they'll say yes, especially if it's important.

[00:24:27] **Bonnie Mullinix:** I have. I know, sitting with one person. In particular, but a word that was applied to me that I took as a compliment, but I'm not sure ultimately it was intended as such was that I was tenacious. And that's exactly what you're describing. Yeah, having Clear and well informed opinions that I believe are important for people to hear and that I'm not just going to say once and just drop [00:25:00] if they don't jump on board that it deserves that extra conversation.

[00:25:05] And I do think that is a cornerstone of advocacy. Which is a big part of the work that we do as educational developers. If we don't advocate for what we think is the next step forward and where we need to be going, then we're not speaking on behalf of. Our faculty colleagues and students, and if we can't listen and then use our position to help raise that up to the people who are often deciding, well, I don't know, you seem to be in the library.

[00:25:43] Maybe you ought to be under the librarian. Why are you under? Over with the provost or something and people will come in and have these ideas that then sever ties that need to be created, if you can't have those conversations, and there are situations where, barriers are put in place that are not just the organizational structure doing that largely it is, but also the fact that.

[00:26:12] Those walls are not meant to be, we put you in silos for reasons. We don't want you talking to each other. We're getting in the way. That's not where the budgetary line goes. There's so many things that can get in the way. Of just good practice and things that we have seen work plenty of other places, but for some reason in a particular institutional context, or more often than not.

[00:26:42] The new person coming in, the new provost, associate provost, whatever happened before isn't the way I do things. I'm going to do what happened at the last institution, or I'm just going to do something new so that I can pin it on my shoulders. The way it ends up feeling to a lot of us who just want to get the work done and keep the learning.

[00:27:06] In the spotlight and not all the drama that is the academy and the kingdom building that goes along with that gets in the way of what's important. Well, Bonnie I think this has been a great conversation. I have to go. Speaking of teaching, I have to go teach my class. That's what I understood. I do want to say, though, and don't put this on the podcast, whoever is editing this, but the budget thing is so stupid, I've got to tell you.

[00:27:34] You talk about, like, siloing things. They've changed our budget system now. So I now have this different budgeting system and they haven't

explained anything to me, so I just keep charging things to different budget accounts. So someone gives me a hard time about it because they have not told me what, where the money is.

[00:27:49] I don't even have, they're going to show me dollar figures right now because we're switching everything over. It's so ridiculous. Like, and my point is it's one pot of money. Why do we have this arcane? Byzantine hard to improve. Like, it doesn't make any sense. Yeah.

[00:28:01] But it's a new arcane Byzantine process.

[00:28:06] Easy. Like, look, you give me this much money, I'm gonna spend it on things that matter. I mean, I'm not gonna, I'm not gonna blow the money. Why are you making me do it? It's just crazy. So anyway

[00:28:15] I believe you. And that's a big part of what is important about Talking about things like that is the opportunity to, yes, compare and contrast and learn new stories, and also along the way, bend a little bit, because when our time is eaten up by things that are institutionally new Necessary, but someone has figured out a way to make them even harder than they used to be for no apparent reason and or doesn't at least explain that, tell me why we needed to shift, we're, we created our own homegrown system for doing this because they were going to triple the price of whatever we were using before.

[00:29:01] I'll take on part of that pain, but tell me nothing and no way to do it and just throw it down on top of me. I know how faculty feel when decisions are made that don't involve them or students when, whenever we can give them a voice and let's listen. But yeah, who you get to talk to.

[00:29:22] Just to bring it back around as we close out and let you head off to your class. The positioning of a CTL within the institutional structure is really critical. The ability to analyze that and figure out how to move yourself into what would be the most direct line and the most advantageous and get rid of as many layers as possible while still Being able to move across different groups, so that you can facilitate and participate in the conversations that are critical to learning and [00:30:00] to teaching, that's what we are all about and what we ought to be able to do and what I hope everyone is able to do.

[00:30:09] I agree

[00:30:10] and I think you said it really well. I want to be able to have the conversations that are important that matter, and I need to be able to report up in

a way that doesn't. Block the work that we're trying to do. So exactly. And on that note, thanks, Bonnie. Appreciate it. It was great conversation Again, excellent.

[00:30:26] Take care