

**MathChat:
Lunch Discussion Group for Term
Instructors of College Mathematics**

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Overview: The College of Arts & Sciences (CAS) at the University of Oklahoma (OU) committed \$1000 for one year to support an effort to create a community among the term instructors in the Department of Mathematics.

Purpose

I proposed to test the feasibility of a low-cost professional development opportunity targeting Lecturers¹ in the Department of Mathematics. OU provides successful professional development opportunities for teaching assistants and regular faculty; this project built on the existing successful models by adapting them to a new population. Successful implementation ultimately will offer a model that can be adapted by other departments that employ Lecturers.

(1) In the academic community, lecturers are also known as adjuncts, part-time instructors, temporary instructors, and other titles.

The Department of Mathematics at OU employs about 28 Lecturers (Fall 2002), who teach hundreds of undergraduate students in lower division courses. This population is the only one lacking an obvious vehicle for professional development. For graduate teaching assistants, the department offers a one-semester course: "Teaching College Mathematics" and the university offers the "College Teaching Certificate". The Instructional Development Program (IDP) at OU offers Faculty Lunch Discussion Groups that target regular faculty.

The experimental vehicle is the College Mathematics Instructor Lunch Discussion Group (MathChat). MathChat is modeled primarily after IDP's Faculty Lunches. We meet six times per semester for 90 minutes each. The first 30 minutes is for a community-forming lunch; the remaining 60 minutes is for discussion of specific topics (see the examples in the next paragraph).

We piloted this model in Spring and Fall 2002 and met with moderate success: six to eight instructors participated in discussions approximately every other week. Another six or so said that they would have liked to participate but the scheduled time conflicted with their teaching responsibilities.

We discussed topics such as the use of graphing calculators, strategies for marking and grading frequent homework assignments in large classes, and discussing case studies written explicitly for the development of college mathematics instructors.

Hopefully, once the program gains momentum, the participation rate will increase, bringing the quality of instruction with it, much as IDP's Faculty Lunches improve instructional practices among regular faculty.

In Fall 2002, CAS funds were used to pay for lunch for participants in MathChat. This

strategy emulates the OU IDP model in which new faculty are provided lunch at the "New Faculty Lunch Discussion Group" and in which IDP subsidizes lunches catered by the Union.

Anticipated Outcomes

The network of lecturers has already strengthened. Several of the instructors have expressed an appreciation for the time to talk with each other to share teaching ideas. There is ample evidence in other arenas that having a community of participation improves teaching and learning. In the end, I expect to design a model that can be used by other departments that employ Lecturers, providing additional value to the college and to the university.