

THE CÉGEP DE SAINTE-FOY: GETTING FAMILIAR WITH THE PROFESSION AND THE INSTITUTION*



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We can all agree that beginning a new job is a significant event, both for the individual concerned and for the employing organization. Embarking on a college-teaching career is no exception to the rule; on the contrary, even senior teachers starting out at a different institution are often hard-pressed to give their courses and become acquainted with an unknown environment. They must deal with the logistical aspects involved in course preparation (computers, photocopies, etc.), meet other colleagues, and familiarize themselves with the new organizational culture. Recent graduates, on the other hand, must go from being content specialists to being teachers, which means developing a whole new professional identity—something that cannot be accomplished in a day.

The complexity of the situation shows the advantage, relevance, and importance of providing structured support for teachers when they arrive at a new college, for their sake as well as for that of the institution in question. At the CÉGEP de Sainte-Foy, deliberations headed up by the academic dean, as well as the related practices described in this article, date back to the late 1990s, and are still evolving. These practices are naturally aimed at supporting new teachers in the various aspects of their duties, and ensuring they are properly integrated into both the profession and the institution concerned, so they become members of the academic community in their own right. Two series of mandatory activities have been established to assist in the integration process.

INTEGRATION INTO THE INSTITUTION AND ITS CULTURE

The goal of the first series of activities, which is institutional in nature, is, of course, successful integration into the college overall, and is intended for all new staff members—teachers and non-academic staff alike. After teachers are hired, someone from the human-resources office meets with them to provide information on college policies, the services available, and working conditions. More specifically, they are advised of their obligations (to the college as well as the students) as concerns their general availability throughout the year and their participation in specific college, program or departmental activities.

At the beginning of the session, moreover, the management team gets together with the new staff members, giving directors an opportunity to discuss the college's educational project, philosophy, and management values. Each department head also outlines the role of his or her department and the services offered, and new staff members have a chance to forge relationships. When this activity was evaluated, participant satisfaction was high.

INTEGRATION INTO TEACHING

The other series of activities runs throughout the term and deals with mainly pedagogical issues (see sidebar): five group meetings headed up by educational advisors, one individual meeting with an educational advisor, and another individual meeting with the associate academic dean of the department concerned. All these activities, both group and individual, prepare new teachers for their entry into the profession and allow the college to discuss its support system in the areas of teaching, learning, evaluation, program implementation, and academic success, and are in part completed by our Website, the pedagogical-resource electronic bulletin board. They are organized with a view to helping and encouraging new teachers to launch, pursue, or expand their deliberations on the profession. The formulas used during the group meetings leave room for participants to discuss cases and share their experiences and thoughts. By means of these activities, new teachers can reflect on their different roles in the community and arrive at a fully rounded idea of the profession as regards the college's values and expectations. Accordingly, we emphasize the program approach for planning and evaluating learning, as well as the assistance measures and services available to students to help them succeed.

The academic dean felt it was important to support new teachers (because, as we have seen, teaching in a new environment is demanding), and to work from this perspective in conjunction with the departments to ensure an integration process that takes account of the different aspects of the profession. Individual departments also play a support and disciplinary role on a daily basis, providing new teachers with orientation

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and often pairing them with more experienced counterparts; these “sponsors” becomes their “go-to” source on a number of issues. Thanks to the activity program, new teachers also get to know about other college resources able to provide assistance, especially educational advisors.

Mandatory Activities for New Teachers (second series)

OBJECTIVES

- To promote the integration of new teachers into the CÉGEP de Sainte-Foy academic community.
- To provide teachers with pedagogical support as they start out at the college.
- To provide the training required for integration (challenges specific to the college system in general and to the CÉGEP de Sainte-Foy in particular, learning-evaluation policy, teacher-evaluation policy, IT resources, assistance and support services, etc.).
- To encourage discussions between new teachers and other college-community stakeholders.
- To identify any additional teacher-training needs.

ACTIVITIES AND CONTENT

Back-to-School Priorities – Week 0

- Competency-based approach
- Course goals and syllabuses
- Student characteristics

Pedagogical-Resource Bulletin Board (Website), Omnivox, and ICT – Week 0

- Teaching sources and resources
- The Omnivox system
- The Magister server (teachers’ virtual space)
- Other computer options for teachers

Learning Evaluation – Week 2

- Exploration of the college’s learning-evaluation policy
- Evaluation:
 - a) Some basic concepts
 - b) Choice of evaluation topics, criteria and instruments

Assistance and Consultation Services Available to Students and Teachers – Week 6

- Services for students
- Services for teachers
- Professional development

Teaching Styles and Learning Profiles Mid-Term Week

- Teaching styles
- Learning profiles
- Meaningful learning
- Teaching strategies and formulas

Two Individual Meetings with an Educational Advisor (the first of which is mandatory) – 1st meeting in Week 5 or 6; 2nd meeting at the end of term

- Synthesis of group activities
- Reminder of pedagogical support available for teachers

Meeting with the Associate Academic dean of the Department

- Reminder of the college’s expectations re availability and participation in college activities
- Non-pedagogical support

FACILITATING PARTICIPATION IN ACTIVITIES

Given the number of new teachers, scheduling conflicts (which are occasionally major and recurring), and the fact that teachers may be hired at any time during the term, providing support in the professional-integration process is a constant challenge. In order to facilitate participation in activities, therefore, new teachers are informed of activity content, as well as of the fact that the institution considers such participation extremely important; the departments are also made aware of the fact. If a teacher is unable to take part in a group meeting, the educational advisor in charge will work with him or her to make up for that absence (for example, by means of an individual meeting or readings).

We are currently trying to better adjust activities in accordance with need, even though the difference in profiles at group meetings has its advantages. At the same time, however, we feel it is pertinent to consider that some teachers are experienced, while others are just starting out; still others have a background in pedagogy, and others have little or no such training.



CONCLUSION

The orientation and integration program for new teachers at the CÉGEP de Sainte-Foy has been developed over the years as a function of experience. For our institution, the program's formula and the parameters—especially what is possible to accomplish in the time allotted—are consistent with the integration needs identified. We feel it is vital to provide new teachers with support from the outset, and inform them of what the college expects of them, in several different regards. The aforementioned institutional activities help new teachers gain an insight into the workings of the college and better determine the context of their action in the classroom, the curriculum, the department, and the college in relation to the staff in general and the students. The activities specifically designed for them help familiarize them with the college's educational setting, and are aimed at supporting their professional development. Given the various limitations on and varying professional circumstances of new teachers, the challenge of participation remains, and we are pursuing our examination of the issue. We especially hope that new teachers will live up to their full potential in the community, for their own benefit as well as that of their colleagues and students. ●

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