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Advancing the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Innovative Staff Development Initiatives at a Rural University in South Africa

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Abstract

This presentation highlights the transformative initiatives undertaken by the Academic Development Department at a rural University in South Africa to advance the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). Recognizing the critical importance of effective teaching in higher education, we have designed comprehensive professional development programs aimed at enhancing the pedagogical skills of our staff members. Central to our efforts is the implementation of a Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education and Training, which equips educators with essential methodologies, assessment strategies, and reflective practices. This program emphasizes not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the application of innovative teaching techniques through experiential learning and peer collaboration. In addition to the diploma program, we facilitate a series of workshops, seminars, and symposiums that foster an ongoing dialogue about effective teaching practices and current trends in higher education. Our research sessions encourage faculty to engage in inquiries into their teaching methodologies, fostering a culture of reflection and evidence-based practice. Key themes of our initiative include collaboration, innovation, and a commitment to continuous improvement in teaching quality. By empowering faculty to embrace SoTL, we are not only enhancing student learning experiences but also contributing to a broader academic culture that values scholarly inquiry in teaching. This presentation will provide insights into the framework, outcomes, and future directions of our staff development initiatives, demonstrating our commitment to educational excellence and the professionalization of teaching at our university.

Keywords: Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Staff Development, Higher Education, Professional Development, Pedagogy, Postgraduate Diploma