ABSTRACT

INFLUENCE OF “PROFESSOR CAMP”: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY ON THE WAKONSE CONFERENCE ON COLLEGE TEACHING

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Higher education faculty often enter their academic roles with little to no knowledge of effective teaching practices. Furthermore, many faculty work in academic climates where the importance of quality teaching is overshadowed by the primacy of research. The Wakonse Conference on College Teaching was established in 1990 to help faculty collaborate with one another to improve teaching. More than 2,500 faculty and future faculty have attended the conference, yet there has been no in depth exploration into the influence that the conference has for attendees. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the influence on teaching of the Wakonse Conference for faculty attendees from the University of Missouri during the academic year following their attendance at the conference. Furthermore, this study explored how communities of practice at the conference and in attendees’ workplaces influenced their overall faculty development experiences.

Archived document analysis included review of conference agendas and participant feedback from previous conferences. Participant observation was also conducted at the 2014 conference. In addition, a series of four interviews was conducted with 10 faculty members over a 1-year period to determine changes that could be attributed to attending the Wakonse Conference. Participants reported changes in thinking and action in both their personal and professional lives as a result of attending the conference. Although most participants reported a sense of community at the conference, a few reported instances of exclusion. Furthermore, limited support was found for the concept of an academic workplace community.