

From Strategic Goal to Institutional Framework: Reimagining Teaching and Learning at Ivy Tech Community College

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[Abstract] Ivy Tech Community College’s 2023–2025 strategic plan, *Higher Education at the Speed of Life*, identified “Promote Effective Teaching & Learning” as Goal 1. Although the institution had long prioritized student success and instructional excellence, it had not previously established a shared institutional vision or framework for teaching and learning. One strategic initiative therefore focused on developing a collective Framework for Teaching and Learning to guide instructional practice, faculty development, and student engagement across the college.

This article examines the collaborative and cross-functional process used to develop the framework, including faculty and stakeholder engagement throughout its creation. It explores the seven identified elements of teaching and learning (i.e., Resources & Support, Design & Development, Delivery & Engagement, Community & Connection, Recognition & Celebration, Iteration & Reflection, and Growth & Innovation) and discusses the initial and future applications of the framework across the institution, and concludes with a reflection honoring the faculty whose work inspired and informed its development. The article is presented as a reflective personal narrative that blends institutional storytelling with practical insight into large-scale framework development in higher education.

[Keywords] teaching and learning framework, faculty development, institutional strategic planning, collaborative framework development, instructional design and pedagogy, community college education, reflective practice

1. Introduction

Ivy Tech Community College’s 2023–2025 strategic plan added a critical focus that had not appeared in prior strategic plans: teaching and learning. Although the college has existed since 1963 and the faculty role has always been primarily focused on instruction, there had never been a statewide focus on teaching and learning. One of the strategies in the strategic plan was to develop a Framework for Teaching and Learning. The creation of this framework was intended to provide a common language, clarify expectations, and articulate aspirational goals for the thousands of full-time and adjunct faculty members who teach at Ivy Tech Community College.

The request was substantial, but many people were eager to participate as they recognized the potential impact a shared framework could have on the college. Although the framework is still in the early stages of implementation, this article captures how it was created, provides a brief overview of the seven essential elements of teaching and learning, discusses initial and future applications of the framework, and concludes with a dedication to the faculty whose work is at the heart of the college.

2. Strategic Plan Initiative

Ivy Tech Community College's 2023–2025 strategic plan, *Higher Education at the Speed of Life*, identified “Promote Effective Teaching & Learning” as Goal 1. Although the institution had long prioritized student success and instructional excellence, it had not established a shared institutional vision or framework for teaching and learning. One strategic initiative therefore focused on developing a collective Framework for Teaching and Learning to guide instructional practice, faculty development, and student engagement across the college.

During the final interview for the position of Assistant Vice President for Teaching and Learning, the author asked what the most impactful and important contribution in this role would be. The Provost and the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Associate Provost jointly identified completion of the Framework for Teaching and Learning as the top priority. The author joined the project several months after initial work had begun, and moving the framework across the finish line required additional time, engagement with difficult feedback, and the inclusion of new perspectives.

The resulting framework reflects a collaborative effort characterized by persistence, openness to critique, and a shared commitment to teaching and learning. It serves as a robust guide for teaching and learning at Ivy Tech Community College and represents the contributions of those who initiated the work, provided critical feedback, and helped complete the project.

3. Process to Develop Framework

A small group of individuals from across the college rose to the challenge of advancing this strategic initiative. The initial group consisted of faculty members, teaching and learning leaders, and academic and student success administrators. The group met regularly and began by examining existing frameworks from other institutions to identify strengths and limitations, which helped them consider topics, audiences, and formats. Following these early discussions, the group held brainstorming sessions to articulate needs, desired outcomes, and key design principles. At the conclusion of these sessions, each committee member created a visual representation of a proposed framework for teaching and learning.

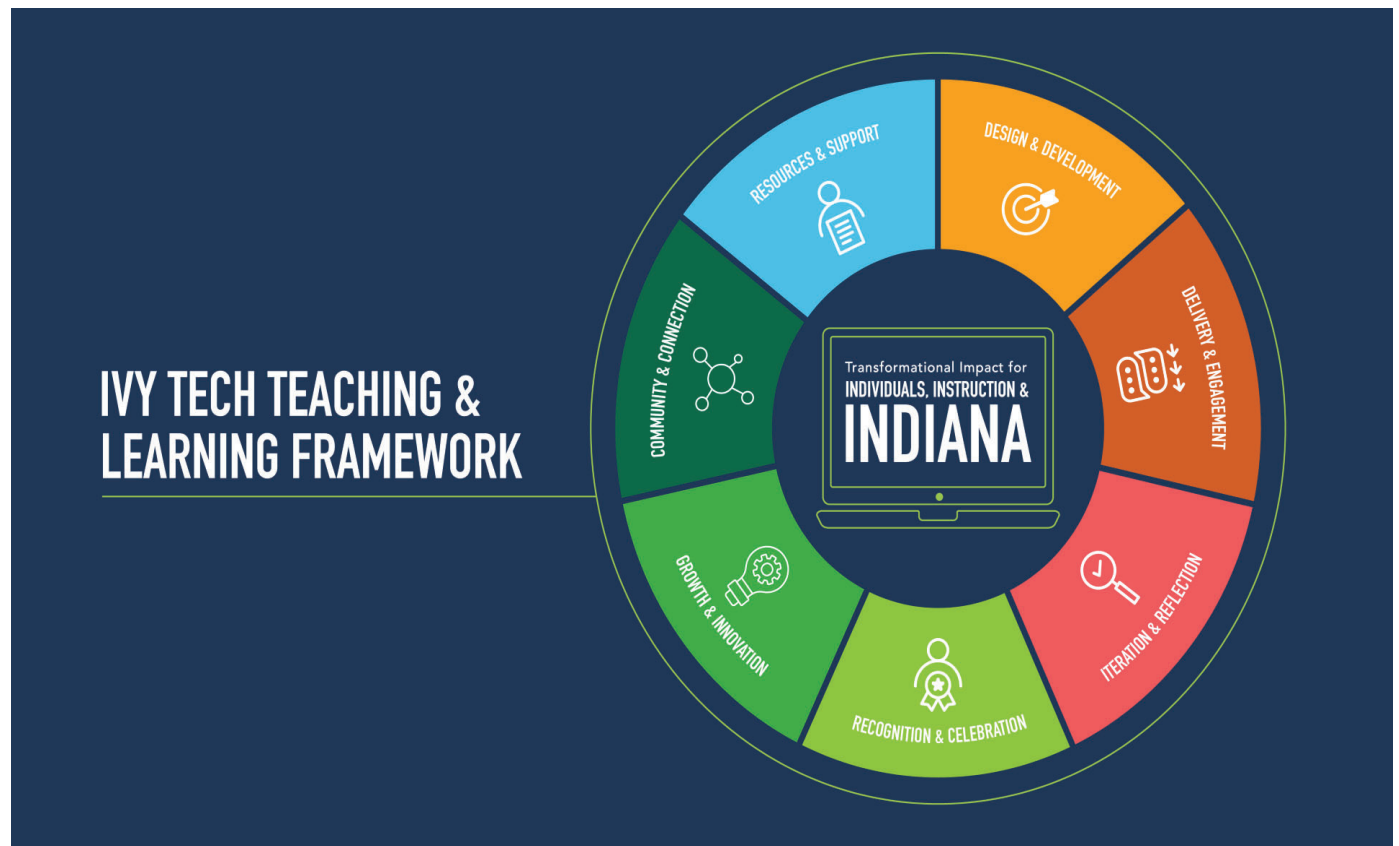
Although some overlap existed, each proposed framework differed substantially. Because the group had invested significant time to reach this stage, they decided to select at least one core element from each proposal to construct a final overarching framework. While this approach was

initially well received, the resulting product ultimately fell short of expectations; it reflected compromise rather than consensus.

At the annual Spring 2025 Ivy Tech OneSummit conference, the framework was shared with Goal 1 Advisory Board members. Attendees offered extensive constructive criticism, including concern about the absence of Career and Technical Education (CTE) faculty input. After the conference, the framework was shared with the Ivy Tech Statewide Faculty Council, and a survey was disseminated to collect faculty feedback alongside the Goal 1 Advisory Board comments. Overall, faculty feedback was largely critical and raised questions about how the framework would be used in practice. The combined feedback from the Goal 1 Advisory Board, Statewide Faculty Council, and faculty survey provided the impetus to regroup and identify a path forward.

In early fall 2025, the two Goal 1 co-leads (including the author) approached the Goal 1 Advisory Board to request approval for additional work on the framework, acknowledging that its current form did not provide the guidance initially envisioned. Members of the original project team were invited to continue, but only one elected to do so. This transition created an opportunity to bring in fresh perspectives and ensure representation from CTE faculty.

Ultimately, five faculty members and academic leaders agreed to address the previously gathered feedback. The group determined that a small number of key decisions would have the greatest impact and yield a usable framework. Over the course of three meetings, all these decisions were made by consensus. The final framework (Figure 1) was presented to the Goal 1 Advisory Board and Statewide Faculty Council for approval in late fall 2025. Because the revised framework addressed many of the earlier concerns, both groups endorsed moving forward.

Figure 1*Ivy Tech Teaching & Learning Framework*

4. Seven Essential Elements of Teaching and Learning

When the framework was complete, seven essential elements of teaching and learning were identified. The elements were intentionally represented visually without linear ordering and at equal size, reflecting the way faculty engage in these practices concurrently as they teach. Together, the elements describe the intentional practices, relationships, and supports through which faculty transform teaching and influence learning in their daily work. Although effective teaching and learning practices often activate multiple elements simultaneously, each essential element represents a distinct primary purpose. To differentiate among the elements, Table 1 presents a lens and time orientation for each.

Table 1*Lens and Time Orientation for Seven Essential Elements of Teaching & Learning*

Essential Element of Teaching & Learning	Lens for the Essential Element	Time Orientation
Resources & Support	“What enables the work?”	Always available/ongoing
Design & Development	“How is learning intentionally planned?”	Before (and between) learning experiences
Delivery & Engagement	“What happens in the learning moment?”	During learning experiences
Community & Connection	“How do relationships and belonging shape learning?”	Across all phases
Recognition & Celebration	“How do we use feedback and recognition to guide and motivate learning?”	After, but reinforcing future practice
Iteration & Reflection	“How do we learn from practice?”	After and across experiences
Growth & Innovation	“How do we extend beyond current practice?”	Forward-looking

To differentiate among the elements (Table 1), each essential element of teaching and learning is described in more detail, and research and evidence to support their inclusion in the framework is provided. Below each element name a current definition and focus of each element is shown to add to the understanding of how and why each is important.

4.1 Resources & Support

Intentional structures, tools, and services that enable and sustain effective teaching and learning: *Focuses on access, scaffolding, and institutional support that enable and sustain effective teaching and learning.*

The essential element of Resources and Support focuses on ensuring that students have what they need to learn and that faculty are aware of available resources and can communicate them effectively to students. Ivy Tech emphasizes a range of academic supports that collectively contribute substantially to student success. Kim et al. (2023) found that retention rates were 41% higher for students who utilized academic support compared to those who did not.

Ivy Tech Community College provides multiple supports, including tutoring, educational technology, student life, advising, disability services, library resources, and financial aid. The IvyCares program connects students with emergency transportation assistance, food security resources, mental health supports, technology assistance, and emergency aid funding (Ivy Tech Community College, n.d.-a). Ivy+Career Link offers career development services that help students prepare for and navigate the workforce (Ivy Tech Community College, n.d.-b).

Although these services are designed to assist students when needed, they can be difficult to navigate. Students often turn first to faculty members with whom they have established relationships. To connect students with appropriate resources, faculty must be familiar with the available supports. Without these services, and without faculty awareness of them, teaching and learning are significantly more challenging.

4.2 Design & Development

Intentional planning, creation, and revision of learning experiences to support meaningful learning: *Emphasizes thoughtful alignment, clarity, and inclusive design before instruction begins.*

Design and Development is an essential element that encompasses the decisions faculty make about what and how they will teach before instruction begins. At Ivy Tech Community College, shared course objectives were developed through existing curriculum committees to ensure consistency across campuses and instructional modalities. These shared objectives establish common expectations for student learning and achievement.

Using these objectives as a foundation, faculty can apply backward design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), develop formative and summative assessments, and incorporate universal design for learning strategies (CAST, 2024) to promote accessibility and student success. Gynnild et al. (2021) found that stronger alignment between summative assessments and course learning outcomes, together with opportunities to rehearse assessment-related tasks through formative assessment, was associated with lower failure and withdrawal rates. Rosnagel et al. (2020) similarly suggested that investment in high-quality course design can strengthen student motivation.

Ivy Tech also benefits from an instructional design team that offers ongoing professional development in writing effective course objectives, applying backward design, incorporating universal design for learning, and using Quality Matters principles. The planning and design work completed before a course begins plays an important role in supporting student satisfaction and success.

4.3 Delivery & Engagement

Teaching practices and facilitation strategies that shape what happens during instructional interactions: *Centers on facilitation, responsiveness, and strategies that actively engage students in learning.*

Harrington (2021) emphasized that student engagement in the classroom and with faculty can have a substantial impact on student success. A wide range of learner-centered instructional strategies can create meaningful opportunities for students to engage with disciplinary content in ways that deepen understanding. Such strategies include inviting students to examine content from multiple perspectives, establishing a supportive learning environment through clear communication, creating opportunities for collaboration, designing projects or simulations that connect course concepts to authentic applications, and incorporating approaches that emphasize metacognition and reflection.

These practices require students to participate actively in the learning process and demonstrate their understanding in meaningful ways. When faculty structure instruction to promote ownership of learning through practice, exploration, and problem-solving, their teaching aligns with cognitive science research and supports deeper understanding (Doyle, 2011). This approach shifts the faculty role from *teller of knowledge* to *facilitator of learning* (Doyle, 2011).

4.4 Community & Connection

Structures and practices that foster relationships, belonging, and shared purpose among faculty and students: *Positions learning as a relational and social process, with belonging central to student success.*

Research consistently demonstrates that students' sense of belonging has a substantial influence on student success, persistence, and retention (Rainey et al., 2018; Strayhorn, 2018; Yeager et al., 2016). For this reason, Community and Connection is an essential element of teaching and learning. For many students, the syllabus provides a first introduction to the instructor, and its tone can significantly shape perceptions of both the instructor and the course (Denton & Veloso, 2018; Harnish & Bridges, 2011).

Even relatively simple faculty practices, such as learning and using students' names, can help students feel recognized and valued. In turn, this sense of recognition can encourage greater effort in coursework and in the classroom community while also making students more comfortable seeking help when needed (Cooper et al., 2017). Felten and Lambert (2020) argued that human connection is central to student success and that students must experience genuine welcome and care in the college environment. Faculty can foster these connections by helping students connect with course content, with the instructor, and with one another (Felten & Lambert, 2020). In addition to building individual relationships, faculty can support Community and Connection through instructional strategies and collaborative learning opportunities.

4.5 Recognition & Celebration

Intentional feedback and acknowledgment practices that reinforce learning, effort, growth, and achievement: *Focuses on how faculty communicate expectations, progress, and value through grading, feedback, and recognition to support student learning.*

Recognition and Celebration emphasizes the ways faculty use feedback and acknowledgment to encourage students to focus on learning rather than simply earning grades. Faculty can support this orientation in several ways, including providing opportunities for revision, using rubrics that clearly communicate assignment expectations, offering positive comments alongside constructive feedback, and being explicit about how students can continue to improve as they learn.

When faculty highlight both what students have done well and what they can do to strengthen their work, they reinforce persistence and continued growth. Hattie and Timperley (2007) found that effective feedback can increase student persistence, and Dweck (2006) suggested that emphasizing growth and improvement helps cultivate stronger study habits, greater attention to revision, and higher academic achievement. Together, these practices position feedback not simply as evaluation, but as a meaningful part of the learning process.

4.6 Iteration & Reflection

Reflection and evaluation practices used to refine and improve existing teaching and learning over time. *Positions improvement as ongoing, evidence-informed, and reflective.*

Iteration and Reflection is an essential element of teaching and learning because meaningful instructional improvement depends on faculty members' willingness to examine and refine their practice in response to student needs. Faculty can engage in this process in many ways, including gathering feedback, reflecting on their teaching, and making intentional plans for improvement. At Ivy Tech Community College, the student evaluation of instruction process provides students with an opportunity to offer constructive feedback near the conclusion of each course before final grades are released. Faculty are also encouraged to seek student feedback more frequently, in addition to feedback from peers and supervisors.

Regardless of the source, feedback becomes most valuable when faculty reflect on it and determine how it may appropriately inform future practice. Haras (2018) emphasized that reflection is a powerful tool for learning and argued that ongoing reflection is foundational to faculty professional development. Faculty may demonstrate iteration and reflection in multiple ways, including journaling, writing reflections on feedback, developing improvement plans or personal growth plans, participating in professional development, and contributing to the scholarship of teaching and learning. Together, these practices position improvement as a continuous and intentional part of effective teaching.

4.7 Growth & Innovation

Exploration and integration of emerging ideas, technologies, or practices that extend teaching and learning beyond current norms: *Encourages experimentation, adaptability, and forward-looking practice.*

Growth and Innovation is an essential element of teaching and learning because faculty must remain responsive to developments in their disciplines, in pedagogy, and in educational technology. Each of these areas directly influences how well students are prepared for subsequent coursework and for the workforce. Guskey (2000) argued that growth and innovation are essential competencies in teaching and learning. Staying informed about disciplinary developments helps ensure that students receive instruction that is current, accurate, and relevant.

Similarly, keeping pace with new teaching strategies requires faculty to approach their work as lifelong learners who continually refine and, when appropriate, innovate their practice to improve student learning. Awareness of developments in educational technology also helps faculty maintain the relevance of their instruction and supports students in understanding how and when technology can be used effectively and appropriately. Although some faculty may choose to pursue additional coursework in these areas, many can engage in meaningful growth through targeted training and professional development opportunities that are directly applicable to their teaching.

5. Initial Framework Applications

Several initiatives beginning in fall 2026 will use the Framework for Teaching and Learning to guide faculty development and institutional practice. All teaching and learning professional development offerings will indicate the essential elements they support, and this classification will be used to organize and filter opportunities across the college. This approach is intended to help faculty more easily identify programming that aligns with their professional development needs.

Throughout the 2026–2027 academic year, monthly information sessions will introduce faculty to the framework and to each of its essential elements. In addition, a working group composed of Statewide Faculty Council members and Vice Chancellors for Academic Affairs recently revised the Student Evaluation of Instruction (SEI) questions, and each question will now be mapped to the framework and its essential elements. Teaching and Learning will also offer sessions for faculty and faculty supervisors on how SEI results might be used to inform annual goals and professional development related to teaching excellence. During the 2026–2027 academic year, the yearlong cohosted Faculty Development Seminar will use the Framework for Teaching and Learning as a guiding document for its programming.

6. Future Framework Applications

Teaching and Learning leaders and members of the Statewide Faculty Council are currently developing teaching competencies aligned with the Framework for Teaching and Learning. Although this work remains in its early stages, it has the potential to clarify expectations for the

faculty role at Ivy Tech Community College. The long-term goal is for these competencies to inform the development of a revised faculty job description, annual evaluation process, and reclassification and promotion process.

At present, these three processes function largely independently of one another. Competencies grounded in the framework may provide the cohesive structure needed to better align them. Human Resources, which oversees these processes, has been introduced to the work, has expressed support for it, and continues to be kept informed as the initiative develops.

7. Reflection

The individuals who contributed to this framework dedicated it to the faculty of Ivy Tech Community College, whose work inspired and informed its development. It is our hope that the framework both guides and supports the important work faculty undertake each day. Represented at the center of professional development, this Teaching and Learning framework at Ivy Tech seeks to provide programming that helps faculty create the *Transformational Impact for Individuals, Instruction, and Indiana*.

Faculty commitment to students and to student learning is central to the mission of the college. The institution's goals depend on the dedication faculty bring to their teaching and to the success of their students. This framework is offered in recognition of that commitment and with gratitude for the transformative work faculty do each day.

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