

# Acknowledging Your Value

*Strategically Asking for the  
Resources to Support Coaching*



*Framing Situation: Good Teaching  
is More than Simply a Good Idea*

**By Meggin McIntosh, PhD**  
Emphasis on Excellence, Inc.

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*Meggin McIntosh*

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## Introduction

Welcome! You have accessed one of the short, practical publications in this special series that focuses on how to strategically “make the ask” of your manager, department chair, board, or some other person or entity to support you through coaching. Each individual publication in the series pinpoints one type of situation that either may prompt someone to seek coaching or is related to an area that someone already working with a coach wants to focus on next in their coaching.

Three key ideas to keep in mind regardless of why you are asking for coaching support:

1. **You have to know what coaching is and be able to communicate that information or you are not able to ask for it.** You can't assume that the person you are asking will know what coaching is.<sup>1</sup>
2. **You have to know that you're worth it or you won't make a compelling case** to your manager, dean, provost, board, program head, or spouse. Note: It is not uncommon for people who are making the investment in coaching from their personal funds to seek ways to talk to their spouse about it.



To help you clarify your worth, write out answers to the following questions:

- **What is motivating you to pursue coaching?** You need to be able to articulate your reasoning clearly rather than making a vague request.
- **What are you hoping will change or be different as a result of coaching?** Think through what the complete answers are for you AND think through how to frame your request in a way that will be meaningful to the person you're asking for financial support.

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<sup>1</sup>If you haven't already, please read the publication, “What is Coaching?” on my website. It is free and you may download and share with others in your organization.

<https://meggin.com/what-is-coaching/>

- **What is of key importance in your role?** You wear many hats and may need to give some careful thought to how to answer this question. The clearer you can be, the better. Once you have your answers, you can consider them through the perspective of the person you're going to be talking with about funding your coaching.
- **In your current role(s), what is working well for you?** Since you may be asking your manager, department chair, or board for support, use this as an opportunity to highlight some of the areas where you are growing and succeeding in your work.
- **What goals or aspirations are you currently meeting or exceeding?** You may rarely think about this because you are on to the next project or area of focus. For this preparatory exercise, however, pause (actually, come to a full stop!) to consider what you're accomplishing and notice what you can build on. This is worthwhile for you and will be helpful to the person you're talking with as they consider ways to help you accomplish even more.
- **Which goals or aspirations are difficult to meet or are places where you feel stuck or stagnant?** Now it is time to weave in some of the realities of the places where you're struggling. Remember, you're building on areas of strength and accomplishment. Going forward, by working with your coach, you want to work through some obstacles that are thwarting your efforts.
- **If you can solve the challenges that are thwarting your efforts:**
  - What would it mean in terms of time, effort, productivity, effectiveness, efficiency, revenue, retention, innovation, and the like? Depending on what the situation is and what "language" will most resonate with the person of whom you're making the request, you may only need to focus on one of these areas.
  - How would the result you're expecting have an impact on others, e.g., your team, your function, your organization? You will notice as you work through the processes presented throughout this publication series, that once you begin tallying the financial impact on others, you quickly get to rather large numbers. You will then use these numbers to make your request. You'll soon



see that what you're asking for in financial support is comparatively miniscule. Being able to make the case using dollars makes the ROI (Return on Investment) tangible for people. Watch for help in doing this throughout this publication series.<sup>2</sup>

3. When you make your ask, you may want to express it in the spirit of, 'Of course, you are going to support coaching for me, but in case you need to explain it to someone else...' I have worked with coaching clients whose immediate boss supported the idea but needed my client to give them some language they could use for *their* boss if they needed to explain the expenditure.

To summarize this section, determine what matters to the decision-maker(s). You will want to frame your request so that they hear it in language they know and understand. What's in it for them? As you may have heard, everyone's favorite radio station is WII-FM (What's In It For Me?) although maybe now that should be reframed as everyone's favorite podcast.

Top organizations have known for years that their best people need to have a coach. Businesses planning to remain in business (which is sort of the point) only invest in coaching if they expect to see a return on their investment. Many top-level executives come into an organization having already identified their executive coach and include that as part of their package when they are hired.

Not-for-profits, increasingly aware of their bottom line, are investing in coaching for at least their executive director at the smallest non-profits and for other key team members in larger non-profits. The complexity of an executive director's varied roles and responsibilities means it is essential to have a specialized coach who is a neutral party to provide the space for thinking things through.

And what about universities and colleges? Higher ed today is not the higher ed of 10, 20, or 30 years ago.<sup>3</sup> The ever-higher



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<sup>2</sup> This is one reason to consider reading the other segments of this series because you will learn ways to assess the tangible benefits (including financial) of what may otherwise seem intangible.

<sup>3</sup> Hmmm...at this point, we can say higher ed is not the same as it was 18 months ago.

demands on faculty and administrators to PRODUCE (research, funding streams, innovations, graduates, outward-facing personas as public intellectuals, papers, etc.) make it clear that high-potential professors, along with administrators, are expecting to have a specialized coach along their journey.

The rest of this publication (and each of the others in the series) focus on a single reason or prompt for accessing coaching at this time in your professional career. Plan to write your ideas as you read and keep a calculator handy.



## Framing Situation: Good Teaching is More than Simply a Good Idea

How much does it cost when faculty prepare and teach less effectively than they could? In this publication, we will look at this from two vantage points, depending on your particular role:

- 1) As a faculty member preparing to work with a coach with the intention of enhancing your teaching practice.
- 2) As the director of a center that focuses on teaching and learning at your university, a role where you support many faculty members (and possibly graduate students) at various stages of their career in their myriad teaching roles.

The difference in the financial impact of having or not having a coach will be evident when we run the numbers. In making your calculations, consider these factors:

a. **Excessive or redundant preparation time does not equal quality teaching.**

Even though faculty members may work 50, 60, or 70+ hours per week at times, when faculty are inefficient with their teaching preparation, the inefficiently-spent time is costly because it is time that is NOT spent on other high-impact endeavors. These endeavors could include meeting with students, writing articles, seeking grants, attending classes related to research methodology, tending to their own health concerns, mentoring

junior faculty, extending the reach of the university into the community, e.g., giving talks, serving on boards, or supporting various local initiatives.

Figuring quite conservatively, a faculty member who is coached to be more organized, have more streamlined practices, and employ more efficacious processes in course prep, classroom management, and grading could retrieve a minimum of five hours per week. These five hours per WEEK could be invested in research, manuscript preparation or mentoring, among other endeavors. In an average teaching year, i.e., two 15-week semesters or three 10-week quarters, that would be – at a minimum – 150 hours reclaimed, which could then be redirected. *What financial difference would this make over the life of someone’s academic career? Thousands? Tens of thousands? Hundreds of thousands? More? Run the numbers. Coaching is an investment with a significant financial ROI.*<sup>4</sup>



Here’s another factor that may matter to your university...

- b. **When a faculty member is not teaching his/her content effectively, students do not learn what is expected.** Their success in future courses is affected, which then affects the instructors of those classes and other students in those classes. The students from these poorly-taught classes may not be sufficiently prepared in their careers, which reflects poorly on the entire university. Do you see the ripple effect? It does not take long to calculate a high-dollar impact from one ineffective professor.

For example, imagine that a professor who teaches an intro level economics course does not teach it very well and students do not learn anywhere near what is reasonable to expect. It is possible that some of these students will decide that economics is not for them and head off in a different direction for their majors, which is quite costly to the home department of this professor. Other students will proceed into their subsequent courses where the professors expect them to come in with a foundation from their introductory econ course. If they do not, that slows down the instruction and it

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<sup>4</sup> Learning to be more effective and efficient has myriad other benefits beyond the financial. However, because this publication series is about making the ask of the people who hold the purse strings, we are focusing on the *financial* Return on Investment because that is what is most likely to get their attention and their support for putting dollars toward your coaching.

frustrates the faculty member as well as students who may have come from feeder courses that were taught more effectively. *There is a direct financial cost to a department when a course is taught poorly.*

Use this knowledge and have the numbers that are true at your university ready when you make the case to the dean, department chair, or other administrator who can fund coaching related to more effective teaching.

And how about this “ouch” situation that results from professors not teaching as well as they could...

- c. **Parents, friends, colleagues of students (and perfect strangers who overhear conversations in grocery stores or restaurants) get an earful about poorly-taught classes.** When it is only one offending class out of several years of undergraduate or graduate school, people give it a pass. But if the perception is that the *majority* of professors, lecturers, and other instructors are poor quality, then the reputation of the institution is negatively affected. How much does this cost? So much. In a state like mine (Nevada) with a small population, do you think our legislators are in tune with what Joe and Josephine Citizen think about our public colleges and universities? You bet they are. Does it affect funding? Absolutely.<sup>5</sup>



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<sup>5</sup> When I first arrived at the University of Nevada, Reno as an assistant professor, with a fresh, new PhD (since I graduated in August), one of my colleagues stopped and stood at the doorway of my office one morning. He barked, “Mac!” which is what he called me for years after that, I was startled since I didn’t know he was there. He said, “Here’s what you need to know about Nevada. If you say something in Elko when you’re there, it will beat you back to Reno. Keep that in mind.” I did. He was right (even before the internet!).

A second story related to this is what I always told people who were on campus to interview for a position. I would say, “One of the best things about Nevada is that if you are fabulous, everyone in the whole state ends up knowing that and you will not go anywhere without people saying, ‘Oh! I’ve heard of you!’ with excitement in their voice. And know this very clearly: If you are terrible, everyone in the whole state will know that, too. If you are hired here, please make sure that you are fabulous.” Unfortunately, not everyone heeded my advice.

When you start thinking about the cost of teaching that is not what it could be and the financial impact due to students talking about their experience, you can quickly see that the cost could be 1) “only” the embarrassment of a newspaper article or other negative publicity, 2) thousands or hundreds of thousands related to donors or others who are thinking about a particular school or area of study, or 3) millions of dollars (related to state funding).

*The cost of a coach – miniscule in comparison.*

- d. **Beginning faculty who are not supported in becoming good/excellent teachers may receive (will receive) scathing comments on their student evaluations.**<sup>6</sup> Although some faculty use those negative comments to spur them on to improvement, the research indicates that many young faculty members blame the students and decide it is not worth focusing on their teaching because “students here/in this generation/anymore just \_\_\_\_\_ (don’t care, want a easy A, are poorly prepared, aren’t up for any kind of rigorous learning situation, etc., etc.)” Most of these beliefs are not true but they give faculty members a “pass” in their own mind, which helps them protect themselves from the pain of feeling less-than-successful in the classroom. Alternatively, some faculty may obsess over poor evaluations, and spend excessive time worrying about them. This can lead to ineffective work in their areas of research or community involvement.

This next factor may hit close to home for the administrator you are asking to support your coaching request:

- e. **Administrators’ time is consumed by student complaints about professors who are teaching poorly.** Even when faculty in a department are all top-of-the-line teachers, there is the occasional student who complains. That’s not what we’re talking about here.

Chairs, deans, and student affairs professionals can easily recount the toll on their time when there has been a particularly poor teacher in a unit. While this has always been true, it is even more significant among current



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<sup>6</sup> Disparaging remarks are hardly private at this point. *Rate My Professors* and other similar sites put student opinions about their professors on full display.

cohorts of students. Depending on the role of the person who is hearing the complaints, their time may also be needed to work directly with the faculty member, although in other instances, that is not part of their skill set and so the time is spent contacting other people who might be able to address the issue. And depending on the university, the problem may or may not be rectified no matter how many student complaints there are.

f. **What about lawsuits?** Many years ago, there were few lawsuits filed that were prompted by poor teaching. This is no longer true. Although some of these lawsuits end up being dismissed, they are not dismissed until significant time, attention, energy, and money have been poured into the process. As we have seen in recent years, the discovery process unearths emails and social media posts. If there is a string of emails or other correspondence – over a period of years(!) – about a particular professor’s teaching that have not been addressed in some way, it may be that this is used to strengthen the case of those bringing the lawsuit. *No one is served by allowing situations to get to this point.*<sup>7</sup>



g. **Lack of knowledge about how to teach students who are different than you are and who are different from one another.** In many cases, DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) is an area where there may be funding for coaching that supports excellent teaching. It is not uncommon for the highly-educated people who teach at colleges and universities to be woefully unaware and uneducated about teaching diverse learners, providing equitable – for all – learning experiences, and designing and maintaining inclusive learning environments.

What else can you think of? The seven factors above are not an exhaustive list.

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<sup>7</sup> The current politically-motivated attacks on faculty – some of which result in lawsuits – are in a different category from what is being discussed in this publication. These attacks are not related to poor teaching but rather are prompted by certain groups trying to silence professors who disagree with their agendas.

Two questions:

1. Should colleges and universities make sure that faculty are supported in being good teachers by having a coaching relationship with someone?
2. Should someone whose job it is to support faculty in their various roles including teaching be given the money for a coach – now and forever?



Do you even need to think about the answer to these questions? Someone who wears the multiple hats of being the head of a center for teaching and learning on their campus excels with a coach in ways that they cannot otherwise.<sup>8</sup>



Although this publication could include multiple worksheets and examples, which I know from working with many clients to figure this out and make the case, let's look at just one example. And be prepared for a staggering dollar figure to emerge from this example.

**Context:** State university (part of a larger system) in a large metropolitan area with nearly 60% of its student body who are first-generation students. Of the nearly 30,000 students, 90% are undergraduates. The six-year graduation rate is just under 50% and the four-year graduation rate is less than 20%.

**Situation:** The university system identified lower-division courses across all their campuses that have DFW rates of 20 - 50%, i.e., courses where between 20% and 50% of the students earn grades of D or F or who have Withdrawn from the course.

For this example, we will focus on one particular course in mathematics that is required for all subsequent math courses for students who have not shown prior proficiency in the course content.

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<sup>8</sup> I hired my first coach when I was the founding Director of the Excellence in Teaching Program, reporting to the office of the provost. She supported me in ways that I did not even know I needed support when I first hired her. Roles like this require different talents and skills than we needed as a faculty member and to make the shift and be successful, an excellent coach makes a significant difference.

**The numbers:** Based on ten years of data, an average of 3500 students per semester enroll in the course. The DFW rate is 41%, which means:

- 1435 students must retake this course to proceed in mathematics, which is, of course, required for all majors. The university's records indicate that 89% of these students try again (1277 students).
- For those students who are retaking the course because they are going to continue working toward their degrees, the cost for this 3-credit course is approximately \$1150 (and that is using in-state rates; it's more than triple that for out-of-state students). This is purely looking at the payment for the course and not considering whether a student's progress is delayed to the extent that they have to enroll for an extra semester, pay for extra room and board, buy different books because the books are changed, etc. We will keep it "simple" because these numbers are alarming enough!
- The cost to the state and federal government – since we know a student's tuition does not come close to covering the cost of that student's education – is at minimum double that, so we'll use \$2300/student.
- To recap:
  - One course with a high DFW rate results in 1277 students each semester who retake a course (on this one campus).
  - $1277 \times (\$1150 + \$2300) = \$4,405,650$



Folks, this is each semester. This is the cost to the economy for a course that is not taught as well as it could be.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Please note: Saying that a course is not "taught as well as it could be" encompasses a range of aspects of teaching at the university level. To completely oversimplify in order to stay footnote-brief...the fact that so many students do not complete or pass a course could be due to: 1) the course being poorly designed; 2) those teaching the class not being adequately prepared to teach the course in terms of content, best practices for instruction, effective methods, etc.; 3) the professors or other instructors never having been given the opportunity to learn how to teach the students who are in their course; 4) there being inadequate resources (including *attending to this as a need!*) to make sure the TAs for the

When my client and I were talking about this (since she was planning to make the case for her institution to continue supporting her coaching), I asked her what percentage impact she believed she could make in her role as the director of a teaching and learning center on what happened in those courses related to improving instruction. Her estimate (which I think was modest) was 10%. \$440,565 of impact/semester.



Was it worth it to the university and the taxpayers of her state to support her in receiving executive coaching?

No one needs a calculator to determine that.



If you are at a college or university, you may be thinking, ‘It matters to me to be able to plan for and teach my courses as well as I am able given the constraints over which I have zero control (e.g., state-controlled budgets, a pandemic, university leadership that is a revolving door); hmmm...I wonder if my institution would support me in having a coach?’

I would encourage you to apply the ideas in this publication to your situation. Find the right coach for your situation and your goals. Craft your ask and practice it out loud with a friend or colleague. Make the ask.

You gain. Your students gain. Your institution gains. Your state gains. No one loses.

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course are able to effectively interact with the students to support their learning; 5) the course pre-requisites having been poorly taught; 6) the faculty being so overwhelmed with other responsibilities that they cannot devote the time needed to prepare for and teach the course; and of course, 7) students who sometimes don’t do their part in learning the content; some of that is “on them,” and some of that is because they have never been taught how to study differently for different disciplines (or maybe for any discipline). None of this section is about blame.