STAC Faculty Research Retreat
May 12-15, 2003

FINAL REPORT

Organizers: Neerja Chaturvedi, Assistant Professor of History
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I. INTRODUCTION

The second annual STAC Faculty Research Retreat held at Jeronimo Resort and Conference Center in Walker Valley, NY, began with the following intention as articulated in the mission statement:

The purpose of this retreat is to bring STAC faculty together in a setting removed from the College campus to share current research interests in a casual setting. The objectives in doing this are:

(1) To foster a community of scholars who can contribute to one another’s research in stimulating, constructive ways;

(2) To provide a setting in which STAC faculty can experience academic and social fellowship outside the official confines of the College;

(3) To use this event as a means to deepen an atmosphere of collegiality and collaboration. STAC’s visibility could be augmented if this event assists the faculty in producing new research for publication or other forms of dissemination.

While we want this event to be available to a broad range of faculty, participation in the retreat is contingent upon presentation of work in progress and upon participation of non-presenters in scheduled sessions. (Work already published or accepted for publication is excluded.) The presentations will take place in organized sessions in which all attendees will participate but in which the presenters will provide an organizing framework for seminar-like discussion of their projects.

The reason presented material must be in-progress and not already accepted for publication is because the intent of the retreat is to provide constructive criticism by all participants. Presentations are limited to eight so we have maximum time for each person’s ideas to receive full consideration. The purpose of including non-presenting participants in the retreat is to ensure we have the greatest possible diversity of viewpoints represented.
II. FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Once again, the College generously provided full funding for this endeavor. As was the case last year, the Retreat received encouragement from all levels of faculty and administration in the planning stages. We are especially grateful to the following for their enthusiasm and backing: Lee Badgett, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Joseph Coyne, Chair of the Division of Social Sciences.

Dr. Badgett has facilitated the continuation of this project by allocating funds in the VPAA’s 2003-2004 budget to cover estimated expenses for the next retreat. For this we are additionally grateful. This budget allocation insures that all interested faculty can participate without depleting funds available to them for attending scholarly conferences and events.

III. FACILITY

The Retreat was held at Jeronimo Resort and Conference Center in Walker Valley, NY. The conference facility provided an intimate, relaxing setting for our daily sessions as well as ample and varied space for socializing, taking walks, swimming, and getting to know one another better. Moreover, discussions and debates which originated in the formal conference setting frequently spilled over into these informal settings.

We are strongly considering utilizing Jeronimo again for the 2004 Retreat.

IV. PRESENTERS AND ATTENDEES

The following is a list of presenters and their session titles:

1. “Sparkill Stream Ecology”
   Don Johnson

2. “Vocationalism: Contrasting Views”
   Robert Trawick

3. “Illuminare Mentem Per Veritatem, or Something”
   David Keppler

   Bruce Bennett

5. “The Status of the Glass Ceiling in Corporate America”
   Barbara Donn

6. “Democratic Primaries: A Preliminary Analysis”
   Robert Schelin
Also present as attendees were Lee Badgett, Joseph Coyne, Barbara Klein, Peter O’Conner, Stacy Sewell, Neerja Chaturvedi, and C.J. Churchill. It was vital that faculty who were not presenting research also attended because they contributed to the variety of perspectives on individual projects and made for a more energetic extended conversation.

In all, the faculty represented diverse fields of study and brought a multiplicity of approaches to each discussion. From the pool of projects presented, we identified the connecting theme to be “Exploration and Creativity in the Liberal Arts.”

V. OUTCOMES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

As was the case last year, responses from participants at the conclusion of the event were enthusiastic. We built on the collegiality which had been established last year and determined that this is in fact an experience to which faculty look forward at the end of the academic year and which continues to facilitate cross disciplinary connections. Once again both junior and senior faculty came together with a few new faces present and several others indicating an active interest in participating in the future.

The following excerpts are selected from attendees’ written comments:

“An extremely valuable opportunity for the faculty to share intellectual interests and to bond as colleagues, which will increase the cooperative spirit of the faculty, resulting in a great benefit to the college.”

“The retreat was a wonderful occasion for sharing ideas and camaraderie. I had a delightful time and very much appreciate the opportunity to participate. The accommodations were comfortable and relaxing, the presentations were interesting with varied topics, and the ‘out of session’ times were warm and friendly.”

“I would like to see at future retreats a planned session for debate on a relevant topic that is common to the various subject areas, like pedagogical philosophies, academic dishonesty, etc. Otherwise I would not change a thing about the retreat.”

“Great place (I would search no further for future Retreat-spots). One more discussion would be good, that is, another ‘formal’ presentation. If not, then perhaps an article (from Chronicle, for example) would be useful as a common read for all of us. I thought it unfortunate that the core of last year’s group was the core of this year’s with two new additions. I guess that what I most like about the Retreat is that I get to know colleagues….I think that if I could make any suggestions, it would be the following: poll faculty to see if people would like to participate….”
“The faculty retreat is one of the most worthwhile developmental activities in which I participate. This year's event was just as interesting and thought-provoking as last year's. The prospect of attending has motivated me to carry out projects which intrigue me and the comments and questions I have received at the retreat have helped enormously. The paper I presented elicited much discussion, which has helped me to consider future expansion of my topic. Just as important as the consideration of the various papers presented is the interaction between faculty members between the presentations. Lively scholarly debate should be ever present on campus and this is a wonderful example. Also, it brings faculty closer together which I believe is helpful when we have to work cooperatively on various committees and projects. I would like to see involvement from other divisions and from other faculty members. This would improve the retreat and be very valuable to the participants.”

“I enjoyed the experience a great deal. It was good on several levels. First, the talks were interesting….It is good to listen to colleagues discuss topics from their respective fields. There is always a risk that such talks could be pitched at a level only others in the field could understand, but that didn’t happen. Second, we interacted with people outside our Division….It is probably good for morale and perhaps for other reasons to increase interaction between faculty in this way. It might for instance lead to new ideas for interdisciplinary courses….I wouldn’t change anything.”

These comments demonstrate that this event is useful intellectually as well as in maintaining a collegial spirit among faculty who seldom encounter one another during the busy academic year. It also provided forum to discuss at length yet informally pedagogical issues. Based on these comments and the interest expressed by many faculty who could not attend this year we fully intend to organize another Retreat for 2004 and to widely publicize it among the faculty in the fall.