STAC Faculty Research Retreat
May 17-19, 2005

FINAL REPORT

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I. INTRODUCTION

The St. Thomas Aquinas College Faculty Research Retreat met in May 2005 for the fourth time and enjoyed our highest attendance yet with 22 faculty members present. Faculty from each of the five divisions of the College participated this year. Based on this year’s enthusiasm and the continued growth of the College faculty, we project the Retreat will remain an active and core element of faculty life.

The Jeronimo Resort and Conference Center in Walker Valley, NY, served as a welcoming and extremely comfortable setting. The Retreat’s statement of purpose which follows below remains unchanged:

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 or nine 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

The College enthusiastically continues to provide full support for this endeavor. Funding was generously provided by the Office of the Vice President of Academic Affairs. We are especially grateful to the following for their enthusiasm and backing: Dr. Margaret Fitzpatrick, President, Dr. John Durney, Vice President of Academic Affairs, and Dr. Joseph Coyne, Chair of the Division of Social Sciences.

The full financial backing received from the Vice President of Academic Affairs for the Retreat continues to insure that all interested faculty can participate without depleting funds available to them for attending scholarly conferences and events.

III. PRESENTERS AND ATTENDEES

The following is a list of 2005 presenters and their session titles:

   Michael Shaw

2. “How to Keep the Brain Healthy Through Therapeutic Recreation”  
   Linda Levine Madori

3. “Treating the Subject: Links Between Sociological Ethnography and Psychoanalytic Therapy”  
   CJ Churchill

4. “Millard Fillmore”  
   Doc Schelin

5. “Impact of Information Technology in Retirement Planning for Americans in the 21st Century”  
   Augusto Casas

6. “Observing Flow Experience in Music Learning Contexts”  
   Evan Matthews

   Nick Papavlassopulos

   Jack Roberts
Also present as attendees were Margaret Fitzpatrick, John Durney, Joseph Coyne, Neerja Chaturvedi, Stacy Sewell, Robert Trawick, Ron Smith, Michael Murphy, Eileen Cunningham, Peggy Nelson, David Keppler, Florette Koffler, Colleen Paul, Barbara Donn. 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 “Politics, Poetic, and People.”

IV. ACHIEVEMENTS

In addition to allowing faculty to present research to one another across the disciplines, the Retreat has fostered pedagogical innovations within and scholarly activity outside the College. It has also, thereby, helped the faculty promote STAC’s reputation as a place where students have the privilege of being taught by professors engaged in current research.

Below are achievements flowing directly from their presentations of six previous Retreat participants:

1. Barbara Donn

   2002 Retreat
   Presentation title: “Arthur Anderson & Ethics”

   Subsequent achievements:

   “My first presentation at a faculty retreat was on Enron. I sought to explain exactly what led to the largest corporate scandal in U.S. history to faculty who were perhaps not fully aware of its complexity. It's a story which still resounds and remains fascinating. The reverberations were enormous and still continue to have an effect on personal lives, legislative policy and the accounting industry. I regularly refer to the scandal in my intermediate accounting classes and business ethics plays a much greater role in the curriculum for that course. My investigation into Enron also spurred me to another presentation which was on the creation of a fraud detection course. This course introduced the elements of the Sarbanes Oxley Act and involved teaching strategies to accounting students which would aid in its implementation. This paper was presented to the annual conference of the American Society of Business and Behavioral Sciences.”
2. CJ Churchill

2002 Retreat
Presentation title: “Identity Formation in Mass Society”

Subsequent achievements:

“Following the May 2002 Retreat, I presented my mass society research in a paper titled ‘What Has Happened to Mass Society?: Two Models Reconsidered’ at the New York State Sociological Association’s annual meeting in October 2002. I then presented a revised version of the same paper at the Eastern Sociological Society’s annual meeting in March 2003 (session #125). After revisions, the paper was published in the peer reviewed journal *Humanity and Society* (Vol. 28, No. 1, Fall 2004) of the Association for Humanist Sociology. Finally, the 2002 Retreat helped me clarify the way I present this concept to students in my Introductory Sociology and Sociology of Propaganda courses.”

3. Florette Koffler:

2002 Retreat
Presentation title: “Exile in Literature”

2004 Retreat
Presentation title: “The Art of Translation”

Subsequent achievements:

“I was a presenter at the 2002 and 2004 retreats, and feel that I indeed gained quite a bit of insight from the preparation and the exchanges that my work elicited. I am using my notes and research for ‘Literary Translation’ and ‘Exile in Literature,’ both very broad topics, to concentrate on writing about the life and work of Max Aub, a very complex figure of the generation of Spanish intellectuals who became exiles to the Americas after 1939. I have already translated a good portion of his Diaries, a true document of his age, and emblematic for a man hunted by the authorities. He wrote in many genres, and his work merits attention, I think, because of his powerful language, the language of a man who probably rarely felt at home anywhere. In that sense his work has much in common with that of several Central European writers I am trying to integrate in a larger study. And, by the way, my thoughts on the challenges of translation, which at the 2004 retreat focused a great deal on Cervantes, have helped me to reconsider some of methodology I use in teaching the Quijote, which I will do again in the Spring of 2006.”
4. Linda Levine Madori:

2002 Retreat
Presentation title: “Cognitive Functioning in Alzheimer’s Patients”

Subsequent achievements:

“The presentation on Arts and Alzheimer's disease was the basic format that my dissertation grew out of. Presenting to colleagues at STAC enabled me to think about how to use arts, psychosocial well being in a dissertation study. The feedback from other professors in other disciplines enables me to objectively view my area of study. I look forward to presenting this year on the results of that study.”

5. Stacy Sewell:

2002 Retreat

Subsequent achievements:

“I presented at the first retreat. The paper was accepted for publication at the end of that summer (2002) and found it's way into a journal. The citation is: 'The Best Man for the Job': Corporate Responsibility and Racial Integration in the Workplace, 1945-1960, The Historian 65 n. 5 (Fall 2003): 1125-1146.”

6. Jack Roberts:

2002 Retreat
Presentation title: “Emerson and the Origins of a Pragmatist Theory of Language”

Subsequent achievements:

“The retreat gave me an opportunity to air out some ideas that would serve as the basis for my account of an American theory of language. This account in turn would become a major theme in my lectures while I served as a Fulbright Fellow 2002-03 in Hungary. Most European scholars and students of literature approach problems of language and literature using a Saussurean model. At the center of this model lies the sign made up of
signified (concept) and the signifier (sound-image). In this model, a word is a self-contained unit that embodies, say, both the idea of catness and the sound produced by saying "C_A_T". What is clearly missing is the real world referent. Even Barthes admitted that the world was a problem in the major twentieth century accounts of language. Not so for Emerson and William James whose concept of sign is tri-partite and thus includes the world or part of the world as a part of every sign. The difference in accounts has astonishing consequences for the study of American literature and language by Europeans and the retreat give me a chance to develop these ideas.”

V. COMMENTS

As was the case last three years, responses from participants at the conclusion of the event were enthusiastic. We continued to build on the collegiality which had been established. We have determined that this is in fact an experience to which faculty look forward at the end of the academic year and which continues to grow and 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. All five divisions of the College were represented among the presenters.

The following excerpts are selected from attendees’ written comments and are organized according to those written by new and returning participants:

New Participants:

“Thank you for organizing the faculty retreat since its inception and for continuing to encourage and welcome new participants. I found the experience to be intellectually invigorating and it also engendered the sense of belonging and community that I have been missing since my transition to the college. It is an event that I will really look forward to in the future. Thank you again for all you do to make it possible….Wonderfully enriching!”

“The research talks were all excellent. I really liked the format of the talks and the format of the retreat. The location was perfect as well. As a new faculty member, it was very nice/useful to have the opportunity to talk with faculty members from other divisions and to hear about the varied research interests of my colleagues. I wouldn’t make any changes.”

“Enjoyed the presentations and location. Good mix of presentation and comments.”
Returning Participants:

“Once again you’ve accomplished a great feat. The retreat seems to get better each year. Congratulations on your creative initiative, organization, and perseverance.”

“I was reminded again, as I was last year, of the wealth of talent we have among our faculty ranks! I think all of those who were involved in any part of the retreat universally applauded the experience. It was an invigorating, fascinating and enlightening set of interactions...not without considerable good humor, I might add!”

“Idea: A   Organization: A   Location: A   Presentations: A”

“I always enjoy this retreat to be able to speak with my colleagues. I would love to have this time to have leisure with my STAC colleagues while learning what is important in their lives. More!”

“The presentations were varied and quite informative. They all encouraged participation and at times interactive work. As usual, the retreat promoted faculty cooperation and friendship which will serve to improve morale. The inclusion of “down-time” was enjoyable and profitable…This was so well planned and organized.”

“The retreat facilities are really wonderful, for the most part--no complaints, overall… I also like very much that there are several locales in the main building where we can present our research -- and that really has an impact on the presentation style…I would like a planned “recreation” event during the retreat…. Maybe this detracts from the idea of a research retreat but if the idea is to see your colleagues in a different light, that might be fun! …Overall, the quality of the presentations are excellent, and the endeavor seems to be so worthwhile for the feedback received by presenters and the knowledge that participants gain of the presenter’s “research personality.” On some level, I could say that nothing should change here. I do find myself wondering about the function of each presentation. Is it for the presenter to present new research? Or old research, just because you want to? Is it to present a research problem, or a teaching problem? Is it to inform other faculty about current events/politics/etc? …That is okay; in fact, that is one if its strengths because the hope is that it can nurture the connections between all of our disparate fields…I think I would like to see some more well-defined agendas. Perhaps the presenter can prepare something for us in advance which includes some background or questions the presenter would like to put forth to the participants. Perhaps there could be an effort to have a commentator--someone who has previously discussed the research and can raise questions from his or her point of view of greater knowledge (if not necessarily expertise)...There is some gender imbalance here. There seems to be no clear
reason why that is – but of nine presenters, one was a woman. Comments are dominated by men, too and the event is feeling way too familiar on this score although in past years there have been more female presenters….If you changed nothing, that would be fine, too…This is really a highlight of the faculty-life at STAC and I appreciate it so much.”

“Once again, a very good experience…the presentations were very well informed, most were very illuminating and some terrific. What I would certainly add, again, was the rewarding experience of camaraderie and my appreciation for the lively, invigorating discussions. Let’s hope this kind of experience can be repeated each year. We should try to involve more faculty, we should let them know that the atmosphere is friendly and inviting… For those who wish to present, they should know that many academic areas and points of view are encouraged – of course, they all should know that the audience is well informed and appreciative…. Overall, great, great, job from the organizers.”

VI. FUTURE PROSPECTS

These comments demonstrate that this event is intellectually stimulating and fosters a collegial spirit among faculty who seldom encounter one another during the busy academic year. It also provides a dynamic forum to discuss 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 2006 and to widely publicize it among the faculty in the fall.

Based on the achievements of past presenters and the enthusiasm of ongoing attendees this event appears to be a valuable part of the academic year and intellectual life of the faculty.