STAC Faculty Research Retreat
May 16-18, 2006

FINAL REPORT

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I. INTRODUCTION

The St. Thomas Aquinas College Faculty Research Retreat for the fifth time and enjoyed a robust attendance. Faculty from each of the five divisions of the College participated. 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

1. “Selling Academic Research to the Mainstream Magazine Market”
   Sandra Mardenfeld

2. "The effects of Niemann-Pick Type C Disease in the Nervous System"
   Colleen Paul

3. “Meditation, Guided Imagery and Your Well Being”
   Linda Levine Madori

   Rob Trawick

5. “Enron: Aftermath”
   Barbara Donn

   Michael Shaw

7. "Traditions in Group Drumming: Exploring Possible Applications for Teaching Beginning Adults."
   Evan Matthews

8. “Ideas for Enhancing Content Based Image Retrieval”
   Bob Vermilyer

9. "Liturgical Design: Creating a Processional Cross"
   Carl Rattner
Also present as attendees were Augusto Casas, C.J. Churchill, Neerja Chaturvedi, Jeff Durham, Barbara Klein, and Ron Smith. 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 “raison d’être” because the sessions reflected the core inspiration for each presenter’s teaching and research.

IV. ACHIEVEMENTS

The central achievement of the Retreat has always been to connect faculty across disciplines and allow us to share our enthusiasm for interdisciplinary collaboration with each other. This year’s sessions showcased most profoundly the value of this enterprise. We learned of grants won by a faculty member in the sciences while another presenter helped attendees see how they might disseminate their research and the College’s profile in popular publications. Several attendees commented on networking opportunities among one another which would not have been obvious without the Retreat to foster them. Moreover, the Retreat encouraged us to realize teaching innovations and collaborations that are hard to see during the busy academic year. Finally, as in the past, this year’s Retreat served as a means to welcome new faculty members into the College community.

V. COMMENTS

As was the case last four 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 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:*

“I enjoyed the experience. It was particularly useful for me as a new faculty in getting to know others. Suggestions: maybe have an organized fun activity.”

*Returning Participants:*
“The Retreat was excellent. All of the presentations were well done. There was a 
nice mix of topics. I love Jeronimo’s – the accommodation were nice as usual. 
Suggestions: maybe extend the Retreat and add in some free time to explore the 
area.”

“Great, dovetailed presentations. (Almost like someone planned it that way….)
Everyone made specialized knowledge accessible and relevant. Suggestions: 
insert extra half day outing/debrief.”

“The Research Retreat was both entertaining and informative. The interchange of 
ideas between colleagues is so important for the professional development of 
faculty. Excellent!! Suggestions: I think some time could be set aside for an 
organized recreational activity.”

“This is the third time I have been to the Retreat. It is an opportunity to socialize 
as well as learn what other faculty are doing behind their office doors. I 
continually look forward to ending the academic year sharing ideas, insights, and 
laughter with colleagues. Suggestions: my suggestion is to do a ‘weekend’ retreat 
in the fall where we can come with our significant others and ‘play.’ No academic 
presentations please!”

“Again I found this a most stimulating experience. The chance to hear what my 
colleagues are accomplishing professionally and to perfect my own creative work. 
As always the social aspect is wonderful, a chance to meet and talk with fellow 
faculty in an intimate atmosphere which promotes a free and fluid interchange. 
The chance to further build a sense of community should also be mentioned.”

“The Retreat continues to be one of the highlights of the academic year for me. It 
is organized extremely well and provides a wonderful opportunity to learn about 
faculty research. I also got to deepen my appreciation for the quality of the STAC 
staff. We learned about the grant work and other accomplishments of the faculty. 
I addition it was a great bonding experience. Suggestions: a break during the 
Retreat for some recreational activity.”

“The Retreat was both educational and inspiring. It served to view the job of 
teaching from different perspectives than those we get used to during the 
academic year. It helped me appreciate the work and talents of fellow faculty 
members and I learned techniques and tools that I can apply to my own lectures.. 
great experience.”

“Thank you for doing everything that is necessary to make last week's event 
successful. Congratulations! While I was only able to participate for one day, I 
thought that the quality and variety of work was even better than it has been at 
earlier Faculty Retreats. And as I've noted in the past, I am (painfully) familiar 
with the amount of time and effort that goes into making even a small gathering 
of colleagues worthwhile. So, . . . hat's off to both of you….Once again, thank
you for making this occasion worthwhile. I learned something and had an opportunity to speak informally with new and veteran colleagues. Win-win!”

“Thank you so much for again organizing a fabulous, enriching research retreat. It is always rewarding to be introduced to a wide range of research, and I feel privileged being able to share my own work with colleagues. But, the retreat is so much more than this – it provides quality time for all of us to get to know each other as individuals who have lives beyond STAC that are filled with rich experiences, and wonderful stories. In some cases we even discover shared histories that we never knew existed. It also opens so many possibilities for networking….”

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 2007 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.