STAC Faculty Research Retreat
May 11-13, 2010

FINAL REPORT

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I. INTRODUCTION

The St. Thomas Aquinas College Faculty Research Retreat was conducted for the eighth time and enjoyed a robust attendance. A total of 24 faculty. We project the Retreat will remain an active and core element of faculty life.

Frost Valley YMCA Conference Center, 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, and Dr. John Durney, Vice President of Academic Affairs.

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. "Moral Therapeutic Deism Makes Malleable Gods"
   Craig Martin

2. “Teaching Science Using Digital Literacy and 3D Gaming”
   Bob Vermilyer & Michael Shaw

3. “Military and Counterterrorism Interrogation Techniques”
   Matt Semel

4. "If It's Tuesday, This Must be Beijing: Political Cartoonists' Take on President Obama's First Jaunt Through Asia"
   Roger Levy

5. Panel on Students in the Digital Age
   Barbara Donn & Jim Vendetti

6. “Contemporary Chinese Fiction in Historical Perspective”
   Charles O’Neill & Neerja Chaturvedi

7. “Star Womb Project: Monad to Nomad”
   Barbara Yontz

   Heath Bowen

Also present as attendees were President Fitzpatrick, John Durney, Christine Cahill, Ellen Chayet, CJ Churchill, David Keppler, Barbara Klein, Meghan Mihal, Michael Murphy, Nick Papavlassopulos, Carl Rattner, Stacy Sewell, and Ron Smith. It is vital that faculty who are not presenting research also attend because they contribute to the variety of perspectives on individual projects and make for a more energetic extended conversation.
The only exception this year was that non-faculty administrator Vincent Crapanzano also attended.

In all, the faculty represented diverse fields of study and bring a multiplicity of approaches to each discussion.

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. 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.

Among the achievements from Retreat presentations from 2005-09 are the following:

Dr. Michael Shaw

Dr. Shaw had three professional articles published based on research reported at the retreat; research that was also supported by faculty development grants. He also made national presentations based on this work at the annual International Reading Association conference, the annual National Council of Teachers of English conference, and the annual conference of the Association of Literacy Educators and Researchers. This research has also made a significant impact on his teaching in the graduate literacy program to teach readers who struggle and to prepare reading specialists to be literacy coaches.


Professor Barbara Yontz

Presentation "I've got you under my skin: Art as Empathy, Embodiment and Experience" was a trial run for a presentation that was given at the Southeastern College Art Conference in New Orleans with the same title in October 2008.

In 2009, Professor Yontz will Chair a panel at the Southeastern College Art Conference in Mobile, Al entitled, "Matter. Memory. Media. Motion" in which she will expand the ideas presented in her retreat paper, searching for ways media, materiality and memory result in physical action.

Professor Yontz has a one person exhibition of a piece designed and constructed at the Phoenix Gallery in Chelsea. It is called "the Star Womb Project: Monad to Nomad." the intellectual part is that it is based on experiments into the formation of the first star. But both the structure and the 5-channel sound that accompanies it were designed to create an experience that would be completely new and at the same time, engaged memory through a bodily, sensory experience. The paper presented at the retreat provided a point along the continuum of investigation into all these issues.

Dr. Ellen Chayet

2009 Retreat: “Penal Policy or Public Policy: Prisoner Reentry in the Era of Penal Harm”

1. Publication: Dr. Chayet was asked to write a review article for the public policy journal of the Massachusetts School of Law, The Long Term View. She used her retreat presentation as a base. Dr. Chayet worked with a criminal justice colleague and was first author on a paper entitled "Penal Policy Is Public Policy: An Examination of Prisoner Reentry." The article is scheduled for publication this fall. This collaboration has also led to the planned development of future projects related to prisoner reentry/community corrections.

2. Course planned: As a consequence of doing the research and reading on reentry, Dr. Chayet realized that the criminal justice program would be remiss if it did not offer a course in this area. She is planning to propose a course, tentatively entitled: Special Issues in Corrections: The Prisoner in the Community that would address some of the major areas in the field. Reentry is at the forefront of research, policy and practice in the area of penology and criminal justice. It also comprises a growing area for post-college employment. She hopes to have the course ready by Academic Year 2010-2011.

3. Powerpoint: An unanticipated benefit of the presentation was learning to use powerpoint. As a result, Dr. Chayet spent the summer developing powerpoint presentations for two of her major, repeating classes (criminology and penology) and has implemented these presentations this Fall. So far, as ancillaries to lectures
and discussions, they are apparently well received by the classes and may have helped students in Criminology in studying for their first exam.

Professor Sandra Mardenfeld

After 2009 presentation, "Reporters in Practice: The Role of Privilege in Contemporary Journalism," Professor Mardenfeld passed her dissertation proposal defense in June 2009. She is currently working on data collection for her dissertation and hope to finish it by the Fall of 2010.

Dr. Bob Vermilyer

The title of Dr. Vermilyer’s presentation at the 2006 retreat was "Ideas for Enhancing Content Based Image Retrieval." He had three important outcomes related to this experience. First, the insights gained by preparing for this presentation contributed to the selection of this research for presentation at the Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers’ (IEEE) Southeastern Conference. The citation for that presentation is: R.Vermilyer, “Intelligent User Interface Agents in Content-Based Image Retrieval”, in Proceedings of the IEEE Conference SoutheastCon, 2006, pp. 136-142. Secondly, Dr. Vermilyer regularly uses some of ideas from this research in both the Human-Computer Interaction course (CS 360) and the Graphic Programming course (CS 370). Finally, the feedback that he received from colleagues in other disciplines has enabled him to take a new view of my research.

Dr. Evan Matthews

Dr. Evan Matthews began three years ago an ongoing collaboration with Dr. Michael Shaw on the Summer Literacy Practicum at St. Thomas. This collaboration has emerged from Dr. Matthews’ presentation at the retreat. He presented his ideas on combining music with children's reader's theatre as a multi-sensory approach to teaching reading. Dr. Matthews brought percussion instruments and retreat participants musicalized “Where the Wild Things Are” by Maurice Sendak. He has since been working with graduate education students and their elementary age students each summer. Last year Dr. Matthews received a grant from the Entergy Corp. to podcast as part of the practicum. On the podcast, which can be found in lower right corner on the STAC homepage, you can hear kids reading poetry and stories with their teachers and with Dr. Matthews, and a series of interviews Dr. Matthews conducted with Dr. Shaw. This is the first podcast originating from St. Thomas and Dr. Shaw is directing many people to the website when he attends conferences and workshops.
V. COMMENTS

As was the case in the last six 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. This year, four new members of the faculty joined us at Frost Valley.

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

**New Participants:**

“This was a wonderful experience. As a new faculty member, I was able to make company with colleagues in ways that I otherwise would not have had a chance. As a result, I feel more connected to STAC. Secondly, it provided me the opportunity to sink back into the scholarly mindset before I begin working on my own research over summer break. It was nice to receive feedback from my colleagues. Finally, the accommodations and food were beyond expectations.”

**Returning Participants:**

“As always, the research retreat was a very enjoyable, enriching experience. Every presentation extends my knowledge, understanding, and thinking. It is also wonderful to commune with colleagues outside of the STAC pressure-cooker. Also, as always, kudos to our fabulous leaders, CJ & Neerja. Just keep on keepin’ on!”

“As always, an extraordinary experience. It is a treat to be able to hear and reflect on what your colleagues are doing and learn more about who they are. The collegial ‘bonding’ is invaluable and something that can truly be accomplished in a setting like this one. I think this ultimately makes us more effective as a faculty. The experience stimulates me, whether or not I present – to develop my scholarly self. Thank you for arranging this and for promoting excellent talks by the faculty.”

“Some interesting presentations that helped me better understand my colleagues work. Very well organized.”

“This retreat is wonderful. It’s a beautiful spot, the rooms are comfortable, and there is too much to do. My favorite parts are hearing all the interesting things other faculty are doing, and even better is the down time. Having a chance to talk with everyone in this casual setting builds community and is really fun.”
“Another excellent retreat. [Many presentations] raid a lot of interesting questions for me. Informal discussions were as always the high point of the retreat. I got to talk to colleagues that I really didn’t know before.”

“It is wonderful in every way! I have no suggestions for improvement....none! The timing of the presentations was great...perhaps, if possible (and I realize that it may not be possible) the schedule could alternate a ‘teaching’ presentation with a ‘research’ presentation. Thank you for your work putting this together.”

“Really good facilities. Everything done well. Thanks for having us.”

“Everything was run smoothly. Well organized. The facilities are good and the rooms are comfortable. [I suggest] fewer presentations and more free times for faculty to interact and have some other activities.”

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. The Retreat has proven to be especially good for introducing new faculty to their colleagues in a relaxed and friendly setting.

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.

As a final observation, because we scheduled the Retreat before the first summer teaching session, many more faculty participated this year than last. We will plan the 2011 Retreat with the same scheduling considerations in mind.