STAC Faculty Research Retreat
May 10-12, 2011

FINAL REPORT

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I. INTRODUCTION

The St. Thomas Aquinas College Faculty Research Retreat was conducted for the ninth 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. "From Dublin to the Hudson Valley: The Ecopoetry of Eamon Grennan."
   Charles O’Neill

2. “Current research being conducted in hospitals on the TTAP Method”
   Linda Levine-Madori

3. “Art, Activism and Social Change”
   Barbara Yontz

4. “Exploring Design through Collage”
   Carl Rattner

5. "How Can We Be Individuals?"
   Craig Martin

6. PANEL DISCUSSION: “The role of Government in American Society”
   Leader: Barbara Donn
   Panelists: Heath Bowen, Meghan Mihal, & David Keppler

   Jack Roberts

8. “Morality, Evolution, and Naturalism, specifically Naturalisms’ Utopias”
   Nicole de Fee

Also present as attendees were President Fitzpatrick, John Durney, Fred Barrett, Nina Bellisio, Christine Cahill, Neerja Chaturvedi, Ellen Chayet, CJ Churchill, Evan Matthews, Michael Murphy, Nick Papavlassopulos, Stacy Sewell, and James Vendetti. 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. Sessions showcased 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. A special innovation of this year’s Retreat was a collage project led by Carl Rattner in which faculty created individual art projects and engaged a level of creativity not ordinarily accessed in regular sessions. 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 in the last eight 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:*

“I was nervous about participating as a new faculty member, but I am so glad that I decided to come. Previous faculty retreats that I have been too were focused much more on pedagogy and teaching rather than the scholarship and personal work of the faculty – which is so much more interesting. I now have a reading list for the summer, and feel much closer to everyone here. Thank you so much for your effort and time in setting this up. The collage sessions were a great break to discussion – possible adding something physical like Yoga or music to break up the sessions too”

“Even though I was only here a short time, I had a great time. I thought you guys did a great job organizing the Retreat.”
Returning Participants:

“This was a very rewarding Retreat. The scholarly presentations were very thought provoking. The site is appropriate and it facilitated great communication among the participants.”

“The Faculty Retreat is one of my favorite times throughout the year. It is intellectually stimulating as we get to learn from and interact with each other. It’s a fantastic opportunity to get fresh and diverse feedback on developing ideas for research and we get to know each other in ways never allowed by day to day interaction on campus. We build relationships, discuss ideas for courses, programs, and ways to improve teaching. I especially like the drinks and informal discussion time. This one was a perfect balance of sessions and free time.”

“Once again, an outstanding Retreat – I look forward to it all year! I was very happy to share my research with my colleagues and was grateful for their comments and ideas. The collage sessions were terrific, a real treat to get a hands-on class. The panel on government was enlightening; it was certainly an engaged session. The evening sessions really helped to get the perspectives on school (and life) that we are not always privy to during the year. Keep it going!”

“As always the retreat was a great experience. I am glad that the newer members of the faculty come, as I think this is really important. I think the scheduling is perfect--you have figured out how many panels in a day or afternoon, what is too much, etc. Good leaving time for a hike. Carl's project was REALLY great--I can't tell you how much I appreciated this. I told him how excited I was about it, and he said, "well, I'll make you a kit to take home." Nice, thanks, but not the point...I like that we did it there, I liked the activity itself and I liked being with my colleagues DOING this, and seeing the results. Great idea, and we should do it again (another project or collages, again, would be great!) Good food, good drinks, excellent company. So good to have a conversation with people even that ONE TIME over the course of a year. It is really important for me individually and out think for the college overall. Thank you very much.”

“As in previous years, I thoroughly enjoyed the camaraderie and presentations. I think it would help better my understanding of the presentations if I were able to read an abstract prior. Also my understanding would be helped with a short glossary of operative definitions.”

“Excellent and diverse program. Well organized and very enjoyable. It is a great way for the faculty, especially the new faculty, to gain experience and exposure to other faculty members. Great job and I can’t wait until next year.”

“One of the most outstanding: thematic, truly interdisciplinary. Collage project – excellent idea, we needed to get outside ourselves. Do more of these. Panel discussion – thoughtful and evocative; better placement than last year, mid-
afternoon. A very restorative and intellectually stimulating Retreat. Love the site; thank you. Add a session on pedagogy to the panel; art workshops.”

“Loved it. Well organized. Perfect balance of work and play time. The drinks and informal discussions were perfect. These evening have produced some of my most memorable bonding experiences at STAC. Also, I really appreciated the opportunity to try out some of my ideas. Last year’s conversation about my work led to a paper that will be published – so these are really helpful for my scholarship.”

“Most important: felt rejuvenated; camaraderie among faculty; hearing ideas/thoughts with other divisions; share nature and ideas. More, more, more!”

“I attended the second day; all of the presentations were interesting. It’s good to hear what colleagues are working on, particularly the collage making with Carl was a welcome addition. The aspect of a continuing creative project throughout the Retreat was great.”

“It’s been a wonderful experience for me and a much needed lifting up of hope for me and for the College’s future. The Retreat, full of intellectual and personal encounters with other faculty from all the divisions has provided a positive boost to my sense of professionalism and energized my planning for next semester. Thank you for all you do to make this happen. Keep doing what you are doing; it works.”

“Food was great; number of lectures was good enough to allow some free time for other faculty activities; the panel discussion format was also good, something that we may have to establish on a regular, annual basis; great job.”

“It’s been three years since I’ve been here. There’s a great continuity in the intellectual character of the bon hommie. In short, I forget how much I love being here. The programs were interesting, sometimes even controversial, and inviting contention. But I was impressed by the spirit of openness and tolerant exchange. I was happy to receive intelligent and spirited responses from colleagues for whom my intellectual respect grew in the process. As an evening entertainment, though people seem to enjoy just conversing, drinking, and nibbling, we might try a communal reading of a short theatrical or radio play; could circulate a ballot of play/radio play titles in advance, take suggestions in advance”

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.

We look forward to planning the 2012 Retreat next year and celebrating a decade of successful retreats!