STAC Faculty Research Retreat
May 8-10, 2012

FINAL REPORT

Organizers: Neerja Chaturvedi, Professor of History
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I. INTRODUCTION

The St. Thomas Aquinas College Faculty Research Retreat was conducted for the tenth time and enjoyed a robust attendance. A total of 21 faculty attended. 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. “Promoting Interest Through the Use of Digital Literacy & 3D Gaming”
   Jim Neufell, Michael Shaw, Bob Vermilyer

2. “Youth Organizations for Art/Design”
   Nina Bellisio

3. “Art Project: Low Relief Sculptural Collage”
   Carl Rattner

4. “Dream Poems”
   Monica Wendel

5. PANEL DISCUSSION: Tree of Life
   Leader: Jim Vendetti Panelists: Nina Bellisio, CJ Churchill, Clara Toth

6. “From Benjamin White to Benjamin Black: The Curious Case of John Banville, Postmodernist”
   Charles O’Neill

7. “All Blues, Percussion & Discussion”
   Heath Bowen & Evan Matthews

Also present as attendees were President Fitzpatrick, John Durney, Neerja Chaturvedi, Ellen Chayet, Elizabeth Finnegan, Don Johnson, David Keppler, Florette Koffler, Barbara Klein, Nick Papavlassopulos, and Stacy Sewell. 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.

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 last year’s Retreat which was carried over into this year’s was an art project led by Carl Rattner in which faculty created individual art projects and engaged a level of creativity not ordinarily accessed in regular sessions. We look forward to continuing this hands-on component along with more panels in the future as these are enthusiastically embraced by all present. 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 ten 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.

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

New Participants:

“I loved the retreat! I learned what my colleagues are working on and got to see what they are like outside of STAC. The art project was fun and Frost Valley is beautiful. It was illuminating.”

Returning Participants:

“As always an excellent opportunity to share intellectual interests with colleagues, discovered the interests/talents/scholarly thought and accomplishments of colleagues and to learn. Stimulates my own thinking. Social experience invaluable – we don’t often have the chance to get to know the people we work with, distanced from our professional lives. Extremely restorative, especially directly after semester ends. Keep panel discussion and art project; otherwise format, content fine.”

“Another refreshing, stimulating, personally uplifting experience. My batteries depleted, emotionally wrenched by the passing of two of our members, this retreat
is ‘just what the doctor would prescribe.’ Thank you for the breath of fresh air –
combined with summer ahead. Accommodations were great, staff helpful and
friendly.”

“All of the presentation in some way were engaging and several in cross-
disciplinary fashion made me think about my own creative work and future
direction I might take. More specifically, I am thinking about the (or a)
communication-dynamic used in Tree of Life (and possibly some of the poetry
readings). Always love the sense of greater community that happens at these
retreats.”

“I find it difficult to say what is the best thing about the retreat. Is it the effective
venue for inspiring interdisciplinary research? Is it the informal discussions, is it
the presentations, is it the opportunity to get to know new faculty? I guess I’d
have to say what makes the retreat so fantastic is that is accomplishes so much.
So, the best thing is that it does it all. Change the topic of workshop sessions, i.e.
perhaps something other than art. Although I personally thought the sculpture was
wonderful I would find it interesting to explore other areas.”

“I was hesitant to present this year, but I am really glad I did. The preparation
allowed/forced me to focus my ideas and the discussion was very helpful and
supportive in the planning of a possible summer workshop/class with STAC and
high school students. Overall, it was a great experience and it makes me wish we
had a faculty lounge so we could have similar discussion during eh academic
year. Continue to include a longer hands-on/creative project, maybe something
with music or writing.”

“Beautifully planned and organized as always. At its tenth anniversary, this
should become by now an integral part of the STAC faculty experience. Great
presentations, some team work, terrific art and poetry conversations, and
immersion into personal creative expression, most interesting panel and
discussion on a difficult and ambitious film Tree of Life. Open, friendly, collegial
discussions, just what’s needed at the end of the year. It would be wonderful if
these retreats could/would continue just as they have been organized and
conducted. This is an opportunity that not one of our colleagues should miss if
possible; try to experience it at least once.”

“The retreat is always rich and rewarding, expanding, provoking, fascinating. It is
always wonderful to deepen friendships and develop new friendships. The
networking that leads to collaborations enriches the entire STAC
teaching/learning experience for students. Keep on keepin’ on.”

“It’s always a pleasure and fun to be up here. The hospitality is excellent, and so
is the organization of the leaders. I think all faculty at STAC should participate in
this annual event.”
“You guys work hard to put this together and deserve more credit than I give you. Thank you.”

“Another excellent retreat; always the highlight of the year. I enjoyed the presentations. What particularly impressed me was the panel discussion of *Tree of Life*, so many different perspectives from my colleagues.”

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 2013 Retreat next year and celebrating a decade of successful retreats!