STAC Faculty Research Retreat
May 7-9, 2013

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 eleventh time and enjoyed a robust attendance. A total of 27 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. The total number of presentations are limited 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. "Achieving Common Core State Standards for Struggling Readers: Teaching Close Reading Beyond the Scripts."
   Michael Shaw

   Stacy Sewell

3. “Homeboy Horace Coleman’s American Grain.”
   Gerry McCarthy

4. Introduction to Printmaking
   Carl Rattner

5. “Reading Comprehension and Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Problem of Understanding.”
   Liz Finnegan

6. “Gender Discrimination in the Legal Field.”
   Christine Cahill, Meghan Mihal, Barbara Donn

7. “Irish Writing”
   Charles O’Neill

8. “Hustle and Grit, or Sporting Whiteness? The transformation of the Color Line in Professional Sports”
   Heath Bowen

9. "Fanfic Profiles as 21st Century Literacy Narratives"
   Staci Shultz

    Barbara Yontz and Nina Bellicio
Also present as attendees were President Fitzpatrick, John Durney, Neerja Chaturvedi, Ellen Chayet, CJ Churchill, Elizabeth Finnegan, Meenakshi Gajria, Don Johnson, Barbara Klein, Craig Martin, Evan Matthews, Michael Murphy, Robert Murray, Suzanne Reynolds, Stacy Sewell, and Elaine Winship. 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 the last two years’ retreats 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. As in the past, this year’s Retreat served as a means to welcome new faculty members into the College community. An emergent theme from this year’s discussions was the faculty’s desire to gather together more frequently.

V. COMMENTS

As has been the case in proceeding 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:

“Really lovely, from the intellectual conversations to the food to the cocktail hours. Suggestions: maybe 45 minutes per talk, then 15 minute break; folks get a little restless, especially with back-to-back talks.”
“Excellent opportunity to her the research that is happening in our school amongst our faculty and in our community. Great networking event. In evening very nice to spend time with faculty outside of school/classroom. I think the format works well. Great job and thank you.”

“Excellent presentations: informative, idea driven. Good to spend time sharing interests – common/shared goals and strategies. Peaceful site, beautiful grounds, great accommodations/food. Good to have time to talk with colleagues in nonacademic setting. Suggestions: a little more time between sessions.”

Returning Participants:

“Excellent opportunity to interact with faculty and to enjoy faculty scholarship/research; good blend of formal presentations and informal conversations. Thank you!”

“I had a great experience as always. I though the quality of presentations was the highest I have experienced. Great balance between work and play. The open bar and opportunity for faculty to bond is invaluable. I wish we had more time/space on campus during the school year for such bonding interactions.”

“Thank you for putting together the Research Retreat. I love it! Who wouldn't come in off of their sabbatical for it? It is such a good way to connect with colleagues. I always joke that it is the one time each year I can sit and talk with Charles O'Neill and get his recommendations for summer reading. I wish we could have more opportunities for more casual interaction over the course of the school year. The discussions about teaching and research, the collegiality, etc., is so good for our college and for the faculty as a whole. I had two conversations about future possibility for course collaborations; it was also especially interesting to see how three members of the School of Business are putting together a collaborative research project. And I seldom have the opportunity to speak with folks in the School of Education, and I was able to hear about two very interesting research projects. In short, this is a great opportunity and I’d like the faculty and administration to give some thought to how we might further and promote these kinds of opportunities.”

“It’s a good experience. I’m inspired to do more in my own field, chiefly reading. I’m inspired by my colleagues. It makes me proud to be part of the STAC community. People also gave me interesting suggestions which I will incorporate in my courses such as CJ’s idea of students reading a portion of *Origin of Species* in my next honors science class. I like the idea of having a day devoted to some issue, human rights for instance would interest me.”

“As always, a very rich experience, wonderful diversity of research presentations. Every presenter was passionate. Food, evening, open bar, staff support, and opportunity to enjoy each other enriched the retreat experience. The Retreat really
reflects both the mission and spirit of STAC as a high level professional institution but also as a wonderful collegial community of scholars (very rare in institutes of higher education). CJ, Neerja: great thanks and appreciation. Keep on keepin’ on!”

“As always, I enjoyed the companionship of colleagues outside of campus. The time to talk casually and exchange ideas and just to laugh together. I appreciate all the talks and the effort put into them. Those that spoke to me in particular were Heath’s and Gerry’s talk (because of my interest in African American history) and Staci Shultz’s talk (because of my interest in writing).”

“Every year I’m more impressed with the diverse and intelligent presentations. I feel; proud to be part of this faculty. This year Nina and I are presenting seed idea for research, hoping for feedback on ways to navigate book publication. My favorites part is the informal discussion over dinner, drinks, hikes, or whatever. Bonding, ideas for cross-disciplinary study, pedagogy, culture, inspiring creative conversation. A meeting or part of a meeting in the fall to review ideas developed at the Retreat.”

“I look forward to the Retreat each year, it helps me focus on my research. After a year of reading hundreds of students’ papers, I’m happy to read my own. It helps me meet new faculty and get to know them. The discussions are extremely helpful and interesting. The presentations help me to be aware of what my colleagues are doing. More science faculty participation. Thank you for another great Retreat.”

“Probably one of the best I have attended in terms of diversity of topics, discussions during talks, and afterwards. Interesting and stimulating collegiality, idea sharing. I would love to continue our discussions throughout the academic year in an informal way. Intellectually restorative; love the art project. Suggestions: Thematic sessions with multi-disciplinary focus; keep sessions shorter, same as this year; possibly session on pedagogy. Thank you CJ & Neerja for continuing to bring this to fruition, the highlight of my academic year.”

“Once again, I’m struck by the rich intellectual life that is present at the College (among faculty). This life is expressed and shared through the Retreat. Without the Retreat I would have no awareness of what colleagues are doing. Inspiring.”

“The Retreat continues to be one of my favorite parts of teaching at STAC. It has been a place where I was inspired to produce intellectual activity which has extended to presenting at external conferences. The interaction with other faculty members has results in academic conversations, curricular collaboration, and the formation of many friendships. It would be great if we could continue these during the academic year. The site is lovely and the accommodations are satisfactory. I like the new shorter length for presentations. Keep up the good work.”
“Facilities are good. Plenty of food, tea, and coffee. The people who work at Frost Vale were very helpful. It is very interesting/informative to hear presentations from different disciplines and use the feedback to question/reframe your own work. Suggestions: Invite/encourage someone from the hard sciences to present.”

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 2014 Retreat next year and celebrating over decade of successful retreats!