STAC Faculty Research Retreat
May 13-15, 2008

FINAL REPORT

Organizers:
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I. INTRODUCTION

The St. Thomas Aquinas College Faculty Research Retreat was conducted for the sixth time and enjoyed a robust attendance. A total of 22 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.

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. “Using Story Books to Teach Oral Vocabulary to Early Childhood Students”
   Changnam Lee

2. “Fancy, Fear, or Finance?: the Housing Crisis in Post-War New York City”
   Stacy Sewell

3. “I’ve got you under my skin: Art as Empathy, Embodiment, and Experience”
   Barbara Yontz

4. “Japan: bashinju, pashinju, noshinju?”
   Roger Levy

5. “Economy & Philosophy”
   Nick Papavlassopulos & David Keppler

6. “No Country for Old Men: From Novel to Movie”
   Charles O’Neill

7. “Super Delegates and the 2008 Presidential Campaign”
   Doc Schelin

8. “What is the Future of Humanistic Studies?”
   Florette Koffler

9. “Closing the Achievement Gap: It Takes a Lot More Than the National Reading Panel’s ‘Big Five’ ”
   Michael Shaw

10. “3D Image Captchas”
    Bob Vermilyer
Also present as attendees were Augusto Casas, Ellen Chayet, C.J. Churchill, Neerja Chaturvedi, Barbara Donn, Barbara Klein, Evan Matthews, Heather Rave, and Robert Trawick. 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.

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 and proposed by a faculty members in education and the natural sciences. 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 in the last five 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:

“This is my first faculty retreat and I had a wonderful time. It was nice to hear other faculties’ research and ideas. I also enjoyed meeting faculty from other divisions – there is not a lot of interaction with other departments during the semester. It’s also nice getting to know your own department better. The informal talks at the end of the day worked very well. I enjoyed myself a lot so I would not change anything. I especially enjoyed the location and would suggest going there again. This retreat was very well organized and run. Thank you.”
“This was my first retreat and I really enjoyed it. It was fun and interesting to be with everyone in this relaxed environment. I also enjoyed hearing all the diverse presentations. It reminds me how much talent and intelligence there is among the faculty. Maybe limit papers and time for papers or extend time so people can enjoy the other things the Center has to offer.”

“Excellent occasion – very fine presentations; wonderful environment. I would like to take some of these classes. Keep doing what you are doing.”

“Thanks for the invite and for arranging this. Wonderful to have non-pressed discussions with colleagues outside of College setting. Also fascinating research – we rarely have opportunity to hear/critique what other are working on/thinking even in our own Division. Beautiful reflective spot. I will plan on spending more time next time and bring my own work. Dedicate one for pedagogy. You did a terrific job arranging this retreat.”

“Just wanted to congratulate your for organizing a terrific program. Everything was top-notch and I really enjoyed myself during the two days I spent at Frost Valley. I am most grateful for the efforts you invested in preparing the event and I am already thinking about a presentation for next year.”

Returning Participants:

“The retreat is always one of the highlight of the academic year for me. The diversity of papers presented was especially broad this year. Each topic evoked lively discussion and heightened awareness; the informal discussion were just as valuable because they gave me the opportunity to meet new faculty and renew my acquaintance with others. The site was beautiful and the staff was very accommodating. I especially enjoyed the collaborative presentation and would encourage others to follow suit, especially along inter-divisional lines.”

“As in the past the time too I had a very pleasant experience. I enjoyed the camaraderie and appreciate the wonderful planning and organization of this event. The presentations were terrific and I learned quite a bit. I also appreciated the different perspectives and the spontaneous give-and-take of interactions. Great job! Obviously we need to encourage more and different people to participate.”

“The location was great! Organized recreation appreciated. Research discussions always stimulating. Perhaps more recreation options would be interesting.”

“Always a positive experience. Meticulously organized yet not over-programmed. I particularly enjoyed the movie and the next day explication. Perhaps more non-presentation activities like the hike. The highlight of my
academic year. On the final day I would restrict the program to one presentation. This might save the final presenter from a smaller audience.”

“Great balance of presentations, informal chat time, etc. Film really diminished the discussion/party, etc. It really wasn’t necessary; we are together for such a short time. Would maybe like canoe paddle, volleyball, horseback riding. Different organizers sometimes.”

“Wonderful opportunity to interact with colleagues. Stimulating discussions, both formal and informal. Thank you for doing this! Your effort is appreciated!”

“As always this was a very rewarding experience. I was very impressed by all the work being done by fellow faculty and learned about concepts and strategies I can use in my teaching. Can we ask presenters to prepare write-ups of their presentations to be compiled and distributed. This would become the proceedings of the STAC Faculty Retreat.”

“Great! The presentations were al very informative and the environment conducive for intellectual discussions, I would give it an A. more planned activities for faculty and fewer presentations”

“Fabulous! Great intellectual discussions. Great dialoguing across discipline. Maybe ask john to provide a brief time for participants to ‘pitch’ the retreat to faculty who might not have decided to attend in the past. (One new participant said to me, ‘I had no idea what to expect, but I loved it.’)”

“They have all been good. But since they always get better, this was the best. Good for future cooperation amongst faculty.”

“Fun and interesting. I really liked hearing/learning about other areas I don’t normally explore. Perhaps shorter presentations so everyone can have a chance.”

VI. FUTURE PROSPECTS

When asked on the evaluation form “Suggestions: Retreat every year or every other year?” the overwhelming majority of participants suggested it be done every year. Some added that every few years we might take a year off to keep it fresh and depending on number of presenters. Especially notable, one participant wrote, “This event is the only one of it’s kind, so keep it annual – subject to faculty interest in presenting papers and leading sessions.”

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 2009 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.