

**STAC Faculty Research Retreat  
May 19-21, 2009**

**FINAL REPORT**

**Organizers:** Neerja Chaturvedi, Associate Professor of History  
C.J. Churchill, Associate Professor of Sociology

## I. INTRODUCTION

The St. Thomas Aquinas College Faculty Research Retreat was conducted for the seventh time and enjoyed a robust attendance. A total of 12 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. "The Roles and Responsibilities of the Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach: Researching the most Effective Methods and Approaches"  
Michael Shaw
2. "Computational Thinking"  
Bob Vermilyer
3. "Penal Policy or Public Policy: Prisoner Reentry in the Era of Penal Harm"  
Ellen Chayet
4. "Hanna's Secret: Guilt and Responsibility in The Reader's postwar Germany."  
Florette Koffler
5. "Reporters in Practice: The Role of Privilege in Contemporary Journalism."  
Sandra Mardenfeld
6. "Taking License: Legitimation Vacuum and Professional Identity in Contemporary Psychoanalysis."  
CJ Churchill
7. "Refining 'Domination': How to make a sophisticated use of Bourdieu's Concept"  
Craig Martin
8. "The Third and Final Continent: The Indian Writer in the New World."  
Charles O'Neill and Neerja Chaturvedi

Also present as attendees were John Durney and Carl Rattner. 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. 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 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.

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

*New Participants:*

“First time presenting – encouraged me to focus on [my area]. I had not immersed myself in – remembered the excitement of my discipline. Also helped me with program development due to increased familiarity with developments in my field. Terrific feedback. Recognize intersections among our disciplines by hearing other faculty research, thinking, interests – potential for future collaborations. Everyone has such interesting thinking/research! Opportunity to personally connect with colleagues. [Suggestion]: More of the same! Thank you for arranging this every year.”

“This retreat met and exceeded my expectations. It was wonderful to hear the presentations from different disciplines. Also the food was good and the vegetarian selections were great to have....[Suggestion]: try to start the films earlier in the evening; I had to stay up past my bedtime. That's a minor thing – excellent work putting this together.”

*Returning Participants:*

“As in the past, I found this year’s retreat at Frost Valley a chance to connect with faculty colleagues in two ways that schedules do not seem to allow for in the regular academic year: (1) to hear their presentations about current research (and) (2) to talk with them informally (at coffee breaks and at meals) about this research and related topics. About their presentations: I am continually amazed with the ability of my colleagues to make scholarly research intelligible and interesting, especially in areas where I am quite ignorant. Not only did I learn something about what are for me, ‘new’ areas of study, but I was also able to observe styles of communicating that might better help me to deliver materials in my own studio/class room. Things that were of interest to me were (alternate) ways to: introduce topics; organize presentations; use visuals and even to verbally deliver. Talking informally: Informal discussion during meals and coffee breaks was a chance for me to get some clarification about things that I did not quite get during the presentations. More important, it was a change to connect socially; to talk at some length with faculty I know but just never seem to get a chance to speak with during the regular academic year. I was also able to meet and talk with faculty members whom I really barely know. I suspect that the relaxed atmosphere of the setting contributed to all of this. Other: I very much liked the Frost Valley accommodations and services, but then I am a rustic. Suggestions for future Faculty Retreats: I know that next year’s scheduling will allow for better attendance. My only suggestion might be to encourage (to whatever extent possible) some sort of interactive (non-judgmental) component to the presentations. Such a component might ‘personalize’ materials and better connect the audience.”

“This has been the fifth research retreat for me and, as in the past, I am happy to have been able to participate. The presentations, the camaraderie, are rewarding in themselves. Planning and ambiance again have been exceptional. Colleagues have been open with observations, suggestions, and I think everyone appreciates the non-pressured way in which we can talk about ideas and the ways in which we approach and develop our respective scholarly interests and objectives. I do not wish to select particular topics but all have been interesting and well delivered. Again thanks to the colleagues who planned, participated, and to the College. [Suggestion]: The organizers have done a superb job, as they have in the past. I think it’s best to let Drs. Chaturvedi and Churchill to plan future retreats. I do, however, hope that more faculty (perhaps newer but especially some ‘old timers’) consider taking part, making presentations, and showing the rest of us what their academic interests are beyond the expected classroom work.”

“As always this was an enriching, informing, relaxing experience. We have a wonderfully diverse, passionate, thoughtful faculty. Each presentation motivated me to think deeply. In addition, the Frost Valley Center and environs provided a perfect setting for our get together. They took wonderful care of us with fabulous

food....Much thanks to John for evening amenities and BIG kudos to Neerja and CJ.”

“It is extremely valuable to hear about others work. Some of the presentations made me think differently about my own. It also reminded me of past things I’ve studied but never applied to my own work. [Suggestion]: I would have liked to have read the books prior to the discussions. Maybe give a list of books and authors that relate to the movies that will be viewed and discussed.”

“The timing this year was very unfortunate! Also that all divisions weren’t represented (that ONE chair came). This should change next year. Also reach out specifically to new faculty. The schedule was great (not too concentrated) and activities (hikes, boating) were also very nice. Food good, movies too; this continues to be a great experience. Also nice ‘ordering’ of presentations.”

“Thank you! As we grow in numbers I believe that group presentations might be a way to not only accommodate everyone but also support collegial objectives. The facility is perfect. I really enjoy the social aspect of the retreat. [Suggestion]: films during late afternoon so they don’t stop conversation during the evening social hour.”

“Another excellent retreat. Again I learned a great deal in both the formal talks and the informal socializing. [Suggestion]: continue to stress ongoing research; it gives a real insight into our colleagues’ work.”

## **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. 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 2010 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.

As a final observation, we noted that scheduling the Retreat during the first week of the summer teaching session appears to have significantly reduced the number of attendees and presenters this year. Several colleagues (including many frequent past participants) told us they would have come if it was not scheduled during the summer teaching session. Because the academic calendar next May also eliminates the open week between Commencement and the summer session, we strongly suggest that the Retreat be scheduled for the three days between when grades are due and prior to Commencement – i.e. Tues.-Thurs. May 11-13, 2010.