

**FACULTY COLLABORATIVES FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING
NAZARETH COLLEGE OF ROCHESTER**

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The primary long-term goal of the Faculty Collaborative Project was to shift the faculty development paradigm at Nazareth College from one-time workshops and seminars to sustained, collegial dialogue. The key mechanism for accomplishing this goal was the establishment of faculty discussion groups (i.e., teaching circles) that would provide a base within which faculty could develop new understandings of the teaching and learning process, as well as of themselves. As noted in our 1st year report, budget update (6 Nov. 03 and 2 May 03, respectively) and recent Snapshot of the project (<http://partners.carnegiefoundation.org/html/snapshot.php?id=741>), the proposed configurations and management of the teaching circles initially proved problematic, however, only minor adjustments to those proposed plans (based on feedback from the early participants) made it possible to begin achieving our desired goals.

With these minor adjustments in place, faculty have, in fact, joined the on-going circle discussions in greater numbers than originally predicted. The original proposal predicted that by the end of the grant a total of nine different teaching circles would have formed, involving 50-60 different faculty. Already, a total of 12 circles have formed and been sustained for at least one semester at Nazareth College, with a total of 64 different faculty having joined one or more teaching circle discussions. Moreover, beyond these 12 teaching circles, plans are currently underway for an additional 4 new circles that will begin in the fall. In several instances, an earlier circle has served as a conceptual catalyst and starting point for one of the newer groups. In other words, our earlier adjustments to the structure of the circles and the venue for guidance on beginning institution-wide discussions and faculty involvement on assessment may have allowed us to exceed our original goals for faculty participation and seems to have set the stage for continuation and ongoing growth.

This increased level of participation may in part be a function of several factors, including the early changes. A second factor influencing the success of the project thus far is also undoubtedly the high level of support provided by the leadership of Nazareth College. Specifically, with the approval and encouragement of the President and Vice President of Academic Affairs, several of the recent Faculty Assembly Days (an all faculty event held once per semester) have been devoted to allowing faculty to experience, on a small scale, the inherent value of discussion while beginning a preliminary dialogue about assessment. Two of these recent all faculty assemblies were devoted to sharing and using as a starting point for discussion proven protocols from the AAHE “From Idea to Prototype” project jointly funded by the Hewlett and Pew Foundation. The administrative commitment of these rare all-faculty gathering times during the past three semesters has proven invaluable to the support and development of the teaching circle discussions. It has also been crucial in the development of the Center

for Teaching Excellence, which will become the vehicle that will maintain and expand the long-term goals of the Faculty Collaborative Project.

And what would be the benefits of doing so? The many benefits reported by our teaching circle participants include: thinking about new approaches to teaching (61.3%); implementing new activities in a course (45.2%); and being inspired to reflect on and approach teaching differently (54.8%). And as the teaching circles have continued, increasing numbers of faculty report that through their participation in the teaching circle discussions they have rediscovered what it means to be part of the “liberal arts experience” (38.7%) and/or have begun “a self-analytic process that may profoundly affect their basic approach to teaching” (19.4%). While the impact has not been equally powerful for all faculty, all have clearly enjoyed the process and report at least modest benefits. More importantly, perhaps, nearly all (83.9%) could imagine long-term benefits that would stem from their participation in ways that might have a lasting effect on themselves and their teaching.

Another meaningful impact of the project thus far, is that of improved student learning. For some, circle participation alone (22.6%) seemed to have led to new ideas that have positively affected student learning. But it is for those who have undertaken projects, where the greatest impact on student learning is seen. In these cases, faculty almost uniformly report improved student learning that is manifest in a number of ways including: 1) an increased interest in the subject matter (58%); 2) better quality student work (50%); 3) easier mastery of difficult conceptual material (50%); and 4) increased interest in the subject matter (42%). And while faculty who complete these projects note that it has been more work than expected, nearly all (92%) report that a logical next step for them will be to expand on, continue to develop, or make improvements to their course projects. Finally, when asked about the number of students affected annually by the course improvements they have made, the collective estimate for those who completed projects last year is in the range of 1,200-1,300 students/year, which is roughly the size of the undergraduate enrollment at Nazareth College.

Clearly, we are progressing nicely toward our original goals. Individual faculty have become involved and have made commitments in numbers higher than expected. Their participation is making a difference to the students they teach. Interest in the circles is growing. For a significant proportion of the faculty at Nazareth College, ongoing and discussion-based faculty development are becoming an increasingly apparent, if not yet integral, part of their lives. We have also begun the process of peer coaching and faculty involvement as assessment leaders, although as noted in our earlier reports, not in precisely the ways originally projected. For example, while Nazareth College faculty found the model for assessment provided by the Alverno College to be a compelling one, they did not find it to be a suitable one. Accordingly, this past semester the search began for an alternative assessment model through participation at national conferences and networking at local and national conferences. This search has resulted in several possibilities, which will be explored as possible vehicles for change during the coming academic year.

We have also made good progress on the issues of peer coaching for new faculty, and will be exploring ways to expand the project next year. With unequivocal administrative and faculty support, the New Faculty Orientation was completely reshaped in light of lessons learned from the Faculty Collaborative Project. Using comments and feedback of circle participants about what worked and what didn't, a fairly typical information—distribution—program was reshaped as an opportunity for building community and collegial dialogue. The discussions that began in Fall 03 as Orientation were transformed into a teaching circle in Spring 04 and will continue next year. In many ways, the comments of the new faculty who joined this second semester teaching circle echo those of other teaching circle participants. All report significant changes in their teaching during their first year here. All report growth as teachers. Finally, and as it was hoped, they also report that the circle itself has served as a vehicle for peer coaching that provides valuable support, mentoring, and guidance as well as a source of inspiration.

Yet despite the obvious and significant progress we have made, it has also become increasingly clear during the past year that we may have a long way to go to reach the goal for institutional or cultural change. Change is never easy; it is a fragile, nonlinear, and iterative process. And if change does not come easily to individuals, it is certainly no less so for institutions, where collectively established traditions and procedures can too easily confound and distract. Much has already been written about the nature of change within higher education. And one of the clear and compelling messages in much of that literature is that individual change and discoveries about teaching may have the greatest potential for impact on institutional culture when they embrace the fundamental principles of scholarship by first being grounded in the disciplines, second becoming public, and third being open to critical peer review. That the overwhelming majority of faculty (74.2%) have reported intellectual engagement and stimulation as a major benefit of participation is significant. Meaningful and lasting impact of the project is already evident at the individual level. But the greatest long-term (indeed institutional) effects will only be reached if the discussions and work of the project is reshaped in such a way as to engage the institution as a whole, while also sharing the stories with those outside the Nazareth community.

One way we have already begun to do this is by participating in (by invitation from Pat Hutchings) the Carnegie Snapshot Initiative, which provides a means of sharing our work with others. Local response to this Snapshot of the Faculty Collaborative Project has been extremely positive. The Snapshot project itself promises to be a rich and exciting way to share information about our project. In the next year we would like to expand our involvement to include nested Snapshot descriptions of the specific circles, as well as Snapshots of individual faculty projects. Collaborative relationships with the College Information Technology staff have already been forged to help in such an endeavor. We have also begun work in creating an internal Teaching Academy, whose membership would draw heavily from among the teaching circle participants. Part of the job of this Academy will be to shape new kinds of campus publications, forum and celebration of teaching excellence.

A clear priority, then, in the coming months for the Faculty Collaborative Project and for the Center for Teaching Excellence as well, will be to create additional contexts and venues for sharing—both internally and externally—the discoveries of the teaching circles themselves as well as of the individual scholarship of faculty who participate in them. Internally, the Center has already sponsored one all Faculty Assembly Day on teaching scholarship where many of the Hewlett circles and projects were showcased. Others have been showcased in the existing Faculty Colloquia Series. We have also created a WWW site that we hope will eventually contain the nested Snapshots of specific circle discussions along with those of individual course improvements.

Thus, while a number of alterations have been made to the project based on the lessons learned in the these past two years of the Faculty Collaborative Project, these alterations have, for the most part, been minor and relatively superficial, having more to do with methodology than goals and objectives. The value of a new paradigm for faculty development involving collegial discussion, innovation projects, new forms of assessment, and peer coaching is clear. In the final year of the grant we will seek input from those not yet involved, both inside and outside the institution, about the question of how best to tell the story of the circles themselves and classroom innovations they have catalyzed.

Finally, we will also seek input about the best way to insure that these kinds of discussions continue at Nazareth College. Not surprisingly, faculty have some pretty clear ideas about what is needed for these kinds of activities to continue here. In our recent survey, for example, when asked what they felt was necessary for the furtherance of these discussions (i.e., collegial teaching circle), the overwhelming majority of participants (87.1%) indicated that maintaining and or expanding the funding opportunities for faculty projects was essential. And a related ingredient for many (80.6%) was providing “the institutional resources needed to implement reforms that come out of the discussions.” Several made it clear that institutional support in a variety of ways wasn’t simply necessary—it was essential. During this final year, we will also be seeking possible ways of ensuring this kind of ongoing support.