



Faculty Collaboration as Faculty Development

By **Lott Hill**, acting director, the Center for Teaching Excellence, **Soo La Kim**, associate director, the Center for Teaching Excellence, and **Robert Lagueux**, director, New Millennium Studies—The First-Year Seminar, all of Columbia College Chicago

Since 1999, the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) at Columbia College Chicago has developed a wide range of professional development opportunities and taken a variety of approaches to meet the needs of a large and diverse faculty body, where part-time faculty members outnumber full-time tenure-track colleagues by nearly four to one. Like teaching and learning centers elsewhere, our center approaches faculty development as an ongoing reflective practice for all faculty at all stages of their career, not simply as remediation for faculty in difficulty nor reserved for faculty new to teaching. In doing so, we address the principles and practices of teaching at the individual, departmental, curricular, and institutional levels, facilitating communication within and across departments and helping to foster an academic community that supports the scholarship of teaching and learning. More concretely, this means that wherever possible, we create and support occasions for faculty to learn from each other. We design CTE workshops and seminars with collaboration in mind; that is, with ways for faculty to participate as facilitators, leaders, and initiators. Perhaps more significantly, we promote a culture of collaboration through our joint faculty development endeavors with key departments and programs across the college.

Such an approach is driven both by principle and by practical necessity. With more than 120 academic programs and nearly 11,000 students, Columbia College Chicago is the largest and most diverse private arts and media college in the nation. There are currently 328

full-time and 1,250 part-time faculty members, many of whom are professionals active in the fields they teach. The CTE is staffed by the acting director, the associate director, and an administrative assistant. We offer weekly workshops or seminars throughout the semester, and cosponsor many workshops with other offices and departments. In addition to partnership opportunities, small centers like ours can strengthen our impact on campus by identifying and cultivating faculty members who are committed to faculty development and willing to take leadership roles. As the key examples below illustrate, faculty collaboration that fosters faculty development can be structured in many ways, but its success depends on faculty having a sense of ownership over the process and outcome of their efforts.

Collaboration for a Common Curriculum

The New Millennium Studies (NMS) Teaching Academy was conceived and is convened in conjunction with the development and three-year progressive launch of the First-Year Seminar curriculum, which will be fully implemented and required for all first-year students at Columbia in fall 2008. As an interdisciplinary course, NMS is an integrative learning experience that provides the educational scaffolding for connecting authentically liberal learning with reflective and creative practice in the arts and media. Organized around the central theme of identity and culture, NMS ties the close study of media in a variety of genres to questions about identity, creation, responsibility, and artistic



voice. The course asks students to consider their artistic and creative impulses in light of larger, self-conscious modes of inquiry and results in the creation of an NMS Portfolio, a body of work that is the culmination of a semester of reflective analysis and thinking.

Co-convened by NMS and the CTE, the Teaching Academy currently has more than sixty full- and part-time faculty from across the disciplines who meet frequently in small groups, at least twice as a whole each semester, and at a two-day retreat in the summer. Led by the director and staff of NMS—who also teach the course—the academy not only prepares NMS instructors to teach the course successfully, but provides a context for meaningful curricular and pedagogical connections between NMS and other Columbia courses.

Meetings address a variety of topics such as learning objectives and goals, stages of student learning and development, and evaluation. This community of support is critical for faculty teaching on often unfamiliar territory outside their disciplines, providing a structured and regular dialogue around questions of theory and practice.

Because no individual instructor is an expert in all the assigned texts and because students construct their portfolios from multiple artistic approaches and media, there is an opportunity for each Teaching Academy member to bring an important disciplinary perspective and expertise to the conversations, thus learning with and from each other while ensuring that NMS students have a common experience across sections. For example, an instructor of cul-

tural studies might model a culture- and identity-based exercise she uses in the classroom, an instructor of film might lead a conversation on responding to student artwork, and an instructor of English might present methods for generating and assessing student writing. Some meetings focus on course texts, others on specific elements of the portfolio and assignments, and others on what we know about how our students learn. All of the meetings are interactive, with continuing opportunities to reflect on common purposes and challenges.

This community of support is critical for faculty teaching on often unfamiliar territory outside their disciplines, providing a structured and regular dialogue around questions of theory and practice.

Collaboration for Reflective Teaching

In its current form, the Teaching Partnership program is a collaboration between First Year Writing (FYW), part of the English department, and New

Millennium Studies (NMS). It pairs three FYW instructors with three NMS instructors to exchange class visits, meet informally, produce a report on the experience, and consider curricular and pedagogical intersections between the two programs. The collaboration is a natural one, as both FYW and NMS form a critical part of first-year students' common experience and offer small-sized classes that are discussion based and student centered.

The program coordinator, a full-time lecturer who teaches both FYW and NMS courses, consults regularly with the CTE and the directors of FYW and NMS, and is responsible for organizing all aspects of the program. NMS, CTE, and the coordinator also drafted a “Guidelines and Expectations” document explaining the program’s goals and timeline. As we emphasize to the teaching partners, these peer observations and discussions are *not* meant to be evaluative in any way, but are designed as opportunities for reflection, learning, and community. In support of this goal, we leave the specific terms of class visits up to participants, encouraging them to exchange syllabi and discuss what they’d like to get out of each visit.

Although the Teaching Partnership program is relatively small and in its early stages, it promotes collaborative faculty development on multiple levels. Participants learn from each other in specific, experiential ways. At a recent meeting, participants were enthusiastic about seeing colleagues in action, and about ideas from their partners’ class that they wanted to try in their own. For example, according to meeting notes,



“at least two writing instructors were impressed by the multimodal nature of NMS and felt encouraged to try more multimodal approaches in their writing classes. Another instructor was more impressed by his partner’s personal style of getting students to talk and think.” The advantages of directly observing a colleague’s teaching are difficult to replicate in other ways.

The partnerships promote dialogue not only across disciplines, but also between veteran and novice teachers in a nonhierarchical, mutually beneficial way. All the participants are part-time faculty, and programs like this provide an all-too-rare venue for connecting part-time faculty to each other and to the departments and the college of which they’re a part but from which they often feel disconnected. While the interaction among instructors forms the heart of the teaching partnership, the collaboration also benefits the larger FYW and NMS communities, as teaching partners share their insights about both programs with their peers.

Collaboration for Civic Engagement

In support of Columbia’s college-wide civic engagement initiative, Critical Encounters, the CTE convenes a colloquium each spring semester to bring together faculty members from across the departments and disciplines, so that they may collaboratively develop exercises, activities, and assessment tools that can be adapted for use in any classroom. This colloquium consists of sixteen full- and part-time instructors who apply to participate based on their understanding of and com-

mitment to a global social issue that has been designated as the annual focus of Critical Encounters. These individuals meet collectively and in small groups five times over the course of the semester to develop and articulate class-based stand-alone activities and modes of assessment that are designed to challenge students’ perceptions and increase understanding of issues such as HIV and AIDS or poverty and privilege.

A faculty fellow oversees the colloquium and participants are each responsible for designing three to five exercises or activities that they themselves would assign in their own classrooms, and then they work collaboratively to translate those exercises and activities across disciplines. For example, a composition assignment around myths and misconceptions about HIV might be adapted as a science assignment mapping the HIV life cycle, which might inform a service learning project where television production students produce public service announcements for AIDS service organizations. These conversations result in a shared knowledge of how a subject is addressed through other disciplines while building a more comprehensive understanding of what and how students are learning in classes across the college. Participants report that they are better able to connect the material in their classes to other courses and better able to make use of on- and off-campus resources and events to enhance their curricula. The materials developed with the colloquium are distributed through faculty-led presentations as well as online.

Collaboration for Department-Specific Initiatives

The CTE has also begun to work with select departments on faculty development connected to department-specific, even course-specific, initiatives. For example, we consulted with a committee in the department of art and design that was charged with assessing and redesigning the curriculum for History of Art 1, a critical part of the foundation core required of all art and design majors. In collaboration with committee members, we developed, organized, and delivered a two-day teaching workshop to introduce the new curriculum. The workshop sessions were designed to model as much as possible the kind of active learning integral to the new curriculum.

Conclusion

Faculty development efforts, whether within or between departments, need not be elaborate, time-intensive, or costly. However, they do need to be conceived with clear goals and structures in mind, and with the support (organizational, financial, logistical, symbolic) of key administrators in order to create an environment in which faculty feel encouraged to collaborate in their own development as teachers and professionals. In the projects described above, we have been inspired by the energy and dedication that our colleagues bring to innovate and improve their teaching. ■