

Faculty Learning Community Program Proposal

Susanne Morgan, Margaret Arnold, Danette Johnson, John Sigg, and Patricia Spencer

August 1, 2008

Supported by a grant from the New Initiatives Fund, we attended the Faculty Learning Communities Facilitators Institute and Conference in Claremont CA on June 18-21, 2008. Based on that immersion experience and our analysis of the Ithaca College faculty, we believe that the Faculty Learning Communities model is a good one to initiate here. Following is a brief overview of our goals and timeline and a more detailed proposal for a pilot program.

Overview

Goal:

- To raise the scholarly profile of FLC participants.
- To build capacity for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.
- To enhance the scholarly nature of institutional explorations.
- To develop strategies and data on student learning outcomes.
- To improve teaching and student learning.

Pilot Year:

Fall 2008:

- A "FLC on FLCs" made up of the five who attended the Institute explores the concept and its possible utility here.
- *Product:* individual FLC proposals and a collaborative statement about FLCs at Ithaca.

Spring 2009:

- A general call for applicants for the proposed FLCs. Screening of applicants and selection of the FLCs that will be offered.
- *Product:* Schedule of FLCs for Fall 2009 and preliminary analysis of baseline data. Analysis of the process from the year.

Costs:

The pilot program has been supported by the New Initiatives Fund and most has been expended. Any remaining funds would be used to support a consultant, such as Leslie Ortquist-Ahrens, to work with us as we explore the program. Other minor expenses would include books or duplication costs for materials and modest refreshments at major meetings.

Proposal

We propose to establish a pilot Faculty Learning Community (FLC) Program during 2008-2009. The pilot would be an "FLC on FLCs" consisting of the five who were supported by a New Initiatives Fund to

attend the national FLC Facilitators Institute and Conference in June 2008. We would function as a faculty learning community facilitated by Susanne Morgan.

The overall goal of the year-long pilot program is to explore the model and assess its potential at Ithaca College. Objectives for the year include:

- To continue to learn about the model through research and consultation with other institutions.
- To identify existing groups or initiatives which resemble Faculty Learning Communities.
- To discuss the model with colleagues through visiting departmental, school, and other faculty meetings.
- To develop proposals for a set of FLCs that we would facilitate in 2009-2010 and recruit colleagues for them. If we conclude that the model is not appropriate at this time, we would not carry out this step.
- To prepare a scholarly analysis of our process and outcomes, perhaps with recommendations.

The goal of the program is to build capacity for scholarly exploration of teaching projects or institutional questions, and to raise the scholarly profile of individual faculty members. An FLC Program will provide a coherent form for engaging in big institutional questions within a scholarly context that faculty appreciate, as it involves inquiry, research, and synthesis. It will enhance understanding of the Boyer Model among faculty and administrators. Fundamentally it will also improve teaching and student learning at Ithaca College. The New Initiatives Fund supported intensive training and resources for a "FLC on FLCs" during the first year, to foster rapid integration of the program. Future costs will be part of regular faculty development budgets.

The Faculty Learning Community (FLC) model is well established nationally, with recognized best practices, strong assessment outcomes, and substantial opportunities for both facilitator training and presentation of faculty scholarship outcomes. Typical programs include cohort-based FLCs whose members focus on a teaching project; and topic-based FLCs, that investigate an approach in teaching and learning or an institutional question. It is important that FLCs be clearly differentiated from committees; they are groups whose inquiry results in a product of their own design. They are not support groups, either, as they engage in common inquiry and a tangible outcome is expected.

Reasons that a Faculty Learning Community Program is a good idea for Ithaca College now include:

1. The college is undergoing substantial change in upper administration.
2. The new Provost has a strong interest in building faculty development and employed an outside consultant to help initiate our process.
3. Many current faculty activities are very much like Faculty Learning Communities. Those groups could help get an FLC program moving, and a program could provide additional support and recognition for them.
4. We just completed our middle states accreditation process and both our self study and the review team's reports include recommendations about general education and assessment, both topics might be fruitfully addressed through the FLC model.
5. We are undergoing a generational shift in faculty and need to establish ways to engage new faculty, especially if they have been in Preparing Future Faculty programs in their graduate careers.

Based on the first semester's work, the FLC on FLCs is likely to decide to proceed for a second year. If so, during the second semester the FLC on FLCs will recruit members for a set of FLCs, visiting departments and other faculty bodies to discuss the model, the program, and the proposed FLCs. Based

on the responses to the call, the FLC will decide which topics will be mounted in the 2009-2010 year. The FLC will also build a web presence to make its resources accessible to the campus.

At the end of the first year, the FLC on FLCs will present a statement of its process and outcomes to the faculty and the Provost. Probably an analysis of some aspect of the work will be submitted to a scholarly conference.

Members of the FLC on FLCs will be encouraged to apply for release time through the Center for Faculty Research and Development. The release time would support their scholarly work facilitating their FLC, the teaching project they would undertake, and the production of a presentation or article at the end of 2009-2010

Update April 2009:

The FLC on FLCs met during the 2008-2009 year and designed the May 2009 Faculty Institute, "Theirs, Mine and Ours: Meeting Collective Objectives through Comprehensive Assessment," to feature the use of Faculty Learning Communities in supporting both assessment work and scholarship of learning.