

## Final Report submitted by Eileen Abrams, Francie Blake, Randy Libros and Jacqueline Wong

### I. The Project

- A. Purpose: The purpose of this project is to improve student learning outcomes by enhancing faculty professional development at the College through the establishment of a Teaching and Learning Institute. The Teaching and Learning Institute would be run as a pilot project during the 2003-2004 academic year, with the expectation that it would then continue annually. Many faculty feel the need and would welcome the opportunity to develop a better understanding of learning theory and learning differences in order to apply the latest developments to the classroom. Our intention is to develop a structure that will meet the needs of the College community and have significant internal support to carry out professional development initiatives. While the College takes great effort to provide individual sessions geared toward our professional development, there has been little opportunity for on-going discussions in a sequenced and structured environment. Our proposal is consistent with The Professional Development Plan for 2002-2003, which states, "The College will provide a variety of activities, at varying times, and use a variety of formats for professional development activities." Based on our research and personal experience, we have concluded that it is important that the Teaching and Learning Institute be structured in such a way as to provide an ongoing context for professional development, opportunities for collaborative effort, and opportunities for exchanges across the disciplines. Our collective experience with the Leadership Institute model has also influenced our conceptualization of the Teaching and Learning Institute.

Our research into professional development models has provided a wealth of information from as close to home as the College and as far away as Australia. In "The Teaching Community: Recreating University Teaching," Ian MacDonald from the Centre for Learning in Engineering and Science describes a model for professional development of university teaching staff, referred to as the "Teaching Community Model," as utilized at Monash and Swinburne Universities in Australia. He states, "Although much is known about learning, and the good teaching practice that encourages it, there has been slow progress in the development of a culture of commitment to quality learning in the university faculties, with a really effective process of change elusive." Here at the College, a model is being piloted in the English Department that fits this community model: the development of many small communities called "Teaching Circles." A major aim of Teaching Circles is for faculty to develop their own teaching portfolios. We also talked with Jay Howard about his experience planning and conducting the Summer Content Institute in 1988, a program that brought together a group of faculty for intensive professional development.

Our Leadership Institute project team consists of four members from the three academic divisions at the College: Eileen Abrams, with over 30 years of experience in teaching and expertise in service learning and educational technology; Francie Blake, Vice-Chair of the President's Diversity Council and member of the Professional Development Advisory Board; Randy Libros, former Chair of the Department of Electronics and current member of the Teaching Center Advisory Board; and Jacqueline Wong, former Teaching Development Officer at the University of Science and Technology in Hong Kong. In order to determine if there was a potential for internal support, our team discussed the proposal with Judy Gay, Vice President of Academic Affairs, who indicated that internal resources to support a Teaching

and Learning Institute might be available. We also had discussions with Mary Griffin, Facilitator of the Teaching Center, who expressed strong interest in collaboration and resource sharing between our project group and the Teaching Center. We met with Sue Piergallini and Anne Greco of the Office of Institutional Advancement to explore possible funding to support this effort; they recommended that we apply for a College Foundation grant.

- B. Institutional Mission: The College's mission statement affirms that the College "provides access to higher education for all who may benefit" through programs which "provide a coherent foundation for college transfer, employment, and life-long learning" and "seeks to create a caring environment which is intellectually and culturally dynamic." By helping faculty improve the quality of instruction provided to students, a Teaching and Learning Institute will advance the College's mission; faculty and students alike will benefit from ongoing professional development that seeks to make us all better able to perform in "intellectually and culturally dynamic" ways. The Teaching and Learning Institute at Community College of Philadelphia will provide a structure for faculty to study the process and psychology of learning and the practices that incorporate and build upon this knowledge and examine and reflect on their own teaching with the ultimate goal of becoming better teachers.
- C. Structure: The Teaching and Learning Institute will be structured to accommodate 20 participants from the three divisions as well as the Counseling and Library Departments. We envision the creation of a dynamic learning environment for participants. The Institute will incorporate formal presentations, problem-based learning, interactive workshops, and ample opportunity for reflection, sharing, and discussion for its 20 participants. Meetings will be held on a monthly basis during the academic year. Between meetings, participants will exchange ideas through a facilitated listserv discussion. The Institute will require that each participant work on a problem-based project applicable to a classroom situation. In some cases this will involve short-term goals, such as implementing a classroom assessment technique. In other cases goals may be more long-term, such as incorporating problem-based learning or a group project into a class.
- D. Goals and Objectives: Through the Teaching and Learning Institute participants will examine: learning theory - how and why people learn; how we apply theory to our work in the classroom; teaching and learning styles and differences - individual and cultural, physical and mental; classroom management; curriculum development; defining and teaching critical thinking, problem solving, and analysis; use and implications of technology; service learning and experiential learning; college demographics and issues facing "developmental" students; and how we assess our own effectiveness as teachers.
- E. Timeline: The following timeline is based on a September 2003 starting date:  
January/February - follow up on prior discussions with the Vice President of Academic Affairs and the Facilitator of the Teaching Center to get their input and suggestions and to determine what levels of organizational and financial support might be available; seek additional allies within the College community to serve on the planning committee.
- February - submit grant proposal to College Foundation
  - March/April - publicize Institute and develop application package
  - May - distribute applications.

- June - review applications and contact prospective presenters.
- July/August - notify participants, conduct planning meetings, and develop formal evaluation plan.
- September 2003 - May 2004 - Teaching and Learning Institute

F. Impact on College community: The members of the Institute will benefit directly, but others, including the students and other members of the College community, will benefit indirectly by this structured, sustained effort that will help to create a dynamic learning environment for the College.

## II. Evaluation

### 1. Is the Teaching and Learning Institute actually scheduled for the following fall?

No. The potential still exists for the TLI to be scheduled as a pilot project for next January. Given the scope of the project and the amount of time necessary to publicize the program, it may have been unrealistic for the TLI to actually begin in Fall, 2003.

### 2. What degree of support have we gotten from the College?

We have received a great deal of support from the Teaching Center, primarily in the form of a commitment of staff time to support TLI activities. Academic Affairs has given support to the concept, and supported our mini-grant proposal, but wanted further clarification of vision and scope before committing resources.

### 3. Did we receive a mini-grant?

No. The feedback we received focused on two primary points. First, that our proposal represented something that the College should do on its own and that it should be supported with existing College funds. Second, our request would only cover a small portion of the total cost and we did not have a commitment for the balance of the budget.

### 4. How effectively have we worked as a group?

In general we seem to have worked well together. We each brought different strengths to the group, and complemented each other. We have had very positive open discussions about our goals as well as practical matters of moving the proposal forward. One thing that hampered our effectiveness was the difficulty in finding meeting times. All of us have very busy schedules and are all doing work at the College above and beyond simply teaching. The needs of other projects have had to take precedence as each of us has faced deadlines in other projects we've worked on.

### 5. In retrospect, should we have approached our project any differently?

An internal scan early in the process would have been helpful. For example, a survey of the faculty could have helped us better assess and define the interest and areas of need for the TLI. It would also have been helpful to meet very early in the process with Judy Gay, who has overall responsibility for professional development, and Mary Griffin, Facilitator of the Teaching Center, so that we would have a better picture of the existing planning process as well as existing plans. Once we learned about the Summer Content Institute, it might have been useful to explore that initiative in more depth.

### **III. Individual Summaries: What We Learned So Far...**

#### **Eileen Abrams**

My project for the Leadership Institute was the development of a design for a Teaching and Learning Institute; my project team consisted of four faculty members from different divisions at the College. Throughout the year, as we worked on our project, I consciously applied what I had learned at the Institute's opening August retreat and initial Friday afternoon sessions about differences in personality traits and leadership styles. I viewed our project team as a "laboratory" in which to use what I was learning and, in an ongoing way, to reflect on the results. I tried to stay attentive to taking the more than occasional risk and to step out of my comfort zone when it came to addressing conflict and assuming responsibility for tasks. I learned some useful lessons about working collaboratively to develop a set of ideas into a coherent plan and about situating a project institutionally.

#### **Francie Blake**

I learned that no matter how good the idea is, we need buy-in from key administrators for a successful project. We were encouraged to design our own project, yet when it came time for support, we were turned down. The result was very discouraging. I will not continue to work on this or any project until I see that we have the support to implement our final effort.

#### **Randy Libros**

Over the years that I have been at Community College of Philadelphia, I have been involved in a number of projects involving a range of topics, including course and curriculum development, collaborative projects with other Departments and with outside institutions, and work on various committees. My work on the Leadership Institute Project (Teaching and Learning Institute) has served to extend and deepen lessons I have learned in other contexts. These lessons are summarized below:

1. Any new initiative must have a clearly defined and well articulated purpose that serves the needs of students or the College.
2. Time needs to be taken to determine who the key players are to make the project work.
3. Time needs to be spent articulating the vision and getting "buy-in" from the key players.
4. Attention to the details of implementation is critical.
5. Attention must be paid to process-both group process for the team that is working on the project, and College processes for implementation of programs.

#### **Jacqueline Wong**

I learned how to work with others in different disciplines, it was not easy for me and I did not feel comfortable with it in the beginning. At first, I did have difficulties to cope with it and I learned to compromise with others in many issues. Another thing I learned from this project is that do not plan too big a project and it will need completely support from key persons, without those support, there will be not project to work on, and do not involve too many people in the project too. It is very difficult to schedule to meet with too many people.