

Executive Summary

At this interim stage of its deliberations, the Center Study Group (CSG) prefers a model of faculty development structured as a “network” rather than a “center.” The nodes in the network would be faculty interest groups dispersed throughout the college, formed voluntarily by faculty who share excitement in some common theme or topic. Within such groups, mentoring relationships would develop naturally and the practical issues frequently associated with faculty development would arise organically: how might IT apply to this teaching interest? how might this research interest apply to the classroom? how might I/we seek grant support for further exploration of this topic?

To assist groups in pursuing such questions, and to help promote the formation of groups, a member of the faculty would be appointed by the Dean of the Faculty to serve as network facilitator. In addition to working with groups, the facilitator would be responsible for maintaining a website and overseeing some centrally located physical space, perhaps in the library. Resources such as sample syllabi, publications or exhibits by faculty and about the scholarship of teaching might be made available in both the “virtual” space of the website and in the physical space, while the website would communicate schedules for interest groups and the physical space would accommodate some of their meetings. The facilitator would also ensure some level of activity beyond individual interest groups, perhaps along the lines of past Senior Week symposia. Administrative support staff would be assigned to assist the faculty facilitator in carrying out these functions.

A primary influence in leading the CSG toward the network model was the repeated testimony of faculty members who have participated in some form of interest group and cited such participation as among the most valuable faculty development opportunities they have experienced. Examples include the “Theory Group” that ran for several years during the 1980s, based in the English Department but involving faculty from a number of other departments and even other colleges in the area; the “Wren Group” (short for “Renaissance”) that intentionally brought together faculty from the “two cultures” of the humanities and sciences; the China travel group sponsored by the Freeman grant; the seminar on “Object Exhibition and Knowledge” based at the Tang Museum, originally sponsored by the Luce Foundation and now by the Mellon Foundation; the faculty research presentations organized by Pushi Prasad as Zankel Chair; the Faculty Learning Community organized by Beau Breslin for faculty new to the college this year. As this range of examples suggests, faculty interest groups can thrive with a minimum of financial support, but they provide means for channeling funds very productively, and they have been successful in attracting outside funding.

CSG envisions the network of faculty interest groups as supplementing (rather than replacing) existing faculty development programs such as those sponsored by IT (for pedagogical and research development), by the Tang (as described above), and by the DOF (e.g., the Pedagogy Series or grantwriting workshops). What the network model offers is not so much a program as a culture of faculty development, responding to a desire clearly expressed on the part of faculty to develop relationships as well as skills.