

# SUNY POTSDAM

## STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK COLLEGE AT POTSDAM

# COLLABORATIONS

## Learning Communities at SUNY Potsdam

Issue 3

March 10, 2009

### Director's Welcome



Welcome to the third issue of Collaborations, the official newsletter of the Learning Communities program at SUNY Potsdam. All of us, faculty and students at the college,

have busy schedules, so our most precious commodity is, without a doubt, our time. And despite all that we need to accomplish each week, we are always searching for ways to make meaningful connections and collaborate in the twofold process of teaching and learning. Learning Communities at the college are an invitation to use our time to develop creative ways for students and faculty to collaborate. Our program aims at fostering productive and effective collaboration at all levels through curricular and co-curricular activities to aid in the creation of as many fresh communities of learning as possible. We believe in bringing together all our talents, interests and skills to produce a caring and reflective academic community at SUNY Potsdam.

### Spring 2009 Workshop

This semester the Learning Communities Workshop will take place on Monday, April 27, from 3:30 to 5:30 pm at the LTEC. Dr. Anne Love, Dean of Academic and Career Development at Wagner College, will be our keynote speaker. This will be a great opportunity for all Fall 2009 FIG teams to come and start shaping up their clusters for Fall of 2009. We suggest that you bring your course syllabi and invite your team colleagues to come along. Call or E-mail the secretary of our program, Ricky Bonner-Murray to save a spot

for your team. Seats are limited. Refreshments will be served and a stipend of \$ 25 will be credited to your flex account.

### Advisory Board

The following colleagues are the current members of the Learning Communities advisory board: Deborah Conrad (Education), Timothy Fossum (Computer Science), Ramona Ralston (Registrar), Shelly Tramposh (Music), Kimberly Bouchard (Drama), Louise Tyo, (First-Year Transitions). We thank them for their dedication to the program.

### Fall 2008 First Year Interest Groups

Last fall we offered twenty seven First Year Interest Groups. New additions were "The CSI FIG" for students interested in the criminal justice major, "Get Psyched" for students interested in psychology, "Globe Trotters" for students interested in study abroad experiences and international connections, "The New Frontier: Bio-Ethics" for honors students, and "American Cultures" for students interested in the cultural diversity of the United States. Three hundred forty-seven Arts and Sciences First Year Students participated in FIGs. No FIGs were offered to Crane students. FIGs varied in size from 6 to 27 students. Four FIGs were residential in the First Year Experience program in Bowman West: "Archeology," "Business," "Natural Science," and "School and Community." The "School and Community" FIG was again our five-course cluster serving the Childhood Education majors.

### Successful Integration: FIGs, the FY Success Seminar and the FY Experience Program at SUNY Potsdam

The Learning Communities program at SUNY Potsdam includes lower division and upper division learning

communities. The lower division learning communities are FIGs or First Year Interest Groups that a number of first year students take together. In most cases, we save some of the seats allocated to our regular course offerings for FIGs. Thus far, these clusters of courses are offered each fall semester to students in the Art and Sciences School and some to students in the Education School.

Some of the FIGs include First Year Success seminars and some do not. In the latter case, if the FIG is loosely organized around a topic, the students gain a sense of group identity through attending the



**Bridging Cultures Luncheon  
Fall 2008**

same cluster of classes each week. What makes the difference, then, for those FIGs that do include the First Year Success Seminar, is that students not only attend the cluster of courses together, but that the seminar gives the whole learning community a chance to develop a common identity through discussions about school requirements, a book assigned, and assessment of the academic progress they are making. If in the courses FIG students take along with others they do not find enough of that structured interaction that brings them together, in their weekly seminar hour FIG students have an opportunity to relate as a group and develop more of a sense of community of learning. In this case, then, the seminar becomes a vital component of the FIG that can have a positive impact on the student participation in the other courses they are taking.

The integration of the program becomes greater in the case of the four FIGs that participate in the First Year Experience program. These four clusters are: Archeology (20 students), Business (25 students), Natural Science (20 students), and School and Community (20 students). These four FIGs include seminars and also participate in the First Year Experience program. In this case, the students in the four FIGs have a more integrated experience because they meet together once a week in the seminar sessions and they reside together on the same building floor and participate in the activities provided

by the First Year Experience program. In addition, the FIG coordinators can develop co-curricular activities (such as get-togethers, field trips) and faculty lunches to assess student progress. Also, our program's summer stipend has helped the Business FIG, for instance, to better structure the semester. The Business FIG faculty have put together a calendar that lists all quizzes and presentations and their due dates so that students know ahead of time when presentations, quizzes, papers for all the FIG courses will take place.

In brief, FIGs at SUNY Potsdam are learning communities that structure the first year semester for incoming students so that they have a more integrated learning experience and successfully transition into the requirements of a college education. Our program strives to facilitate the collaboration of faculty that teach in different disciplines and also supports the growth of the Art and Sciences school departments by offering them a way to attract students to their majors and minors. The inclusion of a FYSS in FIGs and the integration of the FYE program to the Learning Communities program have proven to be very positive steps toward providing a more meaningful first semester academic experience for our First Year students.

### **Instructional Grants**

Last fall semester the Learning Communities board awarded twelve instructional grants to faculty teaching in the First Year Interest Groups (FIGS) and paired courses. Total amount of stipend support: **\$4,356**. The following is a list of the instructional grants awarded:

**FIG: Business FIG;** Activity Funded: Pizza Party and Early Alert Presentation. Faculty person who requested the grant: Meilee Lin; Amount awarded: \$412.

**FIG: Gender: Go Figure;** Activity funded: Film discussion and dinner. Faculty person who requested the grant: Jacqueline Goodman; Amount awarded: \$385.

**FIG: The CSI FIG;** Activity Funded: Pizza Party and field trip to Carleton County Gaol in Ottawa.; Faculty Person who requested the

grant: David Bugg; Amount awarded: \$500.

**FIG: Childhood Education – Block II;** Activity Funded: “Where Are the Books?” Conference; Faculty Person who requested the grant: Deborah Conrad; Amount awarded: \$180.

**FIG: School and Community;** Activity Funded: Presentation “Politics, Schooling and Childhood Needs: Meeting Classroom Needs by Reversing the Real Brain Drain”; Faculty Person who requested the grant: Joel Foisy; Amount Awarded: \$75.

**FIG: Invitation to Health;** Activity Funded: Field trip to Stoney Valley Trails; Faculty person who requested the grant: Kathleen M. O’Rourke; Amount Awarded: \$89.

**FIG: Power and Money;** Activity funded: “Review the semester” social event; Faculty person who requested this grant: Martha Campbell; Amount awarded: \$125.



**Archaeology FIG**  
**Fort Drum Field Trip**  
**Fall 2008**

**FIG: Archaeology;** Activity funded: Fieldtrip to the archaeology unit at Fort Drum and Pizza Party; Faculty person who requested this grant: Benjamin Pykles; Amount awarded: \$540.00

**FIG: Bridging Cultures;** Activity funded: Cinema 10 movie night and coffee, Dinner at Lehman and Dance Night, and Poetry Reading and Authentic Cuisine Dinner. Faculty person who requested the grant: Oscar Sarmiento; Amount awarded: \$500.

**Learning Community: Adirondack Coordinated Environmental Studies;** Weekend field trip to Sagamore Great Camp and Adirondack Museum. Faculty person who requested the grant: Stacy Rosenberg; Amount Awarded: \$500.00

**FIG: Art Studio 1 A and 1 B FIGs;** Activity funded: Field trip to the National Gallery in Ottawa for

the day. Faculty person who requested grant: Mary Jo McNamara; Amount awarded: \$1,050.

## 2008 Summer Stipends

The Learning Communities Board supported the following Learning Communities faculty with stipends to meet and do preparation work for fall. We continued our commitment to support the Environmental Studies coordinated cluster. Total amount of stipend support: **\$2,361.**

**Environmental Studies FIG;** Faculty who requested the stipend: John Omohundro; Amount awarded: \$986.

**Archaeology FIG:** Faculty who requested the stipend: Benjamin Pykles; Amount awarded: \$125.

**Business FIG:** Faculty who requested the stipend: Meilee Lin; Amount awarded: \$500.

**CSI FIG:** Faculty who requested the stipend: David Bugg; Amount awarded: \$250.

**Middle Eastern Heritage Learning Community:** Faculty who requested the stipend: Lora Lunt; Amount awarded: \$500.

## Funding for Learning Communities

The Learning Communities Program offers two types of grants. Development grants are for faculty to prepare a LC and are spent before the LC begins. Instructional grants are for faculty to teach the LC and are spent during the LC. In addition, the program also offer summer stipends for LC teams to meet and prepare for the fall. Visit the Learning Communities website pages: [www.potsdam.edu/academics/specialprograms/learningcommunities](http://www.potsdam.edu/academics/specialprograms/learningcommunities), or contact Dr. Oscar Sarmiento for more information: [sarmieod@potsdam.edu](mailto:sarmieod@potsdam.edu).

## The Learning Communities Website Pages

Find updated information on our program, types of learning communities, instructional grants and summer stipends on our newly designed website pages. We are getting ready to have all FIGS and upper division learning communities offerings for Fall 2009 listed on them. Go to the college’s home page, click on Academics, next on Special Programs, and follow the Learning Communities link.