ACADEMIC Leader

AUGUST 2008
VOLUME 24, NUMBER 8

THE NEWSLETTER FOR ACADEMIC DEANS AND DEPARTMENT CHAIRS

Collaborative Leadership through Strengths Development Part II: Developing a Strengths-Oriented Academic Team

By Eileen Hulme, PhD, and Anita Henck, PhD

This is Part II of a two-part series exploring the concept of leading through a strengths-oriented collaboration. In Part I, Henck and Hulme provided the context for a collaborative leadership model, beginning with self-awareness and self-management. Part II addresses the practical realties of building an academic team by examining a strengths-oriented approach to developing trust within a team.

Overview

Today, higher education faces an unprecedented range of internal and external pressures for change. Colleges face the difficult task of reordering within their organizations in response to everything from an unrelenting demand for expanded technological resources and expertise to public and legislative pressure for access, accountability, and affordability. “The array of challenges that higher education faces today is virtually unparalleled when compared to virtually any other point in U.S. history” (Kezar and Eckel, 2002, p. 435).

Transformation in higher education is often erroneously viewed as a function of top-level administrators who project an inspiring vision to transform the institution. In reality, sustainable academic change efforts within a college or university depend primarily on the adoption of new initiatives at the academic department level (Bennett and Figuli, 1990; Lucas, 2000).

Faculty members at most institutions deeply value their autonomy. While following curricular requirements that align with standards of academic rigor, faculty are empowered to essentially create each class and learning environment based on their own preferences, expertise, and interests. Their scholarship agendas arise primarily from their own personal interests and curiosity. As the need for organizational change arises, faculty members are not always well equipped to function on collaborative teams to address the external and internal demands in a coherent and unified manner. A department’s inability to react swiftly and effectively to changing demands often leaves it on the outside of decisions affecting the academic life of the institution. “When effective teams exist, it is much easier for the chair to lead change effectively and to deal with the resistance that change inevitably triggers” (Lucas, 2000, p. 34).

Developing trust

Trust is an essential element of a high-functioning team in any realm. Yet, the reality is that faculty members do not inherently trust academic administrators. In fact, it is not uncommon to hear that a person has gone to the “dark side” when moving from faculty to administration. The adversarial relationship that often exists, rooted in years of institutional history, stands as an essential barrier to attaining trust. Three elements of a chair’s leadership responsibilities are essential to establishing trust within a department: effective communication, motivating evaluations, and strategic facilitation of change. Embracing a strengths-oriented approach to team development can advance trust-building efforts.

Effective communication

A common mistake in communication is the belief that one person interprets the spoken words of another exactly as intended by the speaker. People’s strengths and experiences have a dramatic effect on the values that guide their actions and shape their perspectives when listening. For example, a person who possesses the strength of responsibility, as identified by the Clifton Strengths Finder instrument, will hear a department chair’s instruction to complete a report by a certain date as a clearly defined deadline that is not to be violated. A timely response is a matter of

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A MAGNA PUBLICATION

ACADEMIC Leader

The Newsletter for Academic Deans and Department Chairs

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The Introduction of Meeting Guidelines Using the Philosophy of Nonviolent Communication

By Gerry Huerth, Cheryl Clausen, and Tina Wade

Have you ever attended a meeting where you felt disengaged? Think about the tone and pace of your meetings. Do some seem to go on forever? Do you feel like the meetings you attend accomplish something? Do the people who attend meetings feel valued and safe to express their thoughts?

At North Hennepin Community College in Brooklyn Park, Minn., we have begun experimenting with a set of guidelines for committee meetings. These committee guidelines were created as an Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) Action Project to address trust and communication on our campus. Eighteen members from all areas of our campus community volunteered to work on this project. We call ourselves the Trust and Communication Committee. Our goal is to encourage open, honest, healthy, and professional engagement in our campus culture.

Starting the project

When the committee sat down together at our first meeting, we really didn't know each other. We decided to start our project by sharing our feelings and needs. What does safety feel like? We started with experience and not theory. We saw how trust and respect developed in our committee. Our hope was to create a set of guidelines that could encourage and re-create what we had experienced in our meetings. We centered our project on the use of "nonviolent communication" (NVC) and a list of needs developed by Marshall Rosenberg. (See www.cnvc.org/.) Two of our members were familiar with this style of communication and others were able to attend one of Marshall's seminars in St. Paul.

NVC is based on the idea that we as humans share many common needs, like affection, understanding, ease, wonder, balance, order, and growth. We often experience conflict with other people because of the strategies we use to get these needs met. Why not move the conversation from competing strategies to shared needs?

Our committee created our first guideline. We used a list of 80 "needs" created by the NVC community as the basis of a check-in and check-out for each meeting. Attendees would start each meeting identifying a personal need from the list that was either met or unmet that day. The check-in took only a few minutes and yet opened up trust and awareness. At the end of the meeting attendees would do a "needs" check-out. What needs were met or unmet during the meeting?

One of the needs expressed in one of our first committee meetings was the need for order. The committee decided to use some practical meeting facilitation techniques for our other guidelines. For example, we suggest that an agenda be electronically sent to attendees before the meeting. Attendees could prepare for topics and also add their own topics. This helped meet attendees' needs for cooperation and active participation.

We also suggested assigning times to the topics on the agenda, including the check-in and check-out, and appointing a timekeeper for each meeting.

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Time can sometimes slip down a rabbit hole and important topics may not be covered. If a topic goes over its allotted time, then committee members have some choices. They can set up an email discussion, create a subcommittee to continue working on the topic and report back to the full committee at the next meeting, or move a less important agenda item to the next meeting and continue the discussion. We found that email conversations can be very helpful for committee members who like to give topics further reflection and gather their thoughts before sharing. The last guideline we suggested was to summarize the meeting and create a definite action plan, including tasks that needed to be completed and by whom, with a timeline.

Implementing the project

The training session that we created to introduce the guidelines is interactive and models what a meeting might look like. We introduced our guidelines on several staff development days on our campus and invited committees to contact us to further guide them in how to use them.

Several committees on campus have begun using the guidelines. For some committees, it was an easy transition, while others had difficulties; some committees did not take the invitation. Currently 12 committees use the guidelines consistently.

There was and still is reluctance on the part of some of our community members at North Hennepin Community College to share personally and to identify personal needs at the beginning of a meeting. Shouldn't we focus on student needs? Why do all this "feel good" stuff? Our Trust and Communication Committee believes that being present to our own needs helps us recognize other people's needs. How many unfortunate, even tragic, crusades have been started by idealist people who "knew" what other people needed, but were blind to their own needs and motivations? We do, however, want to provide flexibility. If a committee feels uncomfortable using the needs language, we ask the members to begin meetings with another icebreaker of their choice. The feedback that we have received is that both methods create a greater sense of trust and respect among committee members. Many committees using the guidelines have commented on the increased productivity and efficiency they provide. Committee members have felt that their needs for clarity, order, and inclusion have been met.

Unexpected results

Shortly after Trust and Communication Committee members were invited to present the guidelines to other campus groups, there was an unforeseen outcome. As conflicts arose on campus, the college community began looking to the committee to help address conflicts using the needs language. We didn't mediate, but simply used our needs-based guidelines to hold discussions with conflicting groups. A culture shift was beginning to take place. Since then, we have used our guidelines to facilitate conversations on campus on controversial topics and address staff development concerns. The feedback we have received has been very favorable, and people were excited to see that the process actually works.

Assessment

In early fall, our committee will revisit committees currently using the guidelines and ask if the guidelines have helped foster trust, respect, and communication. Have they noticed any changes, good or bad, after using the guidelines? We also plan to introduce the meeting guidelines to student groups on campus this fall.

We believe culture change takes time and doesn't lend itself to a one-dimensional assessment. Our committee believes that together, the number of committees using the guidelines, the whole college community using the guidelines in times of conflict, and the beginning of classroom use of NVC techniques, is a positive move in the right direction. Perhaps we staff, instructors, and administrators can model creative, innovative, and even risky problem solving.

Our committee believes that as staff members, instructors, and administrators communicate more safely and clearly with each other, we can work together more effectively to respond to student needs. Our college processes become smoother and more meaningful. Also, cooperative team work is modeled for our students.

Gerry Huerth is a 1st Year Experience instructor, Cheryl Clausen is an administrative specialist, and Tina Wade is dean of mathematics, science, and education at North Hennepin Community College.

If you are interested in learning more about these guidelines, please feel free to contact Gerry Huerth (gerry.heurth@nhcc.edu), *Cheryl Clausen* (cheryl.clausen@nhcc.edu), or *Tina Wade* (tina.wade@nhcc.edu). ▼

Institutionalizing a Student Research Program

By Alan C. Utter, PhD, MPH

Scholarship and the creation of new knowledge, discoveries, and creative endeavors are integral components of all higher education institutions. At Appalachian State University (ASU), this concept has been broadened to include encouraging undergraduate students in research, as we traditionally have done with graduate students, by creating the Office of Student Research (OSR).

The mission of the OSR is to support and promote learning through mentored research experiences with Appalachian State faculty and other national and international scholars and professionals.

The OSR provides a variety of resources, including financial support, to help research become a distinctive feature of the undergraduate and graduate experience at ASU.

In its first three years of operation (2005–2008) the OSR has funded more than 800 undergraduate and graduate student research and travel grant applications (267 grants per year), totaling approximately $225,000. The number of ASU students engaging in research and creative endeavors has increased by 40 percent during this period.

This active scholarly collaboration between students and faculty serves as a unique model to promote an engaged learning environment. Below is a list of some of the programmatic activities that are offered through the university-wide OSR.

Research grants

OSR Research Grants—Faculty- or student-initiated projects from a variety of disciplines are awarded in amounts up to $500.

International Student Research Grants—Awards up to $1,500 are available to undergraduate or graduate students to conduct projects that have an international focus.

Graduate Student Research Grants—Awards up to $400 are available to graduate students for completion of their capstone/exit research project, product of learning, thesis, or dissertation.

BeActive NC/Appalachian Partnership Grants—These projects, awarded in amounts up to $1,000, examine potential benefits of regular physical activity/exercise from a physiological, psychological, epidemiological, sociological, economical, or public health perspective.

Public Service Research Program Grants—Awards up to $500 are available to undergraduate students who would like to use their senior thesis to connect public service with their academic work/research interests.

Graduate Student Association Senate (GSAS) Research Grants—The Graduate Student Association Senate awards research grants up to $500.

Undergraduate Research Assistantship (URA) Program—URAs offer highly motivated undergraduate students the opportunity to work closely with faculty members on their research, scholarship, or creative activity. Students can earn up to $2,000 ($1,000 per semester: fall, spring, summer) and must present their work at ASU's Celebration of Student Research and Creative Endeavors Day held each spring.

Travel grants

OSR Travel Grants—These are awarded in amounts up to $300 for presentation of accepted research or creative endeavors at professional meetings or conferences.

GSAS Travel Grants—The Graduate Student Association Senate awards travel grants up to $500.

Encouraging students to share their research results and creative endeavors with their peers will give them additional self-confidence in their professional development. Students will also learn from their peers when they attend presentations that are given at on-campus research celebrations and discipline-specific meetings. These environments provide unique learning experiences for students and are highly effective in demonstrating how new knowledge is created and discoveries are made.

In ASU's first Celebration of Student Research and Creative Endeavors Day in 1998, 41 graduate and 19 undergraduate students presented and 14 faculty served as mentors. At our 11th annual event, held on April 24, 2008, a total of 122 abstracts were submitted, 75 undergraduate and 47 graduate, and 67 faculty mentors representing 21 academic departments participated.

The following are examples of other student research presentation venues that the Office of Student Research is involved with:

State of North Carolina Undergraduate Research and Creativity Symposium—Twenty undergraduate ASU students representing five departments made research presentations at the third annual State of North Carolina Undergraduate Research and Creativity Symposium on Nov. 17, 2007.

State of North Carolina Research at the Capitol—Six undergraduate stu-

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dents from five departments delivered five presentations to the North Carolina Legislature on April 17, 2007.

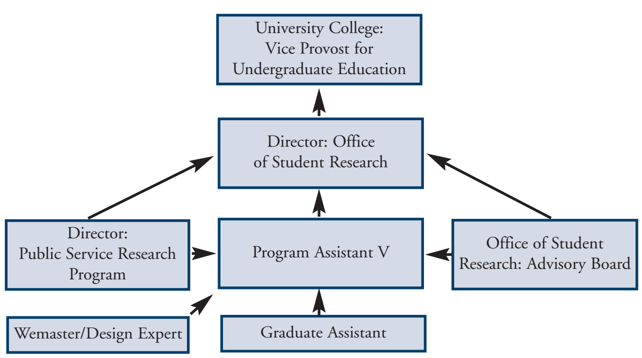
22nd Annual National Conference on Undergraduate Research—Ten undergraduate ASU students delivered eight research presentations at this meeting, held at Salisbury University, Salisbury, Md., April 10-12, 2008.

An important issue when creating a university office of student research is knowing where the budget will come from to financially support its programmatic activities. The following is a list of the internal offices that provide financial support to the OSR at ASU:

- University College
- Be Active NC Appalachian Partnership
- Department of Athletics
- Carol Grotnes Belk Library and Information Commons
- Cratis D. Williams Graduate School
- International Education and Development
- Division of Student Development
- Graduate Student Association Senate

The organizational structure of the OSR at ASU is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Organizational Structure of the Office of Student Research at Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C.



Over the past 20 years, student research programs (especially undergraduate) have grown both at the university and the disciplinary levels, many of them seeking input from professional organizations like the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) and the National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR) in becoming more effective (CUR/NCUR, 2005). In a recent position statement, the attributes of a well-rounded undergraduate research program are discussed (CUR/NCUR, 2005). Among the benefits, from the student perspective, are:

(1) a better understanding of research methods,
(2) the opportunity for co-authorship on publications and presentations,
(3) increased chance for success in researched-based graduate programs,
(4) elevated self-confidence in academic pursuits,
(5) personal/professional gains,
(6) thinking and working like a scientist,
(7) gains in various skills,
(8) clarification/confirmation of career plans (including graduate school),
(9) enhanced career/graduate school preparation and shifts in attitudes to learning and working as a researcher,
(10) empowerment,
(11) involvement in a creative endeavor,
(12) application of knowledge from class, and
(13) experiences and relationships formed (especially with the faculty mentor).

While there may be initial challenges to starting a university-wide office of student research, the benefits for the students, faculty, and the institution in the long term are well worth it. Those who have endorsed student research, scholarship, and creative endeavors have experienced directly its efficacy in advancing student learning, including the knowledge, skills, and dispositions critical to academic success (CUR/NCUR, 2005).

The special collaborative relationships provided by student research are among the most rewarding experiences for faculty members and students. Students who understand how discoveries are made in their chosen fields are well prepared to address the unsolved problems of the future.

Located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of northwestern North Carolina, Appalachian State University is a public institution and part of the University of North Carolina system. With an enrollment of 15,117 (13,447 undergraduate, 1,607 graduate), Appalachian was placed fifth among the South's top master's degree–granting public universities and 10th among public and private universities in the South by *U.S. News & World Report*'s 2008 America's Best Colleges Guide.

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personal integrity. However, a person with the strength of adaptability views time from a more fluid perspective; this person is driven by the demands of the moment. Therefore, a request for a completed report by a specific date may be viewed as a request to attend to the matter when it reaches the level of critical need. Effective chairs realize that they must be concerned not only about what is said, but also about what is actually heard. Understanding faculty members' strengths and experiences can provide essential insight into their communication styles.

Motivating evaluations

Trust is built when an individual perceives that another person is attempting to believe the best about the individual. Academic leaders experience positive faculty relationships when they have favorable expectations for performance. Developing a deep awareness of the unique strengths and passions faculty members bring to their work can greatly enhance a chair's or dean's ability to gain the trust of their faculty.

Chairs are the conduits of meaningful feedback to faculty. A great deal of our existing evaluation system is embedded in a weakness mentality. Chairs spend the majority of their personnel efforts working with faculty members on areas of individual improvement. The key to motivation lies in connecting a person's strengths and passions with the demands of his or her position. As Ryan and Deci (2002) suggest, motivation is driven by a person's sense of competence. Chairs can break through the existing personnel pattern, which focuses on weaknesses, and instead encourage the development of strengths in the pursuit of excellence. This will not only motivate their faculty teams but also instill a high degree of trust.

Strategic facilitation of change

Although change is inevitable, faculty members often feel powerless to effect university-wide change. This sense of victimization creates an overpowering resistance to those changes that are initiated outside the department. By contrast, inherent in leadership responsibilities is that chairs are asked to move their departments in positive and innovative directions. Ron Heifetz describes this responsibility of leaders when he writes: "To lead is to live dangerously because when leadership counts, when you lead people through difficult change, you challenge what people hold dear—their daily habits, tools, loyalties, and ways of thinking—with nothing more to offer perhaps than a possibility" (Heifetz and Linsky, 2002, p. 2).

As academic chairs face the challenge of inspiring thoughtful change, their success is enhanced by a strengths perspective; individuals' strengths energize them for vastly different elements of the change process. For example, faculty members who have the strength of strategic analysis are energized by creating the plans for change. They can effortlessly see the most effective strategy for change and intuitively develop secondary plans if obstacles arise. These individuals are best positioned to be involved in the first stages of creating the plans for change. They are not necessarily motivated by the management of change. On the other hand, people with the strength of discipline might resist an initial effort to change their existing routine; however, they are essential to the internalization and routinatization of the change initiative. They are adept at creating systems that will support the change long after the initial creators have become bored and moved on to other projects. Therefore, by utilizing faculty members' strengths at appropriate times in the change process, a greater degree of participation in the change effort is ensured. Chairs can gain valuable insights into individual faculty members' approaches to change by becoming knowledgeable about their strengths. This knowledge could prove to be the difference between facilitating a successful change initiative and merely managing the turmoil around the resistance to change.

Conclusion

Trust is essential to developing an effective academic department. Although trust is hard to achieve based on historic mistrust and distancing between faculty and administrators, it is worthwhile for department chairs to attempt to achieve trust as a critical aspect of team functioning. Strengths-oriented academic teams provide a new approach to an old dilemma.

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Diversifying the Faculty with Pre-Doctoral Fellowships

By Michael T. Fagin, PhD, and Scott R. Olson, PhD

Most universities endeavor to attract and retain a diverse faculty, focusing aggressively on advertising open positions in a variety of venues. Competing with each other for a small pool of candidates, this often becomes a zero-sum game, with the result that colleges and universities outside metropolitan areas find it difficult to attract and retain a diverse faculty. Instead of competing in this zero-sum game, we should try to make the pool larger—a win-win scenario that truly increases diversity. At Minnesota State University (MSU), Mankato we are having success doing this using a pre-doctoral fellowship program.

Attracting a diverse pool of candidates is not easy for MSU, Mankato. Our rural setting and status as a comprehensive university, to say nothing of the Minnesota climate, make diversifying the faculty a little bit harder. The last decade or two, however, have seen the demographics of our region change markedly, with tremendous increases in the Latino/a and African-American populations and large numbers of Hmong, Anyuak, Somali, and Sudanese immigrants arriving at three times the national average (Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, 2006, p. 11). The result is a 274 percent increase in students of color in our city during the past 15 years (Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, 2006, p. 13). In order to serve these students well, the MSU Mankato faculty needs to be as diverse and welcoming as possible—the key strategy to foster success among diverse students (Turner, 2002).

Unfortunately, this huge growth in undergraduate students of color has not been matched with similar growth in doctoral students of color. Of the faculty members working in higher education in 2003 with earned doctorates, less than 20 percent were persons of color, and the number of Africans or African-Americans, Latinos or Latinas, or Native Americans was less than 8 percent combined (National Science Foundation, 2006). Proportions at MSU Mankato fell short of those small numbers, which led us to conclude that playing the zero-sum pool recruitment game would never bring the sort of diversity to MSU Mankato's faculty that we wanted. This led us to create a pre-doctoral fellowship program, based on the premise that if we supported promising young professionals of color in achieving their doctorates, and provided employment opportunities and extensive mentoring while they were doing so, those positive experiences would lead them to seek open positions at the university. In short, just as we have done with students, we shifted the focus from recruitment to retention.

Implementing a pre-doctoral fellowship program is not complex but does require institutional will and tangible commitment. The desire to diversify the faculty must come from the top, and the president, provost, VPs, and deans all need to be on the same page. Financial resources and support structures need to be developed. We first set aside $80,000 to match academic department support. Then we developed the structures and application processes for disbursement of those funds. Applicants were required to demonstrate that they were enrolled in a doctoral program that could lead to employment in the field. Departments were required to demonstrate that they would provide a light teaching load and an extensive mentoring program to prepare the fellow for work in the discipline. Care needed to be taken to make sure that these procedures met all of the federal, state, system, and campus HR, affirmative action, and equal opportunity requirements. Considerable time and attention went into developing a promotion plan for the program, including general announcements and brochures to all faculty members, regular meetings with college deans, and a website to provide information and access to application forms.

The fellowship covers the first two years of doctoral studies, after which if the fellow is making good progress he or she can be moved into a fixed-term or contract faculty position. Upon completion of the degree, the fellow may be eligible for consideration for a tenure-line position. One thing that makes the program attractive to applicants is that they are paid the same as a full-time assistant professor, but they receive a half-time reassignment for work on their doctorate. Another appeal is the mentoring they receive from the department and dean, as well as from the vice president for institutional diversity and the provost, who get to know each fellow personally and provide mentoring of their own.

Pre-doctoral fellows can be recruited both from within and without the university. Some have finished a master's degree here and get recruited at the point of completing it, but others come from other cities or states just to be in the program. Most of the marketing is through word-of-mouth or via networking at other campuses and national meetings. All of the fellows are enrolled in doctoral programs at other universities in the state or in reputable online doctoral programs so as to avoid hiring any of our own doctorates.

So far, fellows have been sponsored in anthropology, counseling and student personnel, educational leadership, family/consumer sciences, management, sociology, teacher education, urban studies, and women's studies. Many fellows have since attained fixed-term contract lines and even a tenure line. The program has added seven women and three men who may not have otherwise worked here or pursued a doctorate, including two Latinas, six African-Americans, one Native American, and one Euro-American. Linked to other diversity ini-

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Low-Cost, High-Impact Faculty Development: Writing Camp

By Barbara Mezeske

Remember camp? You were dropped off on a Monday morning, left to experience the woods or horses or go swimming with a group of peers you had never met, until Mom and Dad retrieved you on Friday afternoon. Camp counselors organized your day, monitored your activities, and generally ensured that you and most of your new pals were having a good time. Camp was memorable—not always pleasant, but always a break from the ordinary.

Faculty writing camp is a lot like camp was when we were kids, except that the purpose is wholly shaped by the need for scholars to write.

Writing camp runs from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. Monday through Friday some week in the summer, in any convenient campus computer lab. Faculty members show up, sit down, and work on whatever projects they have "back-burnered" all year long: chapters in books or dissertations, book reviews, grant and book proposals, articles, revisions, etc.

There is a lunch hour when everyone can relax, talk about their projects, and commiserate or celebrate over catered food.

Writing center staff or English faculty make good camp directors, but others can certainly do the job as well. The director's first job is to solicit applications and select participants four or five months before the camp. Applicants describe their projects and their goals for the week's work. Applying well ahead of time gives campers time to do their research, gather their data, and collect their sources. And it gives them a deadline. A group of 12 to 15 campers is small enough to create *esprit de corps* and large enough to provide diversity of interests and projects.

The director establishes the ground rules, facilitates first-day introductions, and gives morning announcements. She or he can also ask each participant to turn in a daily goal sheet, and can check on people's progress. In addition, the director is available to consult on any project, to read drafts, to edit, or to suggest ways to reach different audiences. When not called upon to do any of those things, the director writes, too.

Five solid days of writing need to be relieved with some diversions. At my college, we brought in a creative writer during lunch who taught us to write haiku, as a way to limber up our language. We offered 10 minutes of back and neck massage one afternoon. At 2:30 each day, there was a chocolate break. At the end of the week, everyone received a celebratory commemorative T-shirt, which not incidentally served as advertisement for next summer's camp.

Writing camp works because, as one participant noted, there is a powerful "study hall effect." Seated in a computer lab, surrounded by peers who are working, away from distractions of one's home or office or department, faculty members can accomplish a great deal. There is peer support available, and at the same time there is uninterrupted quiet time to work. People forge connections, even though they don't talk much except at lunch or on breaks. Our group wound up socializing midweek at someone's pool and met on Friday night for a final celebration.

The director continues to have contact with camp alumni over the next few months, encouraging people to report on their progress and successes. Participants can also be encouraged to form writing groups to carry on the kind of feedback and support writing camp offers.

The cost was modest. Only the director receives a stipend. The college pays for lunches and break food, and for other playful add-ons. The physical requirements—are already in place. For a modest outlay of funds, the college creates a camp experience that is both productive and memorable.

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tiatives, this is having a strong impact over time in advancing the composition of our faculty.

Critics may claim that the cost is too high or that it takes too much work to implement. To that we say, the pre-doctoral fellowship program may cost more per person than a traditional recruiting program that uses advertising, but what recruitment program approaches 100 percent success? MSU Mankato feels that it is worth every dollar, and all the energy, and more still.

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