



## **EMPOWERING FACULTY THROUGH INITIATIVES THAT IMPROVE TEACHING AND RECOGNIZE EXCELLENCE**

San Jacinto College is a three-campus community college system located in the Houston area. Each campus has its own unique flavor that reflects not only the specific local school districts that it serves, but also the personality of the leadership at each campus. During fall semester 2005, a group of forward thinking faculty selected from each campus assembled for the specific purpose of discussing teaching and learning across the college district. This 30 member committee was known as the Instructional Initiatives Project.

### **Fall, 2005**

The Instructional Initiatives Project was lead by Dr. Linda Watkins, President at San Jacinto College South. At the first meeting in August 2005, the group adopted the following philosophical statement of intent.

*“To create a high-energy teaching and learning environment. To offer leading-edge and dynamic instructional programming in an environment that is built upon mutual respect, continued learning, and passion for what we do.”*

Dr. Watkins used the Appreciative Inquiry Approach to help the group answer the following questions.

- How can we create the above vision?
- How do we ensure that teaching and learning is re-energized, faculty is collaborative in their work, and all personnel continue to learn?
- How do we do more of what we do well?

Each member of the committee was charged to investigate his/her home campus and compile a list of programs that his/her campus was doing well. Results of that investigation showed that the following programs were being successfully implemented.

- New Faculty and Adjunct Orientation/North Campus
- Honors Programs—South/Central Campus
- CETL/South Campus
- Supplemental Instruction Program/South Campus

A six member subset of this committee, the Research Team, was charged with investigating other colleges and universities across the country to find Best Practices that could be incorporated at San Jac. Among the colleges studied were Parkland College in Champaign, Illinois; the Maricopa Community College System in Phoenix, Arizona; Richland College in Dallas, Texas; Kennesaw State University in Kennesaw, Georgia; and Georgia College and State University in Milledgeville, Georgia. This group recommended that the following areas be targeted for additional research.

- Faculty Development
- New Faculty Orientation
- Leadership Development
- Faculty Recognition and Fellowship

Note the common thread running throughout all areas is the emphasis on improving student learning and developing a one-college community.

### **Spring, 2006**

During the spring semester, a Professional Development Committee (PDC) which was composed of a Faculty Coordinator and six members of the original 30-member committee worked to investigate/develop the following initiatives.

- A mission statement and a unit plan for the Professional Development Center
- A district Leadership Program (May, 2005)
- The fall 2006 Convocation and spring 2007 Learning Day
- A district New Faculty Orientation (NFO) program (fall, 2006)
- A district Professional Development website
- An Idea eXchange on the website
- District LearnShops and Learning Communities
- A data base of participants/evaluation for each event
- The campus Centers for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL)
- Campus Dialogue Days, staff development, faculty/staff excellence awards, and Department Spotlights
- A Teacher Excellence Celebration each year
- Criteria for selecting Faculty Fellows

### **Fall, 2006**

The Professional Development Center officially opened its doors during the Fall, 2006 semester. The following initiatives that had been investigated and selected for implementation during the pilot program were introduced to the college community.

- The Professional Development Committee arranged the Convocation speaker for fall in-service and prepared packets of materials for faculty.
- The Faculty Fellows Program began. Faculty Fellows work closely with each other to create a community of faculty across the district. They organize Dialogue Days, Department Spotlights and other initiatives. Two Fellows were selected from each campus through a process, which included a nomination and application designed by the PDC. Each Fellow was given a two course reassignment each semester for his/her service to the college.

- The New Faculty Orientation Program was implemented. NFO is a district-wide program that all new faculty members are required to attend. The idea of NFO is to develop a learning community for new faculty that transcends the boundaries of each campus. Faculty learn all aspects of the college, including student services, faculty development programs, assessment and evaluation, and BlackBoard. The meetings also include discussions of what is and is not working in the classrooms of the new faculty.

A set time was established for the workshops so as to not interfere with the faculty teaching/conference schedules. One Faculty Fellow was given an additional course reassignment to develop and facilitate NFO.

- The Leadership Training Program continued. This is a three-day off campus retreat for potential leaders among campus employees (faculty, staff, and administrators) or leaders who wish to re-energize. They learn about college operations such as budgeting, marketing, and institutional effectiveness, while also learning the qualities of a leader. Sessions are conducted by various campus leaders. Follow-up activities are provided the next year for continued networking. Participants are selected through a process developed by college administrators.
- LearnShops are opportunities made available to faculty and staff that include topics such as active learning, student retention, multicultural environments, diversity, assessment and evaluation and/or other relevant topics. These are offered across the district and are open to all members of the college community. LearnShops are usually 2-4 hours in length and may include more than one meeting. Presenters are experts in the field who are compensated for their services through the budget. These events are organized by the Professional Development Center.
- Learning Communities is an ongoing program that meets monthly to discuss a predetermined topic such as distance learning courses and/or student retention. Learning Communities workshops are organized by the Faculty Fellows through recommendations by the faculty.

- Other events available to faculty and staff are Dialogue Days, Department Spotlights, and Reading Groups. These are specific opportunities for faculty to come together and share ideas on how to enhance teaching and learning. Dialogue Days are informal one-hour sessions that are held in the mornings and afternoons. Department Spotlights are presentations or hands on training workshops conducted by the college community for the college community. Reading Groups are designed to discuss various books and/or articles. The Professional Development Center supports the presenters by ensuring materials are copied, supplies are available and refreshments are at each function. Presenters are compensated for their services according to established criteria. These events are organized by the Faculty Fellows.
- The Teacher Excellence Celebration will be held each year in the spring semester and will honor the faculty who have contributed to the success of the professional development program by participating in and/or conducting workshops or who have demonstrated innovation on their campus. This Celebration will be organized by the Professional Development Committee.
- Each campus designated a space for their Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. The Faculty Fellows manage the space with some administrative assistant support provided by the campus. Each Center provides a meeting area, a computer/printer and workstation for the Faculty Fellows to use and other amenities which will help in the success of the Center on campus.
- The Distinguished Faculty Recognition Program was also developed by a team of faculty members selected from the original members of the Innovative Initiative Project. This program is a three-tier award program that allows faculty to be rewarded for exceptional service to the college.
- All events are evaluated by the participants. The participants are entered into a data base. This data base will be made available to the Vice Presidents of Instruction at the end of each academic year.

*Martha Robertson has been a Mathematics professor at San Jacinto College South for 18 years. After serving on the Innovative Initiative Project, she currently serves as a Faculty Fellow. Martha developed and implemented the New Faculty Orientation for San Jacinto College and served on the Distinguished Faculty Recognition project. She also developed and coordinates the Supplemental Instruction program on South campus. Martha graduated from Baylor University with a BS in Secondary Education and from University of Houston-Clear Lake with an MS in Mathematics.*

*Cecil Dorsey started with San Jacinto College – Central as a Government adjunct instructor in 1973 while employed at the Johnson Space Center. He retired from NASA/JSC in 1997 and became a full load adjunct at the South Campus. In 2002 he was selected as a full time faculty member and in 2003 became the Social Science Department Chair. In 2005 he was named to serve on a committee to develop the Distinguished Faculty Recognition Program for the College and currently serves as a Faculty Fellow. Mr. Dorsey graduated from Lamar University with a Bachelor of Science Degree and received a Master of Arts Degree from the University of Houston in Government.*