Fostering Communities of Teaching

in Departments and Programs of the University

A Statement of the Academy of Distinguished Teachers

April 2001

University of Minnesota
### STATEMENT DRAFTING COMMITTEE

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Summary

The recently-formed *Academy of Distinguished Teachers (ADT)* at the University of Minnesota issues a statement calling for a renewed emphasis on the importance of building and maintaining “communities of teaching” at the level of departments and programs of the University. Although examples of good community are readily evident in a number of departments and programs, some of which are described in the statement’s *Appendix*, there is still much that can and must be done to foster stronger communities of teaching if this institution is to realize its full potential as an institution of higher education. Elements that help foster development and maintenance of good community include creating “environments” where meaningful exchanges and joint endeavors occur around teaching that go beyond necessary administrative responsibilities and formalities. Many factors can erode community—lack of consultation, inequities, highly competitive and non-collaborative environments, and micromanaging. The *ADT* statement offers recommendations for strengthening communities of teaching at the departmental and program level. These include demonstrating the importance of building community through provision of financial support for promoting stronger communities of teaching within departments/programs; doing all possible to “mentor” and support new and established teachers; and insuring that communities of teaching include Teaching Assistants, other graduate students and undergraduate students.
Overview—The Necessity of Community

In 1995, a committee was appointed by University President Hasselmo and the Chair of the Senate Consultative Committee to study and make recommendations for improving teaching and learning at the University of Minnesota’s Twin Cities Campus. This committee met for two years and made five practical recommendations that required little funding for implementation. The first was a call for support to develop a “culture of teaching and learning.” The text of the report emphasized the importance of establishing and maintaining communities of teaching at the level of departments and programs and gave further recommendations for accomplishing this. However, since that time most of the University’s effort has gone into restructuring the administration, changing to a semester-based academic calendar, and elaborating upon existing activities of the University’s centers that support teaching. As the newly-formed Academy of Distinguished Teachers considered possible topics that it might address within its mission to enhance teaching at the University, it became apparent to the members of the Academy that reemphasizing this “call” to build and maintain stronger communities of teaching at the level of departments and programs was an important place to begin.

While surveys of students at the University consistently reflect overall satisfaction with the quality of teaching they receive, the Academy maintains that faculty must seek to improve their skills and to find even more innovative and effective means to enhance their teaching. Strong faculty participation in various programs focused on teaching enhancements at the various campuses attests to the commitment that current faculty have to attaining this goal. Too often, however, efforts to improve one’s teaching goes unrecognized or unsupported at the level of organization closest to “home”—the department or program. Frankly, some units have not built strong communities of teaching that parallel their sometimes
strong “communities of research.” Without vital communities of
teaching at the departmental/program level, faculty are often left
to “rediscover the wheel” or may feel alienated and unappreciated
for their teaching improvement efforts. Indeed within some units,
one’s teaching is sometimes regarded as a “private” matter that
colleagues may be reluctant to discuss with one another. Within
such environments, faculty can erroneously assume that others
don’t share the same hopes and uncertainties about teaching
that they do. When a community of teaching does not exist, those
who aspire to or do invest effort to further develop their teach-
ing skills are left to do so individually and independently without
the support of colleagues. It is imperative that communities of
teaching are fostered within all departments and programs of the
University. Both the specific “culture” of a department or program,
which is often influenced by its specific academic discipline, and
the effectiveness of departmental leadership have great influence
on the community of teaching that is established.

Building and maintaining communities of teaching is com-
plex and the concept itself is not easy to define. It takes strong
commitment and continued effort along with the cultivation of
supportive “values” that are communicated explicitly and implicitly
through all aspects of a department’s/program’s operation. But
when good community exists within a department or program, it
is readily apparent. Thankfully, many departments and programs
at the University of Minnesota have established strong elements
of community that encourage and support thoughtful and effective
teaching. Some of these are described in the Appendix of this
paper.

Unfortunately within a university as large as this one, there
are some programs and departments where little discussion of
teaching occurs beyond necessary administrative responsibilities
and formalities (such as approving new courses). Sometimes
there is little support for those who seek to enhance their teaching
excellence. There may be even a few where indifference, resent-
ment or animosity exist towards those who are strongly committed
to teaching. For example, faculty are sometimes told by adminis-
trators or senior colleagues to “ration” their teaching enhancement
efforts in order to have more time to emphasize the “more impor-
tant” aspects of research and scholarship. Such climates can be
changed and it is clear that this change begins as the University’s
leadership strongly and consistently reinforces the value and importance of teaching as the fundamental purpose for the University’s existence.

This paper describes some of the issues that influence building and maintaining communities of teaching within departments and programs. Through it, the Academy of Distinguished Teachers makes some recommendations that it believes will help move the University forward in its goal to be exemplary in its commitment to and execution of its teaching mission.

Factors that Enhance and Erode Teaching Communities within Departments/Programs

Before communities of teaching can develop at the departmental and program level, it is important that community exist more broadly within the institution. We are fortunate at the University of Minnesota to have made significant strides in this regard through initiatives of the various teaching and learning centers on each campus. These greatly help in fostering community of teaching on an institution-wide basis. Establishment of the Academy of Distinguished Teachers is another development that is significantly helping to elevate the visibility and stature of teaching within the institution and fostering discussions of teaching within the institution as a whole.

Within University departments or programs, establishment of good community implies:

- a strong sense of shared interests,
- a common purpose and motivation,
- a high level of trust and collegiality,
- authentic caring among colleagues about their mutual professional development and prosperity as teachers.

In departments where elements of community are already well established around their research missions, it is reasonable to assume that it should be easier to also build communities around their teaching missions. The same factors that enhance commu-
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nities of research are also important for building communities of teaching. These include:

• regular gatherings around worthwhile professional development activities such as workshops and seminars (not just business meetings),
• informal events with an emphasis on sharing of activities and affirming accomplishments,
• close proximity of offices that can encourage frequent exchanges and discussions,
• availability of ‘commons’ (spaces and times) that encourage colleagues to meet and converse about professional matters face-to-face.

Fundamental to building and maintaining communities of teaching is a strong personal commitment by individual faculty to teaching. All—even those whose own involvement in teaching may be limited—should recognize the fundamental importance of excellent teaching for the University’s mission. Aspects that can be important for cultivating communities of teaching include:

• expressing a strong interest in the teaching activities of colleagues, including observing each other’s classes as a basis for fostering constructive dialogue about teaching (not to be confused with “peer review”)
• advocating “team” teaching by having departmental members collaborate on courses, which necessarily can lead to more substantive discussions about course improvements and teaching in general,
• maintaining ongoing efforts to revise and improve curricula even when imperatives such as conversion to semesters or other urgencies do not exist. This can foster a deeper shared discourse around teaching and learning,
• developing departmentally based projects (especially those that might be grant-supported) that enhance aspects of the teaching mission,
• placing emphasis upon teaching during the hiring process. Search committees and others in departments/ programs can “model” vital communities of teaching for
candidates by engaging them in substantial discussions about a department’s teaching mission during the hiring process, as well as by expecting them to articulate well-conceived perspectives on and approaches to teaching,

- inviting faculty who have participated in teaching enhancement programs such as those sponsored by the University’s various teaching and learning centers to discuss those experiences both formally and informally with their colleagues. This can bring new ideas and enthusiasm to the department/program and lead to follow-up workshops where department members grow in understanding of each other’s teaching while enhancing their skills.

Elements that can erode community fall into the broad categories of administrative and structural/personnel management considerations. Administrators play a crucial role in establishing any institution and the task of leading a department is a difficult one. Administrative factors that can erode communities of eaching include:

- not consulting when making administrative decisions and policies, which may be perceived as imposing administrative decisions and policies.
- utilizing administrative approaches that foster highly competitive environments within the department/program, and especially those that pit colleague against colleague,
- establishing policies that diminish incentives for colleagues to collaborate on teaching endeavors. Cooperation and collaboration are key to effective education and should be central in establishing/maintaining communities of teaching at the departmental or program level,
- micromanaging—there needs to be a balance between showing interest and respecting individuality in one’s approach to teaching,
- permitting inequities in hiring practices, “turf” disputes, and favoritism,
- distributing large administrative and other responsibilities
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to faculty and staff with the expectation that they “do more with less” or “work smarter.” For many faculty and staff, teaching has been the activity that suffers most in the “time crunch.”

There is great diversity among the campuses of the University. Some departments and programs have few members and others many. Because of such inherent differences, there can be no single, centralized approach for structuring programs and fostering communities of teaching within the University. Large departments have inherent limitations that make the building of community more difficult. For example, a large department/program may have no single time when schedules permit everyone to meet as a group of the whole. This can greatly impede establishment of a sense of community and common purpose.

As an ideal, a community of teaching exists when people engage in substantial and worthwhile discussions and express genuine concern in words and actions regarding their colleagues and their students. Management factors can often constrain or undermine communities of teaching. These include:

- perceived unfair treatment and recognition,
- failing to reward and recognize excellent teachers and teaching, particularly when it comes to the practical “chores” and activities that are not necessarily regarded as “scholarly.” Individual and student organization advising are examples of such activities that can be sometimes overlooked or undervalued,
- weighing research publication and grant accomplishments more heavily in matters of retention, merit and promotion than teaching effectiveness and contributions,
- promoting competition among faculty for limited funds allocated to departments and programs,
- establishing teaching loads on an arbitrary basis,
- failing to recognize and act upon “divisions” that might develop within a department/program and particularly between senior and junior faculty.
Existing Communities of Teaching within the University

As earlier noted, it is sometimes easier to recognize a good community of teaching than to define it. Thus, members of the Academy of Distinguished Teachers sought examples of good community within our University for the purpose of illustrating some of the principles of building and maintaining community noted in the previous section. We identified a number of such examples where departments and programs have modeled communities of teaching. These are described in the Appendix and are representative of the entire University, but not exhaustive. They range from considerations of physical space to effective administrative approaches to illustrating a role that graduate students can play within departments’ communities of teaching. As you review these cases we urge you to reflect upon their possible relevance and application within other units of the University.

Recommendations

The Academy of Distinguished Teachers offers the following recommendations with the expectation that, if implemented, they will help establish and maintain stronger communities of teaching at the departmental and program level across the University:

• Building community of teaching must be a high departmental/program priority. Because each department/program must develop and implement its own approach to cultivating communities of teaching, department and program leaders (both administrators and faculty) must work to develop specific plans and strategies for building and maintaining strong communities of teaching. Strategies could include organizing regular teaching-related seminars, retreats, symposia, informal lunches, and other initiatives designed to provide a common time for all faculty and teaching-oriented staff to meet together. Department/program leaders should seek ways to involve members of their unit in discussions of teaching and learning issues that go beyond those needed to resolve rou-
tine matters of department and program administration. *Funding should be specifically earmarked for departments and programs to use in facilitating development of such plans and strategies.*

- **Deans must consistently and strongly promote the importance of building and maintaining community around the enterprise of teaching.** Support of collegiate Deans and other leaders of comparable responsibility is critical for creating opportunities for departmental/program administrative and faculty leaders to discuss approaches for nurturing community within their units. These discussions will likely vary, but as a starting point they could focus specifically on approaches that departments/programs should take to build and maintain communities of teaching. *Such discussions need to go beyond routine curricular and administrative discussions of the “urgencies and emergencies” that often dominate the attention of teaching-related committees.*

- **Provosts and ‘higher’ administrators are key. Resources can help make it happen.** Provosts, in collaboration with other “central” administrators on each campus, should collectively seek ways to tangibly support departmental and program leaders in their efforts to address teaching and learning-related issues. Such initiatives might focus on a variety of issues: fostering a departmental spirit of collaboration and shared responsibility for teaching, defining the use of student and peer evaluations of teaching and learning, and helping faculty/staff better understand strategies that enhance student learning. These efforts, of course, can complement existing programs for new chairs/heads, but should also include veteran departmental/program leaders as well. *Each provost should create a fund from which departments and programs can draw to support events related to building communities of teaching, such as departmental/program-sponsored retreats or colloquia.*

- **‘Mentor’ and resource the teachers.** University leaders and administrators at all levels, in cooperation with the *Academy of Distinguished Teachers* and various teaching and learning initiatives of the University, should offer and promote opportunities to discuss teaching and learning both within and across departmental/program lines. These efforts can and should draw upon resource
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persons from within the University faculty and staff itself. With the “changing of the guard” that is underway for faculty and staff within many units, it is imperative that support be forthcoming to assure that new and junior faculty/staff have opportunities to learn from peers and from “those who have gone before.” This can, in part, be accomplished through continuing and enhanced support of effective mentoring and “resource teacher” initiatives such as the new, early-career and mid-career teaching enhancement programs of the various campuses.

- **Involve Teaching Assistants.** Departments/programs should discuss and implement approaches to fully include Teaching Assistants within their communities of teaching. *Departments/programs should assure that these future colleagues are offered opportunities to experience vital communities of teaching during their graduate education* so that they can, in turn, help to catalyze development of communities of learning in their own right as they progress within their academic careers.

- **Make students a part of the community.** The administration and faculty of the University should endeavor to include undergraduate and graduate students within their definitions of communities of teaching. Students can serve on committees and help organize and participate in departmental-level seminars and discussions. *A student ‘voice’ in such situations can be a very important asset in building community* and assessing effectiveness of programs. Departments/programs should conduct exit interviews with students to gain better understanding of the effectiveness of their educational efforts. They should also systematically query past graduates to gain a longer-term perspective. In their teaching, faculty and staff should encourage cooperative learning and teamwork, which helps prepare students to be “community builders” in their own rights as they move into their lives beyond the University.

APPENDIX
Examples of Good Communities of Teaching*

College of Natural Resources “Conversations about Teaching” (Twin Cities)

The College of Natural Resources “conversations about teaching” series is a tool for engaging faculty and graduate students in discussions about teaching-related issues. Each session consists of three central elements: good food to draw people, a pleasant atmosphere, and a theme that is relevant to teaching and learning and of known interest to faculty and students in the college. During each two-hour session, one half-hour is allocated for meeting colleagues and chatting. This is followed by an hour-long discussion led by someone who is usually from outside the College. The final half-hour is for debriefing the topic and further discussion. The series has been in existence for about five years and is held two or three times per semester. Usually 10 to 20 people attend each session. Past sessions dealt with teaching techniques, student evaluation, curricula matters, and feedback from former students who commented on strengths and weaknesses of the College from their perspective. These sessions have contributed to better teaching and learning because people have shared ideas and techniques in a non-threatening environment. They have also contributed to building stronger relationships among faculty, graduate student, teaching staff and administration of the College.

Unit-based Supportive Communities of Teaching (Morris)

The Morris Campus has stressed both campus-wide and unit-based efforts to promote a supportive climate for teaching and learning. Because of its small size, the Morris campus does not have departmental administrative structures. Individual academic disciplines reside in four academic divisions—humanities, science and mathematics, social sciences, and education, each of which has numbers of faculty that approximate those of some larger departments on the Twin Cities Campus.
On a small campus the Bush Faculty Mentor Program, implemented during the past decade, has played a significant role in encouraging tenure-track faculty in the development of their careers. This has been a particularly important time for the campus because of the very substantial turnover caused by the retirement of the college’s “first generation” of faculty, hired in the early 1960s. Mentorships have helped smooth this transition: they have involved the orientation of tenure-track faculty members to the distinctive characteristics of living and working in Morris, MN as well as within the larger university structure. Partly because of the small number of faculty teaching in each discipline, these faculty mentorships are usually interdisciplinary but often engage faculty members working in the same academic division, although some have crossed divisional lines. An added advantage of interdisciplinary mentorships has been to free the members of a mentorship group from the evaluative stance of a tenured discipline colleague and may allow for more candor and experimentation. While some of the mentorships have focused on research, most have emphasized teaching. Mentorships that have emphasized teaching have worked through numerous issues: advising, diversity in the classroom, using the world wide web, engaging non-majors, teaching large enrollment classes, designing a new course, doing collaborative research with students, teaching outside the classroom, and adapting courses to semesters, among others. Some concrete outcomes of the program for mentees have been the development of educational software for teaching, organizing a program of collaborative research with undergraduates, and the construction of teaching portfolios and a teaching philosophy statement.

In reports of their mentorship activity, the mentors also stress the value of these conversations. They have benefited by questioning academic processes and procedures that have been in place for years. In most instances the mentorship relationship has continued even after the termination of the mentorship year.

Enhancing Community through Pedagogical Innovation in Philosophy (Twin Cities)
The history of the development of a new course in the Philosophy Department, Phil 1006: Philosophy and Cultural Diversity, reveals how a pedagogical community can emerge through curricular innovation. In the fall of 1991, a group of faculty and graduate students began to meet on a bi-weekly basis to discuss the creation of a course that would meet the department’s prerequisite requirement of an introduction to philosophy course while at the same time meeting the University’s requirement of a course in U.S. cultural diversity. The motivation for this course was to try to create a more welcoming environment and a presence in the department for both undergraduate and graduate students of color.

This group discussed a wide variety of issues related to developing this course, including things such as what philosophical criteria could be used to frame this new course, what texts—both canonical and non-canonical—should be included, what pedagogical issues are involved in teaching non-canonical texts, and what kinds of assignments would be most helpful with the new materials. The group used a Bush Foundation grant to bring in several philosophers of color with expertise in diversity in philosophy to give public lectures and seminars to facilitate the project’s development. This helped create a more positive climate within the department for the new course. Eventually, after a somewhat contentious set of discussions, the department gave its approval to the new course. It was taught for the first time in the winter of 1995.

The extensive discussion about the course helped provide its conceptual and pedagogical strengths. Its faculty and teaching assistants were members of the cultural diversity group that created the course. There was an extensive writing component in the course that encouraged students to think not only about the texts they were reading but to also bring philosophical reflection to their own histories and experiences. The course has been taught several times since the fall of 1995 and has been seen as positive, both in terms of student evaluations and enrollment.

Apart for the course itself, the very process of having faculty and students work together on a shared project of philosophical importance had many other benefits. The very existence of this group created a space for people to explore the philosophical implications of non-Western philosophical traditions. Several grad-
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Graduate students integrated elements of diversity concerns into their dissertations. The group was able to publish an article about their efforts in the discipline’s major pedagogical journal. (See “Black Elk Speaks, John Locke Listens, and the Students Write: Designing and Teaching a Writing Intensive Introduction to Philosophy and Cultural Diversity.” Teaching Philosophy, 21 (1998): 35-59). Moreover, the group has created a precedent of having faculty and graduate students work closely together on pedagogical issues. We hope to find ways to foster additional collaborations around teaching issues.

Graduate Students Lead the Way to Helping Promote Community (Twin Cities)

Within the College of Agricultural, Food, and Environmental Sciences, four departments have been cooperating over the past ten years in offering a graduate course on teaching for graduate research assistants who teach in courses of those departments. The collaborating departments are Soil, Water and Climate, Agronomy and Plant Genetics, Horticultural Science, and Plant Pathology. For several years, students in this course have been required to complete a term project that considers some aspect of teaching or course improvement. Often the project is linked to the courses within which the students are executing their supervised teaching practicum, which is also a required element of the course. The final session of the course’s weekly fall colloquium has been dedicated to student presentations of posters describing the results of the projects for that term. Beginning in fall of 1999, the departments began posting selected posters from this session in their departmental showcases in Borlaug Hall where they serve as a further stimulus for discussion of teaching and learning-related topics. They also serve as a reminder of the importance of teaching and teaching improvement in the life of the departments and the University.

Building a Community of Teaching in Agriculture
A localized community of teaching and learning within an institution is best attained when the more general sense of community is strong. The Crookston campus is small, some 50 faculty campus-wide plus adjuncts. There are currently 17 faculty within the Center for Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR). The CANR is multidisciplinary and includes agronomy and soils, natural resources, horticulture, agricultural aviation, mechanized agriculture, food processing and manufacturing, agribusiness management, animal science, and equine management. With such a small core of faculty, it has been necessary to pool expertise to offer credible programs and quality student experiences. Faculty have not had the luxury of being specialists. This has fostered team building and an overall sense of pulling together to get the job done; there is low tolerance for a “slacker.”

A number of activities over the years have nurtured a sense of community within the Center. In the 1980’s, the CANR had a ‘barn-raising’—literally—where everyone worked together to build the first UMC Equine Facility. Later, two additional livestock facilities were built again largely by the CANR faculty and staff, with assistance from plant services staff. Periodic social occasions have also been important to maintain a sense of community within the unit. Each winter, a student-run fair called ‘Ag-Arama’ is staged and offers judging contests of animals, crops, grains, mechanized agriculture, natural resources contests, and culminates in a dance. A number of special awards are also presented. All of these activities bring students and faculty together to work and plan their efforts. It makes faculty better friends—and you want to do things for friends. The recent semester conversion process offered another occasion for CANR faculty to work together and several courses were combined and are now team taught so faculty can combine expertise. In 1993, the Crookston campus made the transition from a 2-year to a 4-year institution. It was a tremendous “growth” experience, causing the campus to think as a community to pool resources, prioritize, develop a new mission statement, incorporate technology into teaching, and import distance education to facilitate new program offerings.

One outgrowth of the transition process was an on-going
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A series of workshops/seminars on the incorporation of computer technology into teaching. These sessions are coordinated by the campus Instructional Technology Center and provide an opportunity for faculty to share teaching experiences and techniques using technology. Still needed, however, is a broader dialogue that explores general teaching and learning issues such as motivation, expectations, assessment, academic integrity, critical evaluations of technology in society and the learning environment, etc. A proposed working title for the series is “Having Fun With Learning” to suggest that we should not take ourselves too seriously as we examine the serious business of teaching and learning.

Building Community in Industrial Engineering (Duluth)

Community is people living and working together to build a better place, enriching the group as each individual is enriched. An academic department can also be a community, where faculty, staff, and students work together in a symbiotic relationship to be a highly effective learning team. Building community, like any major undertaking, takes a lot of work. In the case of an academic department, it also requires a change in culture since people in general may tend to resist change, and faculty are no different. With perseverance, effort, and commitment to a common vision, community can be built. In Industrial Engineering, community building has been undertaken as a strategic goal. The community is defined as the faculty, staff, and students, of course, but also the many companies with whom the department does outreach and design projects.

The department is building our community by a number of means. A departmental emblem has been adopted, which helps people identify the department as part of a team. A vision statement has been developed and is posted it on bulletin boards and the department’s web page to remind all of the department’s common purposes and aspirations. The department holds formal meetings less often than in the past, which helps people come and contribute because they are seen as more important; conversations in the hallway or in the coffee room are sufficient for distributing
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information, gaining feedback on minor issues, or discussing how our labs and lectures can help with learning. New “traditions” have begun, such as participating in National Engineers Week, Homecoming, and hosting “fun nights” in the labs where the students, staff, and faculty can make things just for the fun of it—a setting where learning is transparent and faculty can also learn from students.

This community building process has not been free of challenges. There has been some difficulty in gaining the “buy-in” from everyone on what is needed for a learning organization, but this raises questions for all about whether change is truly needed or if it is just for the sake of change. Turnover in faculty has made it more difficult to build and sustain community, but new people bring new strengths and open eyes to new ideas in teaching and learning. Building community is well worth the time and effort.

Fostering Communities of Teaching within the Department of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (Duluth)

Teaching and learning within the Department of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (HPER) is centered around the four majors offered by the department; exercise science, health education, physical education and recreation. Each major has an identified program coordinator who has an administrative function to manage the courses, sequence of offerings, and curriculum of the major. Faculty have a primary association with a particular program and program coordinator. Thus, there are natural communities of faculty clustered around their respective content areas. The organizational structure described above implies rigidity of purpose and thought. However, the disciplines within HPER have a historical interdependence and this has been increasing in recent years. The curriculum committee of the department is a committee of the whole. The degree programs have core courses that are required of all majors. It is not uncommon for a faculty member from exercise science to teach a course for health education or physical education, just as faculty from health may teach a course for recreation. This interdependence is a consequence of a limited number of faculty to
deliver the degree programs offered by the department. But this interdependence is also perceived as a strength. It has provided a balance for all programs offered by the department. In addition, it recognizes the scope of the respective disciplines, where they hold similar viewpoints and where they differ. Semester conversion prompted valuable discussions between faculty. There is much work yet to done. However, the best is yet to come.

Ways of Building Community in a Communication Department (Duluth)

No secrets—that’s the most important way of building community in the department. Tell everyone everything. Of course, that’s a slight exaggeration. But the principle is this: Keep everyone informed to the greatest degree possible. The Department Chair reports back to the entire department from each and every administrative meeting she attends by sending a quick email describing matters considered at the meeting. The Chair visits classes, always asking the faculty member in question well ahead of time as to the day the visit should take place. The Chair invites all faculty to visit her/his classes at any time, and actively encourages them to do so. The Chair holds regular department meetings, usually every other week and allows at least 15 minutes at the end of every meeting for going around the room and asking each person to say whatever they want to say, to ask questions, to make announcements, share news, etc.). The Chair doesn’t bring up matters at department meetings that haven’t been introduced ahead of time or noted in the agenda. The Chair is a ‘cheerleader’ for the faculty and lets everyone know when a faculty member has received a special award or achieved a significant accomplishment. The Chair drops by faculty offices regularly and visits briefly as well as expressing small gestures of appreciation through notes, cards, etc.
There is a strong sense of community in Education Department, although its increasing size (59 faculty) is making it harder to maintain. What helps a lot is a shared commitment to the college’s and department’s philosophy (a Learner Sensitive Teacher model, with themes of diversity, collaboration, reflection, empowerment, and technology). The department has a goal of preparing students for a particular end (teacher licensure and ongoing accreditation). The department head works hard to foster a sense of community —of “family” through the way she invites involvement, offers encouragement to work together, and creates a welcoming atmosphere in departmental meetings (even bringing snacks for every meeting). Faculty regularly invite colleagues to collaborate in research, grant writing, and teaching initiatives.

Creating Community through the Design of the Physical Environment (Twin Cities)

The Interior Design Program in the Department of Design, Housing, and Apparel has used its physical space to create place and community for students. The program’s studios and community spaces are located on the fourth floor of McNeal Hall on the St. Paul campus. There are about 180 students who spend time in this area each week. The space consists of two studio spaces, faculty offices, and three public/community spaces. Two of these are informal seating areas that invite students to work together in teams, talk about assignments, or just rest and catch up on their reading. The third space is a formally arranged space called the “commons.” Under a skylight, there are seating areas for four and a table with chairs. Faculty members use these areas for lunches, meetings with one another, and meetings with students. Students use this space for the same purposes. Students know that almost every
day they can find faculty around this table during lunchtime. This gives students opportunities to ask questions and share concerns with faculty. Often students and faculty eat together or discuss a studio project. This area also has a ‘critique’ space so work can be pinned up on the wall where anyone who passes by has an opportunity to examine the work and critique it.

The design of physical space has facilitated the development of community for the interior design program. Such physical spaces provide a place where students can identify with their program, interact with other students, and communicate with faculty. We intend to modify other spaces in ways that will encourage additional interaction, and which may foster identity with the program and eliminate barriers to establishing community.

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