NECIT

The New England Center for Inclusive Teaching Comes to UNH; Intense and Sustained Discussions about Diversity and Pedagogy Funded by the Ford Foundation

Throughout the fall of 2005, 7 UNH faculty members from a range of disciplines and across colleges have been participating in the New England Center for Inclusive Teaching (NECIT). NECIT is a collection of academic institutions in the New England region whose self-selected faculty participants engage in weekly development seminars on their campuses and are committed to disseminating and facilitating pedagogical approaches to diversity, to promoting curriculum and institutional change in areas relevant to their institutions. UNH faculty participants include the following: Jennifer Selwyn (History), Victoria Banyard (Psychology), John Nimmo (Family Studies), Marc Herold (Economics and Women's Studies), Thomas Pistole (Microbiology), Judy Sharkey (Education), and Monica Chiu (English).

NECIT emerged out of a University of Massachusetts Boston teaching program called the Center for Inclusive Teaching (CIT), a faculty-governed organization focused on such issues as inclusive teaching and learning, academic excellence, and curriculum transformation. NECIT is committed to promoting high quality inclusive education that engages all students in critical reflection and dialogue. It has been funded by the Ford Foundation, but funding expires in January of 2006, prompting regional NECIT board members and faculty fellows to discuss its future existence, to engage in grant writing, to move the directorial board out of Boston and into participating campuses, and to invite other regional colleges and universities to participate.

NECIT is an exciting and valuable pedagogical forum at UNH, perhaps the first time that a group of UNH faculty has been offered sustained time (a course release for each faculty participant) to discuss diversity and pedagogy. Professor Jennifer Selwyn states, "Participating in the NECIT faculty seminar this fall has been one of the highlights of my seven years at UNH. It has been tremendously gratifying to have an intimate, engaged forum in which to discuss with colleagues how to build the kind of inclusive, dynamic, and diverse university culture toward which we all strive. Our conversations have ranged widely from comparing our individual classroom challenges, strategizing how to build links across departments and colleges, to brainstorming how we might convince reticent faculty colleagues and students to view creating a diverse campus as a positive necessity. Throughout the semester, these conversations have been rich and stimulating, with much-needed laughter punctuating the most serious discussions."

Professor Victoria Banyard says this of her experiences: "NECIT has been an amazing and unique opportunity here at UNH. I've had the chance to consult with seven thoughtful colleagues from around the university about key issues of inclusive pedagogy and curriculum as well as faculty roles in institutional change. It has provided the space to help me really consider how to make changes in the way I teach and given me the support

and courage to do so. I will draw on the relationships formed and the knowledge gained in this forum for years to come."

Because NECIT seminars are occurring simultaneously with the introduction of the Diversity Plan and the Discovery program, its existence at UNH affords a lively exchange of ideas and insights with other faculty involved in pedagogical issues involving diversity. The group is eager to work with staff, students, and other campus groups and centers.

In January of 2005, NECIT offered a day-long seminar, through Teaching Excellence, called "Risks and Consequences," an interactive session exploring discussants' and participants' classroom scenarios that challenged both teachers and students or revealed unintentional learning models. In October, members of the seminar attended the second annual NECIT conference at the University of Massachusetts Boston, each presenting in a formal session. NECIT participants Vicki Banyard and Monica Chiu, the latter NECIT's conduit to UNH, attended a New Hampshire College University Council lecture and workshop in early November at Daniel Webster College, Nashua, where speaker Professor Roberto Ibarra discussed his ideas about multicontextuality in the campus culture. The UNH NECIT seminar group is currently drafting a list of proposals for the Vice Provost of Diversity, Wanda Mitchell, outlining what the group believes are useful (even necessary) tools for engaging the faculty in diversity initiatives. Monica participated in a series of summer 2005 discussions on strategies for funding and sustaining NECIT as a multi-institutional, faculty-led resource. She plans to discuss bringing NECIT to UNH-Manchester and area colleges, and the NECIT group will propose that a second session, to convene in Fall 2006, be made available (with funding) to 6-7 other UNH faculty members. Given the overwhelmingly positive experiences the seminar has provided all seven members, and the sound ideas emerging from it, NECIT members are eager to support and sustain this strong faculty base of participants who will slowly change the teaching culture on campus.

UNH thanks the following centers and offices for their generous funding to NECIT: the Provost's Office, Teaching Excellence, the Center for Humanities, the Presidents Commissions, and the Graduate School.

For more information about NECIT, to express interest in next year's pending seminar, or to convey ideas or comments, please contact any of the NECIT participants above or the NECIT faculty fellow Monica Chiu: 862-0732 or monica.chiu@unh.edu.