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Introduction: Developing Student-Faculty Partnerships at Bridgewater State University

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A Brief History of Faculty Development at Bridgewater

Bridgewater State University (BSU) faculty are very proud of the culture of faculty-led faculty development that has contributed to student learning and faculty quality of life for the past decade. To understand the story of our rich, productive, and rather unique culture, it is useful to know our origin story, which we offer here in brief.

Faculty development began to thrive on our campus at the nexus of a number of college-wide initiatives. The then-new Core Curriculum (2004), with its writing, speaking, and quantitative intensive courses taught to first- and second-year students, demanded a different kind of teaching than our faculty was then prepared to do. The University committed funding and faculty time to help all faculty reflect on their teaching practice, learn new ways of engaging students, and introduce high-impact practices into our teaching repertoires.

This initial push for faculty-led faculty development was supported by the Project Compass grant (2006), a NERCHE multi-year grant that funded improvements on New England public campuses in support of the retention of underrepresented populations. The mantra of Compass, to “teach every student,” has become the hallmark of faculty development on campus. At this time, the Office of Teaching and Learning (OTL) came online. OTL has continued and amplified the efforts of faculty on campus, learning from and taking advantage of the vast faculty knowledge already in place. In 2011, under the auspices of a Davis Educational Foundation Grant, a team of faculty and director-level administrators charted a further course for faculty development at BSU through to 2015.

What we hope becomes clear through the essays included in this issue of *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education* is that faculty development at BSU has, to our institution’s credit, developed most fruitfully out of the intersection of what our faculty have been interested in doing with and for our students and the wider community—things like sustainability, social justice, undergraduate research, just to name a few—and what the institution and its leaders have determined to be the values and goals of BSU. As such, faculty development as a movement has grown and changed over the years, emphasis has shifted, and new priorities have risen up.

Additionally, the unique structure of the leadership of faculty development at BSU has also been a living, breathing, changing thing: faculty (new faculty and more senior folks, faculty who identify as scholars or as teachers, part-time and full) rotate in and out of different leadership positions (made possible through Alternative Professional Responsibilities, which are 3-6 credit per semester course releases) so that new ideas and fresh perspectives inform our practice at every turn (and, it must be said, the individuals involved in faculty development are energized by the experience as well). And this is where you, reader, find us now: we are actively engaged in exploring what student/faculty partnership looks like—partnership in all its many definitions and iterations.

Before we continue: a word about how this collection of essays came to be. Annually, the faculty development leaders on campus host a faculty development day. Themes and speakers are determined by the faculty at large in partnership with the leadership group and the OTL. Last year, our theme was “the signature experience” at BSU. In other words, what academic and co-curricular experiences defined a student’s time on our campus? In support of that theme, we invited Alison Cook-Sather to campus. We were intrigued and energized by

what Alison had to say about working with students, and, too, recognized in her work something of our own teaching values. The day was a great success. Alison's keynote address and follow-up workshop generated great excitement about the possibility of partnership with our students even as we didn't entirely understand what that meant or what it might look like on our campus.

To support us in defining what student-faculty partnership could look like on BSU's campus across various courses and programs, Alison returned to BSU in February for a half-day workshop centered around a deeper understanding of partnership. She had us identify existing partnerships or opportunities to grow partnerships on our campus. After that workshop, Alison invited our faculty development leaders to contribute essays chronicling existing and developing student partnerships on the BSU Campus. Initially, many of us (Lee included) weren't even sure we had partnership experiences to write about. But upon more thoughtful reflection, some nudging, and Alison's return visit to campus for a kind of writing boot camp, we are happy to present to you ten stories from the BSU campus chronicling our evolving thinking and programming around student/faculty partnerships.

Overview of the Essays in this Issue

The result of all faculty development is that people understand pedagogy and they understand the range of ways student can participate in their own learning process. Interestingly, one theme that connects the essays in this collection is that they started out not as true partnerships between faculty and students but rather as collaborations focused on supporting student learning. In most cases (Maura Rosenthal is a notable exception) students were paired with faculty to support learning objectives in various courses or other academic programs. Faculty identify initially seeing the relationship more hierarchically: students would be the beneficiary of these partnerships. But, to a person, all of these authors identify, by the end of their time working in collaboration with students, the ways in which *they* learned about themselves as teachers, about the courses they thought they were teaching (versus the courses they were teaching). They worked their way to partnership—from hierarchy through collaboration.

We begin with three essays that document formal, programmatic relationships between students and faculty that grew into something more—something akin to true partnership and, additionally, inspired those involved to want future student/faculty partnerships to be more explicitly reciprocal. In MaryBeth Tobin's and Caitlin Golden's essay titled "Peer Assisted Learning: Unexpected Benefits for all Stakeholders – Students, Peer Leaders & Faculty," Tobin and Golden share their experience of co-leading a peer-leader program and the unexpected benefits that inure to students, faculty and especially, peer leaders. They share the value of peer leader feedback in their efforts to continually improve the program and in informing their own pedagogy in an entry-level financial accounting course.

In the second essay, Minae Savas's, Dori AuCoin's, and Fernanda Ferreira's "Learner Empowerment: A Collaborative Approach to Peer-Assisted Learning in Global Languages," Savas, AuCoin, and Ferreira share the trajectory of the Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) program in the Foreign Languages Department, which has undertaken a series of projects to build an encouraging and non-judgmental learning environment, specifically in language learning, and to incorporate a partnership between learners, tutors, supervisors and professors. In Jennifer Manak's and Jenny Olin Shanahan's essay, "Learning to SOAR: Partnering with Underrepresented Students in Research," Manak and Shanahan examine the mentor relationships that developed within the SOAR (Student Opportunities as Apprentice Researchers) program. The program matches underrepresented students with faculty in research partnerships that facilitate faculty scholarship and improve the retention and success of students from underserved groups.

The next four essays in this issue involve classroom-based partnerships through which faculty invite students to co-create and co-manage the entire classroom experience in ever increasing degrees. Maura Rosenthal's essay, "Sharing Power to Promote Deeper Learning," explores how Rosenthal partnered with an entire class during the semester to solve a problem in the book club learning activities she had planned. She noted, "The more I share power with students, the less I feel like I am in a constant tug-o-war where I am pulling students towards learning course content that I chose for them and they are resisting my pull." Anne Doyle's essay titled "Creating a Learning Environment with Shared Responsibility for Assessment" focuses on Doyle's work with her Introduction to Linguistics course. She shares her journey as she discovered that her goals were best served when she maximized the possibilities in her classes for partnership through inviting discussion about the focus and purposes of key assessment in the course.

In Susan Eliason's essay, "Using Student Feedback to Fuel the Family Project," Eliason shares her desire to create with students more authentic assignments that enhance learning through the use of the project approach (Pianta, 2006). The fourth essay in this set of classroom-focused partnerships is Karen Richardson's, Deborah Sheehy's, and Misti Neutzling's. In their essay, "Students as Partners with

Faculty in a Teacher Education Program, Richardson, Sheehy, and Neutzling share their experiences of working with student partners within a Physical Education Teacher Education Program. Through partnership they more deeply understand how their role as professor was a barrier to open and honest student-faculty communication.

Finally, the last set of essays explores partnerships evolving beyond the boundaries of the classroom and even beyond the campus. Lee Torda, Kirsten Ridlen, and Marjorie Howe write about their experience co-creating a writing and travel experience in Israel in their essay "Chaos in the Promiseland: Mentorship as Partnership in Undergraduate Research." They explore how they all negotiated respective expertise and inexperience while traveling, reading, and writing in a study abroad/undergraduate research opportunity.

In their essay, "Co-creating Equity and Justice: Student and Employee Partnerships for Racial Justice," Willison et al. share reflections on partnerships between campus staff, faculty and students to put on three specific social justice events designed to initiate discussion and raise awareness about racial justice. The final essay in this set and the collection overall is Roben Torosyan's "Refreshed & Humbled: Altered Assumptions About Power and Payoffs." Starting with a focus on a long-term, shifting relationship with work-study students serving as students consultants in his class, Torosyan's piece takes an outward turn as he describes how he included graduate student voices from around the country as he wrote an external grant to support partnerships between research and teaching intensive institutions.

A Continuum of Emerging Partnerships

As the essays in this issue make clear, we are in different places in our partnerships with students on our campus. Some are quite purposeful and planned for, but many are partnerships that began via a different kind of relationship. If we consider how the development of student/faculty partnerships fits into the larger picture of faculty development and student engagement on our campus, we start with faculty development that asks us to design experiences to engage students in our classes. But there comes a moment when you are going down that path where, if you really mean it, you suddenly cede the perfect control you have over the learning environment and invite your students in, invite them to not simply be engaged but also to design and redesign what that engagement looks like. We, and our colleagues, find ourselves chronicling multiple versions of this moment in the development of student-faculty partnerships at our institution.
