2015-2016 Marian Wright Teaching Circles

The Thompson Center for Learning and Teaching is pleased to announce that seven teaching circles have formed for the 2015-2016 academic year. It is not too late to join a circle if you see one that interests you – just contact the facilitator directly.

Focus on Assessment & Documentation – facilitated by Della Becker-Cornell, Director, Early Childhood and Development Center, dellac@umflint.edu and Aviva Dorfman, Associate Professor, Early Childhood Education adorfman@umflint.edu.

This year our group will devote attention to comparing assessment systems, learning new and adapting old practices to support assessment, and developing methods of classroom documentation. To this end we will study The Work Sampling System, Child Observation Record, and The Ounce Scale and camber their checklist items and categories as well as definitions of milestones and expectations. Beyond this evaluation, members will continue to study methods of making learning visible, following principles of Reggio practice, and examine and study means of creating documentation of individual children’s work as well as long term studies of small group projects and large group learning activities. Through the Teaching Circle we will have the opportunity to share and collaborate about our struggles and successes. Documentation of the processes and final reflections may also be shared as final presentations at the end of the Teaching Circle.

Transitioning ELP Student to Mainstream Academics – facilitated by Anna Eddy, English Language Program, annaeddy@umflint.edu.

The English Language Program (ELP) is designed to help students improve their spoken and academic English and prepare them for the university courses. The program consist of 6 levels. Our team would like to work on redesigning Level 6 Reading and Writing course and Level 6 Listening and Speaking course to provide for rigorous linguistic and academic preparation for the international students enrolled on the ELP. We plan to invite faculty teaching general education courses as guest speakers to elicit information on how best prepare our students for the UM-Flint Bridge program and the academics in general. In addition, we plan to explore the possibility of creating a textbook that can be used in these courses. The Teaching Circle meetings and funds will allow us to collaborate with university faculty, redesign the courses, and create new teaching materials.

Community/University Collaboration for Global Cross-Cultural Understanding: Phase II – Enhancing the Interface and Dialogue – facilitated by Ernest Emenyonu, Professor, Africana Studies, eernest@umflint.edu.

The first phase of the topic of this Teaching Circle which began last year was largely experimental. The goal was "to explore through carefully thought-out collaborative pedagogical approaches and strategies, the ways in which public school teachers can gain insight and awareness of multicultural works that would contribute to a rich understanding of self and others. How can we get teachers to invest in updating their teaching tool kits to include works by writers they may not have studied or read in college? How can we get parents and community to realize that their children need to be fully part of the global community?" The response from invited teachers & community members was encouraging and productive. The second phase will now focus on selected work/s of a visiting writer for close study, analysis and application.

This teaching circle will participate in a critical analysis of the African Centered educational model as presented in the book: Alchemy of the Soul: An African Centered Education. The intent of this study is to explore possible alternatives in pedagogy for effective academic achievement of underrepresented groups.

Secondary Redesign Course Coordination – Facilitated by Karen Salvador, Assistant Professor, Music Education, ksalvado@umflint.edu

As instructors of the new courses [and potential teachers of the courses that have not yet run] in the newly redesigned secondary teacher education program, we will be meeting to work together on course design, so that the courses in the professional coursework sequence are scaffolded to build, with increasing sophistication, the skills, knowledge, and dispositions we expect in our teacher candidates at the end of the program. We hope to articulate a spiral curriculum through these courses, and that means that each of us has to understand what is happening in each of the other courses, and that there will need to be some consistent elements in each course, even within the flexibility of our academic freedom. We are interested in this aspect of teaching because we want our teacher candidates to be well-prepared and think that collaboration is an important way to accomplish this. We also want to model for our students the kinds of teaching we would like them to undertake, which includes this kind of thoughtful curriculum alignment.

Public Speaking Teaching Circle – facilitated by Michelle Silva, lecturer, Communication, misilva@umflint.edu

COM 210: Introduction to Public Speaking is general education course that is taught close to 25 times every academic year by multiple faculty. Recently, COM 210 has expanded its student population to include dual enrollment students, as well as four sections reserved exclusively for students in the Promise Scholar program. This Teaching Circle would bring together 8 faculty who regularly teach the course to discuss the implications of COM 210’s changing student population, and to give those instructors a space to share best practices in the course. The group is a mix of tenure stream faculty, full time lecturers, and part time faculty. Topics will include pragmatic issues such as textbook selection, assignment structure and teaching techniques, along with broader issues such as teaching public speaking for increasingly diverse students and better integrating program assessment into courses.

Development of STEM Learning Community to Improve Student Success and Retention – facilitated by Jill Slater, lecturer, Biology, jislater@umflint.edu.

The teaching circle aims to determine the goals and implementation method(s) of a non-residential discipline specific (STEM) learning community. Through the teaching circle, faculty will first identify the types of academic and social support our students need. Types of support could include supplemental instruction, tutors, peer support, advising, psychosocial interventions and instructional support. This will aid in developing new knowledge about our STEM students, particularly our minority student population, hence, improving faculty knowledge of the specific needs related to our unique student population. Faculty in the teaching circle will also discuss how to implement the learning community and how to recruit and retain students in the learning
Secondly, the teaching circle will assist in the identification of the goal(s) of the learning community. Without effective programs, talent will be wasted, and the country will be unprepared to meet the STEM challenges of the twenty-first century (Rinaldi et al., 2015). Through the learning community, we aim to improve student performance and overall STEM program retention. The circle will investigate specific goals for the community and select appropriate instruments to measure the goals. Eventually, a long-term study will be conducted on STEM students as they advance through their academic careers.

The circle will address the community with the University in mind. The circle was developed with diversity in mind as three CAS departments are represented. These different perspectives will bring to light to the unique challenges and goals associated both within each department and at the college/university level. The data collected from the learning community study will become available to faculty both within and outside of campus so that all can gain knowledge from our learning community and assist the expansion of our project.

Reference: