



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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CELEBRATING TEACHING EXCELLENCE: AN SPJC PERSPECTIVE

Within a period of five years, more than 300 St. Petersburg Junior College (SPJC) faculty, including department chairs, have had the experience of attending the NISOD International Conference on Teaching Excellence. These single experiences have accumulated into a collective professional development account that pays interest to the college in the currency of renewal, camaraderie, and ultimately a better education for SPJC students.

SPJC's comprehensive faculty participation in the annual NISOD International Conference on Teaching Excellence began as a recommendation from faculty leadership. Individual SPJC faculty members had attended the conference and found it to be an outstanding professional development experience. Consequently, in 1987, Faculty Governance Organization leaders raised the idea of providing all full-time faculty members with the opportunity to attend. This recommendation came at a time when the college was reviewing its staff and program development activities, and looking for ways to improve faculty participation in professional development.

The review revealed that not only was a small percentage of faculty and staff attending professional conferences but that, for the most part, the same people were participating each year. A special effort was needed to involve the high percentage of veteran faculty on continuing contract who were not active or minimally active in professional development. That special effort would have to be in quality activities that pertained to teaching and learning. The NISOD conference appeared to offer the quality and comprehensiveness on which to center such a major professional development initiative.

Responding to Faculty Governance interest, the District Board of Trustees agreed to support (with Staff and Program Development funds and auxiliary funds) the commitment to provide the opportunity for all full-time faculty to attend the NISOD Conference on

Teaching Excellence over time. As the plan was put into action, every effort was made to contain costs. To offset transportation, hotel, and registration costs, the college negotiated special prices. The airlines discounted fares as much as 70%. Hotels and NISOD reduced rates and registration fees for this large number. Faculty members paid for their meals and lodged three to a room.

In addition to containing costs, the college built in accountability. Attendees submit evaluations and discuss how better to enhance the value of the experience in improving instruction and services at SPJC. Faculty members report in discipline meetings and other settings on useful programs and practices they encountered at the conference.

Primarily veteran faculty members composed the first group attending the NISOD conference, and their responses indicated that their participation achieved the main goals of the initiative: their experiences, told to other faculty and staff, made going to the conference a highly visible, very worthwhile, and "special" professional development project; and their enthusiasm generated excitement among their colleagues.

The positive experiences of each succeeding group have continued to confirm the value of this professional development initiative to the college. The experience has increased morale and resulted, ultimately, in better working relationships collegewide. Other direct benefits have accrued:

- The activity is important in fulfilling the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) professional development requirement for accreditation.
- Faculty and staff have the opportunity to learn about teaching techniques and educational practices that can benefit students and improve SPJC's effectiveness.
- Attending the conference has led to faculty and staff organizing "mini-NISOD" staff development activities on their own campuses for their colleagues—formal presentations and sharing materials about selected presentations faculty attended at the NISOD conference. Information and knowledge are brought back and used to help improve education at SPJC.



- Faculty and staff have the opportunity to interact with their peers from community colleges nationally and internationally, thus learning about other practices and programs and establishing helpful networks. This results in SPJC faculty and staff being introduced to the latest practices and technologies, as well as having a basis of comparison by which to recognize their and SPJC's own strengths and points of excellence.
- Providing the opportunity for faculty and staff to attend the conference rewards employees for good work.
- Giving faculty and staff members the opportunity to attend the conference is a highly visible sign of SPJC's commitment to faculty development.

One final note: From the beginning, SPJC viewed this professional development initiative as an investment, and it has paid dividends. Its continuing priority was reaffirmed this year when the budget crunch required reductions. The Faculty Governance Organization and the District Board of Trustees concurred in maintaining the commitment to send faculty to the NISOD Conference on Teaching Excellence, with the cost of attendance covered by auxiliary funds, rather than by general tax revenues from the state appropriation. This action underscores, once again, SPJC's belief in NISOD conference participation as one of the best investments in faculty and staff development in America.

W. Jack Crocker, Associate Vice President, Educational and Student Services, St. Petersburg Junior College (FL)

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NISOD regularly receives requests to reprint previously published issues of *Innovation Abstracts*. Taken together over the last 30 years, these requests identify some of our most popular articles.

On occasion, NISOD will reprint some of these articles, showcasing some popular contributions to professional development and the improvement of teaching and learning. We trust that they will become special additions to current readers' *Innovation Abstracts* collections.

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Suanne D. Roueche, Editor

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