Encouraging Professional Development:
A Brainstorming Session for Engaging Faculty Participation

1:00 – 2:30 pm on May 6th, 2011
Conlan Hall, E200


What are the obstacles to faculty engagement in professional development at City College?

What are the elements that promote faculty participation?

How can we improve success for professional development activities?

With an assumption that prospects are dim for state funding for faculty professional development, discussion focused primarily on City College in-house professional development activities organized with little or no monetary support.

The warm up question for the group was attendance at Flex Day afternoon workshops, a time when there are no classes scheduled. The experience of the group has been that even on Flex Day, lack of time is the most frequent obstacle to going to events beyond the minimum required. Those few hours at the beginning of the semester are often needed to resolve unanticipated problems before the students arrive.

Both at the beginning of the semester and at other times of the semester, obstacles to attendance at programs meant for faculty in all departments include:

- Conflict with scheduled classes, committee work, etc.
- Time needed for immediate work responsibilities (meeting with students, class preparation, etc.)
• Too overloaded with work or stressed out.
• Faculty give priority to professional development within their discipline or department over other opportunities.
• Lack of relevance to faculty needs.
• Child care and other family responsibilities.
• No food provided.
• No funding to provide materials or to pay speakers.
• Attendance at events not viewed as an obligation.
• Locations not convenient.
• Health issues.

Departmental meetings and discipline specific professional development programs are of great value to faculty. Some departments share ideas, discoveries or techniques with meetings at which faculty take turns presenting, or with extended Saturday workshops. Some would like to see a larger period of time (Flex day afternoon, one of the independent flex days, or a monthly ‘faculty day,’?) regularly scheduled for departmental activities.

Although the Flex booklet lists faculty obligations to participate in both scheduled flex activities and additional independent flex activities, some faculty may not be keeping accurate records of their fulfillment of these required obligations for which the College could be audited by the State Chancellors’ office.

Members of the group shared characteristics of events that have been particularly successful:

• Promotion beyond email announcements with brochures, flyers, advertising, etc.
• Organizers sending invitations to individual faculty members.
• RSVP or registration encouraging participants to feel committed to attend.
• Letter sent to participants in advance with content to be covered, reading for discussion, etc.
• Stipends for part-time faculty to attend
• Grant funded activities.
• Providing refreshments.
• Meeting in someplace more interesting or comfortable than a classroom or conference room, perhaps at a different campus, or a non-City College space.
• Events in series (such as a monthly discussion) so that the same group of people come together repeatedly.

The participants at the May 6th forum left with intentions to continue to work towards promotion of faculty professional development through the various bodies to which we belong.