

Why a Cooperative, not a Center?

I am regularly asked the interesting, embarrassing and somewhat insulting question. *What are* you doing this year, anyway? The short answers; “running a new program to help faculty with their work”, or “hanging out talking with faculty”, do not really deal with the question fairly. Yet, most people don’t have time to listen to the long answer. Here it is.

The vision of our faculty was clearly articulated in the focus groups and faculty survey of a year ago. We express an interest in “a community of scholars working together to share information, techniques and support which enable all faculty to live up to contemporary standards for excellence and be drawn to those emerging possibilities within themselves and within education.”(Teaching and Learning Cooperative Vision and Goals statement, 2002)

So, what I’m doing this year is holding, nurturing and helping to shape the container for a set of ideals, processes and activities, while also seeking institutional support in the form of budget, space and recognition. All of this could be done inside of a “center” led by a “director”. Yet it is my belief and experience that programs that have real meaning and lasting impact come from a shared and cooperative vision which change and respond and grow with the collective input of a dynamic group of participants. Thus a “Cooperative” not a “Center”.

A colleague of ours recently said, “Paul is the only staff of the TLC.” This is true but in light of what I’ve said above it seems important to say that the “staff of the TLC” is who ever is involved at any given moment. Some of you such as Louise Lien have already offering workshops under the banner of the TLC. Others of you such as Lolly Smith are consulting on a regular basis on issues of concern to faculty. And still others of you contribute through passing conversations by your comments about what is needed or what works well. In this way the TLC is truly a “cooperative”.