

## Enriching Faculty Scholarship through the Creation of Alternative Settings

Meg A. Bond<sup>1</sup>

Jana Sladkova<sup>2</sup>

University of Massachusetts Lowell

### Abstract

*In institutions of higher learning, faculty often conducts their research and scholarship on their own, in isolation. Yet, many faculties yearn to engage in scholarly discussion and benefit greatly from exchanges with peers across disciplines. We present one program designed to facilitate such interdisciplinary engagement and support through the creation of an alternative setting, or 'counter space', called IDEA communities. Evaluations of the first year of the program document substantial benefits for faculty participants, including reduced sense of isolation, increased productivity, deeper understanding of methods across disciplines, access to new collaborations, and help in more effectively navigating their academic setting.*

**Keywords:** mentoring, higher education, academic culture, counters spaces

### 1. Introduction

Most institutions of higher education require their faculty to be actively engaged in research and scholarship that is distinctive and expands the knowledge base of their disciplines. In fact, a critical role of institutions of higher education around the world is to foster the creation of new knowledge; society as a whole has relied upon the academy to foster innovation and to push new frontiers (Boyer 1990; Braxton, Luckey, & Helland 2006). However, not all scholars thrive in academic settings, as they can be lonely and often isolating places, i.e., emphasizing solo work and largely individualistic criteria for success (Best 2010; Keza, 2001). In this article, we will consider some common constraining elements of academic cultures. We then describe an easily-implemented, yet innovative structure – called IDEA Communities (standing for Inter-Disciplinary Exchange and Advancement) – that can provide a 'counter space' (Case and Hunter 2013; Solórzano, Ceja, Yosso 2000) that challenges isolating norms and supports faculty development in new ways. We will share the guiding framework for the IDEA Communities and summarize the evaluation of the first year of implementation.

### Academic Culture

Academics are typically judged based upon their distinctive *individual* research and scholarship contributions (Braxton et al. 2006; Eddy and Mitchell 2012). This value has remained strong in spite of increasing discussion of the value of collaborative research (Kezar and Lester 2009) and a shifting funding climate in which interdisciplinary groups may be more likely to accrue research grants (Dodson et al. 2009). In many disciplines, particularly social sciences and humanities, being the solo author on a book or article is considered more 'worthy' than shared authorship. In other fields, like many sciences where there are different norms in terms of numbers and order of authors, having one's *own* research agenda is still critical to tenure and promotion decisions. Research teams that involve graduate students may be encouraged, but a CV filled with co-authorships with other scholars – particularly as a junior faculty member – can put one in a precarious position if one does not also have a solid *independent* research stream (Boardman and Bozeman 2007; Frost and Jean 2003).

---

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: Meg A. Bond is a Professor of Psychology and Director of the Center for Women & Work at University of Massachusetts Lowell, 113 Wilder Street, Lowell, MA, USA 01854.

<sup>2</sup> Jana Sladkova is an Associate Professor of Psychology and Faculty Associate of the Center for Women & Work at University of Massachusetts Lowell, 113 Wilder Street, Lowell, MA, USA 01854.

Layered on top of the value for individual work is the value for contributing to one's own discipline (Frost and Jean 2003). One reason academic institutions may continue to promote highly discipline-bound work is because there are not yet consistent reward structures in place to move beyond silos and to assess multi-disciplinary work in a thoughtful and sustainable way (Boardman and Ponomariov 2007; Gillespie, et al. 2005). Although strategically valuable, cross-disciplinary exchange is still neither incorporated into definitions of 'success' nor fully supported by norms within most institutions of higher education (Boardman and Bozeman 2007; Kezar and Lester 2009).

While in many institutions work that can be attributed to individual effort is the primary criterion for recognition, not all promising faculty thrive when such norms contribute to a sense of isolation – particularly for women and/or faculty of color who are already at the risk of feeling at the margins based on their identities (Jones and Rhee 2010; Rayburn, Denmark, Reuder and Austria 2010). Yet sharing work with others has many potential benefits. It can help clarify one's thinking and introduce new perspectives that enrich an initial conceptualization (Wenger 2001). This can be true even across fields that seem highly unrelated, e.g., people in technical fields can reap immeasurable benefits from conversations with people whose research has identified individual or social needs in search of technical solutions (Boardman and Ponomariov 2007; Sobol and Newell 2003). Presenting work to others from different backgrounds can also encourage a deeper examination of one's argument and foster better writing by providing an 'intermediary audience' that does not necessarily share one's disciplinary preconceptions (Gillespie, et al. 2005). An idealized image of academic life is those faculties are continually engaging in lively intellectual conversations with other researchers for exactly these purposes. In actuality, however, the silo mentality of many academic disciplines contributes to the fact that ideas are rarely shared across fields (Arnold 2004; Bok 1986). Even faculty within the same department or field often engage in largely parallel play with little exchange other than around departmental business.

One approach to helping faculty navigate both their local institution and the criteria for success in their particular discipline is mentoring. However, here again, the current practices and the norms of the academy can limit options for effective practice. Faculty mentoring programs often focus on a hierarchical dyad matching a junior with a senior professor, such that success of the mentorship hinges upon both interpersonal compatibility and the willingness of both individuals to create a supportive relationship (Ragins 1996). While some such arrangements work, there can be challenges particularly when the topical interests of one do not fit organically with the other's and/or when support for a junior person's work is experienced as a distraction from the senior faculty member's own work (Rayburn, et al. 2010). The culture and reward structures of most universities do not typically include rewards for time spent providing guidance and mentoring for other faculty.

Thus, the challenge we take up in this article is where these aspects of the academic culture leave us vis-à-vis creating supports for faculty scholarship. Our search has been for a model that can address questions such as: how can we balance the structural press within academic institutions for 'ownership' of a body of work with the potential energy and creativity that can be enhanced through community and interdisciplinary exchange with colleagues? And how can alternative structures, or counter spaces, help to offset norms within the academy that can constrain intellectual creativity and productivity?

### **The Challenge: Embracing and Shifting the Academic Culture**

IDEA Communities build upon an assumption that in order to enhance research support within the academy, it can be helpful if strategies are to some extent in sync with the dominant culture, while pushing for change (Kezar and Eckel 2002; see also Bond, O'Connor, and Clinton in press). Thus, the IDEA Communities were designed to simultaneously embrace and challenge academic norms about definitions of success, faculty exchange, and mentoring. More specifically, we sought to create new settings where *individual* scholarship was supported (i.e., culturally syntonic with broader academic culture) in the context of *community* (somewhat countercultural).

We approached the development of IDEA Communities with four interconnected considerations in mind. First, we worked to create settings that enabled faculty to prioritize taking time away from other academic demands to talk about research and scholarship. To do so, the initiative had both top-down and bottom-up features. The initiative was pitched to a university-wide Research Council and was adopted as part of that group's mission to address mentoring needs on campus. Seed funding was provided by the Provost's office. Both of these factors signaled to faculty that participation was indeed valued by top academic leaders.

Simultaneously, we established expectations that the substance of the conversations was to be driven by members' needs. Thus, we put out an open call for faculty to propose groups; they were asked to identify a focal topic, a central convener, and names of 5-10 faculty who shared interests around the common theme. While the project team provided needed support to the groups, the process of group formation was essentially bottom-up. The driving force was faculty desire to gather with other faculty to engage in free-flowing, judgment-free intellectual exchange around a shared interest.

Second, an explicit expectation was that members needed to be simultaneously engaged in their own scholarship related to the shared topic *and* willing to make a commitment to forwarding one another's work. When orienting each group, we emphasized that the most central outcome was *individual* faculty productivity. Yet equally important, we coached groups to establish ground rules that emphasized a sense of commitment to one another (e.g., expectations around attending meetings, reading others' work). Each meeting (typically 1 ½ hours) was devoted to time for one or two participants to share their work in progress. Meetings also included time for helping group members to strategize about professional development issues. To balance sustainability with commitment, we encouraged groups to establish meetings that were frequent enough to foster a sense of connection among members but not so frequent as to contribute to overload and burnout (typically one meeting per month).

Third, we worked closely with team conveners around establishing trust among group members. The primary hard-and-fast rule was that people were to share a question, a dilemma, or a quandary about their work – not a finished product. There is value in being able to share one's work when it is still incubating and at a stage when input from diverse perspectives is most likely to expand the scholar's approach. However, when research exchanges do happen in the academy, it is often at a point when there is no time or openness to incorporating new perspectives. For example, most research colloquia and professional conferences are structured to highlight successful *finished* projects, a point at which the research design or scholarly argument cannot be significantly altered. Taking the risk to share work at preliminary stages requires trust that colleagues will not prematurely judge the quality of the work, react by pushing their own agenda for the scholarship, or steal the ideas - all of which are real dangers that are part of many academic cultures (Bond, O'Connor and Clinton in press; Fox and Mohapatra 2007).

Fourth, we adopted a philosophy of mentoring as collaborative and multidirectional as well as focused on the whole person (including managing work-family-life demands). The approach incorporated elements of both mutual mentoring and network mentoring models (Wasburn and LaLopa 2003). Mutual mentoring refers to a process that is viewed as a 'shared inquiry into practice' rather than a 'hierarchical dispensation of wisdom' (Hargreaves and Fullan 2000, 55). The network mentoring model involves building a community of interconnected participants, who can expose participants to a wide range of opinions, perspectives, and advice.

The concept of 'counter spaces' can be useful here. This conceptualization has been advanced in the context of critical race theory (Delgado and Stefancic 2012) to describe special physical and/or emotional spaces where marginalized groups feel acknowledged and can escape discrimination. Others (e.g., Case and Hunter 2012; Schwartz 2014) have expanded the definition to include other types of safe spaces for marginalized individuals that counter dominant norms and strictures. While IDEA Communities do not solely involve marginalized faculty, the emphasis is on spaces that challenge the status quo. These faculty groups are designed to create a protected space where norms of collegiality and mutual support thrive.

Initiatives on other campuses that focus on faculty exchange have some similarities to IDEA Communities yet few appear to be as self-conscious about promoting alternative counter cultural norms. For example, learning communities, discussed in depth in the educational literature, share the value for collective exploration of ideas – often around pedagogical approaches (Cox 2004). More specific to research, Eddy and Mitchell (2012) write about faculty 'thinking communities', with a focus primarily on 'deconstruction of current knowledge' (Eddy and Mitchell 2012, 288). Other successful models that share some of the features of the IDEA Communities include 'research circles' at the University of Washington, Bothell (UWB) (Gillespie et al. 2005) and 'communities of research practice' at Marshall University (McComas, Fry, Frank, and Farley 2010). Similar to IDEA Communities, such groups often promote free flowing, interdisciplinary exploration and are not centered on one collaborative project, proposal, or paper. Many differ from IDEA Communities in their involvement of students, sole inclusion of junior faculty, and/or a primary focus on pedagogy.

The IDEA Communities model adds deliberate cross-rank faculty membership (co-mentoring) and is distinctive in the explicit attention to faculty member's full life circumstances (i.e. work-life issues) as critical to promoting faculty engagement in research and scholarship. In other words, Interdisciplinary Exchange and Advancement (IDEA) Communities were designed to create opportunities for ongoing interdisciplinary exchange of ideas while creating a community of support for challenging constraining norms embedded in academic cultures.

### **IDEA Communities Process**

To support the development of IDEA Communities, we formed both a steering team and an evaluation project team. The Steering Team was an interdisciplinary group, which included faculty from education, English, public health, psychology, sociology, computer science, and plastics engineering as well as the director of the faculty development center. The Evaluation Team included two faculty members in psychology and a graduate research assistant. The Steering Team and Evaluation Team worked together to document existing supports for scholarship on campus and also to articulate outcome goals, select pilot groups, design the documentation process, and oversee project development. The co-authors of this article include the Director of UMass Lowell's Center for Women & Work (CWW) and a long-term CWW Associate who led the evaluation process.

### **Formation of IDEA Communities**

To recruit the initial IDEA Communities, we sent out an open call for proposals campus-wide. The supports offered to selected groups included consultation regarding group development, evaluation and process feedback, and funds for collective group activities. Three out of nine proposals were accepted. The focal areas of interest were 1) Disabilities (with members from psychology, public health, physical therapy, music, English, criminology, electrical and computer engineering, and the Office of Disability Services), 2) American Studies (with members from English, history, music, and an industrial history center on campus), and 3) Creative Pedagogy (with members from music, education, plastics engineering, computer science, criminology and English). Each group had 7-9 members of all ranks, and some had staff from university-affiliated centers. Of the total 24 participants, 54% were women; most were white (92%) – which reflects an over representation of women (49% of faculty in the primary fields involved) and as light underrepresentation of the faculty of color (11%).

### **Documentation Process**

In addition to documenting who participated, we also wanted to assess the process and the impact of each group. Our guiding questions were: 1) what initially attracted participants to the IDEA Communities project? 2) What types of interpersonal exchanges actually happened within and between meetings? 3) What were the positive elements of the group process and what were barriers to greater success? And 4) what impact did participation have on participants' research and scholarship? Two self-report methods were adopted to solicit participants' observations: self-tracking forms and interviews. We also held a meeting with all participants and top level university administrators at the end of the first year to share our findings, to invite feedback on our interpretations of the data, and to solicit additional observations about participants' experiences. The assessment process was approved by our Institutional Review Board; all participants signed informed consent forms.

**Self-Tracking Forms:** All members of IDEA Communities were asked to complete self-tracking forms at the end of each meeting to document exchanges relevant to their scholarship. The form included nine behavioral statements about actions related to research and scholarship, and participants were asked to simply check 'yes' for any that they had engaged in during the current meeting and, separately, 'yes' for those that had occurred since the previous meeting (i.e., between meetings). Twenty-three of the 24 participants completed self-tracking forms at least once during the first year.

**Interviews:** In-person interviews were conducted with three members of each IDEA Community at the end of the first year. We interviewed a leader of each group and two other individuals per group who were identified by the evaluation team as potentially providing diverse perspectives based upon gender, department, and/or rank. The interview questions were aligned with our overall assessment goals. A total of nine interviews were conducted and recorded by the second author and, on average, lasted about one hour.

### **Findings**

#### **Motivation to join an IDEA Community**

There were four clear themes that emerged in response to our first question related to what factors initially drew participants to join an IDEA Community.

**Wanting a greater sense of connection.** Faculty participants indicated they wanted to meet people outside their own departments and to expand their sense of connection to the wider university. Participants hoped that their involvement might reduce their sense of isolation within their department and in the context of their own research.

For me, being a researcher and a teacher in a pretty narrow field, I feel somewhat constrained, boxed in, so to speak, and I have to admit I long for human interaction of a professional nature. I believed this could be a way to kind of fill that need.

At least one senior faculty member joined hoping to reduce isolation for junior faculty: ‘When I was an assistant professor, I very much worked in isolation. And I knew I had to get a book done, I worked on my book, but really got little or no input from anyone in this campus.’ He expressed the desire to help other faculty avoid this lonely experience.

**Longing for scholarly intellectual discussions.** Faculty participants were looking for invigorating intellectual discussion; some even stated they were ‘desperate’ for such opportunities on campus. The interviewees felt that the interdisciplinary meetings promoted expansive thinking vis-à-vis their own discipline. One said he felt this kind of exchange was ‘like oxygen. I have to have it to breathe in the institution.’ Another said: ‘There have not been many opportunities on campus to work at this theoretical level. This was really an opportunity to have that kind of rich theoretical discussion I really felt I’d been lacking... It really filled a deep need for me. It’s been phenomenal to have.’

**Expanding thinking about own scholarship.** Faculty joined because they wanted to learn from colleagues and about different approaches to a problem. Some had specific goals related to expanding their own work/project; others wanted to make interdisciplinary connections. working with [name] who’s an experimental [social science] researcher... learning from him and what he brings. ... then [another name] who is very much, an applied researcher [in] engineering... from there it’s, it’s looking at how are they attacking a problem. They might have a body of literature ...that I would never have run across before.

Some participants explained their interest as stemming from wanting to learn how others approach topics similar to their own: ‘I am interested in new models of learning, visual, tactile, whatever it might be and understanding different domains that are related to my own field.’ One wanted interdisciplinary exchange without the pressure to collaborate: ‘My work is interdisciplinary...It’s history; it’s aesthetics; it’s literary work; it’s cultural theory; it’s political theory; it’s philosophy; it’s ethics. It’s all sorts of texts ... [but] I get annoyed that people think interdisciplinary has to be collaborative.’

**Mentoring.** Many participants signed up with hopes of receiving informal mentoring. Some were looking for guidance regarding navigating the university; some wanted an opportunity to learn from and connect to more experienced colleagues. One said:

I was looking forward to having a chance to talk to more senior faculty, especially because of their experience and understanding of the way the university works ...more of the behind-the-scene sort of thing that you only learn through experience. Another said: ‘There are people who’ve been here a long time, who were tenured a long time ago; there are people who’ve been here and just gone through tenure; and then there’s people like me who are just, fairly new...you get a diverse perspective in how those [tenure and promotion] things work in different departments.’

### **Interpersonal Exchanges within and between Meetings**

In response to our second main area of inquiry, we learned a considerable amount about the process both within and between meetings from the results of the self-tracking forms. Within the meetings themselves, all participants (100%) indicated that they received general support, 86.9% indicated specific useful feedback on their scholarship, and 78% received guidance on resources that would be helpful in moving their scholarship forward. The following quote provides illustration: ‘Discussion of scholarly activities [are] interesting, and I almost always find new resources and same concerns across departments.’ In addition, about one quarter (26%) received advice about how to approach work more generally, and 30.4% received some advice about life in general. Participants also reported interactions between formal group meetings, including talking with other group members about work (almost 70%) and/or about other more general issues (60.8%). Many followed up on specific recommendations made in the meetings (73.9 %) and/or utilized feedback they had received from their colleagues (30.4 %).

## Perceptions of Group Process

In terms of the third research question, we asked interviewees for their reflections on the group process, i.e., what contributed to their group's success and/or were barriers to its further development. Most faculty said that the factors that enabled the groups to work well included mutual trust and respect for each other as these quotes illustrate: '... I think the underlying issue there is that there's a genuine safety to share. There's a genuine respect of each other' and 'they are very distinct and bright people, who are also respectful and trustworthy in a group.'

Other factors cited as important included having varied ranks within groups, interdisciplinary, and intellectual curiosity and openness of members. As one participant said: 'I think we're all very, very open in sharing, and naturally inquisitive.' Regular meetings, common understanding of process, reading materials before meetings, and actively participating were additional factors contributing to success of the program.

In terms of barriers, finding a regular time and available space that worked for everyone were the biggest challenges noted by participants. Several participants mentioned that meetings were less useful when even just a few people could not make it. Two senior participants said that greater success for such communities would only be possible if participation in these communities had a more direct positive impact on tenure, promotion, and merit decisions. They suggested that something be written into the faculty contract about valuing such activities in promotion decisions, thus assuaging worries among junior faculty about 'taking time away from their research and writing, which they feel is the most important tenure component.' One interviewee also reflected upon the need for an enduring university-based infrastructure: 'I think that to keep something up and running ...it requires more of an intentional structure.'

## Impact on Scholarship

As a counterpoint to fear that participation would take time away from writing, many participants reported that their involvement in the group *increased* their productivity. In response to our fourth question, several faculties shared very tangible outcomes of participation, such as giving a presentation at a national or international conference. Others reported getting peer-reviewed articles accepted for publication, initiating edited volumes of scholarly work, and submitting grant proposals.

I just gave a conference presentation, a national conference presentation this weekend on teaching tools that were developed through participation in this group. It's a peer-reviewed presentation. I am writing it up for an article so that's going to count in my department towards my scholarship and my research. It comes directly out of my engagement with this group.

Others described the impact of participation on broadening their understanding of core research methods and learning to apply new methodologies; some gained broader understanding of critical concepts. Participants also mentioned valuing their learning about how people approach similar topics in different disciplines: 'There has been ... a broadening of my understanding of what [core concept] is. And that has strengthened me. And it could lead to proposals in the future - actually in my research area.'

Some of the more senior faculty reported that they got 'unstuck' while participating in their IDEA Community. They were able to sort out a research project, restructure a manuscript, craft a book proposal, and even shift their research focus.

I am about two-thirds through my manuscript now, and I have been struggling with it. And the IDEA meeting we had where I presented my work, I got some very good feedback that kind of gave me the confidence. I had gotten into a funk about the project, and the feedback I got was reassuring. It also made me realize just this total restructuring of the project that I am going to be undertaking in the next couple of months.

In addition, faculty found the exchanges affirming and stimulating, feelings impossible to achieve while working on their own.

As mentioned above, the goal of many when they joined the IDEA Community initiative was to make new connections and find new opportunities. Such connections did happen, and several participants reported finding new collaborators in research, teaching, and grant writing: '... I was part of thinking about an NSF grant. I wasn't a co-PI but I was mentioned in it ... my work was part of it ... maybe I could be on another NSF grant, so it's all process.' One new team even traveled internationally to discuss shared research interests with a European university.

Several- mostly the junior - faculty mentioned that they had learned a lot about navigating the academy both with respect to their department and the University as a whole. Some reported gaining a better understanding of the tenure process and the university culture; others talked about mentoring on how to manage departmental politics. I knew about certain political issues in the department a particular individual is in. So after one meeting, I was walking out with this individual, and I kind of just asked how things were going. And it gave the person an opening for talking about what's going on in this particular department. And I think that was helpful to them.

### **Reflections**

Participants in the IDEA Communities shared very positive reactions, i.e., felt it enlivened their thinking, reenergized their work, and often also resulted in concrete products and accomplishment even after just one year of participation. As mentioned earlier, the groups received some funding for group activities and a stipend for facilitators. After that initial seed money, however, the groups were on their own – continuing if and only if, the group members felt that their investment of time and energy were balanced by the rewards that came from participation itself. All groups continued into a second year, and over half continued to meet longer. However, we have not defined success by the longevity of the groups. The Disabilities IDEA Community is a good example of how groups can have a natural life cycle. The group met regularly for 3 years; participants reported feeling that their individual scholarship was greatly enriched by the group; and after three years, the group made a collective decision to disband. At that time, the facilitators explained, the group had served its purpose and the new connections could continue without the need of ongoing meetings.

Our experience with this particular form of interdisciplinary exchange, and the results of our evaluation activities, underscore the tremendous potential of IDEA Communities to enhance faculty scholarship through building a safe space and community of support. However, we also want to return to the issues raised in our introduction about academic culture: did IDEA Communities contribute to a change in the culture of the academy, define a 'counter space' with alternative cultural norms, and/or just provide some additional stimulation and inspiration for a few faculty members? This is a difficult outcome measure to document directly - at least systematically. Over the following years at UMass Lowell, there has been a distinct shift toward valuing interdisciplinary scholarly exchanges, and there is increased discussion about new approaches to mentoring. These shifts are evident university wide, with the creation of more interdisciplinary research centers as well as the emergence of a variety of forums for faculty exchange (including the continuation of 'IDEA Communities'), sponsored both by the Provost's Office for Research and by individual Deans. We cannot claim that the IDEA Communities initiative had a singular defining impact, but we feel confident to say that IDEA Communities have contributed to this larger shift in the value for cross-disciplinary and cross-rank mentoring.

There are also many lingering questions and challenges to address about IDEA Communities. Motivation to become involved in the groups undoubtedly varies by career stage and discipline as well as by personal inclination. While participants at various career stages all talked about the value of IDEA Communities, their needs do differ. Attention to these differences is undoubtedly important to the ongoing success of such groups. With cross-rank groups, it is also critical to pay attention to power differentials among group members; such difference can create tensions if issues of power and privilege remain unaddressed (Eddy and Michelle 2012). Similarly, it is critical to pay attention to dynamics around race (Jones and Rhee 2010; Porter 2007) and gender (Park and Nolen-Heoksema 2010; Porter 2007). Our initial groups included many women but few faculty of color. IDEA Communities in subsequent years have been racially and ethnically diverse, and an important question moving forward is how the framing and process of these groups might be experienced differently based upon participants' social and identity locations. We are also cognizant that the benefits may vary by discipline. One example of a particularly generative exchange was when a psychology professor shared her difficulty in designing a measure to assess the match between community demographics and the demographics of community organizations, and another group member declared, 'oh we do that in economics all the time.' However, this type of cross disciplinary sharing – particularly around methodologies – may be less likely in sciences and engineering where methods are highly technical and may not cross disciplinary boundaries. We suspect that our current IDEA Communities framework may be more suited to social sciences, humanities, education, and some health sciences; we are aware of the need to further assess what types of interdisciplinary exchanges are useful in other types of disciplines. We are also left with a nagging question: while we posit that the diversity of disciplines within a group is a plus, is it possible to have too much diversity? If the frameworks or methods are too divergent, can there still be synergy generated by exchange?

Finally, we also recognize the importance of institutionalizing support for the types of exchanges those IDEA Communities is designed to foster. The UMass Lowell model for the IDEA Communities was an Associates Program that is situated within the Center for Women & Work. CWW provides the continuity and infrastructure to sustain that intellectual community of Associates over time. The IDEA communities, in contrast, were deliberately designed to be self-sustaining without ongoing centralized support. Although some level of self-definition and independence is built into the IDEA model, having an institutional home that is committed to providing at least some minimal start up resources and consultation about group process can be critical for sustainability. Current commitment from one Dean at University of Massachusetts Lowell to support similar groups (i.e., gender and violence, junior faculty development/mentoring) is a positive step towards such institutionalization. Further, the question of whether involvement in such groups will be factored into measures of 'merit' and valued in the promotion and tenure process remains unanswered.

In sum, IDEA Communities have exciting potential to benefit individual faculty scholarship as well as to contribute to a shift in the culture of the academy. At first blush, they are easy-to-implement conversations among faculty. However, upon closer consideration of the rationale and emerging dynamics, they are also potentially powerful counter spaces within the academy where faculty contest and challenge the norms of isolation and individualism. We hope our description here provides a model that other institutions can adapt as fits their unique academic context.

## References

- Arnold, G. (2004). Symbolic politics and institutional boundaries in curriculum reform: The case of National Sectarian University. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 75(5), 572-593.
- Best, D. (2010). Varieties of college and university experiences. In J. Darley, M. Zanna, & H. Roediger (Eds.), *The compleat academic: A career guide* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). (pp. 345-360). Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Boardman C. & Bozeman, B. (2007). Role strain in university research centers. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 78(4), 430-463.
- Boardman C. & Ponomariov, B. (2007). Impact of tenure on university scientists' valuation of applied and commercially relevant research. *Higher Education*, 78(1), 51-70.
- Bok, D. (1986). *Higher learning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bond, M.A., O'Connor, M., & Clinton, A. (in press). New Pathways and Alternative Settings: Applying Social Justice Principles to Mentoring in the Academy. In A. Murrell & S. Blake-Beard (Eds.), *Mentoring Diverse Leaders: Creating Change for People, Processes and Paradigms*.
- Boyer, E.L. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. Princeton, N.J.: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Braxton, J., Luckey, W. & Helland, P. (2006). Ideal and actual value patterns toward domains of scholarship in three types of colleges and universities. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 129, 67-76.
- Cox, M. D. (2004). Introduction to faculty learning communities. In M.D. Cox & L. Richlin (Eds.), *Building Faculty Learning Communities. New Directions for Teaching and Learning* (pp.5-23). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Dodson, M., Guan, L., Fernyhough, M., Mir, P., Bucci, L., McFarland, D., Novakofski, J., Reecy, J., Ajuwon, K., Thompson, D., Hausman, G., Benson, M., Bergen, W., & Jiang, Z. (2010). Perspectives on the formation of an interdisciplinary research team. *Biochemical and Biophysical Research Communications*, 391(2), 1155-1157.
- Eddy, P., & Mitchell, L. (2012). Faculty as learners: Developing thinking communities. *Innovative Higher Education*. 37, 283-296.
- Fox, M.F. & Mohapatra, S. (2007). Social-Organizational characteristics of work and publication productivity among academic scientists in doctoral-granting departments. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 78 (5), 542-571.
- Frost, S. & Jean, P. (2003). Bridging the disciplines: Interdisciplinary discourse and faculty scholarship. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 74(2), 119-149.
- Gillespie, D, Dolsak, N., Kochis, B., Krabill, R., Lerum, K., Peterson, A., & Thomas, E. (2005). Research Circles: Supporting the scholarship of junior faculty. *Innovative Higher Education*, 30(3), 149-162.



- Hargreaves, A. & Fullan, M. (2000). Mentoring in the new millennium. *Theory into Practice*, 39(1), 50-56.
- Jones, J. & Rhee, E. (2010). The dialectics of race: Academic perils and promises. In J. Darley, M. Zanna, & H. Roediger (Eds.), *The compleat academic: A career guide* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). (pp. 295-300). Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Kezar, A. (2001). *Understanding and facilitating organizational change in higher education in the 21st century*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kezar, A. & Eckel, P. (2002). The effect of institutional culture on change strategies in higher education: Universal principles or culturally responsive concepts? *The Journal of Higher Education*, 73(4), 435-460.
- Kezar, A. & Lester, J. (2009). Supporting faculty grassroots leadership. *Research in Higher Education*, 50(7), 715-740.
- McComas, K. Fry, L, Frank, S., Fraley, N. (2010). Community of research practice: A Model for Student Research. *Perspectives on Issues in Higher Education*, 13(2), 39-68.
- Park, D. & Nolen-Heoksema, S. (2010). Women in academia. In J. Darley, M. Zanna, & H. Roediger (Eds.), *The compleat academic: A career guide* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). (pp. 311-328). Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Porter, S. (2007). A Closer Look at Faculty Service: What Affects Participation on Committees? *The Journal of Higher Education*, 78(5), 523-524.
- Ragins, B.R. (1996). Jumping the hurdles: Barriers to mentoring for women in organizations. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 17, 37-41.
- Rayburn, C., Denmark, F., Reuder, M., & Austria, A. (2010). *Handbook for women mentors: Transcending barriers of stereo type, race, and ethnicity*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.
- Sobol, M. & Newell, N. (2003). Barriers to and measurements of the diffusion of technology from university to industry. *Comparative Technology Transfer & Society*, 1(3), 255-276.
- Wasburn, M., & LaLopa, J. (2003). Mentoring faculty for success. *Planning and Changing*, 34, 250-264.
- Wenger, E. (2001). Communities of practice. *International Encyclopedia of Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2339-2342.