The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) was a new initiative at Orange County Community College for spring 2006. During that first semester, feedback was gathered from the college community to guide the development of the new CTL. An online survey was distributed college-wide to gather information about what general kinds of professional development opportunities people were most interested in (results of this survey are available at sunyorange.edu). A group of people who took the online survey volunteered to be interviewed further to gain a more detailed view of what they thought an effective CTL at SUNY Orange would look like. This report is a summary of the responses from three focus groups. A list of participants, the questions asked in the focus groups and detailed notes from each focus-group can be found in the Appendices A, B and C.

While each focus group brought out slightly different views about what an effective CTL would provide, there were four general themes that emerged from the groups. Based on the responses of all three focus-groups, an effective CTL at SUNY Orange will provide 1) a specific time and place for college personnel to get together, 2) technical assistance, especially for adjuncts, 3) support for scholarly innovations, and 4) a proactive program with vision and follow-through. In the following paragraphs, I will expand on each theme.

The most prevalent comments in all of the focus groups centered around the desire of people to have a specific time and place to gather to share ideas with colleagues. There was the request to have time to exchange ideas with others particularly about teaching. Many focus-group members recalled times in the past when they came upon helpful hints about teaching from causal conversations with others professors. One focus-group member said "in the high schools, teachers share ideas daily in the faculty lunchroom, we should have a similar experience for college faculty". Another commented that he found a great teaching technique quite by chance when he encountered an accidentally left-behind overhead in his classroom. He reflected that it was unfortunate that he encountered such a great idea so randomly. Focus-group members highly valued their colleague's ideas and the experience of sharing ideas with others. This kind of informal exchange of ideas however, could be greatly facilitated by having a set time and place to gather.

The CTL could also act as a gathering place for people who ordinarily would not have the chance to meet. Groups of people such as faculty and staff, new and experience faculty, professional staff from different areas of the college, and faculty from different divisions, rarely
have the chance to meet one another. Gathering these various groups of people together could lead to collaborations, a greater understanding of what services are available to the student, and a better understanding of our institution as a whole. Such interactions would almost certainly led to an increased ability to serve our students as each individual would have a greater understanding of the services of the college and these services could become more highly coordinated. For example, there was an interest in improving the tutorial services available to students by collaborating with faculty members whose classes are regularly served by the tutorial center. A better understanding of the tutoring process by the faculty could improve the student’s tutorial experience.

While focus-group members expressed the desire to have a time and place to meet informally, they also wanted to have more structured learning experiences as well. Focus-group members wanted to continue learning and primarily, they wanted to learn from each other and especially about teaching. They were also very interested in finding out more about SUNY Orange students and how to be more effective reaching these students. To summarize, one of the main themes from the focus groups was that the CTL could be a place where faculty and staff could gather to share ideas, continue to learn and to develop collegial relationships with other college professionals.

A second major theme that came out of all of the focus groups was the need of a place where people could go for technical assistance, and this need was especially great for adjuncts. This function of the CTL would be as a resource for the myriad of questions newer faculty and staff have about the basic mechanics of their jobs. Ranging from how to get a light bulb changed, to what to do if a student comes to you with difficult personal issues, to how to prevent cheating in class, the newer personnel are often awash with questions. In the words of one adjunct focus-group member she was left to "fly by the seat of her pants" with few resources available to her. This is particularly true if the adjunct teaches at night or on the weekends. An idea that was brought up by several groups was to have a web-based course or simply a web-site with resources for newer faculty and staff. Such a site could have an online version of the adjunct handbook, video clips of master teachers, links to pedagogical web-sites, and a discussion board that could be moderated, and a list of frequently asked questions.

The third proposed function of the CTL was that of a group that would support scholarly innovations. While the previous theme focused more on the needs of newer faculty, this function of the CTL is more focused on the experienced faculty and staff member. The CTL should support the development of more experienced professionals by assisting them in pursuing their research interests, developing innovative teaching practices, and initiating collaborative projects on campus.
Often the mid-career professional is eager for new challenges and the CTL should be there to promote and assist people in their ongoing professional development.

The final theme was not brought up until the final focus group, but it complemented all of the previous themes. The CTL should provide proactive program that has vision and provides follow-through for participants. The programming offered by the CTL should be a well-reasoned, planned approach to professional development, rather than a reactive series of unrelated events. The CTL should also be responsible for following through with programs that are offered and evaluating the effectiveness of those programs.

In summary, the discussions in the focus groups pointed to four major functions of the CTL at SUNY Orange. It should be a place where people are brought together both for informal sharing of ideas and more formal learning experiences. It should act a resource for technical questions especially for our colleagues such as adjuncts. It should also support the innovations and scholarly activities of our more experience colleagues. Finally the CTL should provide a vision of professional development, its activities should be evaluated and follow-through should be provided for the programming that is offered. I extend many thanks to the people who participated in the focus groups. Their insights and feedback will be invaluable in developing an effective and dynamic Center for Teaching and Learning at SUNY Orange. Taken with the other sources of feedback collected in the spring of 2006, the comments from the focus groups will be redefined to create the goals and objectives of the CTL for 2006/2007.
Appendix A. List of Participants in the CTL Focus Groups

Diane Bliss                Doug Sanders            Anita McGlynn
Sandra Graff              Mary Ann McGinnis-Adamo Eileen Burke
Buzz Solomon              Linda Fedrizzi            Helen Motola,
Maureen Larsen            Stacy Moegenburg          Karen Devora
Deborah Chedister         Bill Richards             Shelly Paradies
Mary Ann Raab

Appendix B. Focus Group Questions

1. Name, Position, years at SUNY Orange, what made you want to be a part of this focus group?

2. Think back to your former professional self. Consider what you know now about your profession and what it takes to be successful at it. If you could design a professional development program for your former self, what would be the one most important experience that the program would provide? Why?

3. Looking ahead to your professional future, what would be the one most important experience that could help you become the professional you would like to be? Why?

4. In your opinion, what would be the most valuable service that the CTL could provide for you as a professional?

5. In your opinion, what would be the most valuable service that the CTL could provide for the SUNY Orange community?

6. Do you have any other comments or suggestions about the direction of the CTL at SUNY Orange?

Appendix C. Notes from the Center for Teaching and Learning Focus Groups

Focus Group #1
April 25, 2006

Focus Group Members: Diane Bliss, Sandra Graff, Buzz Solomon, Maureen Larsen, Deborah Chedister, Mary Ann Raab, Andy Conrad (note taker)
Facilitator: Jennifer Merriam

Question 1: Name, Position, years at SUNY Orange, what made you want to be a part of this focus group?
Deb- English 10 years, temp-full time, ESL, credit & noncredit curriculum--curiosity, get to know others, wanted an opportunity to share
Maureen--IT, distance learning, started with other faculty development lab & was reassigned after the "reorganization", interest in technology, recognizes that there is a need for people to have someone they can ask questions about technology, especially adjuncts
Buzz--taught since 2000, represents the needs of the adjuncts especially at night, to learn about the process and skills of teaching. How can we "hook" the faculty into participating in the CTL? through PRT, or other incentive mechanism. Also sees the need for students to meta-cognate.
Mary Ann--7.5 years, familiar with the Middletown Teacher Center, is here to be a voice for the non-faculty member
Sandra--instructor for English, 7 years PT, now FT, is always looking for new ideas, notices that students seem to be resistant to learning, how can we address this?
Diane--English, technical writing, being from a large department, knows the value of teachers coming together to help motivate students
Question 2: Think back to your former professional self. Consider what you know now about your profession and what it takes to be successful at it. If you could design a professional development program for your former self, what would be the one most important experience that the program would provide? Why?

Deb—having a mentor,

Sandy—mentor, mutual exchange, morale boosting, try new ideas

Buzz, something that would focus on the teaching process, particularly for adjuncts, this is a population that is at risk for failure especially for the first year.

Mary Ann, training support, networking, continue learning, pursuing a degree, taking classes

Maureen, at the public schools there is a faculty lunch room where people can meet to cross-fertilize ideas

Diane—it is good to get away—even on a small scale right here on campus. We can look to each other, know all of the different people on campus and get the big picture at the college. We need to know who we can go to with questions to help the students "jump through the hoops" so we can understand the different roles really promote the idea of collegiality to create an environment where we are learners as well.

Question 3: Looking ahead to your professional future, what would be the one most important experience that could help you become the professional you would like to be? Why?

Maureen—learning who our students are, their demographics, especially for adjuncts. Suggests an online site where sample lectures could be accessed, advice on best practices, a web field trip.

Buzz—likes idea of online course, but what would be the motivation for adjuncts to access it? If you build it maybe it will come…

Diane—not everything needs to be incentives, we should be encouraging an atmosphere of collegiality

Side Topic—what about incentives?

Maureen, there is the interest, but the activities need to be good so that people will want to come back

Buzz, try without incentives first

Deb—some people will come others wont

Diane—start small, create excellent experiences on a small scale, try to avoid contractual issues, people shouldn't start to expect something in return

Deb—expert speakers

Sandra—expert speakers on campus, especially for adjuncts

Buzz—expert speakers should be videotaped and be made available for broadcast online

Diane—expert speakers are nice, but we should also be using the expertise on campus, and follow-up groups to the expert speakers

Deb—yeah, people want to share their expertise

Sandra—need a number of experts to address some students who have a variety of problems

Diane—books are ok but better to talk about real problems and situations

Maureen—basic skills for time stress, life management, record keeping

Mary Ann—basic training in human resources

Question 4: In your opinion, what would be the most valuable service that the CTL could provide for you as a professional?

Question 5: In your opinion, what would be the most valuable service that the CTL could provide for the SUNY Orange community?

Diane—collegiality among all areas that promotes learning for all students

Deb—provide a common connection between high schools

Mary Ann—exchange students

Diane—closing the disconnect between student expectations and college expectations

Mary Ann—providing a place to exchange and share between faculty and staff
Diane- Provide a place where CCHS mentors can discuss strategies, and provide support for adjuncts
Sandra- Provide a website with links to national reports, links to reading etc.
Maureen- put "Handbook for Adjuncts" on line, streaming video with pod casts of lectures

**Question 6: Do you have any other comments or suggestions about the direction of the CTL at SUNY Orange?**

**Focus Group #2**
**April 27, 2006**

*Focus Group Members: Doug Sanders, Mary Ann McGinnis-Adamo, Linda Fedrizzi, Stacy Moegenburg, Dr. Bill Richards, Christine Work (note taker)*

*Facilitator: Jennifer Merriam*

**Question 1: Name, Position, years at SUNY Orange, what made you want to be a part of this focus group?**
Doug (6 years); Linda (1 year), Mary Ann (16 years), Stacy (16 years), Jennifer (4 years), Christine (1 year)

- To contribute by sharing what I can offer
- To be a part of something that sounds like it is really (and finally) going to happen
- To share strong opinions
- To bring the perspective of a first year faculty member to the CTL
- To sit back and not be involved would be wrong

**Question 2: Think back to your former professional self. Consider what you know now about your profession and what it takes to be successful at it. If you could design a professional development program for your former self, what would be the one most important experience that the program would provide? Why?**

- Newer faculty members tend to always ask their department faculty members the questions that they have. The CTL can be a “resource” that can answer many new faculty questions, provide guidance and advice and CONNECT newer faculty to “experienced” faculty
- Learning often results from “picking the brain” of other faculty members
- The transition from “career to teaching” can be difficult.
- As a new teacher, was not prepared to play a “counseling” role with students. The CTL can assist faculty with their role in “student management.”
- The CTL can also help new faculty with what to expect in a school year, the “ebbs and flows of the semesters,” time management techniques, “priority management,” who’s who on campus - a resource “stock pile.”

**Question 3: Looking ahead to your professional future, what would be the one most important experience that could help you become the professional you would like to be? Why?**

- By understanding the “pivotal” impact a teacher can have on a student, “real meaning” is found in teaching. The CTL can help faculty move towards finding “real meaning” in their teaching.
- It would be great to have a “feedback loop” - where did our students go and what are they doing?
- Exposure to other teaching styles and strategies can lead to self-improvement

**Question 4: In your opinion, what would be the most valuable service that the CTL could provide for you as a professional?**

- Acquire technology-based teaching instruments (ex. Scantrons…software…) for college use
- Equipment - (Ex. At other colleges equipment cannot be purchased until all users are trained in how to use it - Dr. Richards)
- “Energy” - “a one people program needs interaction”
- The energy and creativity can be lost when faculty have responsibilities in the non-academic world that takes them away from the academic world.
• How can the CTL encourage and support innovative projects, research, learning/teaching initiatives that the faculty is interested in pursuing? (Ex. Explore the possibility of student research assistants; research existing models)
• Since there are always better/different ways of doing things, the CTL could be an environment/structure that facilitates and encourages SHARING

**Question 5: In your opinion, what would be the most valuable service that the CTL could provide for the SUNY Orange community?**

- The CTL can ‘teach’ faculty about who are SUNY Orange students - what are their interests, how do they learn, what excites them, what do they excel in, what challenges do they face…
- College faculty are often discipline trained not trained as K-12 educators are in “teaching and learning”
- The CTL could promote and share the teaching philosophy of faculty members using a creative approach/forum. (Ex. “I’m (name) and this is “how I do Biology.” Utilize the web.)
- The CTL can help to communicate the skills, expertise, and ideas that faculty have - All faculty like to share the things they are good at or enjoy.
- The CTL can capture and celebrate the “diversity” we have on campus (regarding teaching/learning styles/philosophies) - “tapping into our talents”
- Our college should respect and support the types of and varieties of connections between faculty and students (Ex. I’m not taking (name) because he only has essay exams.)
- If the CTL promoted teaching as being in the “life-changing” business, our college faculty would be changed (Dr. Richards)

**Question 6: Do you have any other comments or suggestions about the direction of the CTL at SUNY Orange?**

- A mentorship program is needed on campus; smaller departments have often fostered their own “mentoring culture”
- It is important that faculty know who they can talk to and ask questions and receive advice - a “comfortable” resource
- For the CTL to be successful, a FT Coordinator is essential; this has been demonstrated at other community colleges
- Attention to adjuncts is important since they often feel isolated; adjuncts are an essential resource/support to many departments
- CTL is critical to the “good health of the institution.” (Dr. Richards)
- Often programs that are accountable to an accrediting agency have experience and skills in areas that other departments can learn from; again the CTL can facilitate the sharing of these skills and knowledge
- The CTL should be a “different place to be able to go to” (especially after being in the same office for 16 years)
- SPACE is important for both logistics, functionality as well as atmosphere and spirit
- Fostering a “diner” culture - where people gather and share
- Offer “activities” in the middle of the semester - don’t limit activities to the beginning and the end of the semesters
- Promote and encourage learning communities
- The CTL should be able to “deal with the bureaucracy”
- Strive to eliminate (or at least reduce) the “culture of complaint” (Ex. “Check your complaints at the door”)
Focus Group #3  
May 1, 2006

Focus Group Members: Anita McGlynn, Eileen Burke, Helen Motola, Karen Devora, Shelly Paradies, Eileen Lux, Andy Conrad (note taker)

Facilitator: Jennifer Merriam

Question 1: Name, Position, years at SUNY Orange, what made you want to be a part of this focus group?
Anita - 1st year, nursing, wanted to be part of mentoring, but won't be able to
Eileen B. started 2003, coordinator of tutorial services, has background in adult education, would like to get support from tutorial center into classroom
H. Motola, 15 years, wants to develop and maximize her potential, loves to collaborate and share ideas
K. Devora-developmental adjunct for 2 years, also is assistant principle at Minisink (Middle school?), needs help as an adjunct
Shelly Paradies, 6th year in Biology department, wants new information about teaching to be more effective
Eileen Lux, 6th year, has run professional development programming for non-faculty
Andy Conrad-1.5 year, asked to be here by C. Chew

Question 2: Think back to your former professional self. Consider what you know now about your profession and what it takes to be successful at it. If you could design a professional development program for your former self, what would be the one most important experience that the program would provide? Why?
Helen-wanted to meet with others who had done it all before-to be proactive about learning about the profession
Karen-was flying by seat of pants when she was first hired and did not have support as adjunct
Helen-wanted a group where she could ask questions from positive people
Shelly-would benefit from more formal time for full-time faculty to talk about teaching
Anita-loved the book she got from the person she was replacing with classroom notes--especially the notes about what the students had trouble with, what they had questions about, also wanted to know what rules she needed to emphasize
Eileen Lux-would have asked for follow-up--all of the programming that they did was reactive, without any follow through, need honest feedback
E. Burke-need a work group to discuss ideas and make a change formalized, with the time set up
E. Lux- could use retirees
H. Motola- there is a group called the Sages that are retirees
E. Lux-she has done professional development but lacks formal training in the college setting, lacks a sense of who the audience is
S. Paradies-lack of training for teaching and there is the need for improvement
K. Devora-need experience teaching, some things are best learned doing them, not from a course
E. Burke-perhaps an educational psychology course, how adults learn, and what is the student perspective
K. Devora-problems like absenteeism, she needs a mentor
E. Burke-speaks of the faculty handbook, with a section for adjuncts, what is the status of the faculty handbook?
SP-needs more time
AM-what about Brown Bag Lunches?
EL-had the mentoring program during that time
KD-professional development can be part of the department meetings (for example the math department)
E. Burke-after department meetings, there was discussion, pizza, needs follow-up though, collaborative, with departments
E. Lux-the teachers College at Columbia is a good resource
AM-needs help coming from a clinical background
AM & EB ideas for topics--questioning techniques, higher-level questioning, learning styles, time management, stress management,
EB-tutoring should be more integrated into the curriculum, there should be a representative from the departments that need tutoring that could consult with the tutors.
Question 6: Do you have any other comments or suggestions about the direction of the CTL at SUNY Orange?

E.Lux-followthrough! get people to come back and revisit
EB-need support for implementing new ideas
HM-could use blackboard
EB-list serves for small questions
SP-promoting excellence in teaching, showcasing what others are doing, great ideas, technique of the week, create awareness of what others are doing
EB-need miniprojects that are documented
EL-get a tip of the day to pop up-don’t wait for people to come to you-go to them, get people together on a regular basis and support the things you want to do