Faculty Seminar Leads to Collaboration, Learning

Jaya Kannan, Sacred Heart University
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A total of 20 Sacred Heart University faculty members began the summer break with a week-long seminar on innovative teaching and digital learning. However, the work began long before the opening remarks at the conference.

“Work on the seminar began months ahead with the help of faculty facilitators and student assistants,” said Jaya Kannan, director of the Office of Digital Learning.

Participants worked in seven teams—two each from the John F. Welch College of Business (WCOB), the College of Arts & Sciences and the College of Health Professions. There was one team from the Isabelle Farrington College of Education. Participating faculty members were selected by the deans of each College. The deans also assigned participants to their respective teams.

“The deans made their selections based on the program goals for their particular College,” Kannan noted. “The early work ensured that each team arrived at the seminar with a collaborative goal that would lead to a concrete teaching object.”

The participants worked with five faculty facilitators both prior to and during the seminar. The student assistants came from the Factory, the media studies program and the computer science program. “The students were recruited based on the team’s goals, and they were crucial to implementing the faculty development process,” Kannan said.

The seminar concluded with each of the seven teams presenting their projects. One example from the WCOB involved the challenge of collaborating with international students from the University of Saint Joseph in Macau, China. The business faculty wanted to find an online platform that faculty and students from both countries could access since Blackboard was not available to students in China. With the help of the student assistants, and guided by their faculty facilitator, the team decided to use a host of Google Tools. By the end of the seminar, they had built a skeletal framework for an online course shell that they will continue to develop.

“That project was about the integration of digital learning and internationalization—two of our high-impact practices,” Kannan pointed out.
Going forward, the faculty will continue to receive support as they implement their project in the classroom in the fall. They will also share their success and challenges at appropriate faculty forums, Kannan said.

This seminar was a joint effort from IT, the Office of Digital Learning and Faculty Leadership under the guidance of the provost, Laura Niesen de Abruna, who wanted to reinforce this high-impact practice with the faculty. “My goal is to have this type of faculty seminar every summer,” she said.

“It was exciting to see it all come together. The faculty was very motivated and eager to learn,” Kannan said. “It was remarkable to see their enthusiasm for both the process and the results. They defined their pedagogical goals very clearly and arrived at a concrete solution in just five days. We will continue to work with the faculty as they apply their digital teaching practices in the classroom.”