Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

*NOVA Strategic Vision 2015: Gateway to the American Dream* sets forth a bold challenge for the college to be recognized for its excellence within the Commonwealth and throughout the nation:

By 2015, Northern Virginia Community College will be regarded as one of the top five institutions of higher education in Virginia, known for its excellence in teaching and dedication to higher education access and economic opportunity for the residents of Northern Virginia. It will have a reputation as one of the nation’s top three community colleges, with leading programs in the arts and sciences, nursing and allied health professions, and distance learning.

More specifically, under the goal of Teaching and Learning, the strategic plan calls for the college to “focus on student success by creating an environment of world-class teaching and learning.” One means specified for realizing the goal is the establishment of “a Center for Teaching and Learning dedicated to assisting faculty and staff in improving the quality of teaching and learning services, beginning with distance learning and hybrid instructional delivery modes.”

Based on the above college vision and strategic goal, based on the strong reputation the college already enjoys for the quality of its teaching and the performance of its learners, based on a deeply ingrained culture of excellence shared by the teaching faculty, and based on considerable planning and activities that have occurred in relation to developing the concept for a center, it is proposed that the college establish a college-wide Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL).

Specific planning done by a workgroup consisting of faculty, academic deans and other administrators, headed by Provost Barbara Saperstone and Vice President William Gary, has proposed six major goals for such a center:

1. To promote the culture of excellence for NOVA
2. To increase enrollment, retention and student success
3. To share access to excellent instructional practices and technology
4. To build on faculty strengths to enrich professional development
5. To support a committed faculty and staff through collegial mentoring and student-centered learning
6. To support teaching and learning assessment.

The Instructional and Student Services Committee, in considering the question of what might be done to support and strengthen teaching efforts at the college, endorsed at its March 2006 meeting the establishment of such a center and noted in particular needs for providing opportunities for faculty to assist faculty, for forming faculty learning communities on each campus, and for focusing on development and resources for adjunct faculty.
CETL would work with and provide college-wide coordination for a variety of activities and resources already being sponsored by campuses and college offices and committees to support excellence in teaching and learning. These include the Technology Applications Center, New Faculty Orientation, Learning Resource Services special units and projects related to teaching, Hybrid Course Project, Dogwood, VCCS Center for Teaching Excellence—NVCC Loudoun and Northern Virginia Region, Extended Learning Institute instructional design, Professional Development Committee, Instructional and Student Services Committee, Information Technology Committee, and Academic Deans Council. It is recognized that many of the most effective efforts to support and promote excellence rest in campus- and discipline-based initiatives. At the same time, these efforts can be enhanced and have broader impact by the collegial coordination and strategic guidance proposed to be provided by CETL. The work of CETL would also complement the efforts proposed to be undertaken by the Council on Academic and Student Excellence (CASE), which has particular focus on students and seeks to create an academic environment and campus culture that promotes high levels of student achievement and aspiration.

During the 2006-07 year, Executive Vice President Dever worked with Provost Barbara Saperstone to set up a prototype of CETL, using EVP special initiative funding to provide reassigned time for faculty member Nan Peck to work in conjunction with Annandale Campus resources to provide a variety of college-wide activities (see attached list). These have been well received, particularly because the activities drew from deep resources already present in the faculty and staff as well as provided new development opportunities.

It is proposed that CETL continue under more formal auspices in the 2007-08 year. Under joint sponsorship of the Executive Vice President and the Annandale Provost, the CETL coordinator would be charged not only with continuing college-wide events but also working with each campus to see that campus-based events take place in response to identified needs. To this end, an Advisory Committee would be established with faculty representation from each campus as well as representation from division deans, Instructional Technology, and Learning Resources. Also included would be adjunct faculty members and students.

Further goals for 2007-08 would include a college-wide compilation of activities already occurring, along with an identification of any gaps and additional needs; attention to scholarship, best practices, and evidence-based enhancements that promote excellence in teaching and learning; dissemination of results through various forums, including regional and national conferences; and development of a comprehensive plan, to include organizational structure, for extending the work of CETL into the 2015 strategic timeline for the college.
Planning for the CETL Initiative:

This year the Annandale Campus has been piloting some projects that might become a part of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. Beginning in August 2006, these include:

1. Faculty Forum sessions held monthly on Fridays
   - Captivate Your Students (September 15, 2006)
   - Engaging Learning Activities (October 20, 2006)
   - Boomers, GenXers, and Milleannials (January 19, 2007)
   - Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher (February 16, 2007)
2. Power Up Your Pedagogy conference held January 3-8, 2007 with 129 unduplicated attendees, 41 of whom attended all three days;
3. Annandale New Adjunct Faculty Orientation sessions held August 12, 2006 and January 13, 2007;
4. NVCC Faculty Resource Fair held January 12, 2007;
5. Head Start, and orientation for new assistant dean/program head; and
6. Workshop on evaluating and recording student presentations (with Germanna Community College); and
7. Communication Faculty Offer Videos on Communication Theories, (see http://www.nvcc.edu/TVCENTER/Communication_Theories.htm).

The College has offered several faculty development events including:
8. NVCC New Faculty Orientation I held August 13 and 14, 2006;
9. NVCC New Faculty Orientation II held January 12, 2007; and
10. NVCC New Faculty Orientation III held January 5, 2007

We’ve also spearheaded the publication of a college-wide newsletter Teaching and Learning Matters (Available at http://www.nvcc.edu/home/npeck)

The POD Network has awarded us a $300 start-up grant to be used in our efforts, http://www.podnetwork.org/grants&awards/startup.htm

Faculty and Administrators at the following universities have expressed their willingness to work with us as well:
   - George Mason University
   - University of Maryland
   - University of Virginia
   - Georgetown University
1 “Student success” subsequently added.

2 A proposal for the establishment of a CETL using distance learning and hybrid instructional delivery modes as the financial base for its establishment was sent forward last year. Based on the original working group’s discussions, however, it is believed that the establishment of such a center cannot easily reach its ultimate goal if distance learning and hybrid course development must financially support the development of such a center. It is recommended, therefore, that the general strategic goal be changed to read, “a Center for Teaching and Learning dedicated to assisting faculty and staff in improving the quality of teaching and learning services.”

3 Specific items cited by the ISSC:
   • Increase peer review and mentoring to provide more opportunities for faculty to assist faculty.
   • Identify excellent teaching and facilitate the sharing of successful teaching techniques college-wide through videos and webcasts.
   • Make more resources available through newsletters and the increased use of Blackboard.
   • Institute Faculty Learning Communities on each campus to encourage collaboration among faculty for course enhancement.
   • Focus on the adjunct faculty. The need for professional development opportunities and greater inclusion of adjuncts in campus events were discussed. Natalie Safley noted that a professional development day for adjunct faculty is being planned at the Loudoun campus.
   • Encourage the establishment of a Center for Teaching and Learning. Establishing such a center is one of the Teaching and Learning goals in Strategic Vision 2015: Gateway to the American Dream.
   • Continue to emphasize the benefits of technology to the teaching process and provide individual assistance as needed.