

## Creating your own Community

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A common issue for geoscience faculty at two-year colleges is that of isolation. I have found several strategies that have been helpful for me in addressing this issue. The added benefit has resulted in opportunities to advocate for geosciences at the community colleges and students enrolled in our classes.

One approach to addressing feelings of isolation are to create a community of colleagues around a scholarly idea. For example, I worked with colleagues in various different science (e.g., physics, chemistry, biology, psychology) and math disciplines in developing a common understanding of the Nature of Science. We were part of a faculty and professional learning community as originally described by Milt Cox at Miami University in Ohio (<http://www.units.muohio.edu/flc/>). We worked to reform our curriculum in each of our individual classes through informed discussions and readings. This community of colleagues helped me to find a place of comfort and a professional sounding board in order to explore new teaching approaches in my classroom. More information about our learning community and some of the findings from this two year endeavor are at:

[http://ctl.mc.maricopa.edu/wiki/index.php/Nature\\_of\\_Science\\_FPLC\\_2006-7](http://ctl.mc.maricopa.edu/wiki/index.php/Nature_of_Science_FPLC_2006-7) .

Another approach to addressing feelings of isolation is to attend professional development programs that are appropriate for multiple types of institutions. It is rare to find a workshop that only addresses the needs of community colleges. However, attending professional development with multiple institutions serves two purposes—1) you learn more about something that you can take back to your classroom; 2) you help to remind our colleagues at four-year institutions the importance of students at the community college. While money for professional development programs are not always available, there are occasionally travel grants available (of which I have been a beneficiary). Stepping out and interacting with others outside our own campus can help to foster new ideas and new collaborations.

Many times the conversations that occur outside of the official workshop are some of the most valuable that can be gained for future possible collaborations and conversations (never underestimate the power of the conversation at the bar!). For example, I attended the workshop on the, “Role of the Affective Domain in Teaching Geosciences” (<http://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/affective/workshop07/index.html>). This not only changed my entire mindset to teaching (and helped to confirm some of what I already knew/practiced), I developed some very powerful connections with other colleagues that continue to this day. For example, I am currently a part of a Phase I CCLI grant (<http://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward.do?AwardNumber=0914404>) in which we are gathering data on student attitudes and motivations in introductory geology classrooms.

The most important thing about these types of collaborations is helping colleagues at four-year institutions realize that the community colleges are uniquely situated to help support a missing link in the geoscience pipeline. If forty-four percent of all undergraduates are attending a community college (AACC, 2009), and the introductory geology class is a common general studies class, we have a large resource pool that university programs should *want* to target. If we want our students to be successful, if institutions want to broaden participation in the geosciences; we not only deserve to be at the table, we *must* be at the table.

American Association of Community Colleges. (2009). *Community College Facts at a Glance*. Washington, D.C., Available at: <http://www.aacc.nche.edu>