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About the Center for the Improvement of Teaching (CIT) at UMass Boston

MISSION

The Center for the Improvement of Teaching (CIT) is a grassroots faculty-led organization committed to collaborative work on pedagogy across all disciplines and colleges. CIT's mission since its 1983 founding has been to help faculty foster the learning of diverse students within a dynamic urban university environment like UMass Boston, with complex institutional expectations, changing communication technologies, and evolving concepts of academic knowledge and training. CIT has used sustained reflection and scholarship to promote more effective pedagogical practice, a high standard of excellence in teaching, and an inclusive education that engages all students and promotes their academic success.

CIT's definition of inclusion is broad and highlights race, social class, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, and culture as well as differences in levels of skill, academic preparation and language background. CIT takes seriously the multiple ways that these factors intersect with each other and serve as assets for learning and teaching.

The hallmark and strength of CIT is an active network of faculty, staff, and students who regularly engage in critical reflection and dialogue that deepen and extend a culture of engaged learning, academic excellence, and curricular and pedagogical transformation at UMB. CIT's regular programs include semester-long faculty seminars, public forums, student/faculty dialogues, annual conferences, faculty peer mentoring, and the encouragement of scholarship on diversity, learning and teaching.

Established in 1983, CIT's initial goal was to improve the quality of teaching within the Col-

lege of Liberal Arts by drawing on the skills and wisdom of UMB's faculty rather than outside experts. In 1989, The Center extended its activities to the university as a whole, and emphasized diversity and inclusion as key components in teaching and learning.

SEMESTER-LONG FACULTY SEMINARS

Since 1983 over 280 faculty across disciplines and from every college in the university have participated in intensive and collaborative faculty development seminars. These seminars consist of weekly meetings and an intensive pre-semester session, in which faculty from a range of disciplines and across colleges examine and interrogate issues relevant to teaching in an urban public institution such as UMass. The seminar in the fall focuses on a specific issue such as Linguistic Diversity in the Classroom, Teaching Students with Different Levels of Academic Preparation, or Using Technology to Enhance Learning. The seminar in the spring for untenured and recently-tenured faculty provides opportunity for these faculty to work together on issues of teaching, learning and professional development. Since the fall of 2000, CIT seminars have extended their membership beyond the UMB community and now include a faculty participant from community colleges in the Boston area.

FORUMS/DIALOGUES

CIT has sponsored over 150 forums since 1990. There are approximately four to five forums offered each semester. These forums are

The information included in this section is largely drawn from CIT's homepage <http://www.cit.umb.edu> to which readers are referred for further inquiries.

open to all faculty, student and staff members of the UMB community. They provide opportunities to share perspectives, engage in dialogue, and to collaborate across disciplines about critical and timely issues. In addition to these events, CIT offers an on-going discussion group each semester that focuses on pedagogical issues related to race, class, gender, age, and sexuality. Finally, each semester CIT plans a student-faculty luncheon series that takes place over the course of three weeks, where students and teachers share their particular perspectives on issues of teaching and learning.

CONFERENCES

Since 1994, CIT has organized a January conference on Teaching for Transformation. The day-long conference includes presentations and workshops offered on a variety of issues that are critical to teaching and learning in a diverse, public institution of higher education. They provide opportunities for presenters across different educational institutions in the New England area to explore issues and share strategies that focus on inclusive teaching and curriculum change in college classrooms. Traditionally, the conference presenters have included UMass faculty, staff, and students, although the conference has always been open to and attended by members of the larger Boston area college community. Last year, CIT for the first time extended the call for proposals to include presenters from educational institutions beyond UMass, thus expanding the offerings of the conference and bringing in an even greater off-campus audience. In addition to the annual January conferences, CIT has organized several other conferences focusing on issues of diversity as it relates to teaching. Two of these conferences, Diversity and Academic Standards and The Media's Message: Race, Representation and Higher Education were held at the John F. Kennedy Library.

DIVERSITY RESEARCH INITIATIVE (DRI)

From 1996-1999 the Ford Foundation funded semester-long, student-faculty collaborative research teams who examined issues of diversity,

using UMass as the site of inquiry. Participants reported on this work at a CIT conference on Building and Sustaining a Diversity Research Initiative. This culminated in the publication of a book written by *DRI participants: A Diversity Research Initiative: How Diverse Students Become Researchers, Change Agents, and Members of a Research Community*.

CURRICULUM TRANSFORMATION

In 1990 and 1991, CIT coordinated a Diversity Working Group of faculty, students and staff that contributed to the university-wide acceptance of a diversity curriculum requirement. Diversity was defined broadly to include race, class, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, and culture. UMB now offers numerous courses that focus on at least two elements of diversity. Another area of curriculum transformation in which CIT has been involved is the role that CIT members have played in working with and mentoring faculty who seek guidance with respect to their own teaching.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

CIT produces an annual newsletter, *Building Connections*, which reports on teaching and learning initiatives across campus.

CIT created and updates each year A Diversity Resources Guide at the University of Massachusetts Boston for UMB students, faculty, and staff to be used as a guide to diversity initiatives on campus.

As a resource for participants in the faculty seminars, as well as for faculty campus-wide, CIT has developed a library that includes an extensive collection of journal articles, books and videos.

In 2001, an edited volume, *Achieving Against the Odds: How Academics Become Teachers of Diverse Students* (Temple University Press, 2001), which focused on the pedagogical challenges of teaching at UMass Boston, was published. This collection includes chapters by faculty who have been involved in CIT and thus demonstrates the ways in which CIT's work has contributed to the teaching and learning of these UMB faculty.