Appreciative Inquiry Certification Report
**Coming Together: Envisioning the Future of Communication
at the University of Maryland**

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2. Training dates: January 12-15, 2010

3. Description of Group: Department of Communication, University of Maryland
The department is highly ranked and offers a graduate program that is divided into
four track areas. The tracks represent topic/research areas. This track system has
been in place for the last ten years and has structure that impedes innovation and
collaboration. The participants included all the faculty members.

4. List the names you included in the Core Group: Chair, Graduate Director, Director
of Undergraduate studies, new faculty member, very seasoned faculty member who
had been a past Chair.

5. Positive Topic: **Coming Together: Envisioning the Future of Communication
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6. See Interview Guide, Page 5

7. Method for identifying topic: The core group discussed the issues and then at a
faculty meeting, the entire faculty was asked what their wishes were. After hearing
faculty input, the core group developed the affirmative topic during a meeting with
the facilitators. Also at this faculty meeting, an introduction to AI was provided to
the whole group.

Method of interviews: Face-to-Face paired Interviews.
The energy was very high during the interviews.

Then pairs formed groups of 4 and shared stories and identified their top 3 themes.

After each group presented their top 3 themes, the group had a very frank
conversation about wanting to build more community. The energy of the room was
very intense during this discussion.

8. List of Life Giving Forces that emerged from energy diagram:

Value the diversity of intellectual interests (1 vote)
High academic standards for faculty and students (4 votes)
Value quality of our students both graduate and undergraduate (5 votes) Group 1
Commitment to the department by all faculty at all levels (1 vote)

Collaboration
Cohesion/respect/harmony
Pursuit of intellectual excellence (2 votes) Group 2
Reputation/identity (3 votes)
Time for reflection /research (4 votes)

Human capital – faculty, staff, students (5 votes)
Engaged teaching – getting students into the world (4 votes)
Graduate program as center of department identity (5 votes) Group 3
Shared commitment to intellectual life (2 votes) Group 3
Inclusive decision-making

Community (Who we are – cohesiveness, caring, inclusion, trust) (10 votes) Group 4
Excellence – dedication, commitment, aspiration
Collaboration – cross cutting, in and out of department
Mentoring – The graduate program, faculty to faculty, not just formal (2 votes)
Deliberation – creativity (open to) ratio of history to creativity (3 votes)

9. The groups of four selected a theme and visualized them through skits and
pictures and words:

Group 1 Skit: Responsible
Engaged
Student-centered learning
Community
Intellectual energy

Group 2 Skit: "pursuit of intellectual excellence"
Advancing innovative knowledge claims
Creating outcomes that are intellectually, socially, and professionally beneficial

Group 3: Role of Graduate program in our intellectual life
A proportional role in partnership with:
Undergraduate teaching
Killer colloquium
Professional partnerships
Faculty research collaboration
External collaboration with grants

Group 4: Letter to Department:

Dear Department of Communication of the future:

We admire you. We admire that all members of the department are valued, and that each members knows they are valued. We admire how you place value on the time you spend together. We admire how you understand each other's anxieties and clarify expectations to acknowledge and address them. We admire your open and honest interactions, free as it is of judgment or retribution. We admire that you allow room for conflict and disagreement, and that when it is over you will still care for each other. We admire how you welcome new energy into the department and help and mentor each other so that you can grow and thrive professionally and personally. We admire you for your shared commitment to excellence and creativity. We admire that you know who you are as a department and that you are all committed to getting there.

After they chose the theme that most energized them and visualized the theme, I asked groups to flesh out the theme further and then use the theme as the basis of the SOAR activity.

Note: Prior to designing this session, I asked Lane how I could work in SOAR and where to place it. He suggested the following activities which I used:

AI Interviews
Sharing Stories
Energy Diagram (or simply discussing common/important themes)
SOAR analysis of important themes/ideas
Goal setting (group and/or individual)

10. From the SOAR activity, two key strategic intentions were formed:

1) Increase the community feeling, growing cross-collaboration and intellectual sharing across the faculty
2) Re-imagining the track format and decoupling the research areas from the track idea.

We discussed these intentions as a group and did some action planning and next steps. People picked topics and committees to work on based on their interest. At the end of the 1. 5 days, the group ended with very high energy and an appreciation for the process. They felt they had achieved some breakthroughs in terms of sharing honestly that they wanted more collaboration and community.

11. Impact or Results

Following the retreat, the Assembly voted to decouple the research areas from the track concept. They increased the research areas to 7. This is enabling the strategic planning committee to complete its work by May 2010.

On the community side, there is a committee planning more social events. They had a successful holiday party and have several other gatherings planned.

12. I will check in with them to offer some accountability around the activities they are planning to deliberately structure more community building.

13. What did I wish for the inquiry? What did I learn?

I wanted to experience the interviews, the emergence of the life giving forces and how the themes get visualized. I learned how to better facilitate the interviews as well as the visualization. In terms of my personal best, because the group had a lot of wounds from the past, I facilitated them through the positive and also created space for people to share what they needed to share in order to be able to ask for what they wanted more of. There was a strong longing expressed by the group for more community.

I also learned in hindsight that the inquiry guide really doesn't need to be modified much. The most generic one can work great and there is no need to agonize about this part. The guide we used had been modified significantly.

14. Permission to use this story was authorized by Dr. Elizabeth Toth, Chair of the Department.

CENTER FOR LEADERSHIP &
ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

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Interview Guide

Instructions: Select a partner, and in pairs interview one another using the following questions. Be a generous listener. Do not dialogue. Rather, take turns to actually conduct an interview. If you need more information or clarification ask additional follow-up questions. Use this sheet to record the results of your interview. When your interviews are completed you will share the results with others in a group.

1. Best experience: Recall a time when you felt the most alive or excited about working here or elsewhere. What made it an exciting experience? Describe the situation or event in detail.

2. Core Value: Now thinking about the Department of Communication, what do you value most about this community---and what is the "core factor" that gives life to the community (without it the organization would not be what it is)?

3. Strengths: Building on this and assuming the organization will change in the future, what are those qualities, capacities, strengths, assets, etc. that you would want to keep or build upon, even as it moves into a new and changing future?

4. Affirmative topics:

   A. Research

   • Tell me about your most satisfying research experience. How did it positively impact you. How did it positively impact others? What were the circumstances? What was your role and the role of others in making the experience positive?

   B. Teaching

- Describe a time when you had an exceptional experience teaching a communication class. What was it about the experience that made it exceptional?

- Describe a time when you felt proud to be teaching communication.

C. Inclusive and collaborative climate

- You gain wisdom from many different sources. What has been the most positive collaborative learning experience you have been engaged in? Who was involved? What happened? What made the experience special? How did it help you grow?

- Recognizing that an inclusive climate can mean different things to different people please tell me what it means to you and tell me a story about any time in your life when you felt most included. Tell me about the circumstances, your role and the role of others in creating this environment of inclusion, how you felt and so on?

- Describe a time when you were part of a team that had a high level of trust and respect among the members. How was trust and respect communicated? What made it possible to establish trust in that group?

D. Student Experience

- Describe a time when you were an undergraduate or graduate student and had an exceptional experience with an advisor. What were the circumstances? What did the advisor do to make the experience outstanding? What role, if any, did your classmates play in that experience? What did you do?

- Without being humble, describe a time when you provided a student or students with an outstanding educational experience (instruction, research, mentoring, advising).

5. The future:

- Envision the teaching and learning environment of the future. What would it look like in terms of curriculum, tracks, and organizational structure?

- Looking toward the future, if you could transform the organization in any way, what three wishes would you make?