

## **Sabbatical Leave at Des Moines Area Community College**

*By John Van Ast, Ph. D.*

After two years of teaching fine cabinet making and upholstery in Michigan, followed by a year of teaching at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, I spent the next five years in Minnesota, three and a half years with the Minnesota State Board of Technical Education, honing professional development competence in the program-planning division with the sole responsibility of professional development for Technical College Faculty. Another year and a half was spent with the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis Campus, offering "Teaching and Learning" courses for Technical and Vocational Education faculty new to Minnesota's Technical Colleges, at that time named Area Vocational Technical Institutes, AVTI.

In 1975 I came to Iowa State University to take a teaching leadership position, yes, you guessed it, "Teaching and Learning" coursework for Iowa Technical and Vocational Community College faculty for new and experienced teachers.

In 1990, I requested of DMACC (Des Moines Area Community College) President Dr. Joseph Borgen the opportunity to spend my sabbatical year working with DMACC faculty. The motivating factors were numerous. After 15 years of providing coursework, as well as curriculum assistance through the Iowa Curriculum Assistance System, it was time to spend time with Technical and Vocational faculty, and where better than with DMACC faculty where the rubber met the road.

Carroll Bennett, VP of Instruction, was a valued influence to me as a teacher educator; his influence pointed me to a sabbatical at DMACC. Ninety percent of my time was spent with DMACC faculty, 10 percent with faculty at six other Iowa Community Colleges. Time spent included one-on-one visits with faculty, time in the classroom, time with students, time with department heads, and time with deans. Time spent in the DMACC library searching out the latest articles, books, fiche, yes fiche, on Teaching and Learning Leadership in the Community College Classroom was an effort to become up-to-date on what had been going on, what was currently going on, and what the future of teacher education and professional development looked like.

Dr. Borgen's agenda for my time and talent was to provide a fresh approach to the DPI "Required Certification Courses." In addition, Dr. Borgen was interested in a Master's-level program for experienced Technical and Vocational faculty, which would prepare them to be leaders in Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century.

My vision for a sabbatical and Dr. Borgen's vision for the teaching and learning competence for new faculty and experienced faculty made for a great partnership. DMACC provided office space, secretarial and office services, librarian support, faculty to tap, administrative support, and an environment to succeed.

There was much to learn. There were on-campus bridges to build. There was trust to build. There was self-discipline to maximize my full time on campus. How would I manage my time? How would I maximize the resources DMACC provided? Dr. Borgen gave the thumbs up. The deans gave me access to their faculty. The faculty gave me their trust. And the support services gave me their best.

What was surprising was the enthusiasm of the faculty for their students. What was most surprising was overwhelming support and need for a more effective outcome and delivery for preparing new Technical

and Vocational faculty, and, secondly, for a program to select and prepare experienced faculty to become teaching and learning leaders in their respective department, as well as across disciplines.

Library staff never tired of requests for more and more teaching and learning documents. Support staff never tired of requests for word-processing rough draft after rough draft of what was eventually to become the rational and support document to replace the old required certification courses, the "Induction Mentoring" program for new Technical and Vocational faculty. The new program to prepare experienced staff to become Teaching and Learning leaders for DMACC was the TEACHING AND LEARNING LEADERSHIP FOR IOWA COMMUNITY COLLEGES...**TLC2** . Both programs were outcome based. Both programs used a COHORT implementation model. Both programs were accessible to busy faculty.

There were daily surprises. What an amazing sabbatical experience! I enjoyed working at Iowa State University. I loved my time at DMACC. If Dr. Borgen had offered me the opportunity to stay, I would have. Of course, it did not hurt that my wife Pam also worked there, first in Health Occupation Continuing Education, then as Economic Development Consultant and Acting Dean, and then as Health Occupation Dean.

The experience of going back to ISU was probably the most disappointing surprise. And I knew that would happen. I presented excellent documentation regarding the INDUCTION MENTORING PROGRAM. I presented excellent documentation regarding the TEACHING AND LEARNING LEADERSHIP PROGRAM FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES. The age and size of a land grant institution always make change difficult. And it was. Yet, to the credit of Dr. Larry Ebbers, my colleague, and others, the programs were implemented.

I retired in 2003. Reflection is one of the joys of retirement. And yes you guessed it--I reflect on my 1990-1991 sabbatical with the folks at DMACC as a very significant highlight. Thank you to all DMACC folks who made it happen.

**Editor's Note—Dr. Van Ast was the first college faculty member who spent a sabbatical leave at DMACC. His year at the college resulted in improvements in instruction by increasing the confidence and competence of faculty members. He was and continues to be greatly respected for his professional and inclusive approach to instructing and mentoring faculty members. CB**