Report on the Progress of the FWI Soul on Fire: Narratives That Inspire Project

Submitted by Dr. Anne Wong, Principal Investigator, Dec 18, 2015

Background

Personal narratives can be a compelling way to inspire and motivate. The podcast series entitled “Soul on Fire: Narratives That Inspire” is a collaborative Faculty of Health Sciences Program for Faculty Development (PFD) and McMaster Institute for Innovation and Excellence in Teaching (MIIETL) faculty development project that showcases the narratives of exemplary McMaster faculty educators and role models. It aims to stimulate reflective practice in order to promote teaching, educational scholarship and academic community at McMaster University. Specific objectives are: 1. To create a legacy that showcases the narratives of inspirational faculty 2. To stimulate reflective practice in order to promote scholarship of teaching at McMaster University 3. To inform faculty development programs.

After its launch, we plan to conduct a program evaluation of this podcast series to assess its effectiveness with respect to the degree of listener uptake, impact on teaching practices and academic community engagement. We have already obtained REB approval for the evaluation protocol. We will track online access, discussions, responses to questionnaires, surveys as well as conduct individual and focus group interviews with McMaster faculty. The results of this evaluation will be used to inform further educational and faculty development in the use of podcasts and narratives as well as determine the continuation and sustainability of this project.

Progress and impact thus far

This has been an exciting initiative. PFD and MIIETL agreed to collaborate on this project and we convened a planning committee and had regular planning meetings. As a result of nominations from Department Chairs, we were able to narrow down 7 exemplary faculty who agreed to tell their stories to be recorded as part of this podcast series. Interviews and recording started Feb 2015 and concluded in Nov 2015. All of the editing of the podcasts have been completed. I am currently working with Brian Hamister to finalize the website that will house these podcasts. At the time of this report, this part of the project is nearly completed.

I have been in contact with Susan Emigh and Erica Balch (Public Relations) to develop a strategy for publicity and launch in January 2016. The plan is to feature each podcast interview per month on the PFD and MIIETL website. We will be meeting in the first week of January 2016 to plan for its launch.

So far the impact of this project for me personally has been profound. Because I conducted all of the interviews, I had the unique opportunity to speak with and learn from a broad interdisciplinary group of exemplary faculty members from Faculty of Health Sciences,
Geography, Department of Linguistics, Chemical Engineering and Psychology. I have been inspired by their dedication, passion and insights. This project marks the first PFD-MIIETL collaboration on an important educational and research initiative. This collaboration has been immensely enriching to both programs. It also advances the mission of the FWI for building community across campus. The collaboration broadens academic dialogue, catalyzes lively, scholarly and reflective discussion and sets the stage for further creative educational and research initiatives. These outcomes are consistent with the FWI project as well as our respective programs’ objectives and goals.

It is our hope that faculty will also find these podcasts as inspirational and in doing so, enable them to continue to realise their potential. They may also benefit from developing greater self-awareness through reflecting on their teaching practices. We hope that this series will also further promote academic community engagement and faculty development. As well, the series may contribute to better understanding of the pedagogical impact of online narratives on faculty development inform future initiatives. We will be evaluating this program as previously mentioned. We intend to report on these outcomes in the next year when the data has been collected and analysed.

Beyond the individual level, benefits for the scientific and university community include the opportunity to build interdisciplinary bridges across campus, engagement in reflective teaching practices and the scholarship of teaching and further promotion of academic community engagement and faculty development.

The dissemination of this project will be coordinated with the McMaster University Public Relations as well as locally through our respective programs. I also plan to present this project at university venues such as the Annual Day in Faculty Development and the MIIETL-sponsored events. Other venues include national and international conferences such as the Canadian Conference for Medical Education and the Association for Medical Education of Europe.

Thus far the project has run smoothly. I anticipate some of the upcoming challenges will come from getting enough data for the program evaluation. As there are many exemplary faculty that we have not yet approached for interviewing as well as annual teaching award recipients, I anticipate that if the results support continuing this podcast series, that there will many opportunities to do so.