

February, 1993 - Samuel Morneweck, Chemistry

I spent a wonderful two weeks last summer at NYU as a participant in the Faculty Resource Network program called Advances in Modern Chemistry: Redesigning the Undergraduate Curriculum. There were 15 participants in the program, all of whom were chemistry faculty from primarily undergraduate colleges. About half were from the Historically Black colleges that are partners in the FRN.

The program had two somewhat different foci. One was the explanation and demonstration of some newer analytical techniques in chemistry, while the other was mainly an exchange of information among the participants about ways to improve undergraduate chemistry teaching.

The section on analytical techniques was well organized by the head of the NYU Chemistry Department, who was a very funny, warm host. There was a mixture of both theory and practice, which provided benefits for all, even those who found the theory pretty heavy. Not only did we learn what these techniques could be used for, we were also invited to bring or send samples to NYU for analysis. This is particularly important, since the cheapest instrument that was discussed cost more than \$100,000, well beyond the reach of most of those in attendance.

The exchange of information on undergraduate teaching was probably more valuable, since nearly all the FRN members are urban, undergraduate schools with similar types of scientifically ill-prepared students. We shared information about things we were doing, while the NYU faculty supplied us with copies of publications to stimulate our discussion. Not surprisingly, the NYU faculty did not have much to say about this area because they have a strong graduate program as well as a quite select undergraduate student body taught in large lecture sections. Everyone was especially interested in the Xavier College program, which has received much well-deserved attention for its success at sending minority students into medicine and science graduate programs.

I took advantage of the opportunity to stay at one of the NYU dorms for the two weeks, which turned out to be a good choice. I had a chance to learn much about the East Village restaurants in company with my fellow participants. The eating, the camaraderie, and the good conversation, which frequently returned to the things we had talked about in the sessions that day, made this one of the best parts of the experience. The organization by the NYU staff of all the activities was extremely thorough, making this a truly enjoyable and profitable experience.