According to its mission statement, “the Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education (POD) fosters human development in higher education through faculty, instructional, and organizational development.” I attended POD’s annual conference to learn about how teaching and learning centers like the Sherrerd Center can better serve the students and faculty members of Smith College.

The theme of the conference this year was “Freedom to Connect, Freedom to Risk, Freedom to Learn.” I attended workshops, plenary sessions, and other events on the following:

Freedom to Connect
- considering whether and how MOOCs and other technologically mediated teaching methods can compliment traditional face-to-face or “naked” teaching in the classroom
- networking with staff from other teaching and learning centers
- sharing resources such as “teaching tips,” books on teaching, and ideas for welcoming new faculty members
- using WikiPODia as a resource: http://podnetwork.org/wikipodia/
- leading “from the middle” (Adrianna Kezar)

Freedom to Risk
- protecting faculty members undertaking a risky new teaching method by issuing them a letter from the provost saying that they have the option not to count their student evaluations that semester
- reassuring students in a risky new learning environment by telling them that the grade distribution will not change compared to previous iterations of the same class
- getting students to realize that riskier active learning techniques will help them to achieve higher-order goals such as life-long learning and getting a job (active learning can be defined as “collectively seeking, sieving, and synthesizing experiences rather than individually locating and absorbing information from some single best source” [Dede, 2005])

Freedom to Learn
- using theatrical performances to foster discussions about issues in higher education like teaching ESL students; balancing scholarship, teaching, and service; and supporting group work among students (CRLT Players)
- supporting students especially from “underpowered backgrounds” by preferring active learning techniques over traditional lecture, which does no harm to students from more privileged backgrounds
• offering consultations to faculty members who want to improve their teaching
• asking colleagues in the departments of education and psychology to share their knowledge about recent developments in the learning sciences
• encouraging teaching-arts-luncheon presenters to model their innovative technique rather than lecture