CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES
AND
COLLEGE OF THE SEQUOIAS
COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

#90-0027
This project introduced a Learning Community model to the College of the Sequoias curriculum. By promoting nontraditional form, content and methods of instruction, the curriculum was restructured to link courses across disciplines and to create a community of learners among students and faculty.
Learning Communities: A Project for Curricular Reform

This proposal promotes nontraditional form, content and methods of instruction and will result in improved faculty teaching abilities. It addresses the problem of separation of courses and of participants in the learning enterprise. Its objectives include introducing administration and faculty at College of the Sequoias to the learning community model, a deliberate restructuring of curriculum into linked courses across the disciplines that build a community of learners among students and faculty. Its objectives also include designing, reviewing, and refining learning community curriculum models. A final objective is designing and implementing recruiting strategies so that the models can be offered in the 1991-92 academic year. Activities include workshops to introduce the model, collaboration in ongoing curriculum design, a workshop to review drafts of the designs, collaborative refinement of the design, and development and implementation of strategies for recruiting students. The proposed budget includes expenditures of $14,800 to cover the costs of training, curriculum development, and recruitment of students. The project will finally result in learning community courses advertised in spring of 1991 and offered during the academic year 1991-92. Because of its interdisciplinary nature, the project will impact across instructional divisions. Experiences in colleges already employing the model promise growth of learning community offerings in subsequent years of implementation and expansion to other institutions. The focus of this first year proposal necessitates evaluating the outcomes to assure understanding of the model and evaluating the curriculum created to assure that it contains the components generally found in successful learning communities. This first year, dissemination of information about the progress and products of these efforts at curriculum reform will center on the C.O.S. community and will make use of a college faculty enrichment newsletter, the campus newspaper, and existing campus groups with interest in interdisciplinary studies, such as the Developmental Studies Committee, Honors program, and Curriculum Committee.
Learning Communities: A Project for Curricular Reform

1. Specific Educational Program Being Addressed

Educational Programs/Services Addressed by the Proposal

This proposal addresses Funding Priority 1: AB 1173 Projects. It promotes "nontraditional form, content and methods of instruction" in its objectives to train faculty in the learning community model and to develop learning community curriculum.

The term "learning community" designates any one of a variety of approaches which link together several existing courses around a central theme or question. Students approach these questions from a variety of disciplinary perspectives and build connections between disciplines. The learning community specifically asks students and instructors to listen to and respond to each others' different perspectives: it stresses the collaborative nature of knowledge and knowing. Thus students in learning communities have opportunities to study issues at increased depth, to integrate knowledge across disciplines, and to interact with each other and with their instructors as fellow participants in the learning enterprise.

Such curriculum designs in Washington state have impacted courses and students throughout the system: vocational and academic, developmental and honors, transfer and certificate, lower and upper division, general education and majors. At the implementation stage, we anticipate this kind of wide impact. For the single year herein covered, this proposal will take advantage of the expertise of faculty and trainers from Washington state (See Appendix A) by using them to train College of the Sequoias faculty in learning community design. As C.O.S. faculty design learning community models, they will investigate interrelationships among disciplines and consider collaborative means of exploring these interrelationships, thereby challenging themselves and improving their teaching abilities.
2. Specific Problems Being Addressed

Problems Addressed by the Proposal

Redesigning curriculum into the learning community model addresses a central problem of higher education not only at College of the Sequoias but throughout the nation. This problem has been called "atomization": the fragmentation of the disciplines and departments and of the people, both students and faculty, from each other. In the current system, except for departmental sequences, each course stands on its own. Little or no use is made of the material from one course to another. Students are deprived of any curricular support system that might reinforce or interpret the importance of what is being discussed in any one course; rather, instructors and disciplines appear to be doing their own thing. Students too rarely see the significance of the requirements called general education, and, if they make connections between disciplines at all, it is not usually because we have encouraged them.

Further, most course experience is private and unshared. Faculty rarely pursue the ideas in their courses with other faculty outside their discipline. Skills courses are divorced from "content" courses. Student-faculty interaction is too often minimal, and the major communicative skill cultivated is too often limited to listening.
3. Population To Be Served

Population Served by the Project

This project proposes to train administration and faculty in the learning community model and to support faculty in designing learning community curriculum during the 1990-91 academic year. Therefore, the population served by the project is the administration and faculty at College of the Sequoias. More specifically, fifteen administrators and thirty faculty members, including representatives from all ten instructional divisions, will be trained. At least six faculty members from a variety of instructional divisions will continue to develop learning community curriculum.
4. Objectives

[SEE “WORKPLAN” SECTION OF THIS DOCUMENT.]
5. Workplan Narrative

Work Statement

The following outlines objectives and activities and accounts for the expenditure of $14,600 requested from the Fund for Instructional Improvement. See also Appendix B.

A. Objective #1: to introduce administration and faculty at College of the Sequoias to the basic features of learning communities and to gain their support for design and implementation of the model.

Activity: In August, 1990, Jean MacGregor, Assistant Director of the Washington Center for the Improvement of Undergraduate Education at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, will conduct two workshops at the College of the Sequoias. Twenty-five administrators and division chairs will participate in three hours of training in the learning community model. Thirty faculty members from all ten instructional divisions will participate in four hours of training in the model.

Budget: $1250. Includes travel, food, lodging, and consultant fee for MacGregor and materials (handouts, flip charts, supplies) for workshops.

Evaluation: During the workshops, the consultant will administer formative evaluations to check participants' understanding of the learning communities model. At the close of the workshops, she will administer summative evaluations so that participants can identify workshop strengths and make suggestions for improvement. She and the Project Director will ascertain those faculty interested in continuing with curriculum design.

B. Objective #2: to develop learning community curriculum materials, including the central theme or issue of the community, the choice of texts, the syllabus, the student/faculty covenants, the procedures for evaluation, the teaching methodologies, and other features of learning community models.
Activity: Through the fall semester, 1990, the Project Director will schedule and facilitate a minimum of thirty hours of workshops and/or retreats. At these workshops and/or retreats, at least six faculty from different divisions will collaborate to draft curriculum designs for learning community offerings.

Budget: $6500.
Faculty stipends of $1000/each; materials $500. This stipend recognizes faculty work in curriculum design and recruitment of students throughout the 1990-91 academic year.

Evaluation: Faculty will prepare written descriptions of the curriculum design. They themselves, along with the project director, will evaluate to assure that the design contains the components of learning community models.

C. Objective #3:

to review the draft learning community curriculum design to insure that they conform with learning curriculum materials that have been successful in the past.

Activity: In early January, 1991, C.O.S. faculty will participate in eight hours of advanced training in learning community curriculum design, conducted by Jean MacGregor and four faculty from Washington state whose disciplines match the disciplines of the C.O.S. faculty involved in curriculum design and who have experience designing and implementing learning communities. During this training, the C.O.S. faculty will receive feedback on their draft curriculum designs. This feedback will identify strengths and make suggestions for improving the design.

Budget: $6350.
Includes travel, food, lodging and consultant fees for Jean MacGregor and four faculty members and materials (handouts, flip charts, supplies) for workshop.

Evaluation: During the workshop, the workshop facilitator will administer formative evaluations. At the close of the workshop she will administer a summative evaluation.

D. Objective #4:
to refine the learning community designs in accordance with the January review and to assist in recruiting at least 120 students for participation in the learning communities offered in the 1991-92 academic year.
Activity: During spring semester, 1991, the project director will schedule sufficient workshops for faculty to refine their curriculum designs. In addition, she and the faculty will identify and carry out strategies to recruit students into the learning communities they will offer.

Budget: $500. Materials (flyers, brochures, posters) for recruiting.

Evaluation: Faculty and the Project Director, in communication with the Washington state collaborators, will evaluate the curriculum designs by checking revisions against the feedback received in the January workshop. Student Services personnel and prospective students will be polled to evaluate recruitment strategies.
6. Expected Outcomes

Expected Outcomes

A. In terms of project objectives:

• Faculty and administration of College of the Sequoias will understand the learning community model and indicate their willingness to support its development and implementation at C.O.S.

• At least six faculty members will commit to developing learning community curriculum designs during the 1990-91 year.

• These faculty will draft curriculum designs containing the components of learning community curriculum.

• Faculty from Washington state will review these designs and make suggestions for improving them.

• C.O.S. faculty will refine the curriculum design in accordance with the feedback they have received so that the curriculum is ready for implementation.

• Students will be recruited for implementation of the model in the 1991-92 academic year.

B. Impact of the Project:

The project will impact curriculum design in a variety of disciplines at C.O.S. and will engage C.O.S. faculty in rethinking their curriculum and improving their delivery. In addition, students at C.O.S. will become aware of the learning communities model and join in its implementation.

C. Potential for Continued Support After the Expiration of the Grant:

The experience at Seattle Central Community College, an institution of comparable size and student profile to C.O.S., indicates great potential. In the 1988-89 year, Seattle Central offered students the opportunity to enroll in more than thirty learning communities, including such titles as "The Televised Mind: Uses and Abuses," "Business, Power and Communication," "The Joys of Math and English," "Current Issues in Nutrition," and "The Global Village." It is expected that at C.O.S. subsequent years will result in expansion of the program to include new faculty and new curricular designs.

At C.O.S., it is also expected that the second year of this project will include faculty exchanges with Washington state, so that C.O.S faculty can benefit from first-hand collaboration with faculty experienced with learning communities. The third year of the
project will include expansion to institutions beyond College of the Sequoias. Studies that
demonstrate increased retention among students enrolled in learning communities and higher
scores of the Measurement of Intellectual Development, as well as student and faculty
evaluations of their experiences in learning communities, justify these expectations.

D. Potential for Adaptation to Other Programs or Institutions:

Because redesigning curriculum into learning communities involves a cross-disciplinary effort
and because it confronts challenges endemic to higher education in general, the project
activities are likely to be adapted to both additional programs at C.O.S. and other institutions.
Evaluation Plan:
It is possible, though not very likely given the inherent appeal of the learning community model, that the evaluation plan will reveal fewer than six faculty members interested in designing learning community curriculum. In that case, we could adjust our expectations down to four faculty collaborating in such designs. Otherwise, it is expected that the evaluation plan will insure design of curriculum that can be implemented in the 1991-92 academic year. The outcome is thus very practical.
8. Dissemination Plan

Dissemination Plan:
On campus, the Project Director will disseminate reports of the progress of the project through a faculty enrichment newsletter. She will also schedule faculty-to-faculty workshops to engage faculty with some of the issues and strategies of collaborative learning and its implications for evaluation of students. In addition, she will engage groups which already show interest in interdisciplinary approaches, such as the Developmental Studies Committee, the Honors program and of course the Curriculum Committee. As the project anticipates recruiting students, we can make use of the student newspaper. For dissemination of this innovation beyond C.O.S., organs such as the Instructional Skills Program's facilitator newsletter will prove useful. In future years, once design is complete and implemented, videotapes can be produced to introduce students, faculty, and whole institutions to the learning community model, faculty/student teams can present at conferences and C.O.S. faculty can train other institutions' faculty in the model.
Budget:

$7400 in budget expenditures will cover the costs of personnel to train C.O.S. administrators and faculty in the model. $400 will cover the costs of materials for these trainings. $6000 in stipends will be awarded faculty for their work in curriculum development. $500 will cover the costs of materials for curriculum development. $500 will cover the costs of materials to assist in recruiting students to the model offerings.