CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES
AND
NAPA VALLEY
COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

#91-0012
**California Community Colleges**  
Curriculum and Instructional Resources Division

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<th>FISCAL YEAR</th>
<th>ID NUMBER</th>
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**PROJECT TITLE**

**Learning Communities: A Model for Improving Instruction in California Community Colleges**

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<th>ELIGIBLE PROGRAM</th>
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<td>Grant = $14,970</td>
<td>E --- Improvement of Trad. Instruction Prog</td>
<td>Curriculum Design</td>
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<th>PROJECT DIRECTOR</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lauren Coodley, Prof Psychology &amp; Develop Edu</td>
<td>Diane Carey, VP Instruction &amp; Student Services</td>
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**PROPOSAL DESCRIPTION**

The Napa Valley Learning Community Project resulted in the development of a curriculum of five linked courses in a learning community of a common group of students and common topics. Additionally, staff development opportunities, a symposium to share project results and a plan to continue Learning Communities at the college were developed. Other benefits of the project included the opportunity for students to have additional contact with faculty and increased student retention.
Learning Communities: A Model for Improving Instruction in California Community Colleges

Napa Valley College requests $14,970 to develop and implement a new and exciting format for instruction. The "Learning Community" model links two or more courses around common topics and enrolls common groups of students.

At least eight faculty members and 125 students will be involved in the project. The major objectives are as follows:
- Develop curriculum for at least five sets of linked courses
- Provide staff development opportunities for all NVC faculty
- Hold a symposium to share project results with faculty from other colleges
- Develop a plan to continue the project at NVC

NVC faculty are very enthusiastic about participating in the project and have worked together to develop this model.

The potential impact on community college instruction is tremendous as the project provides opportunities to 1) connect the curriculum, 2) have students interact with faculty and other students, 3) increase student retention, and 4) provide opportunities for faculty development.
Learning Communities: A Model for Improving Instruction in California Community Colleges

1. Specific Educational Program Being Addressed

INTRODUCTION
Within the community college system, most instructors have no idea what other courses their students are taking. Thus, students do not have the opportunity to see the connections between their various courses of study, nor do they understand how all these branches of education relate to the wider community. Likewise, instructors have no idea what their colleagues actually teach. With the introduction of Learning Communities, this sorry state of affairs can be transformed.

Napa Valley College proposes to develop and implement a "Learning Community" model program that will link or cluster courses around common topics or themes, and enroll common groups of students. In learning communities, Napa Valley College students will build strong intellectual and social connections, because of the coherent course work and sustained interaction with their faculty and fellow students. This project is linked to two other model projects with track records of tremendous success.

The first is the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education, which was established in 1985 at the Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. The impact of the Center's Learning Communities has been so successful that within five years 41 public institutions, mostly community college's, have joined in this effort in Washington State. Retention reports show that the dropout rate has gone from 15 - 18% of enrollees to 2 - 3% within the Learning Communities. (1990 Report of Coordinator, Interdisciplinary Studies at Bellevue Community College, Bellevue, Washington).

The second is the Learning, Assessment, Retention Consortium (LARC) project underway at 30 community colleges throughout the state. Many NVC faculty who plan to participate in the Learning Communities project are among the 25 NVC teachers involved in the Teacher-Directed Classroom Research project. The purpose of that project, under the direction of Tom Angelo at UC Berkeley, is to improve student learning and classroom instruction through ungraded anonymous student feedback. The teacher uses simple
assessment techniques to discover how much and how well students are learning and then adapts the instruction methods accordingly as the semester is in progress. The impact of joining the proposed Learning Communities project with the on-going Classroom Research project promises tremendous results that will bring improvement and innovation to NVC's instructional programs.

Developing and implementing learning communities will provide a rich opportunity and a serious challenge. It will open up new dialogue and build new ties among disciplines and departments. It will also challenge a variety of traditional structures, as the model provides a radically different viewpoint about education, organizes administrative support in innovative ways, offers more flexible curricular arrangements and suggests a variety of different teaching tasks.

PROGRAM OR SERVICE
The learning communities project is strongly connected to specific goals of all California Community Colleges: 1) faculty development, 2) strengthening general education, and 3) building critical thinking and writing across the curriculum.

All six of the funds educational program and service areas will be addressed:
   A. Non-traditional forms, content, and methods of instruction;
   B. Programs for improving teaching abilities of faculty members;
   C. Programs addressing special learning needs of educationally disadvantaged students;
   D. Educational services for new clientele;
   E. Efforts to improve traditional instructional programs;
   F. Programs for improvement of the intellectual development of faculty and staff.
SPECIFIC PROBLEMS ADDRESSED
The learning community movement is not a response to one problem in education. It is a vehicle for responding to a whole cluster of fundamental ills besetting higher education today. The six primary problems to be addressed by the Napa Valley College Learning Communities Project are as follows:

A. Mismatched expectations of students and faculty as to what should be going on in undergraduate education:
   Faculty are interested in the cultivation of the "whole person," of an informed citizenry. Yet students have been conditioned to parrot back information in return for a grade which will enable them to continue in the system.

B. Inadequate intellectual interaction between faculty and students, between students and students, and faculty and faculty:
   Students in traditional courses do not meet each other; students do not seek out instructors outside of class. As a result, students are left to sort out the implications of course content in utter isolation.

C. Lack of curricular coherence and strengthen the relationship among courses taken by the student outside his or her major:
   A long standing problem is the unrelatedness between basic skills and subject classes. Students do not have the opportunity to reflect on connections between academic disciplines; instructors can model this kind of reflecting as they link their curricula.

D. Lack of opportunities for faculty development:
   Most full-time faculty in community colleges teach fifteen hours per week and spend several hours per week in their office - all in relative isolation. There are few opportunities available for most faculty to explore new teaching methodologies that will renew their enthusiasm.

E. Low rates of student retention:
   Many of our students fall into non-traditional categories: low income, re-entry women, blue-collar workers, and new majority. One of the dilemmas these students face is the absence of cohesiveness in their present schedules. High risk students need a structure that encourages them to stay at our institutions and succeed. Vincent Pinto, in his Leaving College, states that less than 50% of freshman entering college with plans for a bachelor degree actually complete it.
F. Limited financial resources:
   There is a notable lack of resources to address all these problems at once. The learning community model provides a promising and low cost structure for all of these problems.
3. Population To Be Served

POPULATIONS TO BE SERVED

A. Students: The project will involve a minimum of 125 students during the project period.

B. Faculty: The learning community concept at Napa Valley College originated with Lauren Coodley, a full-time faculty member who brought the concept to campus from her sabbatical work at Evergreen State University in Washington. She has worked with a group of faculty who have a sense of camaraderie, ownership and contagious zeal for making the program work. At least eight faculty will participate in the FII project as teachers. Attached is a list of those who plan to teach a linked course, their discipline, and the course they will develop and teach. All of the faculty at Napa Valley College have been introduced to the LARC Teacher-Directed Classroom Research Project. Those marked with an * are participating in the LARC project.

C. Student Services staff: At least 10 counselors and registration staff will be involved in the process of developing learning communities. Their involvement is critical to insure that students are referred to participate in the program and that all scheduling and registration issues are clear and appropriate when the project begins. Therefore, all NVC counselors and admissions and records staff will be involved in staff development training prior to the start of the Fall semester. This will help avoid miscommunication and broaden ownership in the effort.
4. Objectives

PROPOSAL OBJECTIVES

The goal of the project is to create "learning communities" at Napa Valley College through the development and implementation of linked courses. The courses were selected on the basis of two criteria. 1) Whether a logical connection exists between the two courses i.e. subject matter, course level and, 2) the interest among faculty to participate in the project.

Objective 1: Develop curriculum for five sets of linked courses and implement at least three sets of linked courses.

Fall 1991
- Implement Set 1: Psychology 120 and English 120
- Develop Set 2: English 120 and Political Science 120
- Develop Set 3: Humanities 120 and English 120

Spring 1992
- Implement Set 2: English 120 and Political Science 120
- Implement Set 3: Humanities 120 and English 120
- Develop Set 4: Developmental level courses (to be determined)
- Develop Set 5: Advanced level courses (to be determined)

Objective 2: Provide staff development training opportunities for Napa Valley College faculty and staff. Prior to fall 1992 registration, train at least 8 faculty and 5 support services staff. During spring 1992, train all Napa Valley College faculty at scheduled flex day activity.

Objective 3: Hold a roundtable symposium to share results with at least 25 faculty and staff from four or more local community college districts.

Objective 4: Develop a plan for on-going development, implementation, and evaluation of Napa Valley College learning communities.
5. Workplan Narrative

WORK STATEMENT

The attached work statement provides a comprehensive summary of proposed objectives, activities, dates, staff, and budget amounts that are consistent with the goals of the proposal.

For the past year, Napa Valley College faculty and administrators have worked together to see the project through to the implementation stage.

In 1989-90, Napa Valley College funded Lauren Coodley's sabbatical project which took her to Washington State where she participated in a learning community project. In 1990-91, staff development funds were earmarked to bring Jean MacGregor, the director of the Washington Center, to Napa Valley College to work with faculty to design this program. Napa Valley College faculty have demonstrated an interest and a flair for the kinds of linked learning which this project proposes to implement. At instructional excellence days in the fall 1990 and spring 1991, faculty members displayed considerable creativity in brainstorming possible linkages; participation in the subsequent workshop was well attended. FII funds will provide start-up funds to develop model linked courses, pilot test the courses, and generate broader faculty interest. Demonstration and evaluation will open the door to ongoing and expanded programs. Student responses are expected to play a role in broadening the program to more classes and faculty.

Lauren Coodley will serve as the project director. At least seven other faculty members (see attached list) will receive small stipends to develop curriculum and will be offered the option of a stipend or release time when they teach a linked course. Dr. Diane Carey, Vice President of Instruction and Student Services, is very supportive of the project and will have overall supervisory responsibility.
6. Expected Outcomes

EXPECTED OUTCOMES
A. Project Objectives:

1) Two faculty members will experience the linking of two courses, psychology and English, during the fall semester 1991. This activity will be evaluated and used as a model and discussion point for other instructors, both those who teach linked courses and those who see the program in action and want to participate in it.

2) The model will be shared with Admissions and Records office staff, representatives of the Career Center, and counselors, both to share the perceived benefits to students and to start the process of recruiting for the spring semester 1992.

3) Two sets of linked courses, English-political science and humanities English, will be taught during spring semester 1992. The accumulated experience will be used to improve curriculum design for these and future programs.

4) On-going evaluation will be used to fine-tune the expected benefits of linking for students and instructors. (Napa Valley College is a member of the ten colleges in Northern California participating in the LARC program of classroom-based research, which will be used to maximize student input in the evaluation process.)

5) An additional two sets of linked courses, one developmental pair and one honors pair, will be taught during fall semester 1992. These courses will be planned with input from the Napa Valley College honors committee and student success committee.

6) Special attention will be given to the success and difficulties of the "developmental" linkage to evaluate its effectiveness in abetting comprehensive learning, retention, sense of purpose, etc., among the students. The honors program will encourage enrollment from local high school students.

7) Participating instructors and support staff will meet regularly to engage in on-going curriculum design and staff development; travel to Washington state will take place to observe programs in operation and to develop ideas for new links and formats.

8) There will be on-going recruitment and development of linked courses beyond the FII grant period.

9) A workshop will take place to share results with other California community colleges.
B. Impact of the Project:

The project will have an impact on the instructional program at Napa Valley College: some faculty will engage in an activity which will increase the relevance and comprehensiveness of their teaching on the larger circle of the lives of their students; some faculty will experience concretely a collegial relationship with each other; all faculty will be in an environment in which a new model of instruction is taking shape on their campus and they will be able to participate in its evaluation and continuation.

Students at Napa Valley College will engage in learning in a comprehensive way: blocks of time and subject matter taught together to highlight interconnectedness and union in place of separation and disconnection. A stronger sense of community will develop among students themselves and between them and the faculty. Participating in a learning and communicating community will stimulate active learning and retention. Non-traditional students will find a new format which welcomes them to school in a unified and supportive fashion and sets them on the road to academic and vocational success.

C. Potential for continued support after the expiration of the grant.

Napa Valley College is committed to providing continued support for the learning communities that are developed with Fund for Instructional Improvement funds. The endurance of the learning community effort will depend on the college's strategic understanding of why learning communities are important. We recognize that the learning community program may take another 2-3 years to mature.

Although local resources are not sufficient to develop the project, FII funds will support the critical phase. During the grant year, 1991-1992, project faculty, administrators, and staff will work to develop the key factors that will result in continuation of learning communities:

1) Articulate clear goals to increase understanding throughout the college;
2) Establish an administrative "home" for the program, a consistent set of programs, an active group of faculty, and acceptable administrative procedures;
3) Create channels for planning and oversight;
4) Establish a support system for academic innovation that benefits the diverse elements of the college;
5) Develop a strong link with the college staff development program to continue to offer workshops, conferences and consultants and other support for faculty and curriculum development; and
6) Identify other institutions with which to develop consortium arrangements.

D. Potential for Adaptation

The project is based on assumptions and attitudes of sharing and adoption. Napa Valley College will be adopting a proven model that is successful in 41 colleges and universities throughout Washington State. This FII project will start a learning communities model that can be adopted throughout California. Napa Valley College's location, within a one hour drive from
at least 20 community colleges, will enable faculty to drive in, visit our classes, talk with faculty, and take home a model that can easily be adopted at their colleges.

The project promises to open the door to faculty creativity, talent, and energy. As others adopt the project California will have a variety of learning community models that meet varied student needs and circumstances. The models can be applied in basic skills/developmental level courses, honors courses, and traditional undergraduate level courses. Faculty teaching in any curriculum can find another course with which to link. The possibilities are limited only by the creativity, talent, and energy of the faculty.

Napa Valley College believes this program will play an important role in improving education for community college students. Technical assistance will be made available on an on-going basis. Napa Valley College faculty will welcome visiting teams from other colleges or will arrange to take a team from Napa Valley College to other colleges. Sample curriculum, student recruitment tools, and other materials will be among the products to be shared.

If the project proves to be as successful as our faculty and administrators anticipate in addressing the problems described above, it will be very appealing and will attract interest from colleges throughout California and beyond. The project provides an opportunity for California community colleges to provide leadership in re-shaping undergraduate education through the development of linked courses.
EVALUATION PLAN
The overall evaluation plan includes both summative and formative evaluation components. The evaluation process will involve periodic monitoring by the vice president for instruction and student services, division chairs, the project director, and the team of participating faculty. A partnership involving administrators and faculty will meet regularly to consider important learning community issues.

The factors to be evaluated include the following:
- Has progress been made in meeting the objectives?
- Are activities being completed according to the timeline?
- Has the project resulted in improvements to the curriculum?
- What can be done to improve the project?

When necessary, the faculty team and administration may be required to propose alternative methods and assess the project outcomes.

The faculty team will meet regularly to conduct on-going evaluation and will work together to strengthen the project, identify solutions to problems, and support one another in curriculum development. The Napa Valley College research analyst will help faculty design evaluation methods that will measure student outcomes and other measures of success.

The evaluation process will be on-going, extending well beyond the project year.
8. Dissemination Plan

DISSEMINATION PLAN

Napa Valley College will strive to disseminate the results of the program as widely as possible. The dissemination plan is practical and well developed. It includes the following activities:

- Project staff will prepare mid-year and final reports as required by the Fund for Instructional Improvement Program. Copies of these reports will be made available to anyone interested in the results of the program.

- A major focus of project dissemination will be to inform our own faculty, staff and students about the program and encourage their participation.

- Project staff will hold periodic workshops for NVC faculty during staff development and flex day programs.

- Faculty team members and student services staff will participate in orientation and recruitment programs at local high schools.

- Copies of Learning Communities Model showing the sequence of linked courses that were developed, the curriculum, and notes from faculty, will be available to anyone interested in replication or adaptation.

- Perhaps the most effective means of dissemination is the proposed symposium to which faculty from neighboring community colleges will be invited. Napa Valley College staff will meet with their colleagues to describe the Learning Communities model, its benefits and methods for implementation. The involvement of faculty from neighboring districts will enable participants to draw on their experience and develop a faculty support/sharing network.

- The faculty team working with Napa Valley College's Community Relations officer will write short articles for campus and community newsletters, and participate in local radio interviews.

- Faculty will be available to present an overview of the Learning Communities model at regional, statewide, and national workshops and conferences.

- Napa Valley College will welcome visits by staff at other community colleges who are interested in adopting the learning communities model.
• The faculty team will contribute articles and project updates to campus publications to increase campuswide information and to encourage widespread participation.
PROJECT BUDGET

Napa Valley College requests a small grant, totaling $14,970, to support development and implementation of learning communities. The college will provide substantial matching support to augment the project budget.