CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES
AND
SAN DIEGO
COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

#91-0022
**PROJECT TITLE**

MACREAD: Improving Reading Comprehension and Critical Thinking Skills of ESL Students

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<tr>
<th>FISCAL YEAR</th>
<th>ID NUMBER</th>
<th>COLLEGE</th>
<th>DISTRICT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991-92</td>
<td>91-0022</td>
<td>San Diego City</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>FUNDING CATEGORY &amp; AWARD</th>
<th>ELIGIBLE PROGRAM</th>
<th>PROJECT CATEGORY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grant = $24,883</td>
<td>C --- Special Learning Needs Ed/Dis</td>
<td>Developmental Model</td>
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<tr>
<th>PROJECT PRODUCT</th>
<th>PROJECT TOPIC #1</th>
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<th>ACADEMIC SUBJECT</th>
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<td>Resource Materials</td>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>Curriculum Develop</td>
<td>Inter-Disciplinary</td>
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<tr>
<th>PROJECT DIRECTOR</th>
<th>PROJECT SUPERVISOR</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lean Lowerison, Librarian</td>
<td>Cecilia Cheung, Head Librarian</td>
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**PROPOSAL DESCRIPTION**

In order to improve the reading comprehension and critical thinking skills of ESL students, San Diego City College has developed a computerized data base using paired sets of magazine articles representing opposing points of view on popular topics. The use of this data base provides students an opportunity outside of class to practice language and critical thinking skills. Goals included improved performance on ESL exit examinations and better student retention.
San Diego City College, an urban campus serving some 13,000 students, has in the past few years seen a dramatic growth in immigrant enrollment (primarily Hispanic, Asian and East African), and a concomitant enrollment increase in English as a Second Language (ESL) and sub-college level English programs. Demographic projections indicate that this trend will continue into the next century.

These students often have major problems with college work because they enroll concurrently in a basic English class and in other courses in which their lack of English facility proves a handicap. As would be expected, the dropout rate for this group is unacceptably high. If they are to succeed in college, they must improve their reading comprehension and critical thinking skills as quickly as possible.

This project will create a database which will offer these students the opportunity to practice these skills outside of class. The database will consist of paired sets of magazine articles with differing viewpoints on selected "hot topics" such as genetic engineering, capital punishment and surrogate motherhood. Popular magazines such as Time and Newsweek will be used for their conciseness, lively writing style and relatively low reading level (ca. 7th grade).

Two tests on each set of articles will also be input; one will check only for comprehension; the other will also test for critical thinking skills.

The database will be stored in the library, which offers more open hour during the week (72.5 hours) than any other campus facility.

The ultimate goal is to improve the retention of these students by helping them accelerate their English mastery. The objectives of the project are: (1) to create the database and install it in the library; and (2) to improve student performance on the ESL exit exam through use of the new applications package.

We will use four ESL classes as subjects, two in the control group and two in the experimental group. We expect the experimental group to do better as a group on the exit exam than the control group. We hope the experimental group will have a lower dropout rate as well. Although this project is aimed at the ESL student, the database developed could easily be
used by other classes (and even in other fields) by scaling up the difficulty of the test questions.

It is expected that more terminals will be needed to increase accessibility of the database. A proposal is being written to the Apple Library of Tomorrow Foundation to secure these.

Sharing of the database will be accomplished either via modem or by duplication of the database on floppy disk. Announcement of the database’s availability will be made via FredMail and InfoNet, two electronic educational bulletin boards.

Evaluation will be accomplished by (1) student attitude survey, and (2) comparison of the experimental group’s exit exams with those of the control group. Retention studies will require more than the year allotted for this grant, but we will begin to track the experimental group to see what happens to them.
MACREAD: Improving Reading Comprehension and Critical Thinking Skills of ESL Students

1. Specific Educational Program Being Addressed

This project addresses the following three programs and services (listed in order of emphasis):

1. Basic Agenda criteria: ESL and Basic Skills
2. Special learning needs of educationally disadvantaged students
3. Retention of underrepresented students
2. Specific Problems Being Addressed

PROBLEMS ADDRESSED
The ESL student is by definition deficient in English skills, yet at the community college he is asked concurrently to learn English and to perform adequately in other subject areas presented in English.

This rather unrealistic expectation results in unacceptably high dropout rates for this group. The campus is trying several approaches aimed at increasing the retention rate of these students; this project will add another dimension to those efforts.

One major goal of our ESL courses is to improve student reading comprehension and rate. An equally important objective is the improvement of critical thinking skills. This latter goal was mandated by the state in Title 5 several years ago, and the teaching of critical thinking skills has since been instituted across the curriculum.

The ESL student needs more help with reading comprehension and critical thinking skills than he can get in class (the typical ESL student is in English class only six hours per week). If the opportunity to practice these skills outside of class were easily available on campus, greater (and perhaps faster) improvement in English proficiency might be expected.

The goal of this project is to accelerate the mastery of English of our ESL students. This will begin to remove the language barrier as an obstacle to college success.
3. Population To Be Served

POPULATION SERVED
For the field test, this project will serve approximately 80 students in two ESL classes. However, after the project year, the database will be available to all ESL students (approximately 300 per year), and, ultimately, students in other fields as well. The Potential service group is estimated at 2,500 per year.
4. Objectives

OBJECTIVES
The objectives of this project are as follows:

1. To create a database for ESL students to practice comprehension and critical thinking skills
   a. To create the database structure
   b. To finish inputting and indexing of 44 article sets

2. To improve student performance on the exit exam through use of the new database.
   a. To research, select, and coordinate the pre- and post-testing of the target groups.
   b. To score the pre- and post-tests.
   c. To write two tests for each set of articles.
   d. To write and administer a student survey and analyze the results.

3. To disseminate the database to interested parties.
5. Workplan Narrative

SCHEDULED ACTIVITIES

Popular magazines are an excellent source of reading material for anyone studying a foreign language. Articles in these publications tend to be short, relatively easy to read and written in a lively style, all of which encourage the reader to continue. They are also useful for teaching colloquial or technical terms in common use.

It has been suggested that student interest could be piqued even more by presenting articles with differing viewpoints on the same issue. This approach could also be used to teach critical thinking by requiring the student to analyze the sources quoted and/or to take a stand and defend it.

Library research is required to locate such articles and to determine their suitability for the project. The Project Director, therefore, is a librarian. The librarian will pick a "hot topic" each week and will find two opposing viewpoints about it in recent popular magazines such as Time and U.S. News and World Report. ("Hot topics" might include such issues as surrogate motherhood, genetic engineering, the right to die and capital punishment). Articles will be chosen according to the following criteria: topic interest, terseness, reading level (about 7th grade level will be sought), writing style and concepts or terminology requiring explanation. Some editing or tailoring of the articles may be necessary.

The articles will be paired and input into a Macintosh IIci computer using HyperCard. HyperCard is chosen because of its versatility and ease of use. (It also comes with the computer and thus will not have to be bought separately). Buttons will be used to point students to textual amplification and/or graphic enrichment. Student use of the database will be monitored.

The use of buttons will make it possible for students to access explanations without total disruption of their reading. No more than ten buttons will be used for each pair of articles.

Accessing and retrieval will be made possible by keyword indexing. It is projected that three or four keywords will be used for each set of articles. For file maintenance purposes, author, title, periodical title and Library of Congress subject heading indexing will also be used. A thesaurus will be generated to simplify future indexing.

Setting up the database structure and the indexing system will take the bulk of the project director/librarian's time; accordingly, this activity will be carried out over the summer. By fall 1991 the structure will be in place and eight sets of articles will have been input.

By the end of the project (June 1992), 44 sets of paired articles will be input and indexed.

An ESL instructor will research and select a pre- and post-test and will coordinate the testing
program each semester. This person will also be responsible for scoring the tests. An ESL specialist will write two tests for each set of articles which will be input into the computer. One will check only for comprehension; the other will test critical thinking skills as well. These two tests will allow some flexibility in use by other instructors later. An instructor will write and administer a student survey to be used at the end of each semester. This person will also analyze all project results.

A part-time clerical staffer will be hired as needed to take care of dissemination of the database to schools requesting it.

TARGET DATES

By June 30, 1991  Macintosh computer with printer installed

By August 31, 1991 Pre- and post-tests selected
Program structure set; 8 sets of articles input
Tests for 8 sets of articles input on disk

September 1991  Pre-test administered to target groups
Experimental group begins using database

By January 31, 1992  20 more sets of articles input
Students post-tested; tests scored

February 1, 1992  Project adjusted for spring semester
Student pre-tested
Experimental group begins using database

By June 30, 1992  16 more sets of paired articles and tests input
Spring experimental group post-tested; tests scored
Evaluation of project.
6. Expected Outcomes

EXPECTED OUTCOMES
The two expected outcomes of this project are: (1) the creation of the database; and (2) higher exit exam scores for the experimental groups.

If this project is successful, its impact will be accelerated transition of ESL students to English 101 level and lowered dropout rate for this group. The database will also provide a resource for students in other courses such as sociology, philosophy, and speech.

If additional terminals can be secured, no continued support will be necessary after the project year.

The database produced in this project could easily be used by other community colleges with similar programs. It may also be usable by high schools with similar student populations.
7. Evaluation Plan

EVALUATION PLAN
Evaluation of this project will be done both informally, by means of a student attitude survey, and statistically, by comparative analysis of exit exam results for both control and experimental groups.

We project that the experimental group will do better as a group than the control group on the exam. Although the groups will not be scientifically matched, we will consider the project a success if the average pass rate of the experimental group is 10-20% higher than that of the control group.

We will use the student attitude survey results at the end of the fall semester to adjust the project for the spring, if necessary, and will repeat the survey at the end of the spring semester.

A one-year project will not yield accurate results on the hoped-for decrease in the dropout rate, but we will begin to track the experimental group to see what happens to them.
8. Dissemination Plan

DISSEMINATION
The database will be available for distribution to other schools. We expect that other community colleges and perhaps some high schools with similar student populations may be interested in it. FredMail, a nationwide electronic bulletin board for educators, and Info-Net, a computer bulletin board for the California community colleges, will be used to announce the availability of the database. We will offer to duplicate the database on floppy disks for interested parties. It will also be available via modem.
9. Budget Narrative

[NO “BUDGET NARRATIVE ACCOMPANIES THIS DOCUMENT.”]