Improving Under-Represented Student Success Through Classroom-Based Research

Fourteen faculty will receive stipends to conduct classroom-based research in seven basic skills and seven transfer classes. Faculty, as a result of this project, will increase (1) their understanding that students have diverse learning styles; (2) their understanding of the assumptions underlying their own teaching techniques; (3) their understanding of classroom based assessment techniques; (4) their ability to develop, implement, and evaluate classroom based research projects; and retention of under-represented students.
Improving Underrepresented Student Success Through Classroom-Based Research

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM OR SERVICES ADDRESSED:
(1.b.) Classroom-based research on teacher effectiveness with underrepresented students and (1.a.) Retention and transfer of underrepresented students

SPECIFIC PROBLEM:
Low retention and transfer of underrepresented students is a tragic waste of human resources. Through transforming the teaching-learning environment to better mirror a diversity of learning styles, PCC expects to increase retention and transfer of underrepresented students.

POPULATION SERVED:
Fourteen faculty will receive stipends to conduct classroom based research in seven basic skills and seven transfer classes. Almost 1000 students in those classes will be directly affected by the project. Additional faculty and students will be affected through dissemination of the project.

OBJECTIVES:
Faculty will increase 1) their understanding that students have diverse learning styles, 2) their understanding of the assumptions underlying their own teaching techniques, 3) their understanding of classroom based assessment techniques, 4) their ability to develop, implement, and evaluate classroom based research projects, 5) retention of underrepresented students.

ACTIVITIES:
Project faculty will attend retreats, workshops, and seminars with consultants who are specialists in cultural diversity and classroom research. They will select assessment projects, test them in the classroom, analyze feedback, and develop a research project. They will then test this project in their spring classes, analyze the results, and write up the project in a book.

IMPACT AND TRANSFERABILITY:
Project will transform the teaching-learning environment for faculty and students. Because all community colleges in California face similar problems, the project could serve as a model for other colleges in the system.

EVALUATION:
The project would involve both summative and formative evaluations as well as "classroom based assessment" throughout.

DISSEMINATION:
A book of research projects will be available. Project faculty will share results of the project with colleagues on campus, at a conference co-hosted by PCC and UCLA, and at national conferences.

BUDGET
Total: $49,510; $12,005 from Pasadena City College, $37,505 requested from the Underrepresented Students Special Project Fund.
1. Specific Educational Program Being Addressed

INTRODUCTION:

Pasadena City College seeks funding from the Community College Underrepresented Students Special Project Fund to improve underrepresented student success through classroom based research.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM OR SERVICES ADDRESSED:

This grant proposal specifically addresses

1.b. Classroom-based research on teacher effectiveness with underrepresented students but will also affect

1.a. Retention and transfer of underrepresented students
2. Specific Problems Being Addressed

SPECIFIC PROBLEM:

"How can we increase the number of underrepresented students transferring from two-year to four-year colleges?" representatives of the University of California at Los Angeles asked Transfer Alliance Program (TAP) coordinators at a meeting last fall. Sponsored by the UCLA Center for Academic Inter-institutional Programs, TAP forges academic ties between UCLA and twelve area community colleges with the purpose of strengthening students' academic preparation so they can achieve the B.A./B.S. degree. Pasadena City College has one of the highest transfer rates of the twelve colleges and is among the most diverse in population (see Appendix); however, we share UCLA's concern and wish to encourage underrepresented students to attend PCC with the purpose of transferring to UCLA or other local four-year colleges. For example, although the Hispanic and Black student population at PCC was 31% in 1988, these groups represented only 13% of our transfer students to UCLA that year.

In addition to our concern with low transfer percentages is our concern about the high percentage of Blacks (19.7% in fall 1987) and Hispanics (17.4% in fall 1987) on academic and progress probation (Palermo, "Ethnicity and Probation Rates").

Low retention and transfer of underrepresented students is, of course, not merely of local concern. A recent issue of AACJC Journal noted that the "open door" policy of the 1960s and 1970s has become a revolving door in the 1980s with "as many as 50 percent of the students ... not returning for the second year" (Williams, 14). This represents a tragic loss not only of human resources but also of economic resources for the "economic future of states with large Hispanic and Black populations is tied to the educational attainment of its minority citizens" (Rendon, 19).

The role of community colleges in preparing underrepresented students for transfer is crucial. A recent report from the California Postsecondary Education Commission indicated that

Somewhat more than 70 percent of the Black students who go to college in California after graduating from a public high school enroll in California Community Colleges. Thus achievement of a baccalaureate degree by Black youth is highly dependent on California Community Colleges' performance in motivating and preparing them for transfer ... Among the recent Hispanic graduates of California's public high schools, about 75 percent of the men and 72 percent of the women who enroll in public colleges and universities do so in California Community Colleges ... Thus the transfer function is at least as important for Hispanic as for Blacks students if educational equity goals are to be achieved at the baccalaureate level. ("Update" 11-12, 15).

Many factors contribute to low enrollment or retention of underrepresented students. Among these are areas over which community colleges have little or no control, e.g., entry-level skills;
prior educational histories; competing responsibilities; family and economic conditions (Palermo, "Ethnicity"). For example, many of our Hispanic students are new immigrants who are often un-educated, under-educated or poorly educated. Our support services such as counseling, financial aid, and tutoring services have been strengthened over the past few years in an effort to respond to the needs of our underrepresented students.

Another area in which we can make significant changes to alleviate the problem of low retention and transfer is the college classroom. "Insofar as teaching occupies a position of such primary importance, the environment in which teaching occurs must occupy a similar position" (Williams, 16). Two strategies have been suggested for making the learning environment more hospitable to underrepresented students. One strategy affects content; the other affects pedagogy. Pasadena City College wishes to utilize both of these in an effort to improve the retention and transfer of our underrepresented students.

Consequently in March 1990, Pasadena City College applied for and was awarded a Fund for Instructional Improvement grant to provide fourteen faculty with reassigned time to transform the content of their classes to improve the success of underrepresented students. That grant enabled faculty to integrate perspectives of race and ethnicity into their transfer courses to better mirror the issues and perspectives of underrepresented students. That grant project was so successful that PCC faculty development funds will be used to replicate the grant with an additional fourteen faculty in 1991-92.

The present grant proposal is a companion piece to the Fund for Instructional Improvement grant and is designed to use classroom based research to transform the teaching-learning environment to better mirror a diversity of learning styles.

Nationwide there is a growing effort to find ways to reverse current trends of low retention through classroom based research. Williams recommends that "faculty should have the opportunity to participate in workshops that train them to be classroom based researchers and to use assessment as a teaching tool (22)." Through classroom based research, faculty can learn more about their students in order to more carefully accommodate different learning styles.

According to James A. Anderson, traditional instructional approaches are dysfunctional and anachronistic and have proved to be ineffective with multi-ethnic populations (2). Recent research in cognitive styles helps explain why traditional service delivery systems have failed to improve retention of minorities. Anderson suggests incorporating knowledge about the cognitive/learning styles of our culturally and racially diverse populations into the teaching styles of individual instructors. Anderson cites recent research which suggests that "different cultures produce different learning styles" (4). For example, "minorities typically exhibit a preference for field dependence" (3) whereas the Anglo-European typically exhibits a preference for field independence. At PCC we are well aware of the need to avoid both cultural stereotypes as well as over-generalizations; however, we also must recognize the great diversity in learning styles. Because teachers tend to teach the way they prefer to learn,
faculty need to develop a better understanding of how their students learn so they can "flex" their styles (Haring, 4). Classroom based research is one way to develop this understanding.

Classroom based research (CBR), defined by Patricia Cross as "the study by classroom teachers of the impact of their teaching on the students in their classrooms" ("Zippers, 3"), provides faculty continuous feedback in order to "narrow the gap between teaching and learning" ("Zippers, 4"). With CBR, assessment becomes a teaching tool which can help us begin to question our assumptions and learn why our students may not be learning as well as they could. CBR can help teachers increase their powers of observation, systematic analysis of feedback, and ability to formulate questions that will give them insight into the learning of their students ("Introduction" 5). " A basic assumption underlying Classroom Research is that accurate and credible feedback about the impact of teaching on learning carries a built-in challenge to teachers to see if they can increase learning through experimentation with more effective teaching methods" ("Introduction" 17).

CBR has been used successfully in a number of local projects. Rio Hondo College (with a grant through the Underrepresented Students Special Projects) has experimented with the incorporation of collaborative learning methods in the classroom. A LARC-FIPSE project has enabled a consortium of local community colleges to experiment with classroom based research. A K-12 project through the Center for Academic Inter-institutional Projects at UCLA has enabled teachers to become researchers in their classrooms.

Pasadena City College plans to build upon these local resources and the exciting research in CBR to enable our faculty to improve the learning of our underrepresented students.

CONCLUSION:
At a conference on Cultural Diversity in Chicago in April 1990, Thomas Angelo stated that the 90's provide us with unique opportunities to improve teaching and learning at our institutions. His reasons? First, one-third to one-half of our faculty will be retiring. Consequently, we have an opportunity to change the "culture" of our institution and shift the emphasis from teaching to learning. Secondly, we are aided in this endeavor by the explosion of knowledge about teaching/learning styles. Those of us who are concerned about the future of our students, our colleges, and our country, must grasp this opportunity to enable more of our students to succeed. At Pasadena City College, we believe state funding of our grant proposal will enable us to make a difference in improving the success of our underrepresented students.
3. Population To Be Served

POPULATION TO BE SERVED:

Fourteen faculty (including the project director) will be directly involved in the project, utilizing classroom assessment in seven basic skills classes (reading, writing, and math) and seven transfer courses from a variety of disciplines during fall and spring 1991-92. Almost 1000 students will be directly affected by the project during the academic year of the project. More faculty and students will be served by the project in 1992-93 as project faculty share their results with colleagues in staff development workshops at PCC, in the dissemination conference hosted by PCC and UCLA, and at national conferences.
4. Objectives

PROPOSED OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES:

Pasadena City College seeks funding from the Underrepresented Students Special Project Fund to provide thirteen faculty with stipends to

1) attend retreats, seminars, and workshops with consultants who are specialists in learning styles and classroom based research.

2) utilize Angelo-Cross classroom based assessment techniques in their fall classes

3) design a classroom research project based upon the results of their assessment activities and intended to improve the retention of underrepresented students in their spring classes

4) utilize the results of their research project to transform their teaching

5) write up their projects in a book

Funding would also provide reassigned time for a faculty coordinator and fees for consultants who are knowledgeable about cultural diversity and have had successful experiences with CBR.

PROJECT GOALS:

1) Improve the retention of underrepresented students in basic skills classes and transfer classes

2) Increase the numbers of underrepresented students who transfer to four-Year colleges

PROJECT OBJECTIVES:

Project faculty will

1) Increase their understanding that students have diverse learning styles with particular attention to the learning styles of the underrepresented students in their classes

2) Increase their understanding of the assumptions underlying their own teaching techniques and of alternative teaching strategies

3) Increase their understanding of and ability to utilize classroom based assessment techniques to improve the retention of underrepresented students

4) Increase their ability to develop, implement, and evaluate classroom based research projects to improve the retention of underrepresented students
5) Increase retention of underrepresented students in target classes
5. Workplan Narrative

ACTIVITIES:

September 1991  Budget: $1927
1) Project director will send out notices to all faculty inviting them to submit applications for participation in the project.
2) Faculty will be asked to select the focus class in which they have low retention of underrepresented students and in which they wish to conduct their research.
3) Project director will also contact consultants and set up dates for retreats, workshops, and seminars.
4) She will also order books (Cross and Angelo, Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for Faculty) for faculty.
5) Project director will set up a committee to help in selecting project faculty.

October 1991  Budget: $7904
1) Faculty retreat with Manuel Pastor and Eve Kelemen-Lohnas Workshop on cultural diversity and different learning styles.
2) Introduction to classroom assessment techniques.
3) Faculty take "Teaching Goals Inventory" to better understand the assumptions underlying their teaching techniques.
4) Faculty will receive Cross-Angelo "Handbook" and will select an assessable goal/question to use in the project class, plan a classroom assessment project focused on that goal, question, and teach the target lesson related to that goal/question
5) Faculty and students participate in pre-test

November 1991  Budget: $5196
1) Workshop with Faye Peitzman and two teacher-researchers
2) Assess student learning, collect feedback data, analyze students feedback, and discuss results of classroom assessment techniques with colleagues.

December 1991  Budget: $4971
1) Workshop with Carol Sigala-- introduction to collaborative teaching-learning
2) Interpret results of classroom assessment project and formulate an appropriate response to improve learning. Communicate results/try out response.
3) Discuss with colleagues

January 1992  Budget: $5904
1) Workshop with Faye Peitzman and two teacher-researchers
2) Assess project's effect(s) on teaching/learning
3) Discussion of classroom research projects with colleagues
4) Faculty and students participate in post-test
February 1992  
Budget: $7779  
1) Retreat with Thomas Angelo  
2) Design of follow-up classroom research project to be conducted in spring class.  
3) Faculty and students participate in pre-test  
4) View Angelo videotape of successful CBR projects

March 1992  
Budget: $4471  
1) Conduct research project. Meet with colleagues to discuss results.

April 1992  
Budget: $5179  
1) Modify research project. Meet with colleagues to share/discuss results.  
2) Record results of assessment techniques and research projects in a journal

May 1992  
Budget: $6179  
1) Faculty and students participate in post-test evaluation  
2) Faculty write up results of research projects ("case studies") for a book on alternative teaching strategies

Fall 1992  
1) Faculty conduct staff development workshops at PCC  
2) Faculty participate in conference co-hosted by PCC and UCLA for area teachers (K-college)  
3) Faculty disseminate results of project at national conferences

b. IMPACT AND TRANSFERABILITY:

Impact:

Fourteen faculty (including the project director) will be directly involved in the project, utilizing classroom assessment in seven basic skills classes (reading, writing, and math) and seven transfer courses from a variety of disciplines during fall and spring 1991-92. Almost 1000 students will be directly affected by the project during the academic year of the project. More faculty and students will be served by the project in 1992-93 as project faculty share their results with colleagues in staff development workshops at PCC, in the dissemination conference hosted by PCC and UCLA, and at national conferences.

Transferability:

PCC has a long-standing commitment to diversity and underrepresented student success (see Appendix). The academic senate and college president co-sponsored a series of lectures in 1987-88 on "The New Majority Student." We also promote underrepresented success through a mentor program (Project Leap). In addition, we have discussed diversity issues in a variety of forums: faculty colloquiums, a faculty/administration retreat, and campus-wide President’s roundtables. In fact, some of the design for this project emerged from suggestions gathered at roundtables and retreats.
In a recent report to the college, our Director of Assessment and Research recently noted that "PCC must continue to maintain its reputation for academic integrity and excellence, as well as maintain its enrollments, through diverse and responsive educational programs and services, designed to meet the challenges of expanding post-secondary educational access to large numbers of underrepresented and culturally-diverse minority groups." Among his recommendations were the following

1) Develop programs and services and a positive educational milieu to improve the retention and success rates of underrepresented students while attending PCC.

2) Create a nurturing academic and social environment which is supportive of the growth and development of all underrepresented students to their fullest capabilities and potentials.

3) Design ongoing inservice workshops and seminars for PCC students, faculty, staff, and administrators to foster a broader understanding of the ethnic and multicultural diversity of today's student populations, the uniqueness of their problems, their needs, and their potentials. (Palermo, "Black")

At a faculty-administration retreat in 1990, a policy statement was developed which was approved by the Board of Trustees of the college. That statement reads in part, "to encourage and support efforts to increase mutual respective for ...race [and] ethnicity ...among students, faculty, and staff."

In mid-May 1991, twenty-four faculty and staff attended the Ethnic and Language Minorities Conference on "Curriculum and Culture" sponsored by the Chancellor's office (the largest group from any community college). At the end of May, a retreat was held for thirty-five faculty and staff to continue the dialogue begun at that conference. Subsequently, a 20% reassigned time position was created for a Multicultural Coordinator.

Because of this record of commitment to diversity, we anticipate this proposed project will be institutionalized on our campus and continue to impact students for many years to come. Because the problem addressed in this grant is statewide, we anticipate its results can be transferred to any community college in the state.

PERSONNEL:
Project Director:
Dennies Barber is a Professor of Dance and Early Childhood Development and Editor of the Faculty Senate Newsletter. She attended a Classroom Based Research Workshop with Thomas Angelo and has been using Classroom Based Research in her classes for the past two years. She has already encouraged some faculty to experiment with CBR through informal demonstrations to colleagues. In addition, she teaches both non-transfer and transfer courses, has observed first hand the low
retention rate of underrepresented students, and has a strong interest in improving retention rates of underrepresented students.

Assistant Dean of Instruction:
Dr. Pauline Crabb, Ph.D. in Education, helped develop the college process for curriculum review and for developing measurable objectives for each course. She has attended a Classroom Based Research workshop with Thomas Angelo and will work with the project director to assemble both pre- and post- project statistics and help develop evaluation instruments for the project.

Faculty:
Thirteen faculty from a variety of disciplines will submit applications to participate in the project. Teachers of seven basic skills courses and six transfer courses (all courses selected because of low retention of underrepresented students) will be selected. (Project director will participate with a transfer course.) Faculty will sign contracts in which they will commit themselves to participate in all project activities.

Consultants and Workshop/Seminar/Retreat Leaders:
The following will be invited to participate:
Manuel Pastor, Department of Economics, Occidental College
   Professor Pastor has conducted workshops on cultural diversity for faculty at Occidental and area colleges.
Eve Kelemen-Lohnas, LARC-FIPSE project
   Ms. Kelemen-Lohnas is a specialist in Classroom Based Research and has served as a consultant for the LARC-FIPSE Project.
Faye Peitzman, Center for Academic Inter-institutional Programs, UCLA
   Ms. Peitzman has coordinated the CAIP Teacher-Researcher project for two years and is a specialist in Classroom Based Research. Ms. Peitzman will select four faculty from the Teacher-Researcher projects to share the results of their project with Pasadena City College faculty.
Carol Sigala, Rio Hondo College
   Ms. Sigala coordinated the Collaborative Teaching Project at Rio Hondo.
Thomas Angelo, Graduate School of Education, UC Berkeley
   Professor Angelo is a nationally know scholar in the field of Classroom Based Research.
6. Expected Outcomes

[NO “OUTCOMES” ACCOMPANIES THIS DOCUMENT.]
7. Evaluation Plan

EVALUATION:
Evaluation plans would be developed by:

- Pauline Crabb, Assistant Dean of Instruction, PCC
- Thomas Angelo, Professor, Department of Education, Berkeley

Summative evaluation would be accomplished through
1) pre-/post tests of faculty and students regarding attitudes towards teaching/learning
2) interviews with faculty and students regarding possible changes in classroom climate
3) comparing baseline data on retention rates of underrepresented students in comparable cases

Formative evaluation would be accomplished through faculty journals and interviews with project faculty and students. In addition, classroom based assessment techniques will be used in all retreats/workshops/seminars to obtain immediate assessment from participants.
8. Dissemination Plan

DISSEMINATION:

Project faculty will disseminate results of the project through a book to be printed in fall 1992. This book would include a description of each research project and would be used in workshops with colleagues (campus staff development funds would be used to provide small stipends to faculty attending the workshops). Grant funding would, however, have wider impact than PCC faculty and students. UCLA supports our proposal because they believe our project could serve as a model for not only area community colleges but also K-12 teachers. Therefore our dissemination project would also include a conference/workshop to be co-hosted by PCC and UCLA. In addition, UCLA and PCC would seek state intersegmental funds to disseminate the project statewide. Staff development funds provided by PCC would enable faculty to disseminate the results of our project to area high school teachers and to colleagues at national conferences. PCC has had considerable success in disseminating material developed on previous grants though on-campus workshops and conferences as well as through presentations at professional meetings.
BUDGET:
The proposed budget is $49,510; $12,005 from Pasadena City College, $37,505 from the Underrepresented Students Special Project Fund.
WORKS CITED


