CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES
AND
CHABOT --- LAS POSITAS
COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

#92-0031
### Using Small Group Instructional Diagnosis to Improve Teaching and Learning

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<td>John W. Rath, Associate Dean of Instruction</td>
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**PROPOSAL DESCRIPTION**

This proposal is a grant request. Las Positas College proposes to develop and pilot the use of ‘Small Group Instructional Diagnosis’ (SGID) to improve teaching and learning. SGID is a process that uses faculty.
Using Small Group Instructional Diagnosis to Improve Teaching and Learning

Las Positas College proposes to develop and pilot the use of small group instructional diagnosis (SGID) to improve teaching and learning. SGID is a process that uses faculty facilitator-led small group discussion among students to provide feedback to an instructor in order to improve teaching, provide suggestions for strengthening the course, and increase communication between students and the teacher. A trained facilitator/colleague conducts a structured, confidential interview midway through the course, asking students in a given course what helps them learn, what improvements they would like, and how they would suggest these improvements be made. The facilitator shares student feedback with the instructor and assists the instructor in planning course modifications.

This proposal addresses eligible programs and services priority b, improving teaching abilities of faculty members, and the Board of Governors 1991-92 Basic Agenda Focus a2, educational standards.

While faculty peers can appraise instructional objectives and the currency of subject matter, faculty presently have limited opportunity to receive objective collective feedback from students regarding what classroom strategies would better facilitate learning and performance. Small group instructional diagnosis is a particularly effective tool for providing faculty feedback which leads to improvement of teaching and learning.

SGID will serve Las Positas full-time and part-time faculty who participate in the pilot program and increasing numbers of faculty in subsequent years. Approximately 700 students will participate in the SGID process during the first year.

Proposal objectives include identifying and training five faculty facilitators who will receive SGID training; having 25 percent of full-time teaching faculty and as many as 10 percent of part-time teaching faculty use the SGID process in the pilot year; increasing mid-course changes as a result of SGID; achieving/evaluating student, faculty, and facilitator satisfaction and benefit from the SGID process; training additional faculty to serve as SGID facilitators for additional part-time and full-time faculty who will request to use SGID; and informing members of California community colleges about the effectiveness of SGID process in strengthening teaching and learning.
Expected outcomes of project activities include the following: Faculty will gain an increased understanding of how student feedback can be used in a constructive manner to make mid-course modifications. Faculty will gain an increased awareness and understanding of how teaching methods and course structure impact student learning and performance. Faculty who use the SGID process will devote increased effort to considering how best to structure future courses and how to deliver course content. Students will experience a sense of greater involvement in and responsibility for their learning. SGID will serve as a catalyst for change.

The SGID process is highly transferable to and adaptable for other colleges, and this proposal outlines a number of vehicles by which Las Positas facilitators and SGID faculty will share the results of the SGID project with other faculty: through dissemination of a report, through participation in a statewide conference, and through staff development workshops that utilize SGID survey results.
Using Small Group Instructional Diagnosis to Improve Teaching and Learning

1. Specific Educational Program Being Addressed

Las Positas College proposes to develop and pilot the use of small group instructional diagnosis (SGID) to improve teaching and learning. Pioneered in the 1970s at the University of Washington by D. Joseph Clark, small group instructional diagnosis is a process that uses faculty facilitator-led small group discussion among students to provide feedback to an instructor in order to improve teaching, provide suggestions for strengthening the course, and increase communication between the students and the teacher.

Traditionally, Las Positas faculty have used a number of tools to evaluate course effectiveness, but, while administrators and peers can provide many valuable insights, students are in a better position to offer feedback about the course. In the SGID process, the identity of students is strictly protected, providing the potential for greater honesty in student feedback.

In the SGID format, a trained facilitator/colleague conducts a structured, confidential interview, asking groups of students in a given course what helps them learn, what improvements they would like, and how they would suggest these improvements be made. Students’ suggestions typically deal with class organization (e.g., more clarity in assignments, more frequent quizzes, a question and answer period at the end of each class). Following group discussion, each group reports two or three ideas on each question to the entire class. A student volunteer records these ideas, and the facilitator summarizes the ideas on the board, paraphrasing, questioning, and clarifying until students reach consensus and the facilitator demonstrates a clear understanding of the students’ viewpoint. The facilitator then meets with the instructor to summarize information, answer questions, explain comments, and offer interpretation. SGIDs are typically conducted around the middle of the semester or quarter, thereby enabling the faculty member to use the feedback to incorporate course modifications in the second half of the term.

The SGID process builds on a positive foundation of what works well in the course. SGID facilitators are supportive colleagues who can reassure instructors that problems are not
unusual or insurmountable SGID feedback provides an opportunity for professional growth that can be used right away.

What specific educational program or services the proposal is addressing. This proposal addresses the following California Education Code Section 84381 approved program:

b. Programs for improving teaching abilities of faculty members

Small group instructional diagnosis (SGID) strengthens and improves the teaching abilities of faculty members by providing direct student feedback on

- what helps students learn in the course
- what improvements students would like to see implemented
- how students recommend that these improvements be made.

Using the SGID format, a trained facilitator who is an experienced and respected instructor conducts the student group interviews, summarizes the groups’ ideas, and presents this feedback to the instructor. A key adjunct in the SGID scheme involves the opportunity for peer mentoring to take place as part of the feedback process. The facilitator helps the instructor identify major themes and issues from the student data. The facilitator shares his/her experiences, insights, and interpretations regarding possible motivations and underlying issues. The facilitator helps the instructor develop a plan for responding to the SGID. Through the SGID process, the instructor receives identification/affirmation of what he/she is doing well and receives feedback that results in improving teaching ability. SGID produces several outcomes:

- Provides specific information to the instructor to help him/her modify the class as needed.
- Provides ideas to the facilitator about teaching.
- Creates networking among faculty.
- Builds community among the students.
- Provides a check to students on their perceptions of the class, the requirements, and their expectations.

This proposal also addresses the following Board of Governors Basic Agenda priority:

a. Transfer and General Education
   (2) Educational Standards
   To improve the quality of academic offerings, The Board of Governors suggests that the community colleges:
   - Maintain and improve the quality of instruction to promote excellence in the classroom, in both teaching and learning.

The ways in which small group instructional diagnosis (SGID) enhances teaching are described above. SGID enhances learning in the following ways:
• Provides a vehicle by which instructors can receive mid-term feedback on student perceptions of what does or could help them learn, resulting in concrete, objective suggestions for improving student learning during the same term.
• Promotes students’ assessment of their own learning.
• Helps clarify students’ perceptions of the instructor’s course goals.
2. Specific Problems Being Addressed

What specific problem(s) is being addressed in the proposal.

Las Positas faculty members strive to provide the highest quality instruction to promote classroom excellence and to provide outstanding teaching and learning for all students. Presently, their effectiveness in achieving these goals is limited by insufficient opportunity for feedback from colleagues and students. Tenured faculty undergo peer evaluation every third year, while untenured faculty receive peer evaluation throughout the first four years of their contract. Additionally faculty distribute evaluation questionnaires to students in selected courses at the end of the quarter. Basically, Las Positas faculty are receiving too little feedback too late to make course changes that can impact the learning of students currently enrolled in their classes.

While faculty peers can appraise instructional objectives and the currency of subject matter, students are in a better position to comment on classroom teaching skills, course difficulty, and instructor-student interaction. The small group instructional diagnosis (SGID) described above is a particularly effective tool for providing faculty feedback which leads to improvement of teaching and learning. A study by Wulff, Station-Spicer, Hess and Nyquist ("The Student Perspective on Evaluating Teaching Effectiveness," *ACA Bulletin* 53, 1985, pp. 39-49) found that students prefer the SGID procedure for providing instructor feedback because the process is confidential, the instructor is not present, and students have a direct role in shaping their instruction and learning.

Faculty at other colleges who have participated in SGID programs also express enthusiasm:

The class discussion I had with them about their comments clarified some assumptions that I and the class had not shared up to that time. A great source of feedback, the kind a teacher normally doesn't get but needs. (Joan Kerns)

Very practical. For example, I had not fully realized the problems some students were having in correlating text and lecture material. By the following day, I had a study guide ready. As a direct result, I believe the midterm exams were better than usual. (Carol Doig)

Helpful in designing future classes. Feedback interview from facilitator is impartial with good, solid suggestions for changes. (Joyce Halsan)

Las Positas College has chosen to develop and pilot small group instructional diagnosis (SGID) because

* SGID enables students to take an active role in shaping their instruction and learning;
• SGID is a voluntary, confidential process which provides student feedback through a facilitator to assist the instructor in implementing mid-course changes that will facilitate learning and improved student performance. SGID has no bearing on tenure review or faculty evaluation;
• SGID’s mid-term timeframe enables the instructor to make immediate course changes that will provide improved teaching and learning for the students currently enrolled in the course.

While the SGID process has been described under section 1, above, some further elaboration regarding the selection of facilitators/colleagues is appropriate at this point. In preparing this proposal, a group of full-time and part-time faculty members, appointed by the Academic Senate, thoroughly reviewed the topic of SGID facilitators, reaching consensus that facilitators would be sought who have the following professional and personal characteristics:
• Are full-time or part-time faculty members at Las Positas College.
• Have a sincere desire to serve as an SGID facilitator.
• Have extensive teaching experience.
• Take professional interest in all faculty.
• Care about students.
• Possess excellent communication skills and tact.
• Demonstrate fair-mindedness and impartiality.
• Demonstrate even temper, good humor, and warmth.
• Possess leadership qualities.

Each of the college's four interdisciplinary areas (divisions) will select one full-time faculty member and one alternate, using a process involving nomination and self-nomination. In addition, the four faculty area coordinators will select one part-time faculty member and one alternate, again using a process involving nomination and self-nomination. Under this pilot program, the five selected facilitators, comprising an interdisciplinary group, will receive intensive and thorough SGID training by an outside consultant. An alternate will receive training only if one of the original five facilitators is unable to participate in the scheduled training program.
3. Population To Be Served

Identity the population(s) to be served by the project.

The small group instructional diagnosis (SGID) project is intended to serve all full-time and part-time faculty who volunteer to participate in the pilot program. Of a current full-time teaching faculty of 58, the college projects that 25 percent will utilize SGID in the pilot year, and that as many as 10 percent of the part-time teaching faculty may also utilize SGID. In subsequent years, increasing numbers of full-time and part-time faculty will utilize SGID as faculty become aware of how the program has assisted their colleagues and how SGID provides useful information from students, and as additional facilitators receive SGID training.

In addition to the faculty target group, students in classes where SGID is used will also be served by this project, in that they will participate in the instructional diagnosis process and they will be the recipients of course modifications that faculty members initiate as a result of participating in SGID. At conservative estimates of 20 students per class, the college anticipates that as many as 700 students will be served by this project in the pilot year, and that numbers of students served will increase dramatically in subsequent years.

The short-term impact of this proposal on the target population is that, as a result of SGID, faculty members will receive more information about what is going well in their classrooms and will receive suggestions about how to improve their courses. They will have an opportunity to discuss this feedback with a colleague who serves as a facilitator. As a result of this feedback faculty members will improve the quality of classroom teaching and learning. Students who participate in the SGID process will have an opportunity to help modify courses and will receive the benefits of these changes. While the short-term impact relates directly to improving teaching and learning in a select number of courses, the long-term impact extends not only to improving teaching and learning in a greater number and variety of courses by more instructors but to faculty adopting a style of feedback, self-examination, and course modification which results in a more dynamic and fluid methodology of teaching and learning.
4. Objectives

Proposal Objectives

1. Five interdisciplinary faculty facilitators (four full-time and one part-time) will be identified by July 1992 and will receive SGID training from an outside consultant during fall quarter 1992.

2. Twenty-five percent of the full-time teaching faculty and as many as ten percent of part-time teaching faculty will use small group instructional diagnosis in their courses during winter and spring quarters 1993.

3. Mid-course changes in instructional delivery and/or content will be 50 percent higher in courses where faculty have utilized SGID as compared with courses where faculty have not utilized SGID during winter and spring quarters 1993.

4. Seventy-five percent of students who participate in SGID will express satisfaction with their involvement in the process at the end of the course in winter and spring quarters 1993.

5. Seventy-five percent of faculty who utilize SGID will receive feedback and incorporate mid-course changes that they perceive as constructive to the course during winter and spring quarters 1993.

6. One hundred percent of facilitators will believe that their participation in the SGID process contributed to their professional growth and strengthened their own teaching at the end of the SGID pilot in spring 1993.

7. Five additional faculty will receive SGID facilitator training from current facilitators in spring 1993.

8. In 1993-94, an additional twenty-five percent of the full-time teaching faculty and as many as ten percent of the part-time teaching faculty will request to use SGID in their courses as a result of program information disseminated by facilitators and faculty who have used SGID.

9. In fall 1993, members of the California community colleges will learn about the effectiveness of SGID through dissemination of a final report outlining how faculty were involved in the SGID process, selection and training of SGID facilitators, conducting SGIDs, and evaluation of the overall impact of the SGID process on teaching, student learning, and performance. In addition, facilitators and faculty who have used SGID will make a presentation about the SGID process at a state-wide conference. Finally,
facilitators and faculty will present staff development workshops at LPC and other colleges using the SGID survey results.
Work Statement Narrative

In accomplishing the objectives listed above, the college plans to begin by educating all full-time and part-time faculty regarding the SGID concept, then selecting faculty to serve as facilitators/colleagues during spring 1992. The next activity will be to bring in an outside consultant to provide intensive and thorough training of the facilitators in fall 1992. This training will include three components:

- The training consultant will conduct an SGID in two different classes so each instructor has an opportunity to observe an SGID.
- The training consultant will feed back information to each instructor in front of the observers.
- The training consultant will meet with all facilitator trainees to discuss what they observed and to answer questions.

In fall 1992, after the facilitators have been trained, they will further inform small faculty groups regarding the SGID process and its benefits to faculty and students, and they will be available to respond to requests from the full-time and part-time faculty to participate in SGID. The facilitators will then schedule the SGID meetings with individual faculty members for winter and spring quarters, and the process will involve four components: the facilitator and the instructor will meet to share background information about the course; the facilitator will conduct a confidential small group instructional diagnosis; the facilitator will meet with the instructor to share feedback on the SGID and to assist the instructor in formulating a plan for course change; the instructor will implement a plan for course change.

An important aspect of implementing a pilot program in small group instructional diagnosis is evaluating the success of the program, and the college plans surveys to assess four measures of success: the percentage of courses incorporating mid-course changes, student satisfaction with their involvement in the SGID process, faculty assessment of whether the SGID process was constructive to the course, and facilitator feedback on how the SGID process contributed to their professional growth and strengthened their own teaching.

The concluding activities include sharing survey results with Las Positas faculty and motivating additional faculty to use the SGID process in the classroom; preparing a report of the SGID program; presenting a report on the effectiveness of SGID at a state-wide conference; and presenting staff development workshops at Las Positas and other colleges utilizing the results of the SGID evaluation surveys.

Following is a work statement outlining each of the proposed objectives, scheduled activities, target dates, responsible personnel, and budget by objective.
6. Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes of project activities, in terms of:

a. Project objectives:

We expect the following outcomes for faculty based on the project activities for each of the project objectives:

- Faculty will gain an increased understanding of how student feedback can be used in a constructive manner to make mid-course modifications.
- Faculty will gain an increased understanding of the importance of student feedback in ensuring the validity of course goals.
- Faculty will become more comfortable in seeking and using student feedback.
- Faculty will gain an increased awareness and understanding of how teaching methods and course structure impact student learning and performance.
- Faculty who use the SGID process will devote increased effort to considering how best to structure future courses and how to deliver course content.
- Faculty will experience increased opportunities to engage in conversations with colleagues and students about ideas that work well in the classroom.

We expect the following outcomes for students based on the project activities for each of the project objectives:

- Students will experience a sense of greater involvement in and responsibility for their learning.
- SGID will foster increased communication and collaboration between students and faculty.
- SGID will reinforce students' expectations for sharing experiences and for developing social cohesion.

b. Impact of the project.

The final impact of this project is the improvement of teaching abilities and quality of instruction of Las Positas College faculty. Additionally,

- SGID will encourage increased dialogue and focus on what constitutes a positive teaching and learning environment.
- SGID will result in increased informal networking among faculty.
- SGID will serve as a catalyst for change.

Funding of this project will enable the college to train and support facilitators in the introduction of a pilot program of small group instructional diagnosis during the funding year, with the potential for expansion in subsequent years.
c. Potential for continued support after the expiration of the grant.

The college intends to institutionalize the SGID process in years subsequent to grant expiration, providing necessary funds and/or faculty incentives for participation.

d. Potential for adaptation to other institutions or programs.
This project is highly transferable to or adaptable for other colleges or districts. The concept of small group instructional diagnosis is adaptable to any course, and the outcomes of improved teaching abilities and quality of instruction are eagerly sought by faculty.

While literature exists on the SGID process, Las Positas College proposes to collect data regarding student and faculty satisfaction with the SGID process. We anticipate these data will provide further documentation of the advantages of SGID. The college proposes to prepare a report outlining how faculty were involved in the SGID process, selection and training of SGID facilitators, conducting SGIDs, and evaluation of the overall impact of the SGID process on teaching, student learning, and performance. This report will be disseminated to the Chancellor's Office, California Community Colleges, with executive summaries being disseminated to chief executive officers, chief instructional officers, chief student services officers, academic senate presidents, and student body presidents at each of the 107 California community colleges. Additionally, Las Positas SGID facilitators and instructors who utilized SGID will make presentations to the Las Positas faculty, at a state-wide conference, and, upon request, at other colleges. Facilitators will provide copies of the written report to supplement their presentations. Additional copies of the report will be available upon request at a cost basis. Finally, the SGID survey results will provide an excellent basis for facilitators and SGID faculty to conduct staff development workshops at Las Positas and other colleges.

In summary, the college's goal is to generate interest and follow-up inquiries via state-wide distribution of the executive summary and via participation in a statewide conference.
Evaluation Plan

Overall project evaluation will be directed by the Project Director, Institutional Research Coordinator, and facilitators. Evaluation design will take into account both process and product objectives as well as formative and summative data.

To evaluate how well the college has achieved the outcomes anticipated for each of its objectives, the Project Director will conduct surveys of faculty and students who participated in the SGID process. One faculty survey will determine what percentage of courses in which faculty utilized the SGID process underwent mid-course changes as compared with courses where faculty did not utilize SGID. A second faculty survey will determine whether faculty who utilized the SGID process believed the process was constructive to the course. A student survey will determine what percentage of SGID-participating students expressed satisfaction with their involvement in the SGID process at the end of the course. Finally, facilitators will assess whether their participation in the SGID process contributed to their professional growth and strengthened their own teaching.

All surveys will elicit feedback regarding identification of problems incurred, if any; identification of effective methods; identification of successes; and development of recommendations.

The Project Director and Institutional Research Coordinator will analyze survey data and prepare reports that summarize the success of the SGID program and formulate recommendations for program modifications.

In addition to these surveys, the Program Director will evaluate the college's success in increasing the number of 1993-94 faculty requests to use SGID in their courses as well as the process and progress in disseminating project results to the state-wide college community.
8. Dissemination Plan

A dissemination plan, including recommendations for appropriate dissemination for the project.

As described under section 6d, the college proposes to prepare a report outlining how faculty were involved in the SGID process, selection and training of SGID facilitators, conducting SGIDs, and evaluation of the overall impact of the SGID process on teaching, student learning, and performance. This report will be disseminated to the Chancellor's Office, California Community Colleges, with executive summaries being disseminated to chief executive officers, chief instructional officers, chief student services officers, academic senate presidents, and student body presidents at each of the 107 California community colleges. Additionally, Las Positas SGID facilitators and instructors who utilized SGID will make presentations to the Las Positas faculty, at a state-wide conference, and, upon request, at other colleges. Facilitators will provide copies of the written report to supplement their presentations. Additional copies of the report will be available upon request at a cost basis.

Dissemination of the full report and executive summaries will occur in August 1993. An SGID program presentation to the Las Positas faculty will take place in September 1993, and participation in a state-wide conference will occur in fall 1993-probably November.

To evaluate dissemination success, the Project Director will track distribution of the complete report, presentations made by facilitators and SGID instructors, and requests by LPC instructors to utilize SGID. In addition, the Project Director will make follow-up contacts with colleges which received Las Positas SGID reports and presentations to determine if these colleges instituted SGID programs.
The project budget.

Funding of this project will enable Las Positas College to initiate a pilot program: using small group instructional diagnosis to improve teaching and learning. While the college plans to institutionalize the program at the completion of grant funding, we lack the greater start-up funds to begin this important instructional improvement project.

Funding of this FII proposal will underwrite the costs of providing reassigned time for an initial cadre of faculty to receive training and conduct small group instructional diagnosis in pilot courses. Funding will pay for the services of a professional consultant to provide facilitator training. Funding will also help underwrite the costs of evaluating surveys and producing and disseminating program reports throughout the state, thereby facilitating the expansion of SGID beyond Las Positas College.