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American River

Increasing Student Involvement in Learning: Teaching Modules for Adjunct Faculty

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Improving the teaching methods of part-time adjunct faculty has been a challenge for community colleges statewide. Many of these faculty are specialists in their fields but have had little opportunity to explore new concepts in pedagogy. This project will result in a tested package of modules incorporating the most up-to-date ideas in teaching methodology for professional development of adjunct faculty.
This proposal addresses improving teaching abilities of faculty, improvement of faculty, and the quality of human resources. The intent is to help adjunct faculty learn teaching methods that encourage active student involvement in learning. In so doing, the quality of the programs offered will improve and the students will be better served in their learning.

Adjunct faculty often do not have the opportunities for staff development available to full time faculty, yet they teach a significant number of students. This proposal addresses their training needs.
Research has consistently shown that students who are more involved in their learning and in campus activities are more persistent, demonstrate better classroom performance, and are most satisfied with their educational experience. Using the statistics derived from their Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire administered in over 200 colleges, Pace and Friedlander have shown that the amount and quality of participation in learning activities was a more important determinant of student achievement in college than factors such as age, ethnicity, family income, number of hours employed, high school grade point, or marital status. Minority students who feel connected to the educational institution, and particularly to the classroom group, have shown dramatic improvements in math and science (Treisman, 1989). Pace (1984) also suggested that education is a partnership between the institution and the student. Colleges need to provide resources, facilities, programs, stimulus, and standards for promoting learning, and students need to be accountable for the extent and quality of their effort in taking advantage of the collegial opportunities.

American River College is among the ten largest community colleges in California with a 22,000 student enrollment. There are 350 adjunct faculty who teach approximately 25 percent of the students on campus. During the last two academic years (1991-92 and 1992-93), American River College has had a number of initiatives to meet a campus objective for developing student involvement strategies. One facet of this program is committed to helping faculty develop active learning approaches for their classrooms.

For various reasons, many faculty still rely mainly on traditional lecture methods despite the fact that research has shown this to be less effective in student learning than more active learning approaches. Teachers often experience pressure to cover a certain content with their students and lecturing seems to enable them to do so. Moreover, even when faculty are aware of alternative techniques which involve more active learning, they may not have sufficient training in utilizing such techniques to risk trying them in their classrooms.

American River College has an innovative Teaching Resources Center which offers frequent programs for faculty on teaching techniques. Due to budget restraints, these occur mainly during the day. During the past two years, the college has been utilizing the five flex days to offer workshops also. However, many of the adjunct faculty have said that they cannot take advantage of these
programs due to the timing. Although they may be skilled in their academic fields, many have had little or no training in teaching techniques or working with adult learners; hence, there is still an overwhelming need to help such faculty become trained in active learning techniques.
This proposal is directed particularly to the 350 faculty at American River College who cannot attend daytime staff development programs. Professional growth is not part of the adjunct faculty’s contract obligation. Therefore, incentives will be offered to encourage their participation in the project. The short-term impact will be the learning by faculty of teaching methods which incorporate student involvement through a series of modules in which they themselves are actively involved. The long-term impact will be the success these instructors will experience with their students in facilitating their learning by using such methods. These modules will also be made available to other community colleges for use with their adjunct faculty.
(a) Develop a series of 16 modules that contain teaching methods for encouraging active learning by students. These modules will be developed from September-November, 1993.

(b) Offer the series of modules to adjunct faculty during spring semester, 1994. It will be taught using the methods developed in the modules, in order to model the teaching methods.

(c) Assess the teaching methods of the participants initially and after the completion of the course in order to see the degree to which the participants were able to use the material directly in their classes. In addition, the participants will evaluate the course in order to determine how it was of value to them.
The project will develop a series of modules on teaching methods that encourage student involvement in learning. These methods will enable faculty to help students become active participants rather than passive learners and to encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning. These modules will be offered as a series of three-hour workshops in the evening targeted to the part-time faculty, although they will be open to all faculty. The workshops will be conducted using interactive methods so that the presentations model the teaching behaviors expected of the participants. The workshop leaders will be drawn from our own faculty and staff as well as from other sources.

In addition to conducting the workshops, the presenter will be paid to develop written materials which could be used by future participants, either at this college or other institutions. The sessions will be videotaped and these videos will be available both to our own college through the Teaching Resources Center and to other colleges. Participants would be compensated for their time, either with a small stipend, district salary credit, or flex credit. A very important part of the program will be the evaluation of its effectiveness for the participants. This will include surveying participants, both in writing and with short interviews initially, and at timed intervals after the workshops in order to evaluate what changes in teaching methods occurred as a result of the workshops.

The workshops will be designed for 20-25 participants and will be planned during fall semester, 1993. During spring semester, 1994, the three-hour workshops will be offered once a week in the evening for 16 weeks.

The following topics will be offered with the number of three-hour sessions in parentheses. The sequencing of topics is flexible.

Course planning - determining goals and objectives, lesson planning, and effective first-day ideas/techniques (1);

Motivating adult learners and working with special needs students (1);

Collaborative learning and group techniques (2);
Learning and teaching styles - Myers/Briggs, Kolb, and Dunn & Dunn (2);

Classroom assessment techniques - Cross/Angelo model (2);

Active learning techniques which encourage higher levels of thinking, questioning techniques, and effective discussion methods and lecture methods (1);

Audio-visual and computer techniques which involve the learner (2);

Campus resources --- how to integrate co-curricular activities and campus facilities into the curriculum (1);

Multicultural issues and facets --- how to incorporate them in the classroom and make them relevant (2);

Testing and evaluating strategies (1);

New ideas in educational theories and practices --- faculty sharing from recent conferences (1).
The most immediate impact will be on participating faculty and their students. Virtually all faculty struggle with similar problems in regard to effective methods. Already on this campus, we have heard from many faculty who have tried alternative techniques to lecturing with varying degrees of success. It is so important that all faculty, whether full or part-time, have the opportunity to be trained in effective teaching strategies. Since student success is positively correlated to their involvement in their learning, it is important for teachers to try strategies which promote this. These workshops provide the environment for fellow teachers to share, discuss, and try alternative methods, some of which involve a significant degree of risk-taking.

In the long run, it is the students who will reap the benefits of such techniques. If the course proves to be successful in promoting more effective teaching methods for faculty, similar courses using these materials (or modified materials), could be used at other community colleges who also have adjunct faculty in need of training.

Potential for Continued Support

As mentioned in the section on objectives, the modules will be accompanied by written materials and later by video-taped sessions. These would be 'made available to any faculty and could also be used in planning future sessions. If the evaluation shows that changes were made in the participants’ instructional methods as a result of the workshops, the college will continue such offerings through the Teaching Resources Center for part-time faculty in the future by offering the same incentives. In addition, written results will be shared with other colleges and workshops will be conducted at conferences on this program.

Potential for Adaptation to Other Institutions

Most community colleges share the problem of the lack of training opportunities for adjunct faculty. This project may be directly replicated by any interested community college. The modules that would be developed include the most up-to-date information on educational research and teaching strategies.
Success will be determined initially by the completion of the objectives. Participants will also be asked to give feedback on each module; modifications will be made based on the feedback. Also, the participants will be surveyed, both in writing and by interview, to compare the teaching methods they use before and after taking the course and towards the end of the following teaching semester. The objective is to determine what impact the class made on their teaching methods. In addition, an evaluation will be done by the participants to determine if they considered the course to be of value, and what parts were of particular value. This information will be used to modify the modules.
Dissemination will be done through conference presentations, journal articles, the ARC Teaching Resources Newsletter, which is distributed statewide, and by college visitations which are part of the student involvement program. The written modules and video tapes of the teaching sessions will be made available to any interested college.
[No information provided in this document for this section.]