The First Year Network: An Electronic Support Community for First Year Faculty

BACKGROUND / INTRODUCTION

IMPACT ON SYSTEMWIDE NEED

SPECIFIC EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM BEING ADDRESSED

SPECIFIC PROBLEMS BEING ADDRESSED

POPULATION TO BE SERVED

OBJECTIVES

WORKPLAN NARRATIVE

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

EVALUATION PLAN

DISSEMINATION

BUDGET NARRATIVE
Consortium Projects.

Consortium members will be identified after the hiring cycle is complete at the end of Spring Semester 1993 when it can be determined if districts will be employing faculty members in their first year of community college teaching. The data from a recent statewide Chief Instructional Services Officers meeting suggests that a sufficient number of colleges will have first year teachers whom they wish to enroll as members of The First Year Network, and experienced faculty will be nominated to serve as mentors.

The obligation of each college to the system includes the following:
A. To provide transportation to Modesto Junior College for one day of training for first year members and mentors.

B. To provide for convenient access to a computer linked to a phone line for all first year members and mentors who do not own a personal computer.

It is difficult to give a precise estimate of the financial contribution of each college, as it will vary with distance from Modesto and the computer needs of its member(s) and mentor(s). However, for purposes of estimating contributions to the system in the budget section of this application, various budget assumptions have been made and are outlined in the budget section.
By establishing a network to assist new teachers in meeting the challenges of their first year of teaching, The First Year Network addresses the objective in Basic Agenda Priorities of Educational Quality. Among the Board of Governors' initiatives, one initiative is to enhance the recognition and status of community college faculty. By encouraging excellence in the classroom it will enhance the educational standards of all participants, including those involved in transfer and general education. Similarly, the system will develop human resources by assisting faculty, including those from underrepresented groups, in meeting the professional and personal challenges of their first year in the classroom through ease of communication.

The messages exchanged throughout the year through the "First Year Network," an electronic bulletin board system, will be retained and should serve as an enormously valuable record of the experiences of first year community college faculty. Publications resulting from the study of the record could greatly enhance an understanding of the process by which a new faculty member becomes a teacher and a member of the professional community.
This grant is requested for the purposes of establishing and operating for one academic year "The First Year Network," an electronic bulletin board linking new, full time faculty members with each other and with a group of experienced faculty. The First Year Network is modeled in large part after a highly successful network operated for first year teaching graduates of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and is aimed at the improvement of faculty and staff by meeting some of the needs which are unique to teachers in their first year of full-time community college teaching.
The literature on the experience of teachers in their initial year of full-time employment indicates that it is a very difficult period characterized by a number of difficult stresses and problems. Contact with other first year teachers and experienced faculty through a telecommunications network would ease the stresses and contribute to the solution of problems.

First year teachers often mention a sense of isolation, a need to talk about teaching problems, and a fear of revealing weaknesses as among their more pressing concerns. (See L. Dee Fink, The First Year of College Teaching, J. L. Turner and Robert Boice, "Experiences of New Faculty," Journal of Staff Program and Organizational Development, Summer 1989, or Julie Nicklin, "For Newly Hired School Teachers, an Electronic Lifeline," Chronicle of Higher Education, November 6, 1991.) The special circumstances of new community college teachers may add to these difficulties. New teachers find themselves employed in institutions far different from the colleges and universities which trained them. Products of large graduate departments discover they are half of a two person department. New faculty at small, rural colleges discover themselves in a different world than the urban academic center they left. Although on-site mentor programs may deal with some of these difficulties, they fall short in some important ways.

The isolation new teachers describe often relates to an inability to meet with other first year instructors as well as isolation from disciplinary colleagues. They frequently report a reluctance to discuss difficulties or problems with supervisors.

Why the Electronic Bulletin Board is a Solution: The electronic network provides an answer to these needs. The new teacher can find an immediate group of peers and interested "experts" with whom to discuss educational matters in a supportive, nonthreatening environment. Experience with the Harvard network has shown that the first year teachers feel that the opportunity to talk with peers serves multiple functions. Some users speak of the enormous relief they experience learning that others share their fears and problems. Others say they were able to avoid difficulties because by reading about problems other network colleagues were having they were able to take action to avoid similar situations. Others speak of the support of network peers being instrumental in getting through hard times which could otherwise have led them to leave the profession. Still others praise the opportunity to discuss teaching difficulties
with non-supervising experts." The Harvard experience indicates that the "electronic community" meets some new faculty needs which are not satisfied by other programs.

Info-Net will offer The First Year Network members a number of services not available on the Harvard BBS, i.e., simultaneous conferencing, file exchange, and the Innovations Network, which are explained in the Work Statement.
The population to be served directly by the project will be 25-35 full-time faculty in their first year of community college teaching. These faculty will be nominated by the chief instructional officers of California community colleges. Selection of new faculty will be conducted so as to assure diversity of academic subject areas, ethnicity and gender equity. (It is anticipated that 25 faculty will become members on a first-come-first-served basis. If necessary to assure diversity, some portion of the final ten positions will be filled by selection by the project director; otherwise, these position will also be filled in order of receipt.) This population will be selected for the reasons stated under Part 4, "Specific Problems Being Addressed."

Also served and serving will be the somewhat smaller number of experienced mentors who will be "on system." Although their main function will be to meet the needs of the new faculty, these mentor teachers should enjoy a unique version of the professional growth which generally accrues to mentors as they assist others in achieving success.
A. Recruit first year members: By 07/29/93, 25-35 new full-time community college faculty will have been recruited through nominations from California community college Chief Instructional Officers for membership in The First Year Network. The membership will be representative of the disciplinary and ethnic diversity and gender balance of the "class of 92" new faculty throughout the system. All members will agree to log onto the system at least twice a week while classes are in session and will agree that, with appropriate provisions for anonymity, all messages exchanged on The First Year Network may be recorded and retained as the object of legitimate scholarly study. Evaluation Measure: Nominations, recruitment flyers and recruitment activities will result in 35 new faculty identified on InfoNet.

B. Recruit network mentors: By 08/13/93, mentors for the system will have been recruited through nominations by academic senate presidents of colleges with new faculty who have been selected to be members of the First Year Network. (The number of mentors cannot be known before the disciplinary, ethnic and gender make up of the first year teachers is known.) There will be at least one mentor from each discipline represented in the new faculty membership. Mentors will be selected to achieve ethnic diversity and gender equity. Evaluation Measure: Nominations, recruitment flyers and recruitment activities will result in one mentor for each discipline of the new faculty participants.

C. Create an Advisory Committee: By November 1993, create an Advisory Committee composed of three faculty and three mentors, selected by the members and mentors at their training session. Evaluation Measure: List of committee members and minutes from meetings.

D. Train network members and mentors: By 09/15/93, all members and mentors will attend a one-day Network training session conducted by Info-Net personnel and the program manager. At the end of training all members and mentors will be able to use all features of The First Year Network listed in Objective C. Evaluation Measure: An examination of the number of attendees at the workshop will result 100% use of InfoNet by participants.

E. Establish, maintain and operate a statewide telecommunications network linking First Year Network members and mentors: By 08/15/93, as per contract with InfoNet, an
electronic bulletin board will be fully operational and will remain so until 06/15/94. (See "Proposed Contract" following Budget Detail page for technical details of Network.) Network members and mentors will have at least the following capabilities:

1) The ability to leave signed or anonymous messages in a "public" discussion area for network members and mentors.

2) The ability to "conference" with up to 24 members and mentors.

3) The ability to leave and receive private messages to and from any network member or mentor.

4) The ability to access the "Innovations Network" component of the InfoNet system.

5) The ability through InfoNet to upload and download files such as course outlines, tests, instructional software, etc.

6) Access to a First Year Network News and Information area which will feature items of interest to new faculty and news of events throughout the California community college system.

7) Access to all general services of InfoNet.

Evaluation Measure: The operation of the electronic bulletin board will result in 100% of the mentors/participants using it.

F. Evaluate the Project: By the end of the project year, both a formative and summative evaluation will occur.

Evaluation Standard: A summative report will be produced outlining all evaluation activities.
Work Plan follows Narrative. The Work Plan provides a detailed list of objectives, dates of activities, personnel, equipment, and an evaluation process. Because of its detail, it will not be repeated here.

The work plan will follow the objectives and implement activities that include recruiting faculty and mentors, creation of an advisory committee, training the participants and operating the network. Mr. Bob Gauvreau, Division Dean of Arts, Humanities and Communications, will lead the project, with supervision from Ron Manzoni, Vice President of Instruction.
In terms of (a) Project objectives and (b) Impact of the project.

A. Project Objectives: The outcomes from the objectives as set out above include the following:

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<tr>
<th>Objective Outcome Measure</th>
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<td>1) Recruit First Year Members 35 instructors will participate in the project.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Recruit Network Mentors 1 mentor identified for each discipline of the participants.</td>
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<td>3) Create Advisory Committee Minutes from Advisory Committee provides input to participants.</td>
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<td>4) Train Network Members and Mentors 100% use by participants.</td>
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<td>5) Establish, Maintain and Operate 100% use of InfoNet by mentors/participants the Technical Aspects of the First Year Network</td>
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<td>6) Evaluate the Project. Evaluation Report created.</td>
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B. Impact of Project: The impact of the project will be on individuals, the California Community College System, and beyond. The system should profit from a better understanding of the needs of new faculty. Individual participants who are new faculty should find their first year of teaching made more rewarding, more productive and more personally fulfilling by the relationships and expert support of their peers and mentors. The mentors should be convinced that their knowledge and experience have contributed to the success of a group of new community college faculty.

In the hands of skillful researchers and writers, the collective "journal" made up of the messages exchanged over The First Year Network could provide the materials for publications which should have national impact on our understanding of the needs of new faculty and how those needs can be met.

C. Potential for continued support: The potential for continuing the system following the grant exists because the technical infrastructure is guaranteed, as InfoNet has agreed to continue its donation of hardware and to donate the Hayes modems to future first year faculty and mentors.
Costs, of telephone services, Info-Net technical support and training could be met through the creation of a permanent consortium which would charge "subscription fees" to enroll new faculty as system members. The Info-Net Director estimates an annual fee of $350.00 per participating college would support a network as large as that proposed here.

D. Potential for adaptation: Since "The First Year Network" will be statewide at its inception, its services will not need to be adapted district by district. Expansion of the system following the grant year could reach all interested districts. Geographically homogeneous systems modeled after The First Year Network could be established independent of its operation, if that should be the choice of interested districts.

As The First Year Network is patterned after the Harvard system, other systems following its general organizational structure could be created throughout the nation. The products described in the dissemination section below and in the Work Statement should make it possible for anyone interested in creating a similar network to do so.
The evaluation of “The First Year Network” will consist of a mix of both process (formative) and outcome (summative) evaluation activities. Three major components are:

A. Two surveys of first year users and mentors and a final summary evaluation based on the results of the surveys

B. Consultation with the Advisory Committee.

C. Continuous monitoring of the “traffic” over the system.

Each evaluation will address the specific items of 9.A of the Program Format for FII. At all stages of evaluation, the Yosemite Community College Director of Research will serve as consultant and advisor in both the design and conduct of evaluation. (See also Work Statement and following discussion of dissemination.)

Recommendations for system improvements will be included in the Summative Evaluation and will be used in the planning of the system's post grant operations. For each project objective, the measures will be as follows:

Objective A: Recruit First Year Network Members
Outcome Measure (Process)
First Year Faculty nominated.
Copies of Recruitment Flyer.
List of Recruitment Activities.

Objective B: Recruit Network Mentors
Outcome Measure (Process)
Nominations made by Academic Senate.
List of Recruitment Activities.
Copies of Recruitment Flyers.

Objective C: Create Advisory Committee
Outcome Measure (Process)
List of Advisory Committee Members.
Expected Outcome (Successes)
35 instructors to participate in project
Expected Outcome (Successes)
One mentor for each discipline of the new faculty participants.
Expected Outcome (Successes)
   Minutes from Advisory Committee. Input received on InfoNet.

Objective D: Train Network Members and Mentors
Outcome Measure (Process)
Expected Outcome (Successes)
   Number of Attendees at Workshop. 100% usage by participants.

Objective E: Establish, Maintain and Operate and Statewide Telecommunications Network Linking First Year Network Members and Mentors
Outcome Measure (Process)
   Electronic Bulletin Board in Operation.
Expected Outcome (Successes)
   100% of participants/mentors use InfoNet.

   Excellent to good rating of InfoNet as evidenced by survey of faculty and members.

Objective F: Evaluate the Project
Outcome Measure (Process)
Expected Outcome (Successes)
   Surveys Distributed.
   Evaluation Report created.
Dissemination Plan: Includes recommendations for appropriate dissemination for the project. (See also Work Statement.)

A. Product/results - what is to be disseminated: Items to be disseminated include recruitment notices, print and electronic notices of the system, descriptive articles submitted for publication to professional journals, reports of formal evaluations, and presentations to professional conferences.

B. Target populations: Initial dissemination will be aimed at California Community College Chief Instructional Officers and Academic Senate Presidents. Subsequent products will be aimed at the broadest possible audience of community college educators and at graduate schools of education with community college programs. Final Summary Report will be sent to California Chief Instructional Officers, Academic Senate Presidents, and Staff Development Officers. (See Work Statement.)

C. Methods of targeting and dissemination: See Work Statement.

D. Timetable for dissemination: See Work Statement.

E. Evaluation of dissemination: The effectiveness of dissemination can be measured by a survey and an appraisal of the reaction to the dissemination efforts.
[No information provided in this document for this section.]