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Audio Computer Conferencing

CONTENTS

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
Surveys of telecourse students indicate that a major factor motivating students to enroll in telecourses is a desire to study at home during times that are convenient to the student. Regardless of whether these students are taking their first college level course, or whether they are seasoned students trying to reduce their campus contact hours, they all want to shift the hours they spend in their courses to times that are convenient to their personal schedule.

Voice mail and conference call technologies are readily available and easily utilized by telecourse students and their faculty. Moreover, many students are familiar with these technologies, have used them, and have access to them in their homes.

Utilization of audio conferencing to support telecourse instruction in a foreign language (Spanish) during the Spring 1995 and Summer 1995 semesters.

This solution was chosen for reasons of economy and convenience for the students and faculty.
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Specific Educational Program Being Addressed

[No information provided in this document for this section.]
Students enrolled in foreign language telecourses do not have access to language drill and practice laboratory facilities available to students enrolled in traditional foreign language classes. Therefore, these telecourse students have difficulty acquiring and retaining interactive conversational skills in the language they are studying.

Teachers of foreign language have long known that a direct relationship exists between foreign language comprehension and retention, and the opportunity for students to become immersed in the language they are studying. Unfortunately, there is no convenient way for students taking a foreign language telecourse to engage in "live" interactive conversation with each other and their instructor within the context of the course, unless the instructor requires students to travel to campus to practice in a language laboratory setting. Since many telecourse students enroll because they wish to avoid making frequent trips to campus, requiring them to do so in order to practice conversation contradicts the basic premise of the telecourse.

This application proposes two solutions to this problem:

1. The first solution is to expand the district voice mail and conference call system to allow each student enrolled in a foreign language telecourse to be given a unique telephone number that will provide individual access to a special "voice mail box." Each student will be required to dial into his or her mailbox at least twice a week to respond to questions and other items placed there by the instructor. All interactions will be conducted in the foreign language being studied; all interactions will be in "real time" in the sense that the voice mail will record pauses and "hangups" as well as the student's voice response. Each week, the instructor will poll the student voice mailboxes one by one, listen to the student responses, make comments, and place new response items in the voice mail boxes.

2. The second solution is to utilize the district's telephone system to conduct "live" conversational sessions with small groups of students. For example, a class of 30 to 35 foreign language students could be subdivided into five or six groups and dialed into a conference call for group drill and practice.
The target population consists of students who enroll in a telecourse in introductory Spanish. Studies indicate that these students are likely to be older adult females many of whom are taking their first college level course. In addition, we expect to enroll college age students working to complete their associate and bachelor's degree programs, and adult professionals who need to acquire a working knowledge in the foreign language being offered.
Task

Develop a new curriculum for the telecourse "Destinos' that utilizes voicemail and conference call telephone technology to provide students with individualized, interactive practice conversing with the instructor and other students as a supplement to the televised instructional segments.

Completion date August 31 1995

Evaluation or Benchmark Standard

We expect this approach will result in (1) a higher percentage of students who complete the course, as compared with traditional methods of foreign language telecourse instruction, and (2) higher language comprehension scores as compared with traditional methods of foreign language telecourse instruction.

The number of students who complete the telecourse will increase at least 10 percent over the national average of 40 percent.

Eighty percent of the students enrolled in the course will utilize voice mail box technology and perceive it to be a useful and productive study technique.

Comprehension and achievement scores will be, at least as high among telecourse students as among students enrolled in traditional foreign language classes.
The work plan for this project consists of four major tasks.

The first task is to work with Pac-Bell to design an expansion to the College's telephone system which will enable us to assign unique voice-mail telephone access code numbers to each student enrolled in the Spanish telecourse. Designing, installing and testing this expansion will occur during the Fall 1994, prior to the beginning of the course.

While the first task is underway, the second task will be to design the telecourse component to utilize the voice-mail, and telephone conferencing technology. Specifically, the instructor will be designing the “interactive” exercises that will be installed in the voice-mail system throughout the semester. This work will be done commensurate with the other more traditional activities that comprise the telecourse experience. Once the exercises are available, they will be used to test the voice-mail system. All this work will be completed during the Fall, 1994.

The third task will be those activities which will occur during the Spring and Summer, 1995 semesters, when the voice-mail, conferencing system is actually in use. Periodically, throughout the semester, the instructor will input foreign language messages into the system. The students will be given a specified time frame within which to respond. The instructor will then poll the voice mail boxes, evaluate the student responses, make comments, and input the next set of practice or test items.

The fourth task will be the evaluation of student performance. The instructor will measure student achievement of the course content; attitude toward the course experience, and assess the rate of course completion of the class. At the end of each semester, we will compare these scores with the scores of the students who enroll in the same Spanish telecourse at other community colleges, such as San Mateo Community College. Finally, project participants will compile a report of findings and recommendations.
a. Project Objective(s)

Establish student oriented voice-mail as a student interaction in a distance learning environment.

Field test the process by which faculty and system.

Provide recommended procedures that can guide faculty who may wish to use this technology in their traditional teaching.

b. Impact of the project

Faculty student interaction in and out of the classroom is an important component of a successful teaching/learning process. Many technologies exist by which to enhance this interaction. Unfortunately with budgets declining and teaching loads increasing, computerized and mediated tools which could facilitate this interaction are increasingly beyond the reach of academic planners. In our opinion, the telephone is an often overlooked telecommunications tool that is readily available to virtually every teacher and student. Given guidance and experience, the telephone can facilitate and enhance instruction and communication. This project will focus faculty attention on this most basic instructional tool and lead to increased innovation in how faculty utilize this technology in foreign language as well as all other undergraduate courses.

c. Potential for continued support after the expiration of the grant

The Peralta Community College District office of Media, Learning and Informational Resources is participating in this project for the purpose of ascertaining the value of incorporating this telecommunications technology into all of its telecourse activities. Currently, the District is offering telecourse in twelve subject areas, and is seeking to expand to at least twenty. We are concerned that student retention and completion rates for telecourse are as high as possible. We certainly wish to achieve rates that are higher than the national average of 60 percent.

Accordingly, if this project yields the results we expect, the District will endeavor to provide the technical support to incorporate voice-
mail and teleconference technology into all telecourses and perhaps other general education courses.

d. Potential for adaptation to other institutions or programs

Since this project will utilize standard voice-mail technology, we believe it is easily transferable to other community colleges engaged in teaching foreign languages via broadcast telecourses. A ready network exists for distribution and discussion of the findings of this project. The Northern California Telecommunications Consortium and the Southern California Telecommunications Consortium meet regularly, to discuss telecourse offerings and successful teaching strategies. Since California Community Colleges comprise a majority of the membership of these consortia, these organizations can function as a convenient and widespread distribution network for our reports and demonstrations.
The evaluation of the project will include the recommended components as set forth in the "Request for Applications," formative ends summative evaluation, pre- and post-testing, student and faculty interviews and surveys.
(1) The Product to be disseminated

Information about the techniques used in the voice-mail and small group conference call sessions and sample lessons.

Evaluation results, including student achievement scores and attitude surveys.

Comparison of achievement scores and retention rates with other telecourses utilizing the same television component, but which were taught in the traditional manner, i.e., not utilizing voice-mail and teleconference technology.

Comprehensive manual on how to duplicate the lessons and equipment needs.

(2) The Target population for dissemination

Faculty engaged in teaching telecourses at community colleges in the Northern California Telecommunications Consortium and the Southern California Telecommunications Consortium.

(3) The methods that will be used disseminate to the target population

The participants in this project will present their results and demonstrate the audiobased interactive techniques at meetings of the Northern California Telecommunications Consortium and an Educational Technology Faculty Conference sponsored by ERABCU in October 1994.

(4) Timetable for dissemination

Preliminary results and a demonstration of the technique will be disseminated at an Educational Technology Conference sponsored by ERABCU. At the conclusion of the Spring 1995 semester, Project staff will make a presentation to the Northern California Telecommunications Consortium. A final report of findings and recommendations will be prepared at the end of the Summer 1995 term. A procedure manual will also be produced on project implementation.
(5) Evaluation Methods for the Dissemination Plan

During the scheduled demonstrations and presentations, faculty will be given an opportunity to raise questions, discuss findings and interact with the project principles.