

2004

1. Project Name and Project Director's Name. Include mailing address, phone and e-mail address.

Project Name: Improving Student Centered Learning:
Mentoring and Language Support Labs

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2. Brief Description of Project:

The Arizona Board of Regents Learner-Centered Education and matching funds from Eller College of Management have permitted the Business Communication Program to make substantial and sustainable curricular changes to better suit our student population. Serving 1600 advanced standing students in the undergraduate program, the funding provided us with the ability to build upon the groundwork established with our prior grant and utilize the benefits of our honors students to serve as mentors and community outreach facilitators within our community.

The primary focus of our proposed project was to improve the processes we use to assess student the learning outcomes of our program. The focus of the grant was twofold: to sustain and continue curricular development with the language support lab. Additionally, we proposed creating a second-generation peer-to-peer mentoring program that would provide further communication experience via a mentoring program. The BSL (Business Support Lab) has been designed and implemented with significant success.

At the conclusion of this round of funding we are pleased that our curricular innovations have been permanently adopted by the Eller College. We have now completed and gathered the results of 3 semesters of students; we have enhanced the language support lab and added a graduate level version of the support lab; we have piloted the Business Support Lab and managed to develop peer to peer mentoring in several key areas including successfully building and sustaining community out reach with the Math Department in its course delivery of Business Math.

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3. Goals, Outcomes and Assessments

A. Goals and Primary Accomplishments:

Our primary goal was to continue to build upon the platform our first round of funding provided us with. We utilized the tailored learning experience for students admitted into our professional program to self-serve a diverse population. With 500 students admitted each semester, our student body represents profoundly diverse skill bases: international students account for as much as 19% of our entering student body. Consistently, we have a significant Honors student population (roughly 18%) that represents an accelerated and professional group of students who wish to master materials at a more accelerated rate. While we continued to administer and fine tune the placement and assessment process; we additionally developed and implemented a second generation mentoring program to provide additional learning opportunities for Honors students while supporting our lower performing student populations.

Primary goals included: initial diagnostic testing to determine the best placement for all our students; curricular development to create modules more suited for active student learning based on diagnostic findings; finely-honed assessment tools to accurately measure and determine student success; develop mentoring platforms for higher performing students to return and support lower performing students; identify community outreach projects to provide higher performing students with real life, action-based learning opportunities.

I. Primary Accomplishments:

Needs Assessment:

With our expanded model, we needed to identify and assess needs were for three separate populations: incoming students joining the Eller college, mentors who would be joining our program to provide additional support; and finally the communication needs for various programs and courses who indicated they wished to receive additional communication support within their classrooms. Spring 04 and Summer 04 were utilized to take surveys, evaluate skill sets, compile data, and develop coherent models to meet our targeted goals for all three populations. All data for incoming students was evaluated by key faculty to place students in appropriate skills based courses. This work took place in Sp 04 and Summer 04. Students who self-selected to serve as mentors were assessed by key faculty to evaluate prior academic accomplishments within communication courses as well as by completing survey data to match student competencies to areas in which they could continue to develop skills sets. Needs for programs were determined by interviewing deans and program heads to identify critical areas

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requiring additional communication assistance. Surveys, models and curricula to correlate to the needs assessment were developed in Spring 04 and Summer 05. Specifically this included:

- Development of assessment materials
- Curricular Development
 - Business Support Lab
 - Training Materials
 - BAD 315 Mentor Support
 - Coaching Support
 - All Business Math Materials
 - Language Support Class (undergraduate and graduate)
 - Skills assessments
 - Diagnostics (graduate and undergraduate)
 - Surveys

LANGUAGE SUPPORT LABS:

Our language support labs have continued to grow, and this round of funding has witnessed a symbiotic additional development of a graduate level lab to support the existing MBA program. These additional support labs provide individualized language instruction, in-class discussions and practice, and one-on-one tutoring, to improve writing, speaking, and listening skills in order to communicate more effectively in a team-based, technologically enhanced business environment.

The growth of the undergraduate lab has resulted in increased numbers (up to 25 this semester) and is currently operating under a partnership with the SLAT department, providing PhD candidates with the experience and research data gathered from one-on-one tutorials being offered to support undergraduate students. Additionally, the BSL lab has offered a “buddy” system where student mentors provide international students with a conversation “buddy” – a mentor to assist them in negotiating cultural barriers as well as providing some assistance with improving spoken language.

BUSINESS SUPPORT LAB (PEER TO PEER MENTORING):

The development of the peer to peer mentoring lab (BSL) has been highly successful. The business support lab was piloted in Spring 2004 and has continued to run at maximum capacity ever since. Coordinated by 4 honors students and a key faculty member, this lab coordinated meeting the needs of areas defined as needing crucial assistance. The results have been impressive.

Team Mentors:

In spring 04, five honors students were selected based on interest and skill to act as team mentors for 100 first semester professional admits. These mentors provided student teams with conflict management skills, team building activities, and served to provide support, feedback and additional coaching for all written and presentation deliverables. The results were measurable:

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teams who received support and coaching achieved higher levels of success than those in non-mentored sections (measured in both final assessment results as well as the case competition.)

Additionally, these five students offered information three one hour lectures in the following topics:

- Presentation Standards
- Conducting Market Research
- Strategic Writing Applications
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These lectures were attended by “at-risk” students identified by their instructors. Exit surveys for each lecture indicated these were highly valued by the students and indicated increased awareness of the topics they encountered. Consistent ratings of 89% or higher in increased understanding of material and approach were measured for all sessions.

Based on the success of the pilot, the BSL accepted more students and provided more opportunities for both Fall 04 and Spring 05. Fall 04 and SP 05 had maximum enrollment (32 students) participating in an events-driven curriculum geared toward providing maximum peer-to-peer tutoring.

Community Enhancement:

Teams of students provided “testimony” and team building activities by partnering with the Undergraduate Programs office to welcome the entire incoming cohort and participate in “contract writing” activities. BSL students participated in this activity in Spring 04, Fall 04, and Spring 05.

Teams of students provided support by coaching students for all case competitions offered in the first semester cohort. Students acted as both coaches and judges for case competitions in the Business Communication Proposal and Presentation competition, the MIS 304 case competition, as well as the Business Math case competition. BSL students coordinated and hosted these events in Spring 04, Fall 04 and Spring 05.

Teams of students provided support for the Business Math Kick-Off by addressing both the successful practices of team work, as well as providing an evening long forum for the practice and implementation of team contracts. BSL students coordinated and hosted these events in Fall 04 and Spring 05. Ongoing and expanded support is anticipated and projected for Fall 05.

Additionally, teams of students were assigned to specific courses to enhance specific curricular goals as outlined below.

Business Math:

These students also assisted in working with key faculty from the Math department since Business Math was identified as an area needing key support. *Business Mathematics I and II* are designed specifically for students majoring in business. They are the result of extensive

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collaboration between faculty members from the *Eller College of Management* and from the *Department of Mathematics* at the *University of Arizona*. The courses are the foundation for business core courses, showing how to apply the language of mathematics to business problems, and how to use computers to help do mathematics. The Business Math faculty specifically requested assistance in helping students develop a team contract and work in teams, deliver quality presentations, and assist in providing feedback. The BSL provided semester long support by coordinating key activities, performing as team mentors, and providing additional classroom support on the following projects for over 800 students.

- Business Math Kick Off (Team Contract Writing and Review)
- .Presentation Video:
 - Creation, practice, filming and rehearsal of best business presentation standards, loaded up onto servers for students to review
 - Business Math Faculty Training: faculty orientation to teaching materials, best practices, assessment practices, and student perspectives for business math presentations
- Case Competition: BSL Students served as judges for the Business Math case competition.

BAD 315: Managerial Communication Review

Students exhibiting strong writing skills and seeking additional managerial experience were appointed as private writing tutors to students whose assessment scores indicate a profound need for remediation. These students met with their tutees on a weekly basis to review writing assignments, provide coached feedback, and to assist with problem solving timed writing strategies. The skill improvement in both student populations, tutors and tutees was measurable. Exit surveys indicate students found high learning, marked improvement, and were enthusiastic about this learning model. This will continue to be a course offering indefinitely. Sample online survey of student satisfaction and increased skill development included at the end of this report.

Eller College Projects:

- **Differential Fee Team:** A team of students formed to examine, identify and make recommendations to Eller College Administration regarding proposed differential fees. These students engaged in a semester long investigation into best communication strategies and practices; research and survey of impacted populations; delivery and practicum with real life audiences including Deans, student organizations, and finally, the Board of Regents.
- **Communication Survey:** This team of students developed, implemented and reported on communication practices at Eller College within the undergraduate curriculum. This team of students surveyed key populations by developing both web based surveys as well as conducting focus groups, to examine both student and faculty perception for best communication practices and implementation within the curriculum.
- **Eller Proteges:** A team of students spent the semester investigating alternative ways to leverage the BSL into other key curricular components within the Eller College. These

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students researched and proposed alternate methods of taking the second generation model and implementing it into larger core classes.

4. Problems or Issues:

One problem area identified has been the substantial work load associated with mentoring and supporting teams working on so many divergent projects. The success of this approach has resulted in rapid growth and positive community response. Currently we are experiencing difficulties in reaching all the areas targeted for support. Each project requires faculty supervision and support, and our grant was limited in how much support it provided. Currently, the BSL funding for the fall is to support one faculty member and provide scholarship support for a Master Student Mentor. It is anticipated that with additional support, project management will be more cost effective.

5. Conclusions, Recommendations and Future Directions:

Conclusions:

This funding has enabled us to make permanent and much improved modifications in our core course offerings and curricular development. Second-generation mentoring has proven to be a highly successful model that has been embraced by the college; notably, their ongoing support of the course acts as its own form of validation. Additionally, further initiatives and teams have formed to utilize this model and consider other implementation and adoptions at the college-wide level. Finally, the support that the mentoring project has provided has built a sustainable and lasting platform in the delivery of the courses offered by the Business Communication Program. BAD 314, 315 and 314L are all supported by teams of student mentors co-enrolled in the lab. Additionally, the ongoing support from the college with the Business Math project continues to build bridges out into the community and serve as a model for the success of student mentoring.

Recommendations and Future Directions:

The primary recommendation our program puts forward is to be able to continue to work with placing students in modules that enhance their learning. Students provided with a “real world” learning experience when placed with other students of equitable skill base engage more fully and in a more meaningful fashion. To this end, specific course modules will be retained. We will continue to provide content-based modules (accounting and public administration.) as well as two Honors sections per semester. The remaining population of students, including international students, seems to benefit from working in team configurations that emphasize skill level. To this end, we recognize that providing skill support workshops seems to be the key factor in learner-centered initiatives within our program. To this end, the BSL will continue to enroll and support at-risk students by providing coaching and support to students who have been identified as requiring additional assistance. This high performing group of students will be

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invited to participate in many of the courses that have been created by this first round of funding to provide mentoring and tutoring for students who have been identified as “at-risk.”

6. Has this project led to sustainable change in your department/college?

Describe:

Yes. This project has led to deep revisions within our curricular approach as well as the assessment process we now embrace. This effect has been felt college-wide as students are receiving individualized instruction according to their level of need and ability. Faculty have commented on the increased visibility in student level of performance in presentation as well as writing skills. Most importantly, the students have been highly vocal in their praise for the BSL, a course that provides them with multiple projects and a real world learning opportunity where they “manage” their own projects, refine their skill set, and are able to “deliver” results. Students have provided feedback and testimony that these skill sets are actively sought by recruiters and provide meaningful evidence during interviews. Our two rounds of funding have provided us with the opportunity to make meaningful and sustainable curricular revisions within the College. Additionally, the college now provides two scholarships (\$1,000) for students who assist in coordinating the lab.

Impact:

A. Have other faculty been affected by this project? Yes. If so, describe:

The entire Business Communication Program has been affected by this project. Because of it, our faculty has been able to continue to grow. The impact of the work we have done continues to have repercussions in courses where students must report results in either a written or presentation oriented format. In the first semester, nearly every large lecture class (250+) has been effected by this course modification since the teams for those classes are formed in the BAD 314 class. Additionally, the first semester cohort faculty who work with these students who are in the team configurations based on diagnostic information also report higher rates of team cohesion and unity. Curricular innovation continues to grow based upon these models, resulting in another round of awards this year for our Business Communication team including:

- * Outstanding Faculty Award
- * Innovation Award
- * Dean’s Award for Curricular Innovation

b. Number of courses affected/involved.

Per semester: 14 sections of BAD 314
2 sections of BAD 315
1 section of BAD 314L (Language Support Lab)
1 section of BAD 316

Business Math: 14 sections per semester (B)
28 sections per semester (A)

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c. Number of students affected.

Spring 2004: 470

Fall 2004: 550

Spring 2005: 660

d. Dissemination:

National Conferences:

MCA National Conference 2003: "Communications du Monde: Experiential Learning in The Classroom." New Orleans. (By invitation.)

7. Significant Outcome:

What was the most significant outcome based on learner-centered principles that occurred through your project?

The most significant outcome we were able to achieve is to begin to better serve a large population of students according to their ability and need, and to continue to grow outreach within the community. As a faculty, it is really rewarding to be able to determine an area of need and address it directly, having the freedom to keep tailoring curriculum to student needs and watching those students profit directly from the effort. Including students at all levels of development and success has also been a key outcome that we feel has served the program and our students at the highest possible level.

Finally, like any work in progress, we have been deeply pleased that by accommodating student needs, we have grown an exceptional group of students who are willing and ready to return to the program and assist in developing our program further. The BSL (Business Support Lab) has raised awareness of best communication practices throughout the college, at both the pre-professional and professional programs. It is deeply gratifying to put LCE practices into good use and to be able to continue to develop and sustain our program. It is our hope that our students will continue to move into the role of primary agents responsible for their own learning, remaining consistent not only with LCE initiatives, but reflecting current trends within the business community as well. By individual placement into varying models of the course, students can further hone and shape their educational experience by meeting challenges that answer their own assessed needs, thus increasing active learning and mastery of skill competency, as outlined by LCE initiatives. Perhaps this is the most significant outcome, that by measuring and responding to student need, we empower our students to partner with us to take direction and improve the quality of learning for all.