

Learner-Centered Education Program
Arizona Board of Regents
Attachment A
INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FORM
History Learning Lab

Proposal Title: HistoryNorthern Arizona University
Institution:

Dept./Unit:

Multi-Campus/University Projects (check other campuses or universities participating)

List other participating agencies:

ASU Main UA

UA South ASU East

ASU West NAU

Briefly describe the program and the development plan. This project is designed to develop a Lab to provide learner-centered activities and graduate assistant mentors to help undergraduate students to improve their research and writing skills within the discipline of history.

Funding Category

Indicate a primary (P) and, if applicable, secondary (S) funding category: _____

P _____ Professional Development Program or Course Development/Modification _____

S _____ LCE Research Improved Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Authorizations Project Director

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Part 1. Abstract

The primary goal of this project is to improve the research and writing skills of the undergraduate history majors at Northern Arizona University by creating an active learning history laboratory. In a dedicated-purpose section of an existing computer-equipped laboratory, the History Learning Lab will provide budding historians with hands-on activities and material resources (e.g. resource-rich software, reference books, electronic data bases, writing improvement exercises, and appropriate periodicals). Employing several learner-centered principles designed to guide students in their own self-improvement, trained graduate student mentors will help undergraduates hone their research, critical thinking, and writing skills with extended time on task, and individualized activities that provide timely feedback.

Objectives for this project include:

For the Undergraduate Students *a hands-on opportunity to master research, critical thinking, and writing skills *transformation of the way students work together to improve their motivation to learn and write history *greater understanding of a common set of fundamental criteria for the evaluation of student progress in the development of their research and writing skills For the Graduate Students *provision of meaningful opportunities/challenges to engage in teaching the process of “doing history” in a way that is individualized and learner-centered *better preparation to compete on the job market upon completion of their masters and/or doctoral work For the Faculty *improved assessment of student learning through the development of more meaningful student portfolios of research and writing skills *better use of classroom time by faculty and students to focus on the “excitement” of studying the historical past instead of so much time on basic skill development For the Larger Society *graduating NAU students with improved development of the skills of research, critical reading and thinking, and the greater clarity of writing that is important in all walks of life as preparation of a better-educated citizenry and workforce

This project was conceived upon the analysis of student feedback and faculty observations about the ways that the restricted classroom schedule of time, the traditional practice of unmediated independent research and writing by students, and the lack of a common rubric for the evaluation of basic research and writing skills, has led to less than desired outcomes as students complete their major research papers in the required HIS 498 capstone course.

The Department is requesting \$25000 in funding to launch the Lab which we believe is the most systematic way to address these concerns and to achieve the desired outcomes.

Part 2. Identification of Need

Across America, traditional methods of teaching research and writing in the history classroom are not working well. To change this and achieve excellence, the American Historical Association (AHA) stresses the need to focus on such factors as historical thinking and the evaluation of student performance. “Benchmarks” developed by the AHA to achieve excellence in the field of history stress the need for faculty and programs to become more learner-centered. Examples of good Learner Centered Practices include research by students themselves, collaborative group learning, inside and outside the classroom, and self-paced tutorials. Most importantly, in the face of the growing complexity of the nature of historical study, the Department of History at NAU feels the student research experience, culminating in essays and papers that engage them in more sophisticated critical thinking and analysis, needs greater organized support that will help students overcome the isolation of the traditional model of independent research. More formative help along the way will enable students to achieve better results at the time of the summative judgment of their essays and term papers. Through collaborative efforts and self-paced tutorials that will lead to greater mastery of techniques and practices that enable students to focus more on the analysis of sources necessary for the critical judgments that produce clearer thesis statements and arguments to support their interpretative essays, the proposed History Learning Lab will provide hands-on guidance.

Currently, the Department requires that all of its 400 or so undergraduate majors complete at least 39 hours of history courses to graduate. Every major must take three courses that focus intensely on writing and research, including HIS 200 that introduces them to historiography and historical writing. The course also provides an introduction to methods of “doing research” and “how to write history papers.” There is also a 300 level required writing intensive course and a 498 capstone experience, which require the writing of term research papers. The research paper for HIS 498 should be a kind of undergraduate “thesis,” a summative experience and one to be judged accordingly. However, something is missing, for many seniors cannot write at

the levels expected by the faculty and desired by the students themselves.

Effective writing by history majors communicates abstract ideas and theories, as well as comprehension of historical events. It also represents student abilities to think critically and to analyze the results of their individual research. These skills of the liberal arts graduate are important in all walks of life. In order to achieve at the desired level, student feedback in periodic surveys and exit interviews of graduating seniors indicates that they would like to have more frequent and timely commentary on their work, as well as a better understanding of the criteria and standards by which their written work is to be judged by the faculty. Despite the existence of required courses focused on the research and writing, there does not seem to be enough "time on task" with appropriate coaching/mentoring for the students to truly master the process of reading, research, critical thinking, and writing. Although the need for change has been clearly identified by both students and faculty, the standard university class/credit hour structure, and the increasingly larger number of students in each history class at NAU, have both worked to militate against the implementation of effective improvements. The proposed History Learning Lab is conceived to offer a learner-centered means to address those concerns in a focused way.

The Lab will provide several types of resources and activities. First, it will offer a data bank and library of standard sources used in the development of historical research and writing skills. Although sometimes available in other locations, such as Cline Library and English Department writing labs, the resources are scattered. Furthermore, these resources generally do not come with personalized help from people trained in historical research and writing. By bringing resources and history mentors into a common location, students will benefit by learning better how to use these tools through research/writing exercises designed for use in the Lab. Perhaps even more significantly, they will gain immediate feedback on their work through peer learning groups supervised by graduate assistants and faculty, and from graduate mentors who will staff the Lab on a regular schedule each week.

Second, the Lab will provide the opportunity for "time on task" exercises to improve student abilities in writing the results of their research. A rubric will be created in the Summer of 2005 to establish a set of common guidelines to be used by the faculty in the evaluation of student work. In turn, the rubric will be the basis for a series of exercises utilizing suggestions made by John Bean in his work entitled *Engaging Ideas* (2001) to encourage more logical and creative thinking in the process of writing. The Lab will house software to provide students with

-2-feedback on basic grammar and standard usage, along with more specialized feedback on the Chicago Manual of Style for citations and other requirements for the paper format normally expected by historians.

Third, the Lab will develop and use materials to guide students in the improvement of their final papers. Various exercises will allow students to obtain feedback in the form of oral readings, commentary on early drafts, and peer review of drafts of their papers. In addition, the Lab will allow an opportunity for students to provide feedback to other students as a way of enhancing their own perspective on what is "good practice" in research and effective writing.

The History Learning Lab will powerfully influence more than 400 undergraduate history majors at NAU. All majors, for example, will be required to engage the Lab as part of their instruction in History 200, the entry-level required course. Moreover, those in the required HIS 300W sections will be referred to the Lab for further assistance, and it will be made available to any student who either self-identifies or is recommended by a faculty member from any of the history courses.

The Lab will use and reinforce several of the "Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education," including practices that (1) encourage cooperation among student, via peer feedback that is collaborative, not competitive; (2) stimulate active learning, via hands-on exercises and feedback from peers and graduate mentors which encourages a more active "reflective practitioner;" (3) give prompt feedback that encourages greater success in meeting high expectations; and, (4) emphasize time on task wherein students are able to prod each other to stay with it, and whereby they provide models for better time management. .

Thus, the proposal seeks LCE funding to initiate the History Learning Lab at NAU. Current budgets at NAU do not enable the Department to fund the start-up process that requires the time of faculty and graduate students to identify and purchase the resources to stock the Lab, to develop rubrics of criteria and standards for the assessment of student research and writing, to produce exercises to be used in the Lab by students to improve their knowledge and skills, to create other materials (e.g. course modules to be used in HIS 200 and 300W) based on learner-centered principles, and to equip the computers with appropriate electronic databases and/or hot links to standard resources that can be used directly in the Lab. With support from the LCE Grants Program the Lab will be opened and begin working with students in the Fall of 2005.

With advice from Peter Stearns, former Vice President of the AHA's Teaching Division, and author of numerous material on the teaching of history, an outside consultant will be hired to assist in the initial development and assessment of rubrics and writing exercises, support materials for developing research and writing skills, and the training of graduate assistants, as well as to facilitate the overall assessment of the project.

Computers and printers in the Lab will be used by students for on-line research exercises, as well as for writing drafts that can be immediately critiqued to provide feedback. Software (e.g. Endnote 7, Scholars Reference, a grammar check program, and a plagiarism check program) will be evaluated and installed. Links to reference sites on historical research and writing will be evaluated and installed.

Books supporting the development of research skills, copies of reference tools and periodicals (e.g. American Historical Review and its Perspectives Newsletter; and, The History Teacher), as well as other references on the writing of history will be purchased and brought into the Lab for ongoing use by students and graduate students.

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Part 4. Work Plan

Upon receipt of notice of funding approval, the process of start-up would begin in the Spring of 2005 with the selection of a consultant to work with the faculty. Graduate students will be selected at the end of the Spring term to work during the Summer of 2005 to develop the materials to be used in the Lab, and then to staff the Lab beginning with the Fall term. Ongoing assessment of the outcomes of the student work in the Lab will be used to improve the materials developed and to better prepare the graduate assistants to support the students. The work will be scheduled according to the plan outlined below.

Date	Project Goal/Staff	Objectives/Outcomes	
April 2005	Selection of Consultant	Begin the process of developing materials to be used in the Center	Chair/Faculty (20 hours)
April/May 2005	Selection Chair/Faculty (40 hours)	Select four faculty and four graduate students to staff the project during the summer and work with the consultant	
May/June 2005	Acquisition of materials Chair/Faculty (100 hours) [w/ consultant help]	Screen and purchase resources and materials to be placed in the Lab library	
June/July 2005	Preparation Faculty/Grad assts.	Develop materials for use in the Center Stock and organize materials in Center (320 hours)	
August 2005- 2006	Implementation Grad assts./faculty	Teach students HIS 200 and other referred materials; collect student portfolios to compare with baseline assessments (1120 hours)	March 2006
March 2006- July 2006	Assessment/Dissemination Faculty/grad assts. (60 hours)	Faculty/Grad assts. meet to discuss outcomes, review portfolios; evaluate strengths and weaknesses; begin to develop new assignments for Fall of 2006, etc. Draft articles for potential publication in The History Teacher or Perspectives (AHA), and send reports to other history departments in Arizona; send proposals for presentations at conferences	
August 2006	Reporting	Prepare final report on project for ABOR	PI/Faculty (20 hours)

Key Personnel

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{Each of these key faculty has had experience with LCE principles and practices.} Consultant---TBA Furthermore, as suggested in the Work Plan, other faculty members, plus selected graduate assistants, will play key roles at various times as the project develops.

Performance Measures

Numerous positive outcomes are expected from the development of the History Learning Lab. *Transformation of the way students work together to improve their motivation to learn and write history *Encouragement of greater self-determination and self-confidence in students as they improve reading, critical thinking, research and writing skills

*Faculty expectations would now be more clearly defined by a common rubric and more widely disseminated through activities in the Lab and by a posting on the Departmental WEB page, for example

*Faculty expectations will be more readily addressed through the mediated support provided by the various resources of the Lab

*Faculty will have more time to devote in the classroom to “teaching their passion” about history, as opposed to the mechanics of research and writing. Now, for the most part, students rely on published Guides for this information or upon faculty discussion and reminders in class that take time away from other activities. The Lab will lessen or eliminate that need.

*The Lab will provide a learning laboratory for several graduate students each term. They will be trained in the use of the materials, and the learner-centered principles that inform the materials. The experience will be excellent preparation for teaching history, and will go far beyond what their peers might receive elsewhere.

If the expected outcomes are achieved during the LCE funded start-up pilot phase, we anticipate that the Lab will readily receive support for ongoing funding for the graduate assistants to sustain the staffing long term. We can hire well-motivated and well-qualified students who are not on fully-funded assistantships or fellowships, and do so at less cost to the institution without exploiting the graduate students themselves.

Accomplishment of these several objectives will be measured in the follow-up. Students in HIS 200 will be given a baseline assessment of their research and writing skills as they first come to the Lab. Their progress will be measured over the semester, and subsequent semesters as well, through the collection and evaluation of a portfolio of their research and sample writing assignments to compare such things as the number of grammatical errors, their ease with and comprehension of the readings, and the demonstrated improvement in the development of an arguable thesis based on their research. In smaller increments, through the evaluation of the effectiveness of various Lab exercises, we will be able to determine the success of student efforts to build specific research and writing skills that go into a finished research paper product.

With the assistance of the NAU Office of Assessment, attitudinal and motivational assessments will be developed to evaluate those components of the desired outcomes. Other assessment measures will be created as we fully develop the resources of the History Learning Lab.

The results will be disseminated through the various means outlined in the Work Plan



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Professional Development _____ Program or Course Development/Modification xP
 LCE Research _____ Improved Assessment of Learning Outcomes 2B

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