



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## Developing Community: Taking THE COURSE

*One of every three people in Charlotte wasn't here 15 years ago. They lack roots. As we begin to understand and appreciate each other's roots, community develops.*

Developing a sense of community, encouraging an understanding and appreciation of a community's roots, was the goal of THE COURSE—an 11-week, home-study, newspaper, hands-on, project design, field trip, light readings, get-up-and-go-and-do, film study, map-making, involvement course for families in the Central Piedmont Community College (North Carolina) area.

### Registration

With the local newspaper as co-sponsor, promotion was heavy. The college made a small profit although it kept registration fees low (\$5), getting across the subtle message that community colleges are everyone's best bargain. Approximately 1400 families registered by phone or by the newspaper mail-in form. (One registration served for an entire family.)

Students who enrolled in THE COURSE lived in 13 different states including Arizona, California, Illinois, Maine, Mississippi, New York, Texas, Wisconsin, and Kentucky. They registered from five countries—U.S.A., Belgium, Sierra Leone, Uruguay, and Vietnam. Three students were over 90 years old.

### Curriculum

THE COURSE text was printed in the Charlotte Sunday newspaper (circulation of approximately 320,000). The text covered 11 broad subjects: geology, religion, medicine, politics/law, business, education, women/minorities, arts, sports, preservation, and the future.

Eleven different authors were commissioned to write a single chapter each of this text, and the single theme was "Charlotte and how it got the way it is today." Each author approached the theme from his/her specialty area. Thus, a geographer began with the woolly mammoth 10,000 years ago and brought us to the present where the clay-like land and swift streams still shape how our region develops. A black minister and a white minister traced the coming of religion to Charlotte and the thread that connects "then" with "now"—for example, how can one region embrace Billy Graham, Jim Bakker, and Sweet Daddy Grace?

Each week after reading the newspaper article, students opened a home-study packet. The packets included objectives, related family projects, and suggested field trips. Some of the packets included old newspaper pages for the chapter's time in history. Many contained additional writings from early times, old photographs, do-it-yourself graphs, maps for the students to complete in various colors (to illustrate district gerrymandering or the spread of the city limits, for example), and eyewitness accounts.

### Sample Projects and Field Trips

- "From Brown Mules to Orange Buses," the chapter on education, included the history of school integration and followed the first black child to an all-white school in Charlotte. Newspaper photographs showed the abuse she suffered. She retold her story from today's perspective.
- The author of the Sports chapter, titled "Gentlemen, Start Your Basketballs," dared list the top 25 names and the top 25 moments in Charlotte's sports history—and the debate still rages. The optional project for Sports was: Invent a game and send us the rules.
- The Arts chapter described "the night Caruso came to town." The headline read "Great Singer is Greeted at the Station by Large Crowds" and described how hundreds jammed his hotel just to see his signature on the register.
- The project for the chapter on medicine ("Babies, Boils, Breaks, and Blood") required the student to write a brief paper about the practice of medicine in the 40's in Charlotte. The sources for this paper were three retired doctors who allowed us to list their home phone numbers and invite students to call for interviews (before 10:00 p.m. and calls limited to 20 minutes). The field trip for this chapter was to the college for a hands-on fair of modern medical instruments.
- The project for the Preservation unit was to color, cut out, and assemble a pasteboard trolley. Students began to see where the trolley lines went, how riders dressed in that day, and how those trolley lines created Charlotte's first suburbs.
- For the chapter on the future, students were asked to submit the headlines and lead paragraphs they might expect to see in the newspaper in the year 2005.



- Other field trips were to an old gold mine, to the Federal Reserve (where the handout for kids was a bag of shredded money), to the coliseum and the Grateful Dead's dressing rooms, and for a self-directed walking tour of old downtown churches (some with separate slave balconies). Guides were waiting for THE COURSE students at most of these attractions.

#### Spin-Offs

- Each of THE COURSE authors appeared on CPCC's cable talk show the night after his or her article was published. Viewers were invited to call in with questions or comments. Some shows received 15-20 calls, an extraordinarily large number for a college cable program.
- Audiotapes of the television programs were available to our radio station where we read for the visually impaired.
- The state of North Carolina awarded renewal units to those school teachers who completed any two of THE COURSE's 11 projects. Students responded with elaborate, thoughtful projects, such as original lyrics and music about Charlotte's beginning, histories written for a first-grade level, and paintings of early scenes.
- Schools have asked to buy copies of the television series for their libraries.
- The local school administration is considering the series as required study.

#### Evaluations

Hundreds of students wrote evaluations. Others simply wrote thank-you notes. We have been told stories of warm friendships that began during THE COURSE and of a young couple who met on a COURSE trip and became engaged. We have heard of communication between maids and housewives who had only talked around subjects for years.

THE COURSE takes little credit for these results. The potential for communication already existed within these groups; we only supplied the easy device, only "illuminated the latch string," as one student wrote. It appears that THE COURSE started some people thinking in new areas, communicating at new levels, and seeing with new eyes.

Mike Myers, *Community Relations*

For further information, contact the author at Central Piedmont Community College, P.O. Box 35009, Charlotte, NC 28235.

## A Real-life Grading System

In 1988, I devised a new grading system for Introduction to Business. With this grading system, students learn about real-life American business needs, conduct, and restraints while "earning" a grade.

Since the adoption of this program, poorly motivated students have become busy with stock market affairs and money management at Bunker Hill Community College. Attendance has increased, quiz and exam grades have improved, and overall interest has grown significantly.

#### How It Works

Each student in our course receives 44,000 *fun* dollars applied to his/her account. Incorrect test answers and sloppy work *costs* money; extra work, smart stock buying, and class participation help *earn* money. Each student receives an account summary every 30 days. The ending balance buys a grade. The recordkeeping, billing, and summary are simple, flexible, and computer-driven.

#### Rationale

Why run a business course as much like a business as possible? Students at BHCC have *more experience spending money than making it*; therefore, mastering the idea of saving by reducing or controlling spending is a difficult concept for them to grasp.

Frederick Herzberg, management consultant, professor, and creator of the Motivation Hygiene Theory, has always stressed "self-assessment" at regular intervals for subordinates. What could provide a better assessment than translating course performance into dollars and cents, turning out "invoices" every 30 days, and treating the entire experiment like 25 or 30 small businesses? Each individual student has control of his/her own destiny in a meaningful, believable, and tangible way.

Perhaps the course is less threatening because the invoices, the money idea, and the results seem more commonplace, making them easy to accept. The individual charges, cost centers, and income areas are variable. I have designed costs and charges to meet our own set of peculiarities and needs, but this grading system and the computer programs can be adapted to a wide variety of business courses.

Marshall Nanis, *Professor, Business*

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Suanne D. Roueche, *Editor*

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