



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STAFF AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN WITH SUPPORT FROM THE W. K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION AND THE SID W. RICHARDSON FOUNDATION.

## Academic Partnership Program

The Academic Partnership Program is designed to pair students identified as "high-risk"—that is, not likely to survive even the first semester at school—with a concerned and knowledgeable faculty member, counselor, or administrator. These Academic Partners meet weekly to discuss the student's academic progress and to help the student survive the term by providing encouragement and support.

Each faculty member, counselor, or administrator is assigned 1-3 students per semester.

Assignments are based on (1) input from students who volunteer for the program and (2) faculty members participating in the program. Once assignments are made, the faculty Academic Partner contacts the student and sets up the first meeting.

Meetings are informal, can be held anywhere on campus, and follow these guidelines:

1. The initial meeting serves as a welcoming session and get-acquainted meeting.
2. The second and possibly third meetings include an orientation by the faculty Academic Partner to the school, encompassing a detailed look at the services available to the student. This orientation is more than a "here-is-what-we-got" session. It includes a description of services available to the student and a look at ways the student can make use of these services. This part of the program is vital and may require more than one meeting. An excellent resource is the Student Orientation Guide which each student receives when he/she goes through orientation. The section on "Campus Services" provides an excellent starting point for mentoring.
3. The next two meetings afford the faculty partner a chance to discuss the student's educational and occupational goals and give him/her the opportunity to display appropriate concern and guidance regarding these goals.
4. Discussions during subsequent meetings can reflect the concerns of both partners. For instance, if the student is having a problem with financial aid, or registration, or any other campus service, he/she is encouraged to call upon the faculty partner for assistance in resolving it. One of the most important

roles the faculty partner can play is to act as a liaison between students and campus services, reducing the frustration and confusion in dealing with the bureaucracy (to which we may be accustomed, but which is difficult for incoming students to appreciate).

Other concerns might revolve around various sections of the Student Orientation Guide. While there is an abundance of useful information in this guide, a partner could work with students to identify the most critical information included there.

Fundamentally, the faculty partner focuses on student academic performance and concentrates on ways to ensure that the student is succeeding in class. Therefore, discussions may focus upon how the student is performing in each class, what problems the student is facing, and how these problems can be alleviated, from learning better study techniques to joining study groups to enrolling in tutoring sessions. These discussions might identify social, academic, or personal problems which could be interfering with student progress.

The range of these discussions is virtually limitless, although they should exclude areas encompassing academic advising, course programming, and personal counseling. Faculty partners can refer the student to appropriate services on campus, should concerns in these areas surface. Otherwise, the discussions are guided by the perceptions and acumen of the faculty partner.

In addition to meeting with students, faculty partners contact their students' instructors at appropriate times during the semester to determine each student's progress. This progress, or lack of it, may serve as a springboard for corrective action.

The goal of discussions between Academic Partners is the goal of the program itself: to make the semester a successful one for each student involved.

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## Vitality in Motion: Teachers Helping Teachers

What are a computer instructor, accounting instructor, and biology teacher doing in the newborn nursery in a local hospital? Why is a history teacher sitting in a health careers class? Actually, they are teaching techniques as they watch colleagues interacting with students. Why? They are participating in a unique learning opportunity at McLennan Community College called Vitality in Motion (VIM).

### What is VIM?

VIM is a program whose purpose is, ultimately, to increase student learning by increasing faculty teaching skills. It is based on the belief that the best place to learn about teaching and learning is in the classroom itself. Participants in the program attend each other's classes or the classes of other instructors each week. Using these classes as labs, they then meet once a week in a seminar to examine common classroom situations and share possible ideas.

Membership in the group is open to full-time and part-time faculty and counselors. Emphasis is placed on having a heterogeneous mixture of participants representing many areas of instruction.

### What Are the Objectives?

- To share teaching approaches
- To examine the art (craft) and science of teaching
- To help faculty develop long-term multidisciplinary interactions between faculty members

### What Is Required?

1. Attend a weekly, 2- to 2½-hour seminar.
2. Attend a demonstration class each week.
3. Allow participants to observe your classes, take notes, and offer a critique.
4. Prepare a presentation on some aspect of teaching to give to participants during a weekly seminar.
5. Have a short segment of your classroom teaching videotaped for your own review.
6. Participate in the evaluation of the program.
7. Be committed for one full semester.

Each week, we were required to attend the class of a fellow participant and evaluate the teaching techniques and classroom management strategies. Once a week, we met for two hours in a seminar and evaluated the observations for the previous week. These evaluations led to discussions concerning problems that occur in the classroom. Participants offered suggestions and strategies that had worked for them.

Another part of the seminar included a prepared presentation from a member of the group, followed

again by group discussion. Topics included course syllabi, computer techniques, stress management, and critical thinking and reading skills.

At some point during the semester, we were required to videotape one of our classes. These tapes enabled us to see *how* and *what* our students see as we conduct our classes. We were not required to share our tapes with the group: They were for our eyes only!

### Evaluation

Through participation in the VIM program, we learned some new teaching strategies, saw what other disciplines were doing across campus, discussed classroom problems and methods of coping with them, and formed new friendships and reinforced old ones.

### Recommendations

Recommendations for future VIM groups include developing a formal classroom observation instrument which each participant could use to critique each visit and then give to the observed instructor as soon after the visit as possible. Sometimes things said in private and in anonymity can be both complimentary and critical.

We also recommend that the seminars be held in a room with a large table, overhead projector, and chalkboard. Refreshments should be available to help promote a relaxed and friendly atmosphere.

### Conclusions

The VIM program serves an important function in the quality of instruction on our campus. The business world requires rigorous quality control of its product. This program is one method of quality control. The open critique and the interaction of our members become our best guards against mediocrity.

Here at MCC, it's perfectly natural for a history teacher to be in a health careers class and for a computer whiz, an accountant, and a biologist to be in a newborn nursery. We are using the entire campus as a lab to help us to put vitality into our teaching. We are truly a vital campus in motion!

*Dorothea Lanoux, Facilitator, Vitality in Motion*

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*Suanne D. Roueche, Editor*

January 19, 1990, Vol. XII, No. 1  
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INNOVATION ABSTRACTS is a publication of the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD), EDB 348, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas 78712, (512) 471-7545. Subscriptions are available to nonconsortium members for \$40 per year. Funding in part by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and the Sid W. Richardson Foundation. Issued weekly when classes are in session during fall and spring terms and once during the summer. ISSN 0199-106X.