



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## *The Maryland Community College Project*

"It was like having my brain washed with Windex," said a student whose instructor is a participant in the Towson State University/Maryland Community Colleges Project to integrate the recent Scholarship on Women. This colorful expression of the eye-opening effect of a balanced course epitomizes the experiences of many students at the five community colleges in the project sponsored by the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE).

There is a "ripple effect," too. Since students have started to challenge professors whose courses are not gender- and race-balanced, the "FIPSE faculty" know they are making an impression. Faculty efforts to balance courses have energized and empowered students by introducing them to the idea that the contributions of women and people of color count.

Balancing the college curriculum to ensure that all courses, not just special courses, include the experiences of women and men of all races and classes is the goal of the current "second phase" of Women's Studies and of this FIPSE project. The need for an organized and extended effort to balance the community college curriculum is particularly acute for several reasons.

To start, more than one-third of all undergraduates attend community colleges, and the majority of the student population is female and, frequently, minority. Even so, relatively few community colleges offer Women's Studies courses, and most of their traditional courses are not gender- and race-balanced.

If they are to make sweeping changes, all faculty need opportunities to catch up with the explosion in women's studies scholarship and time to study and absorb the complex pedagogical issues it poses. Faculty development projects aimed at addressing curriculum transformation have taken place at about 100 four-year colleges and universities around the nation. In contrast, at community colleges, where the typical teaching load is 15 hours, faculty have received little or no release time and few sabbaticals to begin the process of "integrating the curriculum."

After a three-year curriculum transformation grant project involving 70 faculty at their own university, Towson State University project directors received a

second FIPSE grant to support a two-year curriculum transformation project at five Maryland community colleges—Anne Arundel, the Community College of Baltimore, Catonsville, Montgomery, and Prince George's. The Towson/Community College Project has three co-directors. The community colleges are contributing release time for the 45 participating faculty.

This is one of the few multi-college integration projects dedicated solely to community colleges. It is also the first multi-college curriculum integration collaboration between community colleges and a four-year college. As a model project, it exemplifies the advantages of bringing together a multiplicity of experiences and perspectives.

The enrollment patterns at these particular community colleges make curriculum integration essential. Nationwide, approximately 56 percent of all undergraduates are women; but 60 percent of the approximately 60,000 credit students at the five colleges participating in the FIPSE project are female, and 63 percent of degree recipients are women. Significant numbers of minorities, especially blacks, Asians, and Hispanics, are enrolled in most of the colleges; and at the predominantly black colleges, 72 percent of the students are women.

The purpose of the project is to help faculty find, evaluate, and then incorporate the recent scholarship on women and minorities into their courses. The structure was established to provide an effective learning context and a high degree of support for participants. Since Spring 1988, faculty have responded to consultants' discussions of gender and racial bias in the curriculum. Faculty have also been meeting regularly and frequently in discipline-based workshops (Literature and Composition; History and Philosophy; Fine Arts, Sociology and Psychology; Biology and Allied Health) to read and analyze feminist pedagogy and the scholarship on women and minorities; and to discuss strategies for updating their courses, revising their assignments, and testing out the changes in their classrooms. Since each workshop is composed of faculty from all five colleges, participants have opportunities to exchange ideas with a variety of colleagues.



While the immediate purpose is to transform particular courses, the ultimate goal is to transform the entire curriculum. FIPSE faculty are currently sharing their experiences and insights with colleagues on their own campuses, and some have been delivering papers on their work at regional and national academic conferences. A statewide meeting of community college faculty this spring will expose the project to a broader audience and distribute a monograph that will include summaries of the workshops, sample course outlines and assignments, and bibliographies.

The Integration Project directors, who read the journals that faculty keep about their experiences in the project, report that the participants have expressed excitement about re-learning the content of their fields,

re-thinking their courses from a feminist perspective, and teaching newly transformed courses. Faculty also express their enthusiasm for working with peers from their own and other colleges.

*Gail Forman, Professor, English*

This article includes information from "Rethinking the BIG Question: A Multi-College Community College Integration Project," an unpublished article by Myrna Goldenberg and Shirley Parry.

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## *Facilitator-Assisted Learning*

When 90% of all college students consider the fear of speaking before an audience to be a serious handicap, why is it that Speech 101 (a non-required course) is one of the most popular courses at Mt. San Jacinto College? One of the reasons for our success may be the use of student facilitators. Another may be the overall design of the program.

In each section, four students from previous classes are selected by the instructor to facilitate a small group of 12 to 15 students. In addition to having completed Speech 101 in a previous semester, each facilitator will have completed four weekend workshops that enhance their skills in small group leadership.

All Speech 101 courses are taught in three-hour blocks, once a week (two day sections and one evening section). Each class is taught in a lecture hall with four adjacent small rooms. Each room is furnished with a lectern, a clock, and a VHS camcorder.

During a semester, a student completes 20 to 24 exercises, which some call "speeches." Ten to 12 of these activities are videotaped on the student's own videocassette. Students then self-evaluate, either at home or in the college library, according to guidelines provided in the textbook (written to implement this program).

A typical class session begins with a 10- to 15-minute lecture in the large group: reinforcing skills to be worked on that day, evaluation techniques, and feedback activities. The next two hours are spent in small groups, where students complete assignments, are provided feedback and evaluation by group

members, and receive guidance from the facilitator. The last 45 minutes are held in a large group, where some of the students are given the opportunity to "show off" their talents. The instructor also explains and illustrates the next week's assignment(s).

The facilitator's role is enhanced and strengthened because he/she is a student who has successfully completed the course. In addition to serving as an interpreter of the instructor's guidelines, the facilitators encourage, guide, coach, assess progress, and keep records on each student in their group. Each week, the points that lead to grades are recorded. Students earn points for: attendance, evidence of preparation, presentations, and self-evaluation. The student, along with the facilitator, keeps a record of his/her own progress.

Each week the facilitator meets with the instructor for 30 minutes before and 30 minutes after class: building an agenda, problem solving, assessing student progress, and providing the instructor with names of students who may need special assistance. This time also provides the instructor with up-to-date feedback to learn what works and what needs adjustment.

Most students report an increase in self-confidence, and they can detail the skills they have gained and those they plan to use in the future. The best evaluation of this program's success in the consistently high retention rate—above 90%—and the number of referrals by students to their friends.

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*Suanne D. Roueche, Editor*

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