



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## *Sail Training at North Shore Community College*

Sail Training is the utilization of the sea and sailboat to enhance the learning of specific content. Sail Training has been used for centuries to help build character and leadership skills. In Europe, especially Great Britain, Sail Training has been built into corporations as a national aspect of management training. Taking a content course out of a classroom and putting it on the water adds a dimension of personal integration and performance-based learning to the course content. Sail Training demands that students participate in their learning with both their minds and their bodies within the sea-bound environment.

In the United States, we have utilized sailing vessels for educational school experiences lasting from three weeks to one semester to one year. At North Shore Community College our major objective has been self-development through the use of sail and curricula content. Landmark School presently teaches literacy skills to its students. There is a semester-aboard program sponsored by a consortium of universities which allows students to take 15 credits. There is also a vessel operated out of Connecticut, *Vision Quest*, specifically for juvenile offenders; it has an 80% success record. Major universities have taught history, literature and music while on a sailing vessel.

The Europeans use sail vessel training differently than do Americans. In Europe, especially England, Sail Training is a part of management training programs. Most European business executives spend a week or more aboard a sailing vessel as trainee apprentices. The British have built a new vessel, *The Lord Nelson*, which is specifically equipped for handicapped participants.

"Although the shipboard setting is an uncommon 'classroom,' Sail Training holds to the common purpose of all education: to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Sail Training enhances general education, fosters marine education, and reinforces learning from the sea experience.

"In Sail Training, the ends and the means are inextricably bound together and require participation in:

- the interdependence of shipboard living,
- instruction and practical experience in sailing,
- on-the-water experience with the world of water."

The North Shore of Massachusetts is rich in marine heritage, and the College's Lynn Campus is ideally situated with access to the sea. In 1986, North Shore Community College was offered the unique opportunity to develop educational programming utilizing the sixty-foot ketch, *Pride of Lyn*, which is managed by a local non-profit foundation. The vessel has a full-time captain and crew, state-of-the-art navigational equipment, and complete audio and video recording systems. The boat's large, enclosable center cockpit, spacious decks, and comfortable main salon offer a variety of settings for small group meetings, as well as ample space for individuals to be by themselves. There are sleeping accommodations for six to eight passengers in three private cabins, in addition to separate quarters for the crew.

One of North Shore Community College's efforts to utilize this unique resource has been the presentation of four one-credit courses offered through the College's Division of Human Services in conjunction with the College Counseling Center. The courses have been conducted over weekends in September, 1987 and 1988, with crew, instructor, and four to six students sharing a live-aboard experience from Friday evening through Sunday. Each course has addressed one of several personal growth content areas: stress management, decision-making, and assertiveness training.

Enrollment in the courses has been open to the general student body although, interestingly, nearly all of the students participating have had very little or no prior boating or sailing experience.

The actual coursework has been conducted with varying degrees of structure, depending upon the instructor, the student group, and, of course, the weather. In general, most instruction periods have been held at anchor in the mornings and evenings, the afternoons being reserved for sailing. But, in fact, class is always "in session." This has been especially apparent on Saturday evenings at anchor off a local uninhabited island. After 24 hours aboard the boat, most of the students appreciate the chance to go ashore. On land the students initially react to the open space and to the sense of freedom it allows. The group stays together,



however, as it explores the island. Conversations tend to focus on the events of the past day. The walk on the island becomes a means of providing perspective for the experiences shared aboard the boat, and the sense of "group" is strengthened.

The group affiliation which develops in the courses has been a dramatic asset. In conjunction with the environmental challenges encountered by each student, instructors have been able to take a very active approach to students' learning. All aspects of the course experience can be maximized, both in the presentation of subject matter and in the facilitation of personal growth and increased self-awareness in each participant.

The courses were conceived and designed as total living/learning experiences. Decisions ranging from choosing cabin mates to scheduling formal class meetings were made by the group, with the crew as active participants in most aspects of on-board life, including some class sessions. As such, actual course content was expanded to address much more than the specific subject area. Each participant found himself or herself challenged by an unfamiliar, and sometimes uncomfortable, environment—where one's usual coping and problem-solving skills often did not apply—shared in very close proximity with a group of strangers, with limited privacy and no easy means of escape. This environment makes necessary the cooperation, understanding, and establishment of shared goals and values. It requires that a group of strangers quickly develop communication skills, trust in one another, and gain knowledge of members' individual strengths and limitations.

We have been fortunate to work with a captain and crew who believe in the value of such an educational experience. They have been eager to participate and are skillful in helping students adapt to the many differences in space, time, and motion inherent in daily living aboard a boat. They have been readily available to answer questions and introduce students to sailing.

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### **Editor's Note to All *Innovation Abstracts* Readers:**

Consider writing an *Innovation Abstracts*! Descriptions of programs and teaching/learning strategies are welcome at the NISOD office.

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**Suanno D. Roueche, Editor**

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