



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## *Creating Cohesiveness by Celebrating Diversity*

As are many parts of the country, San Diego is experiencing an influx of immigrants from all over the world. One challenge for Miramar College is to help these new citizens prepare themselves for adapting to and economically surviving in their new homeland. Additionally, the college is faced with the task of promoting multicultural understanding and acceptance. Multicultural approaches to course subject matter can foster understanding to help overcome prejudices and stereotypes, either conscious or subconscious, about diverse ethnic groups.

A second challenge is to create an educational environment that supports the successful completion of classes by high-risk students. Involving each student's family in his/her education is one strategy for helping a high-risk student survive outside pressures to quit college.

After searching for a way to involve my students' families and promote multicultural understanding and appreciation, I developed the Family History Speech assignment in my Oral Communications class. While this assignment is tailored to the presentation of formal, oral speeches, it can be adapted to classes such as English, history, sociology, psychology, and political science. However, the success of the assignment lies in both the oral presentation of each student's family history and the class questions and discussions that occur after each speech.

### **The Assignment**

Rather than assigning the traditional informative speeches in my Oral Communications classes, I ask that students interview members of their families to learn where they came from, who their ancestors were, and what brought their families to America. Lecture materials cover how to conduct research, how to perform genealogical research, and where and how to obtain this information. I explain how to gather information through interviewing, the types of interviews, and strategies for asking questions and following up on answers. The emphasis of this assignment is two-fold—enabling students to develop useful and necessary research and interviewing skills, and to discover their own personal family histories.

Students are urged to conduct a variety of interviews, preferably in person, with as diverse a group of family members as possible. They are encouraged to interview family friends or people who know or knew members of their families from a different perspective. It is strongly recommended that students either audiotape or videotape all their interviews. Thus, students will have an oral/visual/written archive of their family history, complete with the stories and personalities of the family members they have interviewed.

When the research is complete, each student is to create an 8- to 10-minute informative speech focusing on some aspect of his/her family history—the person or people in their family they most admire and why; the person or people in their family the student finds most interesting and why; how their ancestors first came to America and why; a family custom or tradition the student finds special or touching and why it means so much. Students are asked to attempt to discover what their families hoped to achieve in their new country and whether these dreams were realized. Oftentimes students include what they have learned from those they interviewed and the insights they had about themselves as they went through the process of completing the assignment.

### **The Results**

Students gain a sense of who they are and where they came from. Most important, however, the entire class becomes enlightened about its members, and patterns begin forming.

They realize that underneath the different names, ages, races, religions, genders, backgrounds, and heritages, we have much in common. Students see that people of many different cultural backgrounds desire the same things that they and their families do; they realize that the hopes, dreams, and goals of the different people in class are similar despite the different cultures and backgrounds; they see individuals they can relate to, appreciate, understand, and with whom they can sympathize. In essence, they no longer see stereotypes, but rather individuals.

After the speeches are completed, a strong sense of bonding takes place among class members. Students



are encouraged to ask questions of each speaker. As a class we celebrate our differences, revel in our traditions, but also learn that we have a common bond. By celebrating cultural diversity, we create cohesiveness.

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## ***Bringing Home the Concept Of the NISOD Conference***

The idea was born.

This past year our staff development committee wanted to have a collegewide workshop with a specific focus. We were looking for something that would support and encourage teaching excellence and, simultaneously, would appeal to staff and foster further development of positive faculty-staff relationships.

What better way to do this, we thought, than to pattern an event after the NISOD conference concept. After all, we had tried it on a smaller scale with faculty in the past, and it had been successful—anyone who has been to the NISOD conference knows that you return from that event rejuvenated, enthusiastic, and eager to try out new ideas. A “mini” NISOD conference, or “minicollege,” as it was finally called, seemed to be what we wanted to establish.

The “minicollege” was developed.

1. *We advertised.* We put notices in the college newsletter, seeking ideas for topics and presenters, and we talked to people in the college who had openly acknowledged skills. We were looking for ideas about subjects of interest to a variety of college personnel, focusing on everything from recreational events to computer skills. We wanted to create an event which combined opportunities to learn, relax, and socialize.
2. *We recruited.* Once we had topics selected and knew what we wanted to offer, we put out a call for presenters. We advertised for individuals to make 45-minute or 90-minute presentations (or combinations thereof).
3. *We scheduled.* Armed with a wide variety of subjects, we tried to schedule them so that, at any given time, there would be offerings that appealed to everyone.

This was, indeed, *the* challenge. We achieved our goal by duplicating some events, holding several plenary sessions, and offering at least one event over lunch.

4. *Again, we recruited.* This time we were advertising for participants. Word-of-mouth and notices in the college newsletter helped. In addition, we sought and obtained the full support of the administration with a two-day closure of the college.

What were the results?

Over 200 college employees participated in our minicollege, attending sessions that included everything from making a salad to teaching critical thinking. Each presenter left with a certificate acknowledging his/her contribution to the success of our conference. Feedback from all participants was highly positive, leaving those of us on the staff development committee with the feeling that, despite all the work, we would do it again. It served its original purpose and then some.

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ADMINISTRATORS.**

**May 24-27, 1992  
Austin, Texas**

For more information, write or call: Suanne Roueche, NISOD, The University of Texas at Austin, EDB 348, Austin, TX 78712-1293, (512) 471-7545.

*Suanne D. Roueche, Editor*

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