COLLEGE OF MARIN

INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

PROJECT INFORMATION:
Peer Tutors/Mentors for Social Science History and Politics classes

PROJECT DIRECTORS: Hank Fearnley and Paul Cheney

OTHER PARTICIPANTS:
Walter Turner, Yolanda Bellisimo, Robert Ovetz, Marianne Paules, Robert Proctor

STUDENTS/STAFF TO BE SERVED: At risk students

PROPOSED STARTING DATE: May 1, 2012

PROPOSED COMPLETION DATE: Jan 17, 2013
1. PROBLEM STATEMENT
Over the years the faculty have recognized the existence of a segment of students in virtually every class that struggles with course assignments and requirements. In the vast majority of cases this leads to poor grades and, frequently, failure. Compounded by poor attendance, which is often the consequence rather than the cause of academic insufficiency and with little in terms of ongoing academic resources available to monitor or meet their immediate needs, the students are often deterred from pursuing their academic career. For all intents and purposes, these students have been programmed to fail.

2. PROPOSED SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM
The Social Science faculty would like to introduce in their department a system of peer tutor/mentors who will be trained to attend, on a regular basis, to many of the academic needs of these students. This will be a more intensive tutoring arrangement than currently offered through the Tutoring and Learning Center. Tutors/mentors in this pilot project will be given more direct support from faculty to help at risk students with preparations not only in basic writing and note-taking skills but also in background knowledge particularly applicable to these classes. Crucially, we want to measure the effectiveness of this approach so that we can identify strategies that will significantly reduce dropout rates.

This experimental project will start first with standard introductory courses in Political Science and History. These peer tutor/mentors will, themselves, be currently enrolled at the College of Marin and will have successfully completed the courses for which they will be giving advice, similar to current tutoring arrangements. In this connection COM’s tutoring department has agreed to collaborate with the Social Science Department in this project in a joint effort to locate and identify students who might effectively perform the duties of peer tutor/mentors. The Tutoring department is also prepared to utilize their funds to compensate the tutors for their services.
Periodically during the semester, members of the Social Science faculty who teach introductory courses in Political Science and History will meet jointly in a workshop environment, with the peer tutor/mentors to monitor their progress and to give advice and direction. It is estimated that these workshops will be held approximately three times during the semester, once at the beginning of the semester and twice more during the course of the semester. It is estimated that no more than 7 members of the Social Science faculty will participate in these workshops and that each workshop will take no more than 1.5 hours each.

There is reason to believe, although at this point no scientific evidence, that students are more likely to seek help from their peer group in a less intimidating environment than from their instructors. This, at least, is the underlying assumption of this experimental project.

To assess the value and effectiveness of this project, one member of the Social Science faculty shall assume responsibility for studying the outcomes over a one semester period by gathering relevant data regarding frequency of student-peer tutor/mentor consultations and comparative success and failure rates. The project is designed in such a way as to be easily extended to other Social Science courses and replicated by other departments at the College.

3. OBJECTIVES
The primary objective of this experimental project is to reduce the number of students who fail or withdraw from introductory courses in History (History 100, 117, and 118) and Political Science (Political Science 100 and 101).

4. PLAN OF ACTION

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<tr>
<th>WHO</th>
<th>WHAT</th>
<th>WHEN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walter Turner</td>
<td>Meets with tutoring director to determine number of tutor/mentors</td>
<td>May 1</td>
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5. PLAN FOR EVALUATION

1. Faculty analyst evaluation based upon these criteria:
   a. Number of student participants enrolled in peer groups sessions
   b. Attendance rate of each participating student
   c. Attendance rate of peer tutors
   d. Drop-out rate from peer group sessions
   e. Midterm and final grades of targeted classes compared to cumulative grades of the same class for previous 3 semesters
   f. Drop-out rate of targeted classes compared to cumulative rate of the same class for the previous 3 semesters
2. Survey instruments will be reported grades and drop rate data collected by participating faculty

3. Tutor/Mentor: Project participants will develop a student questionnaire, which will attempt to determine the effectiveness of the project from the Tutor/Mentor’s perspective and to elicit recommendations for improvement.

4. Participating student evaluation: Project participants will develop a student questionnaire, which will attempt to determine the effectiveness of the project from the student perspective and to elicit recommendations for improvement.

6. BACKGROUND INFORMATION
Hank has 37 years of teaching experience and has been the recipient of many grants at the College of Marin. He has collaborated closely with DSPS regarding students in his classes (see Chris Shultz and Xenia Zarrehparvar).

Paul’s teaching experience has included regular development of student peer-groups for class projects. In courses simulating international negotiation at San Francisco State University, for instance, he trained student peer tutors from previous classes to guide students in their projects. He has also had experience guiding Teaching Assistants for 200 level courses as well as organizing student tutoring support for classes that send students to Model United Nations simulations. He developed a program at Dominican University for peer-group support (that was only partially implemented due to departmental reorganization). Such programs require regular monitoring by the faculty. Paul has the experience to oversee a project of the scope described in this proposal.

7. Have you been awarded an IR&D grant in the past?

Hank: YES_____X__ _NO________ How many years ago? ___10____

Paul: YES_________ NO

8. BUDGET

A. PERSONNEL REQUESTED & FUNDING

7 faculty including ongoing statistical analyst: $4,104.23
B. NON-PERSONNEL REQUESTED FUNDING

1. Supplies 0

2. Equipment Rental 0

3. Equipment Purchase 0

4. Contracted Services 0

5. Travel 0

6. Other 0

Total Cost of Project $4,104.23

9. What do you understand the impact would be if the results of your project are implemented:

   On facilities: none
   On discipline/department budget: none
   On scheduling: none

10. In your opinion, will any material produced be of a high enough quality for the college to market?

    YES _______ NO_____ x ____Explain: