PROJECT PROPOSAL

Career Skills: An Online Course to Promote Success

Presented by:

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Introduction:

Yavapai College, like many colleges, is facing fiscal challenges that threaten its ability to deliver traditional coursework to communities outside its immediate tri-city area. Delivery of coursework to rural areas of Yavapai County contains multiple costs, including adjunct instructor salaries, transporting instructors to remote areas, classroom rentals, computer equipment, Internet access, etc. In an effort to streamline costs while still delivering quality educational services to residents in rural areas of its county, Yavapai College has disassembled its Extended Learning Campus, and appointed the Career Skills Program the mission of course delivery to outlying areas. The Career Skills Program was chosen because of its integrated course curriculum, proven success record in transitioning non-traditional students into college and work environments, and the past success of its director in piloting new programs.

The Career Skills Program is an integrated program (Life Management Skills, Business, and Computer Science courses) designed to help students transition into college, learn workplace skills necessary for entering the job market for the first time, or upgrade existing skills to earn promotion or change their careers. Faced with a new mission that included limited funding and staff, the Career Skills Program chose to pilot (for the outlying areas) a hybrid online version of its traditional program, scaling back the number of face-to-face instructor hours, and supporting an incremental increase in online learning for rural students. The major educational issue for rural students in Yavapai County is one of access. They simply live too far away to be able to attend class. The goal of the program is to address that issue through online learning, offering face-to-face basic computer and Internet courses, personal assistance in acquiring skills required for

success in online learning, and providing support and mentorship for continuing education.

Students meet with instructors six hours per day, three days per week for the first three weeks of the six week program. During this time, students are introduced to the Career Skills Program in Blackboard. Wireless laptops and a satellite dish (mounted on a mini van) provide computers with high speed Internet access for classroom participation. In addition to the online resources and classroom structure, students have two instructors available to assist them in learning to track through lectures, assignments, discussion boards, emailing assignments, taking online quizzes, checking their grades, etc.

For the final three weeks of the program, students migrate to the online format. For students who do not have Internet access at home, community access centers and libraries are available through inter-agency agreements with Yavapai College. One day each week, instructors are available with the mobile lab at the access center for additional computer workshops, online access, instructor assistance, and question and answer sessions.

In this manner, Career Skills instructors alternate six week programs at various rural access centers. The fourth program is now into its third week, at a distance of approximately forty miles from the main Yavapai College campus. At its conclusion, the program will move to a different location approximately sixty miles from the main campus. The Career Skills Program plans to conduct two sessions each semester, with the expectation that students will go on to take more online courses, taking advantage of the educational opportunities available to them through online learning.

Surveys, exit interviews, and course/instructor evaluations will comprise the first

round of program assessment. The Yavapai College Institutional Research department will offer guidance and assistance in drafting surveys, evaluating results, and modifying the program. The Career Skills Program reports directly to the Dean of Instruction, which offers another layer of evaluation and review. At the end of the fiscal year, 2004, the viability of the program will be reviewed.

Literature Review:

As in its face-to-face format, the Career Skills Program in the outlying areas primarily serves nontraditional students. Nontraditional students have special needs, one of which is the opportunity for socialization that is needed for a successful career and citizenship (Carriuolo, 2002). These students would probably best be served by a combination of on-site and online study that would attend to the students' academic, technical, and social needs. Initial face-to-face orientation and basic skills workshops allow students to meet one another, interact with the instructor, and master the basic online skills needed for success in the program (Carriuolo, 2002).

As has been documented by other professionals, access is a major issue facing rural communities. Potential students are willing and ready to engage in study, but rural isolation prevents some of them from pursuing an education (Holub, 1996). With limited financial resources, Yavapai College is unable to transport instructors and equipment to rural sites for an extended period of time. Capitalizing on existing technology such as the mobile van, and a satellite dish for high speed Internet access enables the instructors to deliver the program to students in the outlying areas through a modified program that limits the number of times instructors are required to drive to the sites. In addition, emphasizing the concept of "how to take an online course" and offering computer

training, support and mentorship empowers rural students to take advantage of online

opportunities for higher education.

Creating an environment for adult-learner online success includes giving students

ample time to preview the course site and learn how to navigate it before the course

actually gets under way (Conrad, 2002). By meeting with students regularly in the first

three weeks, then easing them into their online environment for the remainder of their

program, students are supplied with a level of comfort and familiarity (Conrad, 2002).

Use of technology to overcome challenges of access and rural isolation can make

learning an individual experience that takes place any time, any where, and at any point

in a person's life. Technology has the potential to connect teachers and learners in new

ways, offering a richer means of communication and sharing, and a new means for

performance and self assessment (Kochtanek, Hein, 2000).

It is assumed that if students can navigate the courseware being used, they should

successfully complete the class. Students also need training to learn what is expected of

them in an online classroom (Palloff, Pratt 2001).

<u>Statement of Thesis/Problem:</u>

Yavapai College passed a significant bond last year, based in large part on its

promise to provide coursework and college services to residents in areas **outside** the

greater Prescott area (referred to as "outlying areas".) Intense scrutiny exposed the

inadequacy and questionable practices of the Extended Learning Department, hence

leading to the department's demise, and the funds being dispersed to other departments.

The Career Skills Program has been tasked with picking up the charter to deliver

coursework to the outlying areas, with limited staff and funding, while **at the same time**

continuing to provide its basic program on campus. The problem that must be addressed

is how the Career Skills Program is to bring quality college coursework and services to

remote populations in Yavapai County, taking into account the educational barriers that

exist such as access, transportation, basic education needs (GED, Literacy, etc.) without

compromising its existing programs on campus. In other words--how will the program

stretch its instructors and resources to serve educational needs in the entire county.

Discussion of Methods :

Feedback from community forums in the outlying areas has outlined some basic

needs and requests: GED and Adult Basic Ed classes, computer classes, leisure courses

such as art and guitar, access to college resources such as Library Services, Financial

Aid, Advising, and Registration.

The Career Skills Program proposal to the college, and one that has been accepted

and is currently in session in pilot format, is to build the **foundational skills** among

residents in the outlying areas that will help them to become successful in online

education and distance learning opportunities. Access and transportation are barriers only

under old paradigms of physical campus locations and traditional classroom attendance.

Community forums have revealed that the majority of residents in the outlying areas have

access to the Internet, and have embraced online learning, only to be discouraged by

poorly designed online courses, lack of technical expertise in submitting coursework

electronically, communicating with their instructors via email, and so on.

The Career Skills Program will transition much of its coursework into an online

environment, providing hands-on training in the first three weeks of class at the outlying

area access centers. This will promote and nurture educational opportunities for residents

who have typically been left out due to distance location barriers. Use of a wireless laptop computer lab and a satellite dish mounted on the mobile van will allow high speed Internet access for students as they're learning to use computers, and becoming familiar with their online classroom. Classes are conducted in community access centers.

The Career Skills Program will provide an instructional liaison to visit the sites on a regular basis, providing technical assistance and advising services. This will bridge a gap for students who typically feel alienated from college resources.

Leisure courses are taught on the Prescott campus by local experts. Community forums have revealed that many of the communities have experts who could teach classes such as art, clay, music, etc., but have had difficulty connecting with the college for certification. The Career Skills Program will serve as community liaison to coordinate certification of instructors and scheduling of classes to be taught by **local experts** rather than trying to transport Prescott instructors to the outlying areas.

Proposed Timeline

Project Start Date: November 01, 2002

Project Completion Date: June 30, 2004

November 01 – December 20, 2002

- Meet with Dean of Curriculum to discuss proposed curriculum outline and receive approval to begin project.

- Conduct community forum in Black Canyon City for feedback regarding community opinion of Yavapai College, course requests, explanation of initial classes to be offered, etc.

- Coordinate funding for high speed Internet access for mobile van with Vice President for Workforce Development.

- Coordinate laptop software setup with Yavapai College ITS personnel.

- Prepare Innovation College Grant Proposal for curriculum and Blackboard course design during holiday vacation.

December 21, 2002 – January 15, 2003

- Complete initial curriculum and Blackboard course design.

- Create student resource CD, and student resource packet.

- Coordinate with Yavapai College ITS Department for purchase and installation of satellite dish on mobile van.

- Coordinate classroom facilities and class schedule for pilot class in Black Canyon City.

- Build classes in Yavapai College Course Bank.

- Prepare course flyers and mailers for residents of Black Canyon City.

January 16, 2003 – February 2, 2003

- Training from ITS on use of Satellite Dish and wireless network for laptops.

- Initial setup at Black Canyon City site to prepare satellite dish and test network.

- Orientation at Black Canyon City to register students and answer questions.

February 3, 2003 – March 14, 2003

- Meet with students Monday, Wednesday and Thursday for first two weeks of class.

- Introduce students to online environment, basic Windows, Internet, Email and word processing concepts.

- Meet with students on Tuesdays for final four weeks of course to answer questions, conduct workshops (PowerPoint, Excel, QuickBooks, Intermediate Word.)

- Each week, personnel from the main campus will be in attendance to assist students and community residents with Financial Aid, Academic Advising, GED advising, etc.

- Yavapai College reporter will interview students who wish to participate in media coverage of Black Canyon City Career Skills Program.

- Finish up Black Canyon City class. Conduct surveys and exit interviews to help determine strengths and weaknesses of hybrid delivery.

March 15, 2003 – June 30, 2004

- Rename Career Skills Program with title more fitting new mandate of delivering courses to outlying areas.

- Repeat six week session intervals in remaining outlying areas of Yavapai County: Congress, Ashfork, Seligman, Clarkdale, Mayer, Cordes Junction.

- Conduct surveys and exit interviews with participants in each six week course to determine strengths and weaknesses of hybrid delivery.

- Conduct follow-up surveys and interviews with past participants to determine number of students who are taking additional online courses, discuss success/challenges of online courses, etc.

- Meet with Dean of Instruction, Distributed Learning, ITS and other department personnel for evaluation and further development of online delivery model.

- Meet with Yavapai College Institutional Research personnel to evaluate and study data collected through surveys, exit and follow-up interviews, and registration of additional online students from outlying areas.

- Determine viability of continuing hybrid course delivery to outlying areas via mobile lab.

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