

## **Title III Grant, Strengthening Institutions Program Innovations in Learning Project Proposal**

### **Project Description:**

This project aims at developing a learning community incorporating English 101A and History 117A. The goal of the community is to enrich the teaching of both history and composition by linking the two disciplines in interesting and thought-provoking assignments.

The specific task we have is to create a curriculum and a set of assignments that meet the goals of this learning community. The focus of the learning community is to enhance the students' understanding of history by in-depth reading, thinking, and writing on specific topics in history. Thus, instead of experiencing history as a compendium of dates and events, they will see that history can be controversial, argumentative, challenging, and fun! They will learn to examine primary sources in greater depth, view documentaries about the founding of our nation, and think and write about the challenges faced by the first leaders of our nation. Like all English 101A students, they will practice expository writing, critical reading, library and research techniques, and writing the documented research paper. In addition, they will compare websites, learn to detect bias in sources, and sharpen their critical thinking skills by examining an issue from several perspectives.

The English 101A class materials and assignments have to be adapted to meet the needs of the learning community. The class is organized around four units and a research paper. All units contain a multi-media presentation, a reading assignment, group work or class presentations by the students, and a formal paper. Each assignment builds on the skills previously acquired by the student and teaches new skills. For example, Assignment 1 tests the students' ability to organize an essay around an effective thesis and topic sentences and to write effective introductions and conclusions. Assignment 2 tests the students' ability to analyze a historical document and to integrate quotations into their papers. Assignments 3 and 4 add on the skills of providing parenthetical documentation and creating a list of works cited in MLA format. In addition, Assignment 3 teaches students to write a comparison/contrast paper and Assignment 4 deals with cause and effect. The Research Paper tests the students' ability to research a specific topic in history, to formulate a thesis based on research and thinking, and to support that thesis in an organized, documented research paper approximately 1800 words in length. For this project, we will plan each assignment around a topic that the students are concurrently studying in history.

### **Project Outcomes:**

- Students will learn to differentiate between fact and interpretation and develop a comprehension of their interrelationships. In addition to acquiring a knowledge of U.S. History (the who, what, where, and when of historical scholarship), students will understand the significance of this content in relationship to broader course themes (the “why” question).
- They will develop individual interpretations of historical events—students' voices

resonating with original, thoughtful, and creative ideas supported by relevant data and expressed clearly using formal and informal writing style.

- They will learn to appreciate a variety of historical perspectives.
- They will learn to organize, write, and edit college level essays of various lengths.
- They will learn to do library research, evaluate sources, and write a documented research paper.
- The students will use their writing and research skills when constructing in-class essays for the midterm and final exam in History 117a.
- The students will learn critical thinking by examining both primary and secondary source materials. They will use these documents in both their final research papers and during their midterm and final exams in History 117a.

### **Assessment Strategies:**

The student's learning outcomes are assessed by the successful completion of their coursework.

The students will fill out a student questionnaire at the beginning and end of the semester which will evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching strategies.

The instructors will evaluate whether the students have benefited from the activities and instructions by reading their written assignments.

A comparison of the mid-term and the final will reveal student progress in critical thinking skills. (The online quizzes simply build a foundation of historical knowledge that students are expected to use to substantiate generalizations and support their own historical interpretations. The midterm and final are designed to assess students' critical thinking skills.)

### **Project Implementation Timeline**

Spring semester 2007: The instructors will meet once every two weeks to design assignments and compare student progress in their classes. The project will be completed at the end of the semester.

### **Faculty Responsible for Development and Implementation**

Shirin Maskatia  
Darren Bardell

### **Technology and Software Requirements**

Documentaries already present in library  
Video equipment present in classrooms  
Computer on wheels available from audio-visual center

