

**ACS Interdisciplinary Mini-Grant Final Report**  
**Title: “Interdisciplinary Quantitative Data Colloquium”**  
**May 30, 2008**

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Date(s) of Project: August 18, 2007 through May 13, 2008  
Amount Awarded: \$5,300

1. Original Goals and objectives

1. To provide a regular opportunity for students to observe and participate in a form of interdisciplinary collaboration.
2. To provide a regular opportunity for students to observe and participate in planning and conducting quantitative data analyses.
3. To provide a regular forum for faculty that share interests in quantitative data analysis to collaborate across disciplines and model such collaboration for students.
4. To provide a regular forum for faculty and students to get advice and suggestions on quantitative data analyses for their own research.

2. If goals/objectives changed during the course of the project, please state the revised goals/objectives.

There was no change in the goals of the colloquium.

3. In what ways were the goals/objectives met? Please give examples.

*Goal #1: To provide a regular opportunity for students to observe and participate in a form of interdisciplinary collaboration.* Over the course of our ten colloquium meetings during the year, we believe we achieved this goal. There were many examples of students participating the sessions, often simply in the discussion of the data or findings being presented at a given session. Once, two philosophy majors were particularly involved in our discussion of the challenges of analyzing a data set on war. The issues they were discussing, though were highly technical and had to do with problems of multicollinearity, and heteroskedasticity, even though neither of them had had a statistics course. Like virtually all students who attended, I know those two also enjoyed seeing the faculty tease and joke with each other as part of our general camaraderie of working together in any given session. In general, no student could attend a session without seeing how much we faculty enjoyed working with each other, learning from each other and valuing each others' unique disciplinary perspective and what each brought to a particular analysis issue or data set.

*Goal #2: To provide a regular opportunity for students to observe and participate in planning and conducting quantitative data analyses.* This was a common occurrence. For example, during one session, the presenter said he was interested in exploring differences between objective measures individuals' social class status and their own

subjective perceptions of their class status. He introduced us to a data set from the General Social Survey, and allowed us time to work in teams to try different analyses. Several students of mine from Introductory Sociology worked with me to compute a new variable that was the result of subtracting the objective from the subjective measure. We then performed several regression analyses to predict what variables determined the degree of discrepancy between an individual's class status, and their perceptions of their class status. The students enjoyed the process and several mentioned they didn't realize quantitative data analysis "that fun." (My heart soared, of course.)

*Goal #3: To provide a regular forum for faculty that share interests in quantitative data analysis to collaborate across disciplines and model such collaboration for students.*

This goal was achieved as well, though not for many more faculty than were on the grant. Each session gave us a chance to see what some of that faculty member's interests were, and to see how they approached data analysis. Among some of the issues that arose were differences between sociology and psychology in what were viewed as acceptable procedures that were driven by necessity and a desire to find support for hypotheses in light of a paucity of data, and what were seen as unacceptable and as violating principles of hypothesis testing in a controllable laboratory setting.

*Goal #4: To provide a regular forum for faculty and students to get advice and suggestions on quantitative data analyses for their own research.* We feel this goal was largely achieved. The instance described above is one where the faculty member later mentioned that the session helped him in planning his analyses for the future with that data set. However, because our priority was interesting students in quantitative analysis and enticing them to attend the sessions, the data sets faculty chose to present were often not ones they were using for their chief research project at the time, but were instead were those they thought would be fun and interesting to explore with others. That said, all the faculty who discussed the colloquium's success at the end of the year agreed that although the sessions often may not have been helpful for their specific research projects, they were helpful for sharpening their own quantitative data analysis techniques generally.

4. Describe the evaluation/assessment process used. Summarize the results of this process. Include any instruments used to evaluate/assess your project.

The primary quantitative and objective measures used were unobtrusively recorded numbers of people in attendance. At each of the meetings we noted the number of faculty on the grant in attendance, the number of faculty not on the grant in attendance, and the number of students in attendance. Those results, on average, are as follows:

Faculty on grant, on average: 6.7

Faculty not on grant, on average: 2.2

Students, on average: 4.3

We had hoped for better attendance. This means that while we largely achieved our four goals as stated in the grant proposal, we achieved them only for a limited proportion of the college community.

However, our qualitative, subjective means of assessing the project's success give us hope for colloquium's next iteration. Because of the small number of principle participants in the project, we evaluated it using mainly by discussing with each other our own perceptions of the project's success and our ideas for improving it in the future. As we discussed the ways in which the colloquium could better meet its goals with a few different strategies, we became confident the colloquium will be improved this upcoming year.

5. If you were to redesign your project, what would you do differently and why? (What are the "lessons learned?")

We attribute the lower than hoped for attendance of both students and faculty not on the grant to two things, each of which we plan to address next year.

First, our time period was both less desirable and less open than it could have been. We held our colloquium on Friday afternoons when all students were free, but not of a mind, perhaps, to participate in academic activities. That was also the most common time for faculty to have committee meetings. This upcoming year we plan to use available convocation times, which are regularly scheduled for every Thursday morning from 11 to 12. All faculty and students have that time open in their schedules, and it is specifically reserved for such general education events such as ours. We think attendance could be improved significantly by making this time change.

Secondly, and perhaps just as importantly, we plan to recruit students more aggressively, and to target specific students we think are good candidates for participating regularly. We didn't use to the colloquium as a means of beginning a mentorship type of relationship with students, but we now think it may be a fine means of doing just that.

6. How have you shared the results with ACS colleagues and beyond ACS?

Those of us faculty on the grant have all informally shared our experience with the colloquium with certain friends and colleagues outside our campus. Beyond that, though, we have not shared the results of the colloquium with colleagues. If this year's iteration of the colloquium achieves the improved attendance we hope it will, we plan to write an article for the Palladium describing the colloquium and recommending its general format to other schools in the ACS.

7. What are the next steps (follow-up) in your project?

(Please see our response above to question #5.)

8. A complete financial statement, showing original budget (the breakdown of the amount awarded) and expenditures.

(Please see attached our final financial report.)

9. Please include a statement than you give ACS permission to post your original proposal and a summary of your work on the ACS Interdisciplinary website  
<http://www.colleges.org/newmodels/interdisciplinary/index.html>.

As the lead author of the proposal and this report, I, Loren Demerath, hereby give the ACS permission to post our original proposal and a summary of our work on the ACS Interdisciplinary website

<http://www.colleges.org/newmodels/interdisciplinary/index.html>.

- Loren Demerath, May 30, 2008.