

ACS Information Fluency Project

Proposal

Title: Training Student Research Fellows to Serve as Peer Tutors

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Abstract:

This project is intended to make student Research Fellows available to faculty as peer tutors by training them via a 3 credit course and paying them to work with teaching faculty and librarians to assist other students with research assignments in particular courses. The training course would be taught primarily by librarians and would include guest lectures by faculty and Academic Technologies staff. Courses in our general education curriculum would be targeted for placement of the Research Fellows. This program would be analogous to our current Writing Fellows, who take a course covering advanced composition and tutoring skills, and are then assigned to faculty who have requested a Fellow.

Rationale:

A course that teaches students not merely to conduct their own research, which is the usual goal of courses in information fluency, but to assist others in finding, assessing, and using information, must impart not only generalizable skills, but also appropriate habits and attitudes regarding research, as these are the basis for helping others. Such a course is not specific to particular intellectual domains (e.g., “science” or “business”) or locally available resources and its curriculum could be implemented at any ACS institution. A system for matching the graduates of such a course with a program providing Research Fellows to faculty teaching courses in general education curriculum would address two questions that often arise in attempts to foster information fluency:

1. How do we encourage faculty to incorporate more research assignments into their syllabi, given that these require time and effort to supervise and to evaluate?
2. How do we overcome students’ reluctance to ask for assistance when they need it and to reflect on their methods for gathering, assessing, and using information?

Research Fellows offer the advantage of a way to relieve a part of the burden on faculty who assign research projects and a way to encourage undergraduates in the courses served to ask for help from a competent peer while developing a more conscious approach to research.

Preliminary Description:

- a. The course will last one semester. The pilot program for Research Fellows will be the following semester.
- b. Student fellows will be recruited via faculty recommendations and notices in the online campus bulletin board.
- c. Target audience for the course will be rising sophomores and juniors. Target audience for placing fellows will be faculty teaching general education courses and other faculty teaching upper level courses who have indicated an interest in fostering student research skills.

Plans for follow-up and evaluation:

Student and faculty participants will be surveyed (including the Fellows themselves). Meetings of student fellow, faculty, and librarian participants will be held to evaluate both the concept and the implementation (ideally over lunch). In cases where the assignments on which the Research Fellows provided assistance were the same as those offered in previous semesters, faculty would be asked to compare the “before and after” results.

Plans for dissemination of results to the rest of ACS and beyond:

Course syllabus and full description of program would be available to all ACS institutions.

Suggestions for replication at other campuses:

A similar program could be replicated at any school with sufficient librarian and faculty interest.

Preferred time of year for the event:

The preparatory course would be offered in Spring 2003. The pilot research fellow project would be scheduled for Fall 2003.