

Associated Colleges of the South
Report to the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation
New Initiatives in Cost Containment
December 31, 2000

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1. Introduction

The Associated Colleges of the South is pleased to present this report on the use of funds made available by the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation in May, 2000. This report covers the eight-month period from the receipt of the grant to the end of December of this year. A financial summary is included in the appendix.

In large measure, this was a time of organization and establishing a foundation for numerous activities to take place in the future. One example is in the business area in which key business officers have begun to organize a new approach to strategic planning and budgeting. During this eight-month period, the business group has defined the need for the project, contacted a management consulting company, negotiated the financial charges to be made, and initiated the efforts to gather the necessary data from the participating institutions. In the coming year, the group will make use of this data and develop specific budgeting strategies for the future -making extensive use of technology. Other initiatives fall into a similar pattern for the year 2000: setting in place a foundation for many efforts to be conducted in the next few years.

II. Organization and Structure of the Grant Program

During this start-up period, the ACS presidents and academic deans provided the principal supervision and oversight for the program. The presidents, who were directly involved while the project was prepared - as they were in the prior grant from the Foundation -discussed the various aspects of the project at their June, 2000 meeting. At that meeting, they reaffirmed their commitment to the project and included the project into the consortium's five-year plan. Once again, they expressed their gratitude for the support from the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation, noting how useful this project can be in making our colleges and universities more efficient and more effective. They also noted the various benefits that accrue from bringing the various administrative and academic groups together, pointing out that working together on one project opens up the possibilities for other collaborative efforts as well.

The grant was also a focal point at the meetings of the ACS chief academic officers in 2000, meetings held in May and October. In their important management oversight role, the vice presidents, provosts and deans made sure they were aware of the details of the new initiative, including the process for evaluating the various activities that take place.

Oral reports will be made to the deans on three occasions per year, along with a number of written reports in between meetings.

Each group has an organizing program committee to give policy guidance. Each of the virtual academic departments has a faculty committee in place and they work closely with ACS staff members. The special ACS technology program committee has been established to organize collaborative workshops taking place for faculty and staff. The group consists of faculty and instructional technology staff. The joint purchasing effort is coordinated by the chief purchasing officers on each campus. The initiative making use of technology in administrative areas is coordinated by all the chief financial officers on the campuses. And the admission and technology effort is spearheaded by a small coordinating group of admissions directors who are in turn working with a broader group of admissions directors at ACS institutions, All of these groups are charged with the responsibility of insuring that these projects are faithful to the proposal submitted to the Foundation. That means insisting that the projects are effectively managed, that they meet the objectives originally outlined and that they are carefully evaluated.

III. The Program Initiative - Cost Containment on the ACS Campuses

The following is a discussion of the numerous initiatives made possible by the Foundation grant. The initial attention will be made to the academic cooperation made possible and this will be followed by a discussion of areas in which administrative collaboration is taking place. The sections have been written by the responsible staff members in cooperation with members of the program committee.

Academic collaboration

A. Collaborative Effort in Languages ("ALIANCO")

Our first step in creating a "virtual department" (or collaborative program) of modern languages was to contact all ACS language faculty (particularly those who had participated in the 1997 and 1998 workshops that were funded by the Lettie Pate Evans Foundation) and give them the opportunity to discuss which languages or areas might benefit from collaboration, as well as mechanisms for facilitating such collaborations. Although we are already engaged in similar efforts for Classics and archaeology, language instructors and students have special pedagogical needs, so it was important for us to ensure that we will be using the best available technologies and methodologies to meet those needs. We have, however, offered several collaborative courses over the Internet, and have the structures in place to expand these offerings to language courses, so in this case participants need not start from scratch in considering how to effectively "team-teach" across large distances.

We also created a small steering committee of 4 ACS faculty with experience in the use of technology, who met at the ACS Technology Center July 22-24, 2002, to begin to plan for future meetings and training. At this meeting, we created a comprehensive database of all ACS language faculty, which has served as a basis for identifying faculty interests and strengths. We also discussed a number of ways in which collaboration might improve teaching and increase

efficiencies in the various languages. For example, faculty who teach the less commonly taught modern languages face the challenge of offering a full four-year program to majors and minors despite small enrollments. One way to help increase the number of upper-level offerings available to students might be to use technology to make these courses accessible to students at other ACS institutions. Or, an online beginning-level course in one of these languages could be opened to ACS students at colleges where this opportunity has not been available in the past. Similarly, faculty in the more commonly taught languages might benefit from sharing expertise with their colleagues in developing advanced and specialized courses such as medical Spanish that are made accessible to all ACS students through technology. Perhaps technology can also help students accomplish the goals of courses strained by over-enrollment more quickly and efficiently. Finally, all languages could benefit from a shared copyright-free database of materials for language teaching. These are only a few examples of how technology-facilitated collaboration can enhance modern language programs.

As a next step, we have identified possible leaders in each of the languages, and asked them to begin an electronic dialogue with their ACS colleagues about where to begin. Russian faculty in particular have recognized the value of working together, both in terms of faculty collegiality and range of offerings that could be available to students. We also determined that the language lab directors will be crucial to the collaboration process, being as they are the local technical support resource for language faculty, and will be called upon to provide support across the consortium for this initiative. Thus, the lab directors and faculty who teach Russian will be meeting in April to talk about the more technical aspects of collaborative support, as well as identify one or more collaborative courses that the group might want to offer, perhaps in the spring 2002. Language faculty and support staff are also planning a summer workshop at the ACS Technology Center, both for technology training and continued planning.

B. Collaborative effort and program in Latin American Studies

Organizational efforts and cooperation have begun in regard to the virtual department of Latin American Studies (LAS). All ACS institutions were invited to identify and designate a representative to serve on a planning committee for this effort. Institutions were encouraged to identify faculty members across a broad range of disciplines who share a Latin American Studies focus; thus, members of the group include academics who are experts in anthropology, biology, cultural studies, history, literature, modern languages, and political science. We feel this interdisciplinary mix is important and will be very beneficial as the project proceeds.

The initial meeting of the planning committee took place via a conference call in October. Participants exchanged information regarding their respective areas of expertise, their ideas and visions for the development of the virtual department, and past cooperative experiences which might serve as models in this effort. During the conversation, two concrete steps of future action were agreed upon:

A) Currently, each member of the planning group is preparing a summary of the present state of Latin American Studies on his or her campus, along with a list of needs and interests which would benefit those studies for both students and faculty. After this sharing of

information, members will identify overlapping areas of interest and needs and form working teams to address them.

B) The group is planning a face-to-face meeting in April 2001 in conjunction with an ACS Latin American Studies Symposium at Birmingham-Southern College. During this meeting the teams will continue to discuss areas of needs and interests, have the opportunity to share plans with consortial colleagues and will devise next steps in development of the virtual department, which are responsive to existing needs and future possibilities.

Among the possible initiatives being contemplated, and scheduled for discussion in April, are research collaboration with faculty in Latin America, joint conferences to be held (perhaps in Latin America) and study abroad. For study abroad, a single place in Latin America might be selected, or a site for a study abroad activity might change from year to year. The group is scrutinizing various countries and potential Latin American partner institutions that could make such study abroad opportunities exciting and valuable for ACS students. Simultaneously, discussion is also focussed a possible exchange of students between Latin America and the ACS institutions.

Those participating in this effort already see the value of collaboration as a means of raising the visibility of Latin American studies and activities on each ACS campus. In addition to creating joint courses, offering special faculty development opportunities, and promoting collaborative research, the group hopes to establish permanent partnerships with Latin American institutions through which student internships, service learning programs and other study abroad initiatives might take place.

C. Technology Workshops

ACS offered five workshops to consortium faculty and staff in summer, 2000. The topics were selected based on the interests of faculty and staff and on proposals we solicited from our members. All were held at the ACS Technology Center at Southwestern University, which serves as a hub for consortial technology activities.

From June 7-11, 15 information technology and library staff members from 9 ACS institutions met for a Technology Support Workshop, led by Pat Ramsey of Southwestern University, Kim Joyce of the University of Richmond, and Judith Rutschman of Rhodes College. The goal of this workshop was to begin to explore the challenges that faculty support staff face as they work within an ever-changing environment of new technologies and information resources. Participants had the opportunity to present and discuss support strategies in use on their own campuses, and to develop a variety of faculty support tips, ideas, and methods. They began to identify and share best practices in member institutions. Since concerns at small liberal arts colleges are often similar, we found that our support staffs could benefit from collaboration in planning how to encourage, assist, and support faculty in exploring and using technologies for teaching and learning. Participants also began to identify areas in which collaborative support might make sense, e.g., keeping a common archive of online documentation of software and skills often employed by faculty,

as well as creating an email list and discussion group to serve as a way for support staff members to keep in touch, and to support one another. Future plans include the establishment of a collaborative support web site for faculty, creating staff development opportunities for technical support staff (important both for ongoing training and retention) and the continual study and refinement of lists of faculty needs that staff can work together to support. Participants also expressed an interest in exploring a joint "help desk," as a way to utilize the strengths of all support staff across the consortium.

Tom Williams, Professor of Physics at Washington and Lee University, led a workshop on Computer-based Physics Labs from June 21-25, 2000, which was attended by 14 faculty from 11 institutions. This workshop was designed for faculty and staff members at ACS institutions who are responsible for the laboratory component of introductory physics courses, to give them the opportunity to discuss the rationale for, view and use hardware and software available for, and demonstrate and conduct successful laboratory exercises using computer technology in these courses. Participants were able to see the latest products available for this purpose, share experiences and experiments, and establish a web site for continued exchange of information. The workshops consisted of formal presentations by national leaders of the movement to computer based laboratories, followed by a session where the speakers responded to questions raised by the audience. Vendors from the two major computer based laboratory equipment manufacturers brought their interfaces to lab equipment and conducted presentations, after which participants were allowed to work with the equipment.

From June 28-July 2, 2000, 25 faculty and staff members from 10 ACS institutions participated in "Educational Technologies For Support of Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning," led by Jimmie Purser, (Millsaps College) and Kevin Treu, (Furman University).

The purpose of this workshop was threefold:

- to provide training to consortium faculty in "state-of-the-art" educational technologies that may be used in the classroom or in support of asynchronous learning,
- to provide a forum for experienced users in which to share successful applications of educational technologies, including evaluation techniques,
- and to provide developmental support for ongoing projects by participants. (Participants were required to come to the workshop with some specific project in mind.)

Topics included:

- Demonstration and over-view of emerging technologies
- Training with selected tools, including PaintShop Pro, Lotus ScreenCam, Real Producer, Macromedia Flash, Windows Sound Recorder, PhotoVista (includes learning to use a digital camera), and Microsoft PowerPoint
- Training in the production of multimedia assets, such as digital movies, sound files, graphics, and panoramas
- Introduction to JavaScript and Perl

- Training in how to establish an effective asynchronous learning environment and how to support an asynchronous learning environment using Microsoft NetMeeting [videoconferencing, chat, whiteboard, file sharing, and desktop remote]
- Classroom models for use of educational technology, including examples from participants and such tools as Internet Assistant
- Evaluation techniques for educational technology applications - reports of results and survey of sources

Participants also had the opportunity to make a presentation about their own uses of technology, and share their experiences with the development and evaluation process.

Fourteen music faculty from 8 ACS institutions, as well as a faculty member from Earlham College (member of the Great Lakes Colleges Association) attended a workshop on July 5-9, 2000 entitled "Effective Use of Technology in the Music Curriculum." This workshop was led by Patricia Gray of Rhodes College, who was assisted by colleagues from Rhodes and Birmingham-Southern College. Music courses are particularly fertile areas for the introduction of computer technology because sound, sight, and movement are all central to the subject matter. Students come into these classes from an environment filled with the Internet, MTV, computer games, and computer kiosks of all varieties. Music classes confined to lectures, listening to CDs, and writing on the blackboard will probably seem dated to them. Many music classes can be enriched and expanded. New techniques added to the traditional format can help students understand the material in more depth than ever before. The challenge is to combine the old and the new in a way that encourages students to learn and retain more. The danger for both faculty and students is becoming so fascinated with the shallow, glitzy elements of new technology that they never benefit from its real capability. This workshop will demonstrate techniques that have been tested and refined and that have been proven to legitimately enhance teaching.

The 3-day music workshop focused on the following areas:

- web design for class web sites and student projects music notation
- animation construction
- computer generated accompaniment programs for student instrumental and vocal practice
- online test construction

The workshop included demonstrations of software, lab time for the creation of individual projects, and break-out sessions for the discussion of implementation problems. Participants also devoted time to the discussion of areas for ongoing collaboration, and were enthusiastic about creating a consortial music program along the lines of other ACS "Virtual Departments." Among other things, member institutions could benefit from access to live and archived broadcasts of musical events across the consortium, as well as an exchange program for visiting artists. Participants also discussed how best to share technology materials across the consortium, and created a web site and discussion list to disseminate their work and continue to discuss the collaborative effort. They also plan to hold a follow-

up meeting at the ACS Technology Center in summer, 2001, and have begun to experiment with using the ACS RealServer for webcasting events.

Our final summer event was a small work session for ACS chemists and biochemists on "On-line Molecular Visualization Using Chemscape." Five faculty members, including leaders Stephanie Dew and Jennifer Muzyka of Centre College, took part in this effort to create materials for use across the consortium from July 14-17, 2000. The workshop focused on the subject of molecular visualization, specifically the use of Chemscape Chime to embed molecular structures in web pages. Participants discussed the design of such pages for dissemination over the Internet and their use in the classroom, and learned to create interactive web pages for instructional use in their courses.

For the results of participant evaluation of these workshops, please see the Appendix.

IV. **Administrative Cooperation**

A. Joint PURchasin

The ACS joint purchasing group met twice during the year to look at new possibilities that could save or contain costs in a substantial way. They entered into various new arrangements and explored a variety of other connections for the future. In the office supply area, they added Boise Cascade to the list of vendors, which includes Office Depot as well. As the year 2000 ends, they are assessing whether certain travel agencies, the Kimball Office Group and others would be suitable partners. The group interviewed a number of vendors and rejected a variety of them on the basis that they did not offer the promise of providing high quality goods or service at a reasonable cost. One travel agency, for example, was interviewed and studied very carefully, but the group concluded that the service would not be as helpful and responsive as they had originally anticipated. An e-commerce company was interviewed, but it was felt that the company did not have a sufficient track record to warrant the use by ACS institutions. E-commerce, meanwhile, continues to be a very high priority interest for the group, which will continue to look at numerous vendors in this area.

The group has begun what will be a very important conversation with faculty and staff on the campuses to determine how the anticipated new contract with vendors can be best communicated to the campuses. Given the highly decentralized nature of these and other American colleges and universities, it is crucial that attractive new agreements be properly described to the campus. And proper description includes making clear what cost savings could accrue through the joint purchasing process. The buying group will meet again February of 2001 to evaluate the next set of vendors.

B. Benchmarking Activity in the Business Area

The chief business officers have been sharing information, or benchmarking their activities related to the budget process. As they have done so, they have agreed it would be extremely helpful to develop a joint budget model. This effort is now underway. The institutions are currently gathering and submitting information that could be put into the budget model, which

offers the promise of enabling the business officers, their presidents and trustees to manipulate the data and various factors in a myriad of ways. Perhaps needless to say, the chief business officers are particularly intrigued by the value of using the technology in this new way. By jointly engaging a single consultant, the individual institutions are also saving considerable funds in the process.

C. Collaboration among admissions officers

The admissions officers have discussed various possibilities for collaboration -and are keeping these possibilities in mind -but the principal emphasis is currently on an intense look at technology. The planning has taken place this past fall, with joint events scheduled for January of 2001. At that time, working with a specific technology vendor, the admissions officers will come together to explore a variety of technological applications in the admissions process. These could cover communications with prospective students, handling of inquiries and applications, follow-up actions after students have applied or visited a campus, recruiting of international students, and joint marketing of ACS institutions to prospective students. Given the extremely *high cost* in the admissions area, the presidents and others in ACS have deemed the admissions area as one well worth exploration.

V. **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the splendid grant from the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation has enabled the consortium to take initial action in a variety of areas, extending to all the major thrusts contained in its cost containment plan. Networks have been established, issues have been identified and plans have been prepared. In some areas - for example, the collaborative workshops - a full set of activities has already taken place, with more to follow. In other more complicated areas, the major part of the plan will unfold in 2001. The collaboration in admissions is an example of such an endeavor.

Without the funding provided by the Foundation, these discussions and actions would not have been possible. With the encouragement from the Foundation and its financial support, the consortium has moved forward in the area of cost containment, and looks ahead to presenting even more substantial results in the years ahead.

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