Beautiful Idea:
In-Situ Service Learning

Co-Developers:
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Project Description:
The goal of this project is to enhance student academic success through cooperative learning and to increase student retention and graduation rate through the development of positive attitudes towards their studies. We expect that student involvement with a study group under the leadership of their fellow student will enhance their learning experience and serve as an important reinforcement of their academic persistence. An outcome of the project will be assessed through testing students on particular topics and further comparison of the testing results among students involved in study groups and those who study on their own.

An important part of the project is to facilitate and support the formation and functioning of the study groups within the structure of a class, with special attention given to selecting and supporting group leaders. Our plan is to provide support and tools to these advanced students who are willing to donate their time and serve as leaders of study groups. We named our project In-situ Service Learning to emphasize the fact that such learning occurs in a most natural way, and that students who become group leaders provide an important service to their institution as well as the members of their groups.

In situ: in the natural or original position or place
Merriam-Webster Dictionary

Service-Learning is a form of experiential learning where students apply academic knowledge and critical thinking skills to address genuine community needs.

Pamela and James Toole, 1994, Service and learning at CMU
http://www.facit.cmich.edu/instructional-support/service-learning

Narrative.
Academic success is the ultimate challenge for every student at Hostos Community College. In addition to their school responsibilities, many of them have full or part time jobs and dependent family members. Current economic situation exacerbates their difficulties. Often the sole providers for their families, our students are compelled to concentrate on their employment concerns at the expense of their studies. As an added challenge, many of our students do not have sufficient background in sciences to effectively study on their own (5). To compensate for the situation where there is less time for study, efficiency in study methods gain significance as the primary means to insure maximum possible benefits in return for time invested.

Educational research has shown that students learn better and retain material longer when they work in small groups (2, 3, 4). In addition, productivity of a small group of students is significantly increased by the presence of a group leader with sufficient scientific background. His/her contribution to the group study sessions should compensate for the likely insufficient scientific background of other members of the study group (5). A student best suited for the position of a group leader would be a classmate who demonstrates better understanding of the subject and shows willingness to share his/her knowledge with fellow students. Group members usually trust these students and are willing to accept their leadership in a study process. Formation of study groups is sometimes a naturally occurring phenomenon that has been observed by many faculty: after the conclusion of a class students would gravitate towards an academically distinguished student or two, and ask whether they could study with them. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the formation of these
Informal study groups is beneficial to all students involved, independent of their academic standing. An additional benefit of this cooperative learning modality is the development of a positive attitude towards individual achievement. As students experience their contributions to the group are being translated into better grades and deeper understanding of the subject for themselves, their assessment of their own potential and self-worth increases, thus increasing their motivation to continue with their studies.

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Team leaders will be selected upon observation of the class dynamic, and after first partial exam results are available. These students will be offered to become team leaders of study groups on a voluntary basis. Team leaders will be given support of the instructor whom they will meet on a regular basis to discuss any issues that may arise within a study group. Participation in study groups will be open to all students on a voluntarily basis.

Goals and anticipated outcome.

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Timetable.

The first semester after acceptance of the project will be devoted to the development of criteria for the selection of team leaders and the development of support system for them.

Implementation of the project will be carried out during the following semester. Materials for the study groups will be developed and made available to all students of the class independent of whether they join a study group or not.

Project results will be analyzed upon the conclusion of two semesters of implementation of the project, and recommendations on the feasibility of the college-wide adoption of the study group modality will be made available to all members of the Hostos teaching staff.

References


