

The University of Arizona
Parents and Family Programs
Parents and Family Association Grant Proposal

PROGRAM TITLE

CONNECTING THE STUDENT/FACULTY INTERACTION GRANTS PROGRAM TO TIER ONE CLASSES:
CREATING A SMALL CLASS FEELING IN A LARGE LECTURE ENVIRONMENT

Respectfully Submitted by

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"I would like to thank you for helping fund the field trips for Michael Evans' NATS 101 class. I attended trips to both the Desert Museum and Professor Evans' lab. The field trips are an excellent compliment to the information presented in class, allowing students to see the real world applications of our newly acquired knowledge. I also enjoy having the opportunity to interact with my professor in a setting that encourages informal, but insightful discussions. Spending the morning learning about science, then having a lunch time discussion about current issues in academics or in politics has been a wonderful experience, and is something every student should be able to experience in college. I appreciate what you and the Student Faculty Interaction Grant Program have done for this class."

Quote from student – received November, 2007

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CONNECTING THE STUDENT/FACULTY INTERACTION GRANTS PROGRAM TO TIER ONE CLASSES: CREATING A SMALL CLASS FEELING IN A LARGE LECTURE ENVIRONMENT

OVERVIEW OF DEPARTMENT

An extensive body of research literature reveals that interactions between students and faculty that take place outside of the classroom have a significant impact on students.¹ In particular, Endo and Harpel (1982) found that frequent informal contact between faculty and students is related to personal, social, and intellectual outcomes, as well as student satisfaction. Their study also reveals the important fact that informal interactions between faculty and students have a greater influence on more student outcomes than do formal interactions. Consistent with Endo and Harpel (1982), Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) found that student-faculty interactions are related to gains in intellectual development, as well as to first-year student persistence.

In a relatively recent qualitative study of student-faculty interactions outside of the classroom, Cotten and Wilson (2004) found that large lecture classes are perceived by students to be a barrier to facilitating student-faculty interaction. In such classes, students often feel that their professors do not know them and so they are more reluctant to approach the faculty outside of class time. More importantly, Cotten and Wilson also found that students would feel less intimidated about interacting with faculty if meetings could take place in “neutral territory” – places outside of the class and the office. Given the many student outcomes that such interactions impact, it is extraordinarily important that large institutions, like The University of Arizona, find more ways to give the large Tier One courses a “small class feel” in order to facilitate interactions that will be beneficial to our students. **One way that we propose to accomplish that goal is to connect SFI funds to our Tier One classes and to provide the instructors with training that will help them connect with students, which we will address in the proposal below.**

For nearly 20 years, The University of Arizona has encouraged student-faculty interactions through the Student/Faculty Interaction Grants program (SFI), which provides funds to faculty for activities with students outside of the classroom. This encourages participants to interact in less formal settings (i.e. “neutral territory”), which reduces students’ feelings of intimidation. Faculty members apply to the program for grants to fund a wide array of events, including outdoor activities, one-on-one lunches, arts and entertainment, or even dinner at their homes. This program has become an integral part of both the faculty members’ curriculum and the students’ opportunity to meet with their instructors and fellow students outside the classroom setting, and has been growing each year.

Since 1999, the Student Affairs Office has provided funding to over 6,000 faculty to interact with over 25,000 students outside of the classroom. In 2007 alone, the SFI Grant Program provided over \$26,000 towards events that reached over 4,500 students and 600 faculty members. Faculty members and students have praised the program and shared the success with other faculty, which has resulted in the program reaching virtually every college on campus.

A 2004 assessment of the program indicates a powerful impact on student learning, engagement and retention. Students who participated in a Student/Faculty Interaction event noted:

Increased Engagement in the Learning Environment – 67% of the students who participated in a student-faculty interaction event reported an increase in their active engagement in their large lecture course. The impact of SFI on the learning environment became increasingly positive over the course of the semester. Students were more likely to make positive remarks about the effect of SFI on their learning after they participated in an SFI event (62% of students in pre-test vs. 88% of students in the post-test).

Increased desire to interact with faculty member outside of lecture setting – 62% of students in the Student-Faculty Interaction Group perceived that they spent more time interacting with faculty members outside of lecture after attending a student-faculty interaction activity. When asked if they would participate in SFI beyond office hours and class discussion on the pre-test, 26/194 (13%) of the respondents said they would compared to 33/116 (28.5%)

¹ See, for example, Endo and Harpel (1982), Kuh (1995), Kuh and Hu (2001), and Tam (2002).

respondents in the post-test. Students who participated in an SFI event were more likely to consider future Faculty-Student interactions than students who had not participated in an SFI event.

Increased positive perceptions of faculty member – 76% of the students who participated in a student-faculty interaction event found their faculty members more approachable and 66% of the students who attended a student-faculty interaction event reported that their participation positively influenced their perceptions of their faculty members.

PROPOSAL

Given the evidence that large lecture environments tend to discourage students from connecting with their professors, and the fact that student/faculty interactions outside of the class are correlated with first-year persistence, we propose to connect Student/Faculty Interaction Grant funds to large Tier One lecture courses. At The University of Arizona, all students are required to enroll in Tier One courses. Class size in these General Education courses is large, ranging in number from about 150 to well over 500 students. In these classes “Students are exposed to various areas of study and acquire valuable skills and knowledge applicable to their lives at the University and beyond. Tier One courses introduce students to fundamental issues and concepts pertinent to three study areas: Traditions and Cultures (Trad), Individuals and Societies (INDV), and Natural Sciences (NATS)” (<http://gened.arizona.edu/gened/general/nutshell.htm#TIER>).

While it would be ideal to connect the SFI funds to all of the courses, it would cost approximately \$200,000 per year to do so as there are nearly 800 General Education sections per year. It is our goal to be able to provide such funds in the future in order to impact every first year student who sets foot on the University of Arizona campus. However, in order to establish such a standard, it will be important to demonstrate the effectiveness of such a strategy through a pilot program.

Consequently, the Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs, Lynette Cook Francis, and the Vice President for Instruction, Juan Garcia, would like to request funding from the Parents and Family Association in order to create such a pilot program. The proposed pilot program would offer the following features:

- \$200.00 per section to support activities outside of the classroom;
- Training for the instructors on how to create engaging activities and help create the “small classroom feel” in a large lecture environment, how to better connect with students in a large lecture environment, and how to better understand the needs of today’s students;
- A meeting with faculty during the semester to assess the program and provide support for the involved faculty members;
- Regular teaching journals to help assess effective and ineffective activities both in an outside of the classroom environment.
- The use of a control group to provide comparative information regarding the effect and impact of this program on students and faculty who receive SFI funds and students and faculty who do not engage in SFI funded activities.

By funding this grant, the Parents and Family Association will be supporting an innovative partnership between Academic and Student Affairs that combines the strengths of each area: Academic Affairs’ strong curriculum and Student Affairs’ expertise on student development.

Even as a pilot, this initiative will have significant impact. It will provide training for and shape the future teaching of fifteen faculty members and teaching assistants who teach thousands of students per year. And it will influence the learning of over 4,000 freshmen. The lessons learned by faculty, teaching assistants, and students should have a positive effect on all of the groups’ future experiences at The University of Arizona.

FUNDING REQUEST

In order to fund this pilot program, the Office of Student Affairs and the Vice President for Instruction request \$200 per section to fund a wide variety of student/faculty activities outside of the classroom including going to films, plays and museums, dinners, etc. In addition, we request \$60 each for the training of 15 faculty members and 45 teaching assistants.

Budget	
\$200 per section for 90 sections (approx. 3000 students)	\$18,000
Training for 15 Faculty and 45 TAs	\$3,600
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Total:	\$21,600
Amount requested from Parents Association	\$21,600

MEASURES AND ASSESSMENT

After every funded event, participants return to the Student Affairs Office rosters of faculty and students who participated in the activity and a brief written evaluation of the program. We use this information in assessment, to solicit support for additional grants and awards, and also in publications that highlight the program.

We will survey the student and faculty participants to ensure that our goal of increasing student learning, engagements and retention is met. The survey will include questions on the impact of SFI on teaching practices, on continued engagement between students and faculty, and on student learning.

RECOGNITION FOR PARENTS ASSOCIATION/PARENTS AND FAMILY PROGRAMS

If this proposal is accepted, the Student Affairs Office will ensure acknowledgement of the Parent and Family Association at SFI activities, and in SFI grant correspondence including 3-D memos, grant applications, award letters, and on the Student Affairs web site. Print recognition will be provided in Student Affairs publications.