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TSSA Grant Report Winter 2011

Conference attended: Lilly West, Pomona, March 2011

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I would like to thank the TRC for enabling me to attend the teaching conference Lilly West in March of 2011 in order to further my professional growth. Without the funding from the TRC I would not have been able to attend.

Lilly West March 2011

The main themes of the conference were: (1) Just-in-time teaching; (2) The use of technologies to enhance student learning, and (3) Best practices in online classes. I attended several sessions on each theme and gained valuable information, part of which I have implemented in my classes. Additionally, the research and practices presented have inspired me to engage in a variety of research projects, some of which are now supported and funded by the TRC.

First, the sessions on just-in-time teaching focused on the question how instructors can enhance student comprehension of the material by knowing which concepts students did not understand. Very often instructors don't know whether students understood a certain concept or not because students may be embarrassed to ask the instructor for clarification. Also, students may think that they understood the material when they did not. Thus, they will continue the class thinking that they are well prepared for the exam when they are not. Just-in-time-teaching provides instructors with an opportunity to determine before class whether students did or did not understand the material. The assessment process is straight forward. The instructor gives students an online quiz or a hard copy that must be turned in the day before the next class. The instructor will go over the student answers and know right away which concepts need to be clarified and what was well understood. The instructor prepares a discussion of the concepts that need clarification for the beginning of the next class before moving on to the next lesson. Ensuring that students understand the material is especially important in classes where the concepts build on one

another. If a student misunderstand something at the beginning that student could feel lost for the rest of the quarter or semester. Just-in-time-teaching gives instructors instant feedback rather than waiting until the first exam, when it is too late for the students. Weekly assessment of student comprehension also allows for immediate correction and adjustment of teaching methods. For instance, maybe students need more examples, hands-on work, or visuals to understand the material. I have incorporated this technique in my Statistics class by using the classroom response system TopHatMonocle. After I explain a certain concept (such as the measures of center), I ask students to solve two or three problems and submit their answers. The answers are unanimous. I only see the number of students who gave a certain answer. This immediate feedback allows me to address misunderstandings right away before I move on to the next concept. Additionally, I'm also conducting a research study funded by the TRC to assess whether this use of the classroom response system is effective in reducing statistics anxiety.

Second, many sessions focused on the use of technologies, such as facebook, twitter, wikis, blog, discussion board, and online survey tools. The purpose of these technologies is to enhance student learning by fostering deep learning and student engagement and by using the "language" that the high tech generation uses. These technologies were also used to build a student community, especially in online classes. I implemented Blog and Discussion Board projects in my Corrections class, which was taught in the summer as an online class. In collaboration with Dr. Amy Leh, the results of this teaching approach are being presented at the SITE conference in March 2012. The main result of our study was that the evaluation of the usefulness of Blog and Discussion Board by students appears to

depend on prior knowledge about these technologies. Dr. Leh's students were graduate students in educational technology and were well versed with Blog and Discussion Board. They all very positively commented on both technologies and felt that they were effective learning tools and effective in building a learning community. My students were undergraduate criminal justice students, most of whom had never used Blog (only 1 student knew how to use Blog). Almost all of them had used the Discussion Board before. The evaluation of the technologies by my students was much more diverse, that is, some students really liked it, some thought it was "ok," and some hated it. The most common issues were getting familiar with Blogs and figuring out how to do it. Our study will be continued this year to add more data (we had small sample with 11 and 30 students, respectively) and to add an additional component to the research question. The question is whether student use and evaluation of the technologies depends on their personality and how they communicate.

Finally, the conference also emphasized best practices in online teaching. Online classes are becoming more popular at public Universities, which also reflects in the Cal State Online Initiative. Several sessions provided helpful insight into what works and what doesn't in an online learning environment. One of the Universities presented a unique and effective approach in supporting faculty who were teaching online classes. They created a Center and solicited the best online instructors of their University to act as mentors and developers for other faculty. Participation is voluntary. Faculty can come to the Center and provide them with access to their current online class. The class is then evaluated by three of the mentors. The faculty receives a lengthy and detailed report on the strengths

and weaknesses of the online class. Following the mentors meet with the faculty member and discuss an implementation plan for the revision of the online class. The faculty member works with the Center personnel and the mentors until the class is finished. Some of their classes have received national recognition and one class was named the “best online class of the year.” I believe that this approach would also be effective at CSUSB as we move towards the implementation of more online classes that target non-traditional students.