

Internship Written Report

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Description of work projects

Through the *Virtual Mentoring Project* I hoped to bring together Native American college students from the UNM American Indian Science & Engineering Society Student Organization with a class of sixth grade students at Santa Clara Day School (SCDS) on the Santa Clara Reservation via a blended learning environment for the specific purpose of supporting successful science fair projects.

The *Virtual Mentoring Project* UNM students were able to provide assistance to SCDS elementary students primarily through e-mail, text messaging, phone conference, online chat and occasional face-to-face meetings. This enabled college students to mentor the children at a time that suits their busy schedules. College students provide assistance to the elementary students with science fair procedures, research and general school related advice. As most of the college students have experienced the Science Fair first hand, they are uniquely qualified to mentor the elementary children in this project. The benefits of virtual mentoring are substantial for both groups of students:

Elementary Student Benefits :

College Student Benefits:

- Develop bonds with caring, supportive
- Telementoring enables students to

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| adult role models | participate in community service not |
| • Receive higher level of one-on-one support for Science Fair | otherwise possible due to schedule and transportation constraints |
| • Improve technology skills through "real world" application | • Experience satisfaction from helping a child achieve |
| • Learn to view college as something Indians can achieve | • Gains a deeper understanding of the importance of science education |

To achieve our goal of supporting successful science fair projects several needs were identified:

1. UNM students need to be able to understand what being a telementor was all about in order to support their mentees success.
2. Due to time constraints on UNM students and deadlines on science fair projects the entire project needed to be carefully coordinated.
3. Due to the nature of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society Science Fair, to which students would be entering projects, resources for students and their parents would need to be developed.
4. One of the goals of the project was to provide a replicable model for other AISES college chapters to implement so project documentation was an important aspect of the overall agenda.

Self-evaluation of work undertaken

While virtual mentoring was not a new concept, it is new to both the UNM and SCDS students. I had previously managed such a project with the SCDS teacher/work-site supervisor, Phyllis Jenkins. We meet and agreed we needed to take our experience with virtual mentoring to a new level with the intention of building a "tool box" of resources for all participants to learn and grow from the experience. In order to meet the needs identified in the previous section we came up with a list of products (see Appendix of Katrina Coke's Professional Portfolio - <http://portfolio.ndnedtech.com> for examples of internship products) I would generate for the project:

1. Project website: A project website would be used to promote the project for all stakeholders involved and as a place to share information among interested parties.
2. Moodle CMS site: A Moodle (see <http://moodle.org> for more information about this CMS) site hosted by the Technology & Education Center at UNM would be developed to provide resources for students and their families on the topic of Science Fair.
3. A repository of resources specifically related to telementoring along with a plan for supporting mentors through-out the process.

Additionally, other documents and artifacts of the project would be made available to all

parties as well as anyone interested in replicating the experience within their own organization.

As this project was unique on many levels, most of the products were designed specifically to meet the needs of the learners involved. It was challenging to research and collect resources on both science fairs and telementoring then to adapt those resources and develop instructional materials and training suitable for both Native American children and adults. As a Native American myself having worked with 25 Native American schools and organizations from around the country in the last 10 years, I feel I am uniquely suited to this task.

In general I feel I was able to successfully manage the project without significant issues, however one incident served to remind me how important it is to consider the implication of cultural protocol when working within our communities.

On a visit to Santa Clara Day School two of the UNM students were not able to ride with me to the site but made arrangements to meet us there. These students had never traveled to this part of the state before and ended up getting lost on the way. Ordinarily this would be considered a minor inconvenience but the area they found themselves lost in was known to the locals as a "witchy" community. For many Native people the practice of "bad medicine" is very taboo and people who do so are avoided at all costs. The fact that I had failed to protect these students from potential exposure to harm could have jeopardized the entire project.

Fortunately, I realized the severity of my failure and apologized to the students. In addition, I made sure that clear directions and a map to the school were given to each of the participants and provided both mine and the SCDS teacher's cell phone numbers with instructions to call immediately if they got lost. I believe my understanding of the issue and response to the incident defused what could have been a bad situation. This was an issue of trust which is very important when working in Native communities.

How the Internship developed skills or professional goals

The products I created during the project design, development and implementation allowed me to practice and improve on many of the skills I obtained during my coursework in the OLIT program. I particularly improved in instructional design, distance learning, project management and learning systems development. The skills I was able to hone during the internship still serve me well as I continue to work in both the K-12 and higher education environments. Without this opportunity to practice these skills in a professional setting I doubt if I would have been able to be as effective in these areas as I am today.

Relation of work to program focus

One of the main reasons I selected OLIT out of the several degree programs I

looked at was the emphasis on adult learning. Both my BS degree and the bulk of my experience was in the K-9 learning environments and I wanted to get into more adult learning theory to improve my work in professional development. Working closely with the UNM students in this project (most of whom were in their mid-20s) gave me the opportunity to develop and practice using the adult learning theories I was introduced to in my coursework. This tied into, not only one of my main professional goals but also a main OLIT program focus.

Designing and delivering the telementoring training for the UNM students and implementing the CMS for the project gave me a chance to directly apply concepts and skills learned in both Instructional Design and Instructional Multimedia classes.

Although my program focus was on instructional multimedia I actually found the organizational learning piece helpful in guiding my work in the context of the two organizations (SCDS and AISES UNM Chapter) I was working with. I found I had to spend a lot of time with the organizations learning their specific needs and environments in order to effectively manage the project. So, for example, in order to develop a relationship with the AISES chapter I needed to attend their meetings and join in on fund-raising activities and other events. This is a common expectation among Native American organizations and most of the important organizational work is done while, for example, while cooking frybread for Indian Tacos or sitting at an information table at a Pow Wow.

Although I had not planned to go into distance learning, I found this project gave me an opportunity to expand on the concepts we studied in distance learning class. It also led me to consider further study in this field which eventually led to me obtaining certification in synchronous learning through NMSU.

Overall evaluation of the learning experience as a whole

Although I had worked with Ms. Jenkins previously in a similar project there were distinct differences that made this project unique. I was new to New Mexico, UNM and the communities in which I was working. While this created some challenges I feel through the support and guidance of Dr. Good I was able to overcome any obstacles.

From the beginning I encountered challenges. The school I had originally chosen to work with pulled out after a few weeks into the project forcing me to rethink the entire program. Although, I had already approached the AISES students with the proposal and the kids were looking forward to the project, I almost changed to an entirely different plan. It was Dr. Good that convinced me to stick with the original plan and find another school to participate. Fortunately, Phyllis Jenkins decided to come on board with her class and, as we already had a good working relationship, I decided to pursue the project with her students.

Another obstacle was financial. While I had support from my position as a GA at the TEC, there were still costs associated with the program that needed to be covered.

The AISES students attempted to get funding through their organization but that fell through. I ended up working extra duty helping out with fund-raising efforts to pay for those expenses.

With a shortage of funds to consider I was unable to provide stipends for the students as I had hoped. I had to get creative with student incentives. One of the solutions we came up with was to give students community service hours which went towards a scholarship for the National AISES conference which was highly motivational. I also committed to providing the students with tech support for various projects they needed for school. For example, one student wanted to do a website for a class final project and another wanted to do a video. I provided support for those projects at the student's convenience and at no cost. I even went so far as to coerce a friend (who was a professional photographer and owed me a favor) to photograph one of the student's wedding at no cost! I can honestly say that while these methods may have been unorthodox, they were effective and contributed to the success of the project.

The overall management of the project turned out to be more time consuming than I had planned. I had to work closely with both SCDS and UNM AISES to develop and promote an open, trusting relationship with them both. This meant constant communication via phone and email with 15 participants amounting to more than 300 emails and countless phone conversations. In the process of supporting the project I spent quite a lot of time visiting SCDS and found myself acting as informal mentor to

about half of the class. This added another group of participants I communicated with on a regular basis. Perhaps the most valuable part of the entire experience was learning time management skills.

In conclusion I feel that this internship was exceptional learning experience. I was able to establish new relationships and solidify old ones with many people in the communities of Albuquerque and Santa Clara as well as the organizations I worked with. I also came away with an new found confidence in my abilities as an educator and project manager. I am extremely grateful for the support I received from Dr. Judith Good and others who supported me in the OLIT program.