

California State University
Northridge
Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling

Information Competence Grant Proposal

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Ensuring Information Competence in Educational Psychology & Counseling Graduate Students

Information Competence Grant Proposal

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Abstract

This project describes two core processes that will be used to ensure information competence in EPC graduate students. The first core process involves an initial assessment of computer skills and basic information competence of students enrolled in a required prerequisite class, followed by access to appropriate referrals and developmental resources for those who need additional support and course assignments to enhance skills, with a final assessment of skills before movement into the graduate program. The second core process involves infusing ACRL competency standards into specific core classes (including EPC 602, Research Principles), following by an assessment of students' demonstrated ability of information competence before moving to the final phase of graduate study B the master's thesis/project.

Background

The Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling (EPC), one of six departments in the College of Education, has the largest graduate enrollment in the university and is one of the largest academic departments on campus. In Fall 2000, the nearly 350 graduate students in the department's two degree programs, Master of Science in Counseling and Master of Arts in Education, comprised 11% of the graduate population at CSUN.

As a prerequisite to departmental master's programs, students are required to complete EPC 451, Fundamental of Counseling and Guidance, prior to admittance to the formal program. Each academic year, approximately 160 students enroll in this undergraduate class.

As a culmination to graduate education, each student is required to write a thesis/graduate project or take a comprehensive examination. This semester, Spring 2001, 106 graduate students are enrolled in EPC 698C, Thesis/Graduate Project, while 15 students are taking EPC 697, Directed Comprehensive Studies (preparation for the comprehensive examination). In preparation for both culminating experiences, students are required to take EPC 602, Research Principles. Each academic year, EPC 602 normally has an enrollment of 120 students.

The impact of our graduates throughout the community is meaningful and far-reaching. Upon graduation, they teach, counsel, and administer in schools with early childhood programs (pre-K through 3rd grade) through elementary and secondary grades to programs in higher education. In addition to graduates' influence in schools, many choose to work in community organizations and

agencies as career and mental health counselors, research and assessment coordinators, and program developers. Thus, requiring that graduates have information competence as a learning outcome for their degree program will not only impact their professional performance, but also the learning of those they teach and counsel.

The Problem

Although each candidate for admittance to graduate programs in the EPC department must meet specified prerequisite requirements, no preference is given to candidates with a particular undergraduate major. Therefore, the candidates we admit may have majored in such far-ranging areas as: psychology, English, mathematics, business, art, or health science. This diversity normally provides a rich blend of knowledge and experience within graduate classes; however, this strength creates its own difficulty. Students' backgrounds may be far different in specific skill areas, for example, writing, statistics, research, and information competence. Each year the department faculty has identified a skill area that needs to be strengthened, and has developed a plan to address that area. (For the AY 2000-2001, we are emphasizing writing skills.)

The department faculty is very concerned with the quality of master's theses, as well as with the quality of student research in general. Differing backgrounds in undergraduate education have resulted in uneven training in the type of research necessary for academic success in the field of educational psychology and counseling. We want our students to be fully literate in the field and able to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information."

Purpose of Proposal

The purpose of this proposal is to incorporate the skills of information competence in the department's student learning outcomes, so that information competence is a required learning outcome for the degree program. This will enable students to conduct successfully the type of research necessary for a thesis of master's degree quality and fulfill one of the requirements for graduation, as well as provide life-long professional skills in dealing competently with information, plus thinking and reasoning.

Project Activities

Department faculty members and appropriate members of the library faculty will develop plans, at a working retreat, for creating the following two core processes in order to incorporate the skills of information competence in student learning within the department curriculum. The initial design of these processes, to be developed in detail at the retreat, is outlined below.

Core Process One (Computer Skills)

1. Assess all students enrolled in prerequisite class (i.e., EPC 451) to determine level of basic computer skills. (Use Florida International University as a model, Internet: www.fiu.edu/%7Elibrary/ili/iliprop.html)
2. For those whose skill level is unacceptable, identify (in conjunction with library faculty) appropriate referral and developmental resources
3. Determine how students will be assessed after use of resources
4. Develop appropriate assignments in prerequisite class to enhance computer skills and basic information competence

Core Process Two (Information Competence)

1. Based on the ACRL's *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (2000) and model programs, develop (in conjunction with library faculty) learning outcome goals in information competence for core graduate courses, including Research Principles (EPC 602) as a "cornerstone class," and Laws and Ethics for Counselors (EPC 676), as well as other core courses.
2. Frame meaningful questions and develop appropriate assignments for these core courses and specialty courses that promote information competence
3. Determine (in conjunction with appropriate library faculty) a process for assessing performance relative to the outcome goals in number 1 above.

Library faculty will be involved in each step of project activities as consultants and participants.

Deliverables

1. Assessment instrument used to assess basic computer skills
2. List of appropriate referral sources
3. Determination regarding how students will be assessed after use of referrals;
4. Syllabi for required courses in department that specifically identify assignments that promote information competence.
5. Department mission statement that includes information competence as an objective
6. Representative assignments in which students are being asked to demonstrate the various skills of information competence
7. Web pages that provide the proposal, the activities, and the deliverables.

Timeline

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| March 2001: | Identify 3-5 faculty members who will work with chair to develop plans for retreat and follow-up on retreat outcomes. |
| March 2001: | Identify library faculty members, who will work with department faculty |
| March to June 2001: | Develop plans for retreat. |
| August 2001: | Hold retreat |

Core Process One (Computer Skills)

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| September 2001: | Assess student's computer skills in EPC 451, give feedback, and make appropriate referrals. |
| September 2001: | November, 2001: Give appropriate assignments in prerequisite class to enhance computer skills and basic information competence. |
| December 2001: | Assess computer skills of the students in EPC 451 who had unacceptable skills in September 2001. |
| January 2002: | Deliver results of Core Sequence One project (See Deliverables Section) |

Core Process Two (Information Competence)

- September 2001: Add learning outcome goals (based on ACRL's Standards to EPC 602 and other core classes
- Oct. - Nov. 2001: Further develop appropriate assignments for EPC 602 and other core courses that promote information competence.
- Oct. - Dec. 2001: Develop approach for assessment of performance on ACRL's Standards
- February 2002: Implement goals and assignments in core courses.
- Feb. - May 2002: Assess performance on ACRL's standards.
- June 2002: Deliver results of Core Sequence Two Project

Budget

\$2,900	Two-day retreat for 16 faculty members to plan core processes one and two.
\$2,900	Partial compensation for planning committee effort, plus project administration, including preparation and copying of materials for final report.
Total:	\$5,800

Qualifications

Rie Rogers Mitchell, department chair and project director, has had extensive experience in research and various aspects of information competence. During a 35-year career as a researcher and university professor, she has written numerous articles and is currently preparing a second book. All of these have required extensive research.

All EPC faculty members are skilled researchers with excellent computer and information competence skills. Three faculty members give workshops on basic computer skills and information competency. These are Drs. Greg Jackson, Bernard Nisenholz, and Merril Simon. Dr. Nisenholz, who teaches EPC 451, has already infused some aspects of the ACRL standards into this class, but without the detailed assessment of skills that we plan to ultimately include as part of this project. Drs. Michael Auer and Beverly Cabello, who teach EPC 602, include some elements from the ACRL standards in this class, but again these have not been assessed.

Library faculty members have outstanding expertise in information competence. Through consultation, an appropriate library faculty member will be contacted to act as a participant and consultant in the process.