

2006 Summer Instructional Development Grant
Needs Analysis for the Grant Proposal to Develop of Online 'Plant Community Profiles' and in
Integrated IPFW Natural Areas Website'

Grant Report
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Overview:

Last Fall I submitted Instructional Development Grant to develop a natural areas webpage for campus. My proposal was not funded directly, but the CELT Board instead offered me a small amount of money to perform a needs analysis related to the grant proposal. The goals of the analysis were twofold. The primary goal was to solicit input from other IPFW faculty with interests in the campus natural areas to ensure that the final product was of maximal utility both in terms of its content and interface. The analysis was also expected to provide a venue for publicizing my proposal and increasing faculty awareness of the campus natural areas and their potential teaching (and research) uses. Additionally, the potential existed for identifying collaborators or sponsors. As outlined in the letter announcing the decision of the CELT board to support the research needs analysis was expected to be conducted over the Summer and Fall 2006 and to require no more than 40 hour of time.

As required for all grant recipients, I attended the Instructional Development Grant Institute sponsored by CELT in May of 2006. As a component of this workshop I met with Gail Rathbun, the CELT director, and Ken Jaeger, a computer specialist in Information Technology Services (ITS) with a specialization in website database design to brainstorm ideas for the needs analysis. I was encouraged to think broadly, and creatively, when identifying potential website users to include in the analysis. However, Gail warned that the response rate for such written surveys, indicated as my preference for the analysis, was frequently modest and suggested that I should also be prepared to contact the survey recipients individually by phone or in person. Ken and Gail agreed that it would be useful to refer faculty participants to the online compilations of landscape and floristic data, termed 'Plant Community Profiles' that I had prepared for a subset of the campus natural areas as a product of my 2005 CELT Instructional Development grant (Development of IPFW Biology Department 'Multi-Use' Plan Ecology Lab Exercises), as a demonstration of the types of content and interface that were possible, but with the caveat that these materials were preliminary, non-inclusive, and that the user interface was technologically unsophisticated and needed improvement. My idea of arranging for tours of the campus natural areas as a complement to the needs analysis was also encouraged.

Grant Work (Needs Analysis):

In preparation for the needs analysis, I compiled a comprehensive list of campus natural areas, recognizing nearly twenty in total, and produced an annotated campus map showing their locations (Appendix A). I also began the process of updating and expanding the short written descriptions of the campus natural areas that I had initially prepared as a component of the 'Plant

Community Profiles' (Appendix B). I toured the campus with Dr. Jack Sunderman, a retired IPFW geology professor, to learn more about the geological features of the campus, and also of Allen County, more generally. I also contacted Chet Shastri, the Director of Fort Wayne's water filtration plant, located directly downstream of the campus on the St. Joseph River, to learn more about the history and regulation of the city's water intake dam in order to better understand its effects on the creation and maintenance of the campus wetlands.

In the early part of the Summer, I prepared the written survey (Appendix C) and contacted Janet Kelly, the Director of Special Projects for Physical Plant, and Dr. Solomon Isiohro, Geology professor and chair, to help with the campus tours that were scheduled for early August. Since Janet and Solomon are both major proponents of the campus natural areas were eager to participate and we scheduled two dates for the tours in early August. I prepared an e-mail advertising the tours and needs analysis that I sent to 15 faculty in early July (Appendix D). The faculty included representatives of four departments in the College of Arts and Sciences (Biology, Geology, English, Anthropology), in addition to faculty from the School of Visual Arts, and faculty from the School of Environmental and Public Affairs (SPEA). The faculty included in the mailings had been selected based on my survey of the IPFW Bulletin for courses with themes that seemed compatible with uses for the natural areas for instruction (labs, demonstrations, etc., Appendix E).

Unfortunately, I received only a single reply and the response of the individual was negative in the sense that he indicated that he thought that he had been included on the mailing list by error believing that he had no use for the campus natural areas. However, I subsequently learned that the formatting of the e-mail's text, which I had prepared in Microsoft Word, had been modified in the process of copying and pasting it into the body of the message so that all of the paragraphs ran together. Per Gail Rathbun's suggestion, I prepared a similar letter in printed form that was sent to the same faculty through campus mail one week later, but again the letter generated little interest and the tours were cancelled.

In the Fall semester (mid-November), I distributed the written surveys, via campus mail, along with a cover letter similar to the one I had prepared for the tours. In the letter, I introduced myself and explained the rationale for the needs analysis, and the website more generally. I also included printed examples of the online 'Plant Community Profiles' that I envisioned as serving as a starting point for the design of the website (Appendix F). The surveys were sent to the same faculty that had been including in the summer mailings plus several additional biology faculty that I had not included in my original solicitations. Again the response was modest. I received only three responses, two from biology colleagues and Dr. Isiohro in Geology. However, I also received encouraging responses from faculty in other departments although these individuals did not return completed surveys.

Assessment:

The needs analysis itself was not successful since the percentage response to the survey was too limited to generate meaningful data. However, in the process I have discovered other IPFW faculty and staff that share my enthusiasm for the project and the campus natural areas in general. Without naming specific individuals, I have identified potential collaborators from at least three departments in the College of Arts and Sciences (Geology, Anthropology, and Biology). In addition, I have been referred to a reference librarian at Helmke Library who had participated in early discussions related to the development of the Native Trees of Indiana website developed by the Grounds Department. Thus, the needs analysis was successful to the extent that it has provided that groundwork for assembling a small group of IPFW faculty and staff that

would be interested in contributing to the development of the website, either directly, or as 'consultants'.

What's Next?

The development of the campus natural areas website remains a priority to me but it is ultimately a long-term process that I have to balance with other demands on my time. As I look forward to submitting my tenure case in the Fall of 2008, my current focus is on maximizing my research productivity. I do not plan to apply for additional funding for website development for the time being, but will continue to work on the project in a piecemeal fashion as much as time and creativity permit. To keep the project moving forward, I will involve IPFW students to an increasing degree. For the coming Summer, for example, I have arranged for a senior biology major to help complete the floristic surveys of two campus natural areas. This student will prepare both photographic and physical (herbarium) documentation of all plant species at the sites. In addition, starting in the Fall of 2008 I will modify the herbarium assignment of my field botany course to include the production of web pages for a subset of the species that will be incorporated into the plant database component of the website. After submission of my tenure case I look forward to being able to focus more directly on the management and completion of the webpage.