

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

**Dean of Students Office
Student/Faculty Interaction Grants Program**

**Respectfully Submitted by
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* Per conversation with Keith Humphrey
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Overview

Research shows that students who feel more connected to faculty members and the university have a greater likelihood of retention and graduation. In the Dean of Students Office, and for any academic department applying, this connection often takes the form of a Student/Faculty Interaction grant. The Student/Faculty Interaction Grants program (SFI) provides funds to faculty for various activities with students outside of the classroom, and allows participants to interact in a less formal setting, 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.

Since its inception – originally as an idea from students in student government in 1988 – this program has impacted thousands of UA students and faculty. Budget cuts over the years have severely inhibited our ability to meet the need, which has grown tremendously. Although the emphasis of the program is on retention of first and second year undergraduate students, faculty and staff realize the value of these interactions and repeatedly request funds for activities involving upper class students. Precisely because of the profound impact students feel after participating in an SFI-funded event, the Dean of Students Office would also like to extend the invitation to the few departments who have never applied. Neither of these needs can be met because of the challenge to find adequate, consistent funding.

Abstract

For almost 20 years the Dean of Students Office has provided funding to faculty and staff to interact with students outside of the classroom. When students see faculty as approachable, caring individuals, boundaries disappear and real learning occurs – on both sides of the educational “equation”. To quote a recent faculty user:

“Not only do these grants provide students a chance to see their instructors outside of the classroom, vice versa is also true, and I find this makes a difference in my teaching. The students become more human! Again, my students and I thank you for the evening, and the fuller relationships thus developed.”

Recently conducted research supports anecdotal feedback – namely that after participating in an SFI event, students feel more connected to their professors, to one another, and to the University. They are more likely to come to class and less likely to be disruptive when they are there. Unfortunately, there are never enough funds to meet the demand and the Dean of Students Office seeks funding to “grow” the program to include upper class students as well.

Narrative

In 2000 the Boyer Center, founded by student affairs visionary Ernest Boyer, established a national network of institutions which share a commitment to build strong educational communities that collaborate with one another, identifying principles, practices, and assessment tools that could be adapted to new sites. In recognition of the Dean of Students Office's efforts to build strong student/faculty interactions outside of the classroom, and its innovative programming toward that end, The University of Arizona was asked to be a founding member of this prestigious Collaboratory. In 2002, the Boyer Collaboratory began an assessment of two programs administered out of our office – the Faculty Fellows and SFI grants programs – looking at the ways they build educational communities at the UA.

Around the same time, reports of incivility in the classroom came to the attention of the Dean of Students Office. Over an 18 month period in 2002 and 2003, we surveyed faculty and students in the large, general education classes many underclassmen attend to determine to what extent they experienced disruptive behavior in these classrooms. The majority of both students and faculty indicated that they had experienced disruptive behavior at some level.

Our office began an education and outreach initiative to the campus community to communicate this information. In an effort to share this information with students, we created a video which appealed to them in a humorous way and established guidelines that we hoped would lead to successful, productive learning experiences in civil classrooms with environments conducive to learning. Both national and local media outlets ran extensive stories on the video and the topic of disruptive behavior. In 2004 and 2005, during new student orientation throughout both summers, the DOS Office showed the “Arizona Idol” video on disruptive student behavior to incoming freshmen and transfer students – impacting approximately 12,000 students. Our office continues to show the video whenever meeting with a group of students to familiarize them with the University, and the resources the Dean of Students Office can provide them.

Thus engaged in the issue of disruptive behavior in the classroom, our office implemented a study to assess whether the SFI program had an effect on student behavior. What resulted is the Learning Environment Research Project, which has already revealed a number of encouraging outcomes, namely that students who participate in SFI grant funded events:

- feel more connected to the class curriculum,
- are less likely to demonstrate disruptive behavior, and
- participate more in the classroom.

Through the Boyer Collaboratory’s Partnership Assessment Project, similar conclusions about faculty involvement with SFI were being drawn:

- 81% believed this program’s results for students’ learning was worth the effort
- 77% believed students would benefit from more educational experiences like those provided by this program
- 75% believed this program embodies important values of our campus

Research results illuminate and give us tidy data to formulate. But what truly inspires is hearing what students and faculty have to say after participating in an SFI event:

“We are now more relaxed with each other. I noticed today in class a greater aura of openness to me the person, not just the ‘teacher.’ This is important, especially in regards to my pedagogy....Our conversation regarding our texts was much improved - more students spoke, more students spoke longer at a time. The (SFI) monies were an important asset to me at this early stage in the course of study with my students. Clearly, it will benefit these first-year students to establish a different kind of interaction with their teacher(s).” – Teaching Graduate Assistant

Faculty report seeing a difference after an SFI experience: attendance increases, particularly in large classes; students come earlier to class and talk to each other; there are less behavior and disciplinary

problems; students ask more questions after class and the number of e-mails increases; students are more willing to volunteer for research opportunities; and students connect with academic advisors earlier.

Students had similarly profound things to say after an SFI funded event:

- “I have three degrees from this university; I’ve been here five years and that’s the first time I’ve ever had a function like that . . . it makes the learning process more complete and makes the link between the classroom and actual real life.”
- “It (the event) helped us understand what they were teaching in class.”
- “I have had an enormous opportunity to interact with these people, which I wouldn’t have had in class. People know who I am and that feels good because I don’t feel like I’m in this humongous university where I’m just a number. I really feel like I’m a person, and my professors see me as a person, and my classmates see me as a person...”

Students also spoke about getting to know faculty on a personal level: individuals talked about their experience as putting a “common face on faculty” or “getting to know faculty as a real person, who has a real life, who has interests outside the classroom.” For some students, their experience with the SFI grant-funded event seemed to extend to other faculty as well, with one commenting that she is now more comfortable approaching other professors.

Since 1999, the DOS Office has provided funding to 5,406 faculty to interact with students outside of the classroom. (This figure represents many faculty who use the program repeatedly throughout the year, indicating a great satisfaction with its results.) During that time – 1999 to 2005 – the SFI program impacted 22,139 students in 349 areas (colleges, departments, units), by granting support in the amount of **\$175,637**. But over the same time period, faculty and staff in fact requested **\$296,170** to facilitate out-of-classroom learning – almost twice as much as what we were actually able to fund. This is with minimal marketing from the DOS Office: it is counterproductive to devote time and resources to generate interest when we cannot meet the existing need. This funding gap is what we hope support from the Parents Association can help to fill.

Until 2005, the bulk of funding for the SFI Grants program came from a contribution by the UA BookStores, which along with a \$7,000 commitment from the Dean of Students Office constitutes the only University support given to the program (budget below). The DOS Office appreciates the generosity shown from the UA BookStores but also recognizes the limitations inherent in such an arrangement: if product sales fail to reach stated goals for just one year, the SFI program is in serious jeopardy. For this reason, we constantly look for other funding opportunities and have been successful in garnering additional support from corporations such as Alltel, Xerox and IKON/HP (and the program has also enjoyed the support of the Parents Association in the past, in 1999). However, each of these grants has specific criteria for funding such as diversity-related programming, student leadership development, or community building among campus organizations: these criteria consequently don’t always allow for the flexibility we like to offer SFI applicants. It is also worth noting that none of these obligations have been paid for the 2006-2007 academic year. For this reason, these companies’ contributions were not included in the funding figures above.

Our office provides an efficient, streamlined process for faculty to apply for these grants. We meet with frequent users of the program to elicit suggestions for improvements, and in 2003 administered a customer satisfaction survey, resulting in an online application process which has proved to be very popular with users. We have had no increase in staffing to handle applications.

Funding Request

The Dean of Students Office is seeking funding from the Parents Association in order to match the level of need that UA faculty and staff consistently show for out of the classroom interaction. The SFI program’s far-reaching, profound and positive effects on faculty and students alike have been substantiated through formal research. The focus on larger, general education classes has an impact on disruptive behavior, and participants enjoy more productive learning environments as a result. The DOS Office has efficient, responsive systems in place but simply cannot meet the existing need financially, much less grow and respond to interest from other populations such as upper class students.

The Student/Faculty Interaction Grants Program impacts a large number of students and continues to grow as our class size grows. In order to meet the demand, and ensure its ability to fund events with upper class students, this program is in need of \$20,000.

Budget

Existing SFI support (through UA BookStores contribution)	\$20,000
Dean of Students Office support	\$7,000
Xerox support (not yet received for 06-07 AY) *	\$20,000
IKON/HP support (not yet received for 06-07 AY) *	\$30,000
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Total:	\$77,000

* To re-iterate, these grants have specific criteria for funding and do not have a primary goal of student/faculty interaction

Amount requested from Parents Association \$20,000

Measures and Assessment

After every funded event, participants return to the Dean of Students 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.

Recognition for Parents Association/Parents and Family Programs

If this proposal is accepted, the Dean of Students Office will build in recognition of the Parents Association and its support. The Association will be recognized verbally at each SFI activity, and in SFI grant correspondence including 3-D memos, grant applications, award letters, and on the Dean of Students Office web site. Print recognition will be provided in Dean of Students Office publications.