

Title of Grant: First Aid for Field Faculty

S2008 – 94W-CF

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Abstract:

Many VCCS science faculty (biology and geology in particular) lead outdoor field trips, and both students and faculty report the tremendous educational value of these learning experiences. To ensure the safety of trip participants, we proposed to offer VCCS instructors who lead outdoor field trips training in Wilderness First Aid.

Actual Outcomes:

VCCS students benefited by being assured they are on field trips with trained personnel. They were then able to focus on their learning. VCCS instructors & field trip leaders benefited by being able to specifically state their training to prospective students. The instructors were also more confident that they knew what to do when an emergency arrives. Furthermore, and of possibly greatest benefit to instructors, will be a sense of and preparedness that the workshop fosters. This awareness will likely preclude many emergencies before they reach the point of an instructor's needing to employ first aid skills. The VCCS benefited by having increased confidence in their field-trip-leading instructors in dealing efficiently and correctly with medical incidents that may arise on their field trips, until such time as professional medical help arrives and takes over. (This proactive approach towards training field trip leaders also puts the VCCS in good legal standing while not compromising its educational mission.)

Other Colleges:

All were invited via the VCCS Science Peer Blackboard site. Final participants came from: Northern Virginia Community College - Annandale campus (4); Northern Virginia Community College - Alexandria campus (1); Northern Virginia Community College - Woodbridge campus (1); Thomas Nelson Community College - Hampton (2)

Discussion and Critique:

This was an excellent opportunity for faculty who lead field trips to learn new skills and perspectives. It is our opinion that such training should be provided more readily to those instructors who take students into the field. Education research and student feedback suggest that field learning experiences are valuable learning experiences, but they do carry risks not associated with classroom experiences. Accordingly, to best serve our students, we must not only plan effective field trips, but also prepare

instructors for medical emergencies which may arise on these trips. The VCCS might consider actively promoting wilderness first aid training, as opposed to funding it on an as-asked-for basis. While we are very appreciative of having our training funded, it seems it would be more proactive to set up a program where gaining WFA skills is encouraged to everyone.

Evaluation:

All funded faculty were surveyed 6 months after the workshop. One funded faculty member wrote, "Since the training, I have encountered a few people (not in wilderness setting) who were unconscious for unknown reasons. The training helped me calmly and efficiently assess and treat these individuals, and ultimately decide on appropriate level of follow-up care." Another noted that, "Since the class, I find myself sizing up my group of students and our surroundings, looking for potential problems. This is helpful. Specifically, last week a student who is diabetic was part of our hiking group. I understand diabetes easier and felt ready to help when she suddenly broke out in a sweat and had to sit down." In ranking the efficacy of the workshop's various aspects, surveyed faculty ranked every aspect as a 9 or 10 out of 10 possible. These positive results reflect the perceived utility of receiving the training. Those surveyed unanimously claimed that they felt the WFA training was worth the time they put into it. One respondent said that the workshop was "absolutely worth the time. Emergency situations are hectic regardless; this level of advanced training will only help to handle any situation that may arise with students, regardless of physical setting." Another said that the WFA training was a "perfect use of mini-workshop grant funds- [this training] should be required for faculty who take students into the field."

VCCS Benefits:

Through this grant and supplementary support from Abe Eftekhari, NOVA-Annandale Dean of Math, Science, and Engineering, eight field-trip-leading biology and geology faculty were trained and certified in Wilderness First Aid skills. If an emergency medical situation were to arise on any field trip that they lead, they now have the skills to diagnose and treat certain conditions until professional medical help arrives. These eight faculty are also now versed in the legal responsibilities and ramifications of providing medical care, an important skill set in today's litigious society.