

Summary of Mini-Grant Experience

Tiffany Glassman (8/9/02)

The purpose of my mini-grant project was to help develop the activities that took place at the Maui Education Workshop in May 2002. I worked closely with Lisa Hunter, Barry Kluger-Bell, Candice Brown, Anne Metevier, and Sally Duensing to plan and carry out the inquiry training and development activities at that conference. My first contribution to the process was creating a list of existing CfAO activities that could be turned into inquiry-based activities (see attached document).

I also helped shape the plans for the activities in Maui. I really wanted to keep the meeting focused on the kind of teaching the participants would be doing, so that the meeting would be as relevant to them as possible. With this in mind, I suggested that the initial exploratory activity be something related to light, optics, astronomy, etc. Barry came up with a great activity involving the gray-step card which I think went off very well. Anne and I helped Barry determine which optics activities would be at an appropriate level for the Maui participants which led to a good mix of simple and complex phenomena. I also pushed to keep as much time as possible for the development of our own inquiry activities on the last day of the meeting.

The meeting went very well as a result of our collective effort. I think the participants were much happier with the outcome than after the first meeting because they walked away with activities that they could immediately put into place in their teaching. It was very gratifying to hear the reports of how well the inquiry went at the CfAO internship orientation shortly after the Maui meeting.

During the meeting Anne and I also helped facilitate a few discussions and the inquiry activity itself. I learned a lot from the process of facilitating. It is much harder than it looks and it was great to have Barry standing by to help out. Running into problems and then asking Barry for help and seeing how he could move through the problems was a great learning experience.

It was also educational for me to watch Barry and Candice planning for the optics inquiry we did in Maui. It helped me get a better understanding of the process of developing a lesson plan (not just for inquiry activities) which paid off in trying to develop my own inquiry plan on the last day. Working so closely with Barry and Candice also gave me a better understanding of what inquiry is and how it can (or can't) be applied in different situations. It really brought home the idea that not everything has to be a full-fledged inquiry, but that student learning can be improved by incrementally moving an activity to be more open-ended and learner-driven.

I think the clearest result for me of being involved with CfAO educational activities is the way I taught my introductory Astronomy class this summer. Talking to and working with people committed to better educational practices led me to try to integrate hands-on activities and other current educational practices into my teaching. I look forward to continued contact with education professionals such as Lisa, Barry, Candice, and Sally so I can continue to improve my own teaching skills.