MICROSOFT TEACHER TRANING GRANT SUPPORT: HISTORY OF A LONG TERM
COMMITMENT TO A STATE UNIVERSITY
TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM

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INTRODUCTION

In the mid 1980's SUNY Cortland was a member of a consortium of NYS colleges receiving grant support in the form of hardware and software from IBM corporation. At the end of that funding support, consortium members were encouraged to apply for a new source of funding (Microsoft software support).

This paper will describe the Microsoft grant partnership program for higher education.. The paper will also outline types of progress made at SUNY Cortland which could not have been made without such support; describe some of the difficulties of a software grant (as opposed to grants which supply funds for hardware, personnel, etc.) Finally, the paper will make some points about corporate grants as "philanthropy or marketing," which are two possible ways to look at such sources of support.

HISTORY

Microsoft Corporation initiated software grants which coincided with the marketing of Windows software. The proposals requested information concerning the institutions requesting the software, proposed uses in teacher education, platforms, and proposed curricular innovations. Over the years both the proposal and evaluation processes have been streamlined. Software grants take the form of site licenses for (usually) the total number of computers which might be located in a computer teaching lab and are usually worth approximately $35,000 a year.

ISSUES

In the early years of the grant process, several problems emerged which are worthy of note: First, in terms of "who's in charge", it was difficult to determine the person/persons who should be signing the software license agreements, due to the many conditions imposed on the college by the agreements.. In more recent years, the college has hired an Associate VP for Information Technology which has centralized computer services and

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signing such agreements on behalf of the college is no longer so difficult. Another problem which has impacted our campus is the sheer volume of shipments, and what to do with "older" software which, due to the license, really is not ours to dispose of. In SUNY Cortland's case, we have a room full of boxes of software (note: software packaging has never been noted for space conservation). Some items are out of date (earlier versions of Encarta, for example) but none has ever been destroyed. It is not ours to donate, and so it takes up valuable space. Other issues which have plagued us include: rapid

turnover of contact people at Microsoft who deal with these grants. Another difficulty in the early years of the grant was hardware. Since this was clearly a software grant, it did not provide funds for either hardware or staffing…and often a gift of software had hardware implications. In the early 90's many of the lab computers did not have facility for sound – neither speakers or headphones. Much Microsoft software of the instructional kind did need sound capabilities. It was difficult to convince the "powers that be" that a grant could be COSTING them money, as they needed to purchase hardware to show off the software's capabilities. These problems have decreased over the years, but were monumental at first..

PROGRESS ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE GRANT

SUNY Cortland did a number of things using grant software which we would probably not have done (or not have done as soon) due to the Microsoft grant. Among them was the effort to teach an integrated package on **both** IBM and Mac platforms to teacher education students. A course, EDU 314, was developed which emphasized use of word processing, graphics, spreadsheets in educational applications. Microsoft Works was used and taught on both platforms so teachers would be ready for whatever school configuration in which they found themselves. Also a course for school administrators was developed using Word, Excell and Access – that course would probably not have been developed or taught without the Microsoft support.

PHILANTHROPY OR MARKETING?

Eight years ago, the author of this paper and a colleague (Stuck and Ware, 1993) did an analysis of some corporate technology grants (specifically IBM Program for Teacher Preparation and Advancement and Apple's Classroom of Tomorrow program). Some of the findings of this analysis seem relevant to the Microsoft grant program also, and will be mentioned here and discussed in more detail in the presentation.

This analysis was prompted by concerns stated by Apple (1988) and others which relate to the philosophical issue of whether (or how much) industry/business should be involved in (and dictate the goals of) education.

An underlying theme in the previous paper and in this one is that such corporate grant programs may not be as philanthropic (nor research oriented) as they seem. When analyzed carefully for the hidden curriculum to which they contribute, some interesting ideas emerge: One sees a curriculum in which one type of computer or computer configuration or software is considered "best"; a curriculum which seeks research data to support its own claims; and a curriculum which seeks to replicate itself, thus providing a large installed base of a certain type of computer (or specific software) in the schools -- and thereby influencing purchase in the homes and future business sites of the students affected.

CONCLUSION

An earlier paper analyzed documents from the ACOT project supported by Apple Computer and IBM/NYS's partnership with public schools and schools of Education. This paper extends that "look" to the Microsoft Higher Education partnership grants.

This paper's message is simple: grant proposals are not always what they seem. Computer corporations' gifts may make it possible to accomplish things otherwise impossible, given teacher education program budgets. However, a seemingly benign document may also be a front for getting industry's foot in the door. Software grants may cost money, while appearing to "save money" Institutions must look carefully at industry education cooperation, so that the goals/aims of both may be served.

REFERENCES

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