

Project "Peer Resource Network for Foreign Teaching Assistants" started and coordinated by the Teaching Assistant Development Program

September 18, 1986

Media Contact: Paul Lowenberg, 534-3120

(NOTE: Members of the media who wish to attend a portion of the retreat are welcome to do so. Arrangements can be made by contacting Claire Langham at 534-6767 or 457-0782)

NEW PROGRAM HELPS FOREIGN TEACHING ASSISTANTS

A unique effort to help foreign teaching assistants cope with the problems of teaching undergraduates in an American university is being started at the University of California, San Diego.

The project, called "Peer Resource Network for Foreign Teaching Assistants," is directed by John Andrews and coordinated by Claire Langham of UCSD's Teaching Assistant Development Program. It is funded by the National Association of Foreign Student Affairs (NAFSA) with an additional contribution from the UCSD Graduate Student Association.

The program begins with a three-day retreat at the Rancho Del Cielo in Ramona, September 19-21, with three follow-up sessions planned during the school year.

The retreat will allow some 40 foreign teaching assistants to meet with a dozen American TA's to begin developing a peer network.

"The ultimate objective is to improve intercultural communication in the classroom," Langham said. "The project is innovative and has not previously been conducted on our campus nor in other locations."

Teaching assistants are usually graduate students who are paid to teach smaller sections of large undergraduate classes at the university.

The focus of the weekend retreat, according to Langham, will be to establish rapport between individuals and as a group, develop awareness of the expectations and differences in classroom behaviors, share teaching techniques, and prepare TA's for participation in the training workshops given all new TA's at UCSD.

For graduate students from other cultures, teaching a class of primarily American students can sometimes lead to misunderstandings and communication difficulties.

For instance, because of language differences, American students may have trouble understanding a teaching assistant from another country. Or, a foreign TA may be shocked and consider a student "disrespectful" when that student challenges or disagrees with him in class.

The Teaching Assistant Development Program at UCSD is directed by Andrews and operates within the Office of Graduate Studies headed by Dean Richard Attiyeh.

Each year more than 250 teaching assistants begin meeting with classes for the first time. At any given time there are around 600 teaching assistants instructing UCSD undergraduates.

(September 18, 1986)