

BRIEF REPORT, MARCH 2013: FAIMER network – “requests for help”

The existence of a **learning community** is a central element of the FAIMER fellowships, with terms such as “FAIMER family,” “mentoring-learning web,” and “community of practice” referring to this sense of community, connections, and common desire to learn with and from each other.

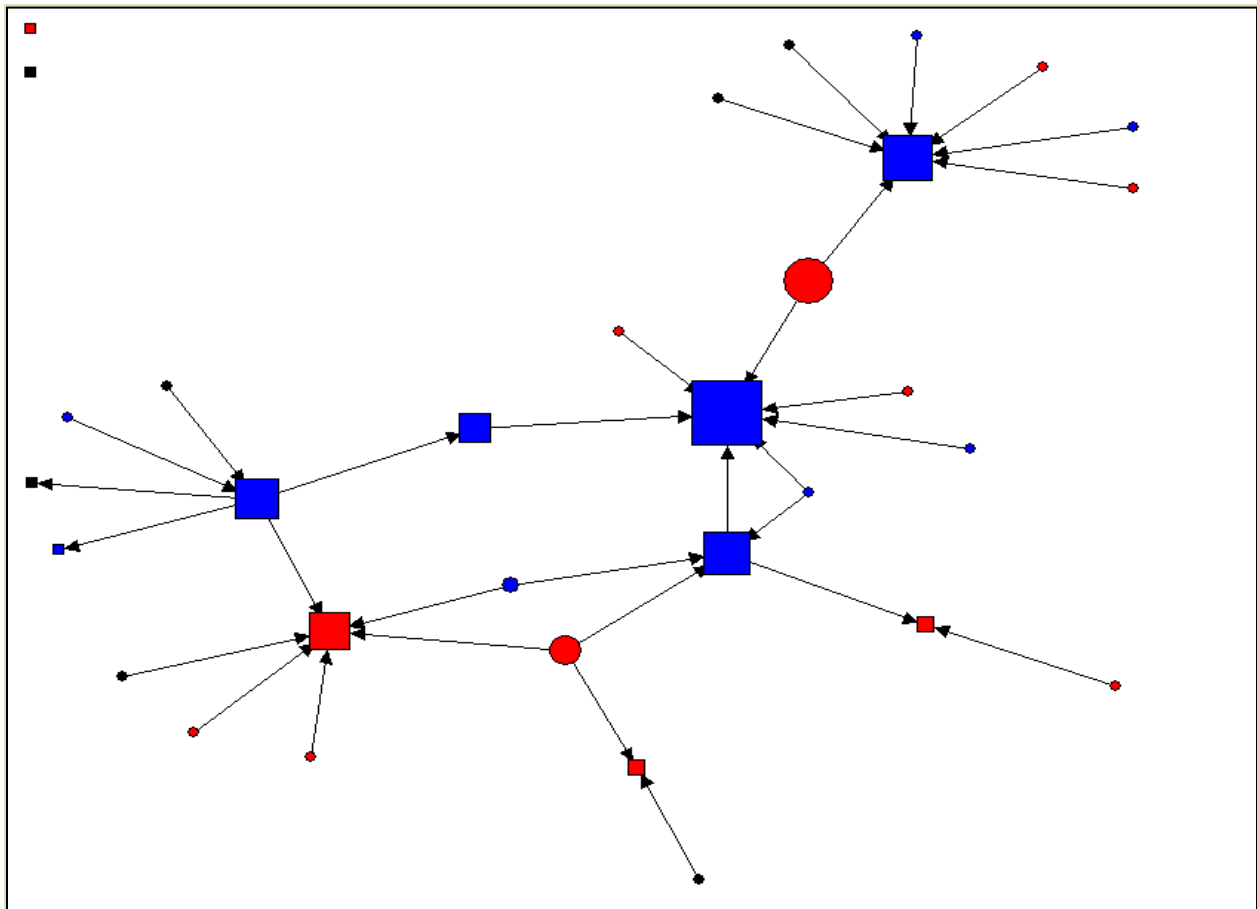
Networks have been defined as “a pattern of interconnections among a set of things” including patterns of relationships between people (Easley & Kleinberg, 2010 <http://www.cs.cornell.edu/home/kleinber/networks-book/>). “Social network analysis” is an approach to studying networks of social relationships. We can apply this approach to looking at the FAIMER community; this report shares one example.

Here we look at “**requests for help**” made on the FAIMER Institute (Philadelphia) listserv from October 2012 through February 2013. “Requests for help” were defined as messages from an individual asking for information or assistance of any kind. This did not include messages that were part of the e-learning (ML Web) modules or messages sharing news or information.

The “social network” here is the 32 individuals who requested and/or responded to requests for help during this time period. Twelve of the 32 made requests (2 individuals made 3 requests each; 10 individuals made 1 request).

In the network diagram below:

- **Circles and squares** represent one individual each – **squares** represent individuals who made requests.
- **Arrows** represent the flow of information/response from one person **to the person requesting help**.
- Current fellows (2011 and 2012 classes) are in **BLUE**, fellowship graduates are represented in **RED**, and current faculty (some of whom are also graduates) are represented in **BLACK**.
- **Size of the circles/squares** is based on a network metric called “betweenness” which measures how often a person lies on the shortest path between two other people (taking into account how many shortest paths there are). Betweenness here is measured disregarding the arrow direction.



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What do you notice as you look at this diagram? We can see that there is one main network where everyone is connected by requests and offers of help by fellows (current and graduate) and faculty. Some people who made requests also responded to the requests of others (arrows pointing in toward square and pointing out away from square). We can see that 10 of the 12 people who made requests received a response on the listserv (the other 2 squares in the top left corner did not get any responses on the listserv but may have received personal emails).

Since betweenness here is disregarding the arrow directions, someone with high betweenness could be responding to multiple requests, both requesting and responding, or getting responses from multiple people. Betweenness is one type of measure of centrality – someone who is often on the shortest path between people can be a “bridge” between parts of a network. **Imagine if you were to remove any of the large squares or circles from this network – what would happen?** In most cases, you would end up with a fragmented network with disconnected clusters of people. Burt (2004) argues that “people connected across groups are more likely to be familiar with alternative ways of thinking and behaving” since they have access to more diverse viewpoints/information (<http://gatton.uky.edu/Faculty/ferrier/Burt%202004.pdf>).

The network diagram below is the same as the previous EXCEPT that color represents the **geographic region** where the individual works/resides as follows:

- Africa in **GREEN**, Latin America in **ORANGE**, Asia in **BLUE**, Middle East in **PINK**, North America in **YELLOW**, Europe in **GREY**.

This shows an international network. What else do you notice as you look at this diagram?

