Teaching teachers to teach writing, critical thinking, and information literacy: A case study of a faculty learning community as a campus-wide pedagogical intervention strategy

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Teaching Teachers to Teach Writing, Critical Thinking, and Information Literacy

Case Study of a Faculty Learning Community as Campus-wide Pedagogical Intervention Strategy

Christine Bachen, Nicole Branch, Laura Doyle, Tricia Serviss, & Julia Voss

IWAC 2018 | Auburn University | June 4, 2018
Transdisciplinary team

Chris, associate professor of communication & director of assessment

Denise, writing center director & lecturer in writing

Nicole, head of library instruction & assessment

Laura, lecturer in civil engineering

Julia, assistant professor of writing studies

Diana, lecturer in political science

Trish, assistant professor of writing studies
Introductions

What drew you to this session?
What do you hope to take away?
Institutional context about Santa Clara University

"The Jesuit University in Silicon Valley"

- 5438 Undergraduate Students
- 3130 Graduate Students
- Faculty: 556 (full-time), 360 (part-time)

Robust Core Curriculum
What got things started?

Series of disconnects about critical thinking, writing, and information literacy

➔ Students’ perceptions of and claims about abilities
➔ Direct assessment of student work
➔ Faculty’s perceptions about students’ proficiency
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First years</th>
<th>Seniors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>prepare 2 or more drafts</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pages produced (sd = 55.4)</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>117.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agree SCU contributed to their writing development</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: National Survey of Student Engagement 2015*
Direct assessments of students’ writing skills

SCU 2015 pilot writing assessment
Info literacy from the faculty perspective

70% of faculty agree that improving their students’ research skills related to locating and evaluating scholarly information is an important educational goal.

49% of faculty agree that their students have poor skills locating and evaluating scholarly information.

2015 Ithaka S+R Library Survey
The Opportunity:
Develop a two-year project to improve student outcomes

Teaching and Learning National Institute
Evergreen College, Olympia, WA
Summer 2016
The Student Writing and Research Learning Initiative (SWiRL)

➢ cross-disciplinary support for writing and research instruction for students

➢ resources for writing and information literacy instruction in writing-intensive courses, particularly for faculty without formal training in the teaching of writing and information literacy
SWiRL Initiative Timeline

First Contact: 3-26-2016
Today
SWiRL Initiative Timeline

July 2016

SWiRL Team Meetings
SWiRL Initiative Timeline

July 2016

SWiRL Team Meetings
SWiRL Initiative Timeline

July 2016

- SWiRL Team Meetings
SWiRL Initiative Timeline

July 2016

SWiRL Team Meetings
SWiRL Initiative Timeline

TLNI

SWiRL Team Meetings
SWiRL Initiative Timeline

TLNI

SWiRL Team Meetings
SWiRL Initiative Timeline

TLNI

Project Summary August 10, 2016

Initiative for Student Writing and Research Learning (SWiRL)

Project developed at the Teaching and Learning National Institute (TLNI), Olympia, WA.

July 31-August 4.

Team members: Chris Bacon (Assessment & Communication), Megan France (Assessment), Nicole Branch (Library), Trish Davis (English), Julie Voss (English), Laura Doyle (Civil Engineering), Diane Modkas (Political Science).

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Brief Description

We will form an Initiative for Student Writing and Research Learning (SWiRL) to better develop cross-disciplinary support for writing and research instruction for students. Currently students think they write very well, but only recognize that they are developing critical writing skills in CTW 1 and 2. Our assessment of student work, especially student work in advanced writing courses (years 2-4), reveals that their content development and use of evidence does not meet our desired standards (see SCU Written Communication Brief). This is also reflected in faculty perceptions that student can’t write well and are not proficient in finding, evaluating, and using research—even at the point of graduation.

This project will provide resources for writing and information literacy instruction in writing-intensive courses, particularly for faculty without formal training in the teaching of writing and information literacy. Additionally, as SCU continues to diversify its student population—and pursues inclusive excellence goals as an institution—transparent writing assignments and information literacy instruction ought to result in more equitable learning.

Full Description

SCU is interested in strengthening student learning outcomes in the areas of writing and information literacy, and with that, critical thinking—three of our regional accreditation agency’s (WASC) five core competencies. We have done several assessments in these areas with first-year and senior-level work, and based on these assessments (as well as informal feedback from faculty) we know that we can do more to improve student learning in these areas.

We offer two courses in critical thinking and writing (CTW) in the Core Curriculum for first-year students. Additionally, we require that students complete an advanced writing (AW) course in the Core—often taken in their junior year. Some of the advanced writing courses are offered within the majors and focus on disciplinary writing. There is interest in seeing the number of these discipline-specific writing courses increase, as most of the majors require some form of senior thesis or capstone and this is seen as valuable preparation for these. The CTW and Advanced Writing courses all address written communication, critical thinking, and information literacy.
**SWiRL Initiative Timeline**

**TLNI**

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**SWiRL Team Meetings**

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**PART THREE: TIMELINE**

**YEAR ONE (2016-2017)**

**Phase one (Fall 16):**
1. Create case by gathering and analyzing data. This includes setting up communication avenues, designing schedules, planning focus group (questions, group composition, timing, goals, etc.) that will take place in the winter quarter.
   a. We have baseline data including samples from CTW, A-W, and disciplinary writing (through multi-state writing study).
2. Identify stakeholders from past faculty development.
3. Plan focus groups for winter.
4. Develop digital surveys that parallel fall focus groups.
5. Share year one calendar of events with community. Communicate it out to community.
   - End of fall quarter: LAUNCH initiative

**Phase two (Winter 17):**
1. Facilitate three focus groups that would:
   a. Establish common language.
   b. Solicit different strategies for teaching information literacy and writing.
   c. Identify and empower different kind of teachers/teaching across disciplines.
   d. Identify research-based practices that we can then promote.
2. Facilitate 3 student focus groups that would ask them to describe:
   a. Their understanding of critical thinking, writing, information literacy as terms/concepts.
   b. What effective strategies they have been taught and/or use to perform critical thinking, writing, and information literacy.
   c. Identify which classes they've taken that have included substantial critical thinking, writing, and information experiences.

**Phase three (Spring 17):**
1. Draft documents that form a resource bank/archive.
2. Plan year 2 workshops (call workshops TUNE-UPS).
3. Identify ten key/committed people for faculty development activities.
4. Develop ongoing outreach strategies that addresses how to distribute information, how to keep communication going, develop multiple teams.

**Phase four A (Summer 17):**
1. Use year one planning to develop assessment mechanisms like information literacy and effective written communication rubrics.
2. Form a dossier of rubric-like materials useful to start conversations with wider group.
3. Solicit sample rubrics from peer institutions/funders.
4. Pursue questions like: what level of work would we hope to get from our students upon graduation?

**Phase four B (end of Summer 17):**
1. Share some support for research-based writing instruction with new faculty at orientation.
SWiRL Initiative Timeline

2016 - 2017: Data Assessment Phase
SWiRL Initiative Timeline

2016 - 2017: Data Assessment Phase

SWiRL Team Meetings
SWiRL Initiative Timeline

2016 - 2017:
Data Assessment Phase

First Year Writing
Pre- and Post- Surveys

SWiRL Team Meetings
SWiRL Initiative Timeline

2016 - 2017: Data Assessment Phase

- First Year Writing
- Pre- and Post- Surveys
- NSSE Writing Module to first year and senior students

SWiRL Team Meetings
SWiRL Initiative Timeline

2016 - 2017:
Assessment Phase

11-4-16: Meeting with administration
SWiRL Initiative Timeline

2016 - 2017:
Assessment Phase

Focus Groups

SWiRL Team Meetings
Excerpts from student focus groups
Excerpts from faculty focus groups
Key takeaways from focus groups

**Students**
- First-year writing course offers only meaningful writing instruction at SCU.
- Uncertain about cross-disciplinary writing expectations and how to translate terminology

**Faculty**
- Perceive deficits in student disciplinary writing
- Identify additional frustrations with students’ critical thinking, research skills, ability to synthesize information

*Both groups crave dialogue and opportunities to bridge gaps*
FLC Action Plan

1. Think beyond first-year writing courses. FYW can't teach students everything they need to know about writing.

2. Support disciplinary faculty who assign/assess writing and research; help them to teach writing in the context of information literacy and critical thinking as well as assign/assess.

3. Create sustainable faculty development initiative in pursuit of SWiRL (student writing and research learning)
SWiRL Initiative Timeline

2016 - 2017:
Assessment Phase

4-27-17: University Grant Awarded

SWiRL Team Meetings
SWiRL Initiative Timeline

Summer 2017
FLC Planning

SWiRL Team Meetings
Frameworks informing the SWiRL FLC
New Information Literacy Framework

Authority is Constructed and Contextual

Information Creation as a Process

Information Has Value

Research as Inquiry

Scholarship as Conversation

Searching as Strategic Exploration
Writing Frameworks

**Practicing** habits of mind (curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, metacognition)

**Developing** rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking, writing processes, knowledge of conventions, abilities to compose in multiple environments

**Learning** drives scaffolding & assessment of writing

**Engaging** threshold concepts related to disciplinary writing improves student learning
Transparent Assignment Design

Purpose: Provide clear learning objectives; help students recognize how the assignment benefits their learning

Task: State the activities the student should do/perform; provide the steps, guidelines, or a recommended sequence for the students’ efforts

Criteria for Success: Describe the characteristics of the finished product. How does excellent work differ from adequate work?
SWiRL's Guiding Principles

Equitable curricular design must make explicit the intersections of critical thinking, writing, and information literacy.

Learners--actual, not just imagined learners--and learning matter most.

Scaffolding learning through evidence-based practices is prioritized.

Writing and information literacy are grounded in critical practice.

Curricular and pedagogical development should be iterative.
SWiRL Faculty Learning Community (2017-18)
SWiRL Initiative Timeline

2017 - 2018
FLC Pilot
SWiRL Faculty Learning Community

Goals
➢ Support writing in the disciplines/genre-specific writing
➢ Enhance assessment, grading & feedback
➢ Address differentiated learning/instruction
➢ Improve assignment design, including sequencing/scaffolding
➢ Communicate clear expectations to students
➢ Build community
➢ Become resources for own departments

Participants
➢ 12 Lecturers and Tenure-stream Faculty from 11 disciplines
# FLC Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall Sessions</th>
<th>Winter Sessions</th>
<th>Spring Sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction and grounding frameworks for writing, info literacy, and</td>
<td>1. Course-level inventory: How do our courses overall reflect writing,</td>
<td>1. Giving more attention to writing and research skills in assignments and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>critical thinking</td>
<td>information literacy, and critical thinking?</td>
<td>rubrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Scholarship of teaching and learning</td>
<td>2. Transparent assignment design and charrette process</td>
<td>2. Developing learning activities to support learning goals of assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Disciplinary discourse and critical information literacy</td>
<td>4. Threshold Concepts in writing</td>
<td>over the course of the FLC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Writing and information literacy, within a critical thinking framework</td>
<td>5. Rubrics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fall Sessions:**
- 1. Introduction and grounding frameworks for writing, info literacy, and critical thinking
- 2. Scholarship of teaching and learning
- 3. Designing, teaching, and assessing writing
- 4. Disciplinary discourse and critical information literacy
- 5. Writing and information literacy, within a critical thinking framework

**Winter Sessions:**
- 1. Course-level inventory: How do our courses overall reflect writing, information literacy, and critical thinking?
- 2. Transparent assignment design and charrette process
- 3. Charretting assignments and rubric discussion
- 4. Threshold Concepts in writing
- 5. Rubrics

**Spring Sessions:**
- 1. Giving more attention to writing and research skills in assignments and rubrics
- 2. Developing learning activities to support learning goals of assignments
- 3. Sharing and reflection: Evolution of pedagogy, assignments, and rubrics over the course of the FLC
Faculty Work

Readings & discussion

Analytic writing, assignment and course audits

Work on own assignments & courses

In-session small group work: feedback, application of principles

Feedback on FLC
ACTIVITY: You try!
Before/After analysis of assignments: Criteria

- Transparent assignment design:
  - Purpose
  - Task
  - Evaluation Criteria
- Writing
- Critical Thinking
- Information Literacy
Hands-on assignment analysis activity

Imagine you are a student receiving this assignment. Which version would better help you complete this assignment successfully? Why?

Consider our criteria (below), or your own.

- Transparent design: Purpose, Task, Evaluation Criteria
- Writing
- Critical thinking
- Information Literacy
What are your observations?

1) Mini-proposal: affect guiding design of assignment
2) The task needs to be upfront; task is buried. Assignments get longer and longer--how to help students access the task?
   a) Media: Print vs digital delivery?
   b) Short first page (ala executive summary)
3) Detailed assignments help students to get better collaborative help (in writing centers, etc.)
4) Make the genre of an assignment explicit
5) Visual accessibility matters--font decisions and sizes. (Document design matters)
6) “Instructor use only” is the criteria.
7) A lot depends upon how the assignment is enmeshed in the course; context matters.
8) Suggestion: have students give revision feedback to assignments & resubmitted to faculty for revision.
9) Purpose energizes students (or maybe turns them off).
10) To what extent should communication be a goal of the writing assignments?
11) Lines up with “Quality Matters” tools used in online instruction.
Our preliminary findings on FLC impact
## Transparency and Critical Thinking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transparency</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasks</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success Criteria</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Thinking</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose involves CT</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria for evaluating quality of CT</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Writing & Information Literacy

### Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specifies context/rhetorical situation</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolds writing process</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation criteria reflect rhetorical situation</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Information Literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describes sources important for assignment purpose</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical use of info (accurate, in context, documentation)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation criteria reflect use of sources</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluating the SWiRL FLC Pilot
What have we learned so far?

Things to keep:

Value of cross-curricular community of faculty who learn from each other
Large leadership team allows for productive 1-on-small group face-to-face feedback & sustainable, distributed labor
Generate excitement via introducing conceptual frameworks about writing, info literacy, critical thinking

Things to change:

Less demanding time commitment
Close the gap between conceptual learning and application opportunities (especially to own teaching materials)
Provide more opportunities for application activities (frequency, reiteration, & infrastructure)
Draw more explicit focus on developing shared language/knowledge around writing & information literacy
Did we meet our goals?

- Support writing in the disciplines/genre-specific writing
- Improve assignment design, including sequencing/scaffolding
- Communicate clear expectations to students
- Enhance assessment, grading, & feedback
- Build community
Did we meet our goals?

- Support writing in the disciplines/genre-specific writing
- Improve assignment design, including sequencing/scaffolding
- Communicate clear expectations to students
- Enhance assessment, grading, & feedback
- Build community
- Become resources for own departments
- Address differentiated learning/instruction
Looking ahead to next year

1. Create our own resources to assist faculty in making concrete changes to improve discipline-based writing and research
2. Run 2 quarter-long FLCs, not year-long FLC
3. Offer sessions on writing and info literacy as part of regular faculty development programs
4. Involve this year’s FLC participants in next year’s activities
5. Keep assessing
Questions, conversation, gratitude

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