

Think, learn, share: Writing for  
teaching and learning in  
Criminology

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# Overview

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- The faculty Writing Academy (WA) was intended to function as a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) focused on the design and implementation of writing ladder courses in diverse disciplines.
- The WA is a 4 year project and each year serves as an important tool for the implementation of the faculty development portion of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP).
- The FLC model was chosen because research confirms its effectiveness both in developing faculty skills and in enhancing student learning (Cox, 2004; Furco & Moely, 2012; Addis et al, 2013; Lancaster et al, 2014).

# Overview Continued

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- Cox (2004) noted that participation in an FLC provides “deep, double-loop learning” that offers “many opportunities to reflect with other FLC participants on its effectiveness and the assessment of resulting student learning and feedback” (p.18).
- All the participants focused on developing discipline-specific courses that incorporated writing tasks to build competence and fluency in student writing,
- The FLC also promoted continued integration of the QEP goals throughout the university curriculum.

# Writing Academy Cohorts

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Year 1 – started Fall 2015

Accounting- one of ten largest majors

Criminal Justice- a new and growing major also taught in ADCaP and UIW Online

First Year Composition (Core)- two Core composition courses, taken at UIW by about 50% of graduating seniors

Philosophy (Core)- Core course taken by almost all students

Vision Science- quantitative discipline

# Criminal Justice Course Selection

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- All of the Criminal Justice Faculty (3) teach CRJU 3322 Criminology
  - We implemented informal low stakes writing assignments to assess learning
  - Consistently used writing rubric to evaluate student writing.

# Low Stakes Informal Writing

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- We found that there are many reasons to implement low stakes writing into CRJU 3322 Criminology.
- We settled for on reasons for implementation.
  - 1st to ensure that basic theoretical concepts are grasped and understood.
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> to allow for immediate feedback on formulated responses.
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> to help provide a clearer understand to what is not understood.
  - 4<sup>th</sup> to develop and enhance students writing and composition skills in Criminology.
  - 5<sup>th</sup> to develop and enhance our students' critical thinking skills.
  - 6<sup>th</sup> to foster a positive learning environment.

# Rubrics

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- Rubrics as writing guides can provide our students with clear instructions of what is expected of them.
- CJ and Sociology students will have solid guidelines about what makes a good writing assignment, discussion question response or paper.
- Bean (2011) explains that rubrics can (if properly structured) improve students' quality of writing and as a result increase the students' overall learning.
- Rubrics make available valuable information about the extent to which specific learning objectives need to be achieved.

# Evaluation of Changes/Strategies

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- Evaluation of what worked well in the course was based on the course ability to improve student learning as measured by the student's questions and responses to informal writing assignments.
- We also assessed what worked well based on principles and practices used to respond to student writing.
- Student's course evaluations were used (sparingly) when assessing what went well.
  - In this context the students that took the time to provide comments about their experience in Criminology were effective compared to overall average.



# What Worked Well?

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- The informal writing assignments, let us know pretty earlier if the concepts that we were teaching were being learning.
- When the majority of the responses to these writing prompts reflect the learning outcomes were not achieved, this allowed us the ability to immediately reteach that concept or provide examples to assist in instruction.
- We did have a few students inquire if the informal writing assignments were going to be graded.
- Our responses were not a confirmation or a denial of the assignment use for assessment however we redirected the students to the usefulness of the assignment in promoting learning.

# What Worked Well?

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- Students were required to complete discussion questions in response to the reading material for the daily topic.
- Writing exams with corresponding rubric were also implemented (if chosen) into the course.
- The discussion question rubrics evaluated content and writing skills.
- The writing exams rubrics were concerned with concept mastery, writing skills and use of sources.
- WTL provided uniform instructions and evaluation of the discipline or subject matter.

# What still needs improvement?

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- More thought and attention could be paid on the front end, when determining student learning and achievement from the selected assignment, then determining what constitutes a good response.
- Student feedback:
  - Timely feedback can be improved.
  - The value of feedback.

# What's Next?

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- We've already begun to use rubrics in all sections of Criminology.
- We will continue to use and expand on the use of low stakes writing assignments in Criminology courses.
- We also implemented the use of rubrics in all of CJ classes that have a formal writing component.
- With the Provost push for our programs to offer more online course options, We believe that the use of these writing for teaching and learning practices are good a tool for online learning.

# Questions?

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- Contact Information...

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