College Writing Faculty Development Workshop

Academic Challenge in College Writing
September 9, 2009

Goals
- To discuss strategies for providing academic challenge in College Writing.
- To examine best practices for working with writers with different preparations for college-level writing, varied comfort levels with writing, and assorted strengths and weaknesses as writers.
- To share approaches for challenging all College Writing students, while providing appropriate scaffolding for their continued development as writers.

A Sampling of Student Comments related to Academic Challenge

- My college writing class did not challenge at the level I would have preferred.
- I learned a lot from this class. The class workshops were extremely helpful for me, and the rubrics were a great guideline. I enjoyed having the freedom of choosing my focus for the papers assigned.
- I was constantly frustrated in this class because I never had room to grow.
- Personally, as I was talking to other students in ENG 110 with different teachers, I felt as though my class was driven at a higher level, even though it was still ENG 110.
- I thought my professor did a great job of keeping class interesting and fun, but still demanding college level work for all of his students. I never felt overwhelmed with the work I had from this class, but I was consistently working on assignments for this class.
- There are too many students who put college writing on the back burner because they feel they are babied and it is a waste of their time.
- It would have been more beneficial to challenge students further with their writing.
- Although college writing can be painful at times, I feel as though it was a very good course and I now know why it should be required. You really do learn a lot of new strategies and how to fix your work no matter how good it may already be.

Providing Individualized Instruction

- Less is more.
  The number of assignments required in ENG 110 sections ranges from 3 to 9, with many sections with assignments at the high end of the range actually using scaffolded assignments that build on each other. As you consider how many projects/papers you assign:
Are you able to space them across the semester so that students have time to draft and revise their work, and so that you have time to respond to one assignment before the next is due?

Do you feel overwhelmed by the workload? If so, is there an assignment that less clearly supports the course objectives that you could cut?

Are you able to offer varied types of feedback (i.e., written feedback, individual conferences, group conferences) to in-progress and revised work?

Are you able to work with students individually to assess their strengths and help them develop personalized writing goals?

Faculty who assign fewer projects but spend more time on each often report greater satisfaction with their teaching; similarly, their students appreciate the additional opportunities for individualized instruction that the faculty then can offer.

- **Making Time for Conferences**
  With College Writing’s focus on helping students develop sophisticated writing processes, it is appropriate and beneficial to build conferences into your semester schedule. These opportunities for one-one-one or small group feedback help you tailor instruction to each student’s strengths and needs.

- **Setting Individual Goals**
  Some faculty ask their students to set individual goals for the semester. Which objectives do students think will most challenge them? If they think they’ve already met an objective, what are their goals for refining their writing even more? Could they try different process activities to expand their “toolbox”? Could they try refining their style? Could they try finding and integrating evidence from more challenging scholarly sources? Could they take their work to a more advanced level by making it public? Students can be responsible for tracking their progress towards meeting their goals.

- **Offering Choice in Paper Topics**
  Allowing students to choose the focus of their writing (even if from a small range of possibilities) may help them take more ownership of their writing and put more investment into their work. In turn, the personal investment might inspire them to try a new writing strategy or to spend more time polishing their work.

- **Managing the Paper Load**
  Here are some strategies faculty have used to manage the paper load as they personalize the learning experience:
  - Use **rubrics** that identify the learning outcomes for the assignment and help the faculty member and student assess whether an individual student has met that outcome (and what an advanced outcome might look like – i.e., average versus excellent, meets expectations vs. exceeds expectations).
  - Support **peer response** and **self-assessment** so that the faculty member isn’t the sole source of feedback.
  - Require students to submit **reflections** on their progress towards meeting the course objectives and their own individual goals for improving their writing. These documents do not require extensive feedback – perhaps only one sentence responding to a key idea
the student has expressed or offering a strategy to extend their development as a
writer.
  - Give students a learning outcomes grid to track their own progress on objectives-
    related writing goals. What new process strategies have they tried? What types of
    audiences have they written for, and how did they adjust their writing? What types of
    evidence have they used to support their arguments? How might they refine their use of
    evidence? How have they worked to develop a more sophisticated writing style? This
    type of teaching tool helps students identify their learning as a shared responsibility
    between them and their instructor. (Sample included below)

- Other ideas for individualizing instruction?

**Supporting Writers who Need Additional Resources/Feedback**

- *Understanding ENG 100: Supplementary Writing Workshop and our placement practices*
  Students who place into ENG 100 take it concurrently with ENG 110 during the fall semester.
  ENG 100 offers students extensive one-on-one consultations with writing faculty and makes
  frequent use of conferences. While students might opt to work on ENG 110 projects within this
  context, they also have the opportunity to solicit feedback on writing they are doing for other
  classes. Students who place into ENG 100 are strongly encouraged to take it but not required to.

- *Teaching Students Strategies for Asking for Feedback*
  Giving students opportunities to develop their own peer feedback questions – and modeling
  how to ask for helpful feedback – will help students transfer this part of the writing process to
  other contexts. What techniques do we use to help students acquire and hone this skill?

- *Writing Center*
  - Trained peer consultants can meet with students working on any kind of writing at any
    stage of the writing process.
  - Recommending the Writing Center and teaching students strategies for asking for
    specific feedback can help students identify the Writing Center as a resource they can
    use anytime during their educational career. But please don’t require students to visit
    the Writing Center without first visiting with the Writing Center Director...

- Other ideas?

**Upcoming English 110 Events – Mark Your Calendars**

- October 14, 12:15-1:15 PM, McEwen 213: Direct Instruction in Process Strategies
- November 11, 12:15-1:15 PM, McEwen 213: Assignment Showcase - Providing Opportunities to
  Write for Academic, Professional, and Public Discourse Communities
- February 10, 12:15-1:15 PM, Location TBA: Digital Literacies and College Writing
- March 10, 12:15-1:15 PM, McEwen 213: Assessing and Responding to Student Writing
- April 14, 12:15-1:15 PM, McEwen 213: Activity Showcase - Facilitating Peer Response and Self-
  Assessment
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals for Writing (Expectations for Average ENG 110 Student Writing by End of Semester)</th>
<th>Project 1</th>
<th>Project 2</th>
<th>Project 3</th>
<th>Project 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Readers can discern the writer’s purpose.</td>
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<td>The writer’s purpose matches the assignment guidelines.</td>
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<td>The writer targets an appropriate audience and attempts to select content that is appropriate for the audience/purpose.</td>
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<td>The writer demonstrates a good grasp of basic rhetorical concepts at play in own work and writing process.</td>
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<td>The text is well-organized.</td>
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<td>The text’s thesis is apparent, and the writer’s other rhetorical choices support the thesis.</td>
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<td>The writer sustains a persuasive argument.</td>
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<td>The writer skillfully integrates current research, using an appropriate blend of quotes, paraphrases and summaries.</td>
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<td>The writer aptly transitions between the source voice and the writer’s voice.</td>
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<td>The writer’s sources are credible and relevant.</td>
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<td>Goals for Writing (Expectations for Average ENG 110 Student Writing by End of Semester)</td>
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<td>The writer accurately cites sources using a consistent documentation method that’s appropriate for the audience/purpose.</td>
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<td>The text reflects extensive revision, responding to self-assessment and other sources of feedback.</td>
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<td>The text contains few, if any, errors.</td>
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<td>The writer meets specific assignment guidelines (title, subtitle, name, .doc or .rtf file, submitted through Blackboard).</td>
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<td>The writer can articulate his/her own writing process and evaluate its effectiveness.</td>
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<td>Other writing-related goals</td>
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<td>Specific goals for next assignment</td>
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