

First Annual gtPathways-WAC Competition
Sue Doe, English

The gtPathways-WAC competition, administered cooperatively by the University Writing Program and TILT, was funded in 2012 by TILT and the College of Liberal Arts in order to encourage innovations to the gtPathways writing integration. Through this initiative, competition winners became Writing Research Fellows for 2012-13 and undertook relatively small projects that directly support the gtPathways Writing Integration Initiative. Selected projects and faculty in 2012 were:

- “Live Concert Blogging to Help Students Improve Musical Comprehension and Appreciation in the Introductory Music Appreciation Class”
Michelle Stanley—MU100 Music Appreciation
- “Large-scale Assessment of Writing Integration in the General Psychology Classroom”
Karla Gingerich PSY100 -- Introduction to Psychology
- “Capturing Evidence of Increased Engagement through Write-to-Engage Processes in the Introductory Art Classroom”
Natalie Barnes, Art 100 -- Introduction to the Visual Arts Course
- “Using the Classroom Dossier to Challenge Student Assumptions about the Middle East”
Gamze Cavdar, Political Science, POLS241 Comparative Government and Politics
- “An Exploratory Study of Inkshedding as a Method for Improving Classroom Climate and Increasing Content Retention in the Economics Classroom”
Mairi-Jane Fox, Economics 211 -- Gender & The Economy

Here is a review of each project.

“Live Concert Blogging to Help Students Improve Musical Comprehension and Appreciation in the Introductory Music Appreciation Class”

Michelle Stanley—MU100 Music Appreciation



Research Rationale and Strategy

In MU 100 (Music Appreciation), a core curriculum class that will have enrolled approximately 1700 students in the 2012-13 academic year, one challenge is that, in addition to the standard challenges associated with writing for a college setting, most students are also new to the formal study

of music and the language that surrounds it. In fifteen weeks, students must develop enough familiarity with music, including its terminology, to be able to critically assess what they are listening to. Furthermore, students learn about global musical styles and genres that they often are not familiar with. To achieve a greater level of critical understanding of global music, MU100 students are exposed to a set of musical elements by which they can assess the music they hear and then apply that new knowledge and terminology to demonstrate a critical appreciation of the music they encounter. Course objectives require attentive listening skills, knowledge of terminology, understanding of the basic of musical elements and an introductory grasp of the standard classical music program.

To demonstrate their increasing mastery, students in MU100 are expected to write a full concert report at the end of the course. This report reviews and assesses live concerts they attend. For this writing assignment, students are asked to synthesize the material heard in the live concert into a coherent, informative, accurate paper utilizing analytic approaches that employ the new music terminology and concepts they have learned through the course. This task requires not only critical thinking but critical thinking applied to a text they *hear* rather than read. An associated goal of this assignment is for students to become increasingly engaged and respectful concert-goers; since they are required to attend live performances and share the concert hall space with patrons from the community, their demonstration of concert-going protocol and decorum is an obligatory part of a successful performance in the course

Professor Michelle Stanley's research project therefore attempts to address the preparatory period or scaffolding of skills and understanding of concepts needed by students to achieve the goals of the course. Essentially, Michelle's strategy was to better prepare students for their experience in the concert hall by developing a curriculum for the classroom that better supports this goal. Faculty therefore re-worked the course in order to lay a better foundation for the students as they learned to write about music. Faculty emphasis in this revision was on developing 'hands on' performances in the classroom, small writing assignments, peer support, terminology integration, and a rehearsal of the concert setting. As a part of this larger effort, Music faculty put together a special "test concert" for the students. They used polleverywhere.com to monitor and encourage student engagement in the rehearsal performance so that students would be more prepared for the real concert experience. One section of MU 100 was designated as the test case.

The study asked:

- Does in-depth and hands on concert going preparation affect the quality of the writing of students and their comprehension of musical concepts and elements?
- Do in-class concerts, dress rehearsal attendance with instructors, peer support and live concert blogging help students find clarity in their musical ideas so that papers are presented with accurate information and strong comprehension?

Desired Outcomes

Professor Stanley hypothesized that a more engaged student would be able to create a concert report paper that better reflected the goals of the course. She also theorized that increased engagement might lead students toward becoming better music consumers and audience members.

As one component of the study, on October 23, 2012, MU100 presented a concert of CSU music students at the University Center for the Arts. The music students discussed their pieces with the class and then performed for them. While the music was being performed, faculty ran an internet program on a screen at the front of the concert hall that allowed students to ask questions about the performance in real time. Using a texting program, the students could ask questions and the instructors answered them as the music was being performed.

The pilot effort was a promising one. Professor Stanley will be analyzing the results of the student writing after the semester is over and students' concert review papers are graded. In the meantime, she believes that in-class student engagement may have improved as result of the live concert blogging with the polleverywhere texting as well as other preparatory approaches. She will be reviewing students' feedback about their engagement as self-reported in course evaluation questions administered at the end of the semester.



Oct 23 2012 concert with live blogging

“Large-scale Assessment of Writing Integration in the General Psychology Classroom”

Karla Gingerich PSY100 -- Introduction to Psychology



Research Rationale and Strategy

In PSY100 (Introduction to Psychology), a core curriculum class that will have enrolled approximately 3000 students in the 2012-13 academic year, one challenge is the question of assessment or whether the “writing is working.” A central question is defining the notion of what “working” would mean for the integration of writing. In other words, it is essential to define exactly what it is that a writing integration might be expected to achieve. For Psychology 100, the central goal of the writing integration has to do with writing’s effect on learning. Specifically, are students learning something about Psychology through the writing assignments and do students *perceive* that they are learning through the writing assignments?

Another challenge for the writing integration is providing adequate training and ongoing assessment of the work of the GTAs assigned to grade and respond to writing. In PSY100, these GTAs are designated as Writing-GTAs (or W-GTAs). They respond to student writing for between 2,500 and 3,000 students per year, and in most semesters there have been at least four assignments completed outside of class by each of those students. W-GTAs are assigned the complex task of providing written comments/feedback on student papers, as well as assigning a grade according to a rubric. Perhaps most importantly, Psychology conceptualizes their work as instructional, or in other words, Psychology wants GTA feedback to take an instructional approach and have an instructional effect. To support the instructional role of the W-GTAs, therefore, training is done in the fall and through the E-608 course. The goal of this training is for W-GTAs to learn to provide feedback that is helpful to students. W-GTAs are therefore provided training (professional development) to help them offer forward-looking comments aimed at giving students concrete feedback about how to improve. This approach requires much more professional development than simply learning how to assign a grade; however, even the latter is a difficult skill to develop. PSY100 professional development of W-GTAs therefore also includes calibration sessions undertaken to achieve a level of agreement in the way W-GTAs apply the rubric. All of these efforts amount to a substantial, even daunting professional development project, especially since W-GTAs come in with varying levels of writing ability themselves, as well as varying levels of motivation for the job. Thus, one significant challenge has been the training and ongoing assessment of the work of the W-GTAs.

Professor Gingerich’s project therefore sets out to do a large-scale assessment and report on the writing integration and the perception of the W-GTAs regarding their training and experience on the job. 20 full-time W-GTAs are assigned as graders/responders, and many others are also involved in this writing

integration, including the gtPathways Consultant from the Department of English, up to four doctoral student “Teaching Fellows” (the instructors-of-record for the course) per semester and several special appointment and adjunct faculty instructors, as well as Gingerich herself as Faculty Supervisor of General Psychology. As this network of involved parties suggests, there is a great deal of time, effort, and funding spent on the writing integration, and this projects steps back to assess its usefulness for a particular course, PSY100, which has taken the integration seriously enough to design an extensive assignment sequence and to systematically develop and refine the writing integration as a central component of the class. The findings from this assessment might be expected to be useful for a wider audience attempting to undertake similar assessments. The project will thus offer concrete suggestions for doing a large-scale assessment of the writing integration in other units/programs.

The study asks:

- From the perspective of everyone involved (students, W-GTAs, teachers, consultant, and faculty supervisor), is the writing integration working?
- Is the W-GTA training in PSY100 meeting their needs?
- Do perceptions at various levels of the integration match up?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current integration, and what improvements could be made?

Desired Outcomes

There are two desired outcomes for this effort:

1. A large-scale assessment will offer a report that integrates the perceptions of all the parties involved in the writing integration, including a significant amount of feedback from students and W-GTAs.
2. An assessment report that will be made available to a wider audience, with a “how-to” component so that others might undertake program-specific assessment projects of their own that relate to the writing integration.

“Capturing Evidence of Increased Engagement through Write-to-Engage Processes in the Introductory Art Classroom: A Beta Test”

Natalie Barnes, Art 100 -- Introduction to the Visual Arts



Research Rational and Strategy

Natalie Barnes project for ART100 involves evaluation of a rubric she developed to assess the effectiveness of short writing assignments that are given in the classroom setting. The criteria developed through the rubric aim to address student' critical thinking as it relates directly to the content of the course, to encourage students to think beyond the ART100 classroom, and to develop their skills in the writing of academic arguments. An additional, associated goal for the research associated with this rubric is that to provide for effective yet streamlined assessment of student responses, especially since ART100 does not have GTA grader-responders and hence writing integration (and its assessment) in the large lecture classroom of ART 100 is completely dependent on instructor labor and initiative.

Professor Barnes is using outside evaluators to investigate the value of the rubric. These evaluators will evaluate the rubric's effectiveness in assessing the curricular goals that writing hopes to impact in ART100.

The study asks:

Does the rubric adequately assess students' grasp of the following curricular goals:

- 1) the role of the artist?
- 2) the value of diverse positions and perspectives?
- 3) art's impact beyond the classroom?
- 4) defense of a position about Art and the role of the artist?

Barnes developed these four areas for assessment because these are key elements in determining the degree to which students have internalized an overall course objective of ART100 which is to "explore the development of visual arts from prehistory to contemporary times and understand the role of the artist."

Desired Outcomes

An outcome of this research will be refinements to the in-class writing rubric, which may be useful and adaptable for other courses.

DRAFT RUBRIC -- ART100

Role of the artist			
Response shows little understanding to the artistic connection of form and content.	Recognizes artistic connection to form and/or content but makes little or no artistic connection to contemporary issues and/or new technologies.	Acknowledges that the artist proposes new ideas related to contemporary issues and/or explores new technologies.	Acknowledges the role of the artist having an impact on contemporary issues or in the development or artistic exploration of new technologies.
Ability to recognize other positions			
Sees their opinion as the single defining solution or appropriate response.	Recognizes there may be other positions or opinions that do not align with their own based on valid evidence.	Recognizes and references other positions that may not align with their own, but could include solutions or responses that may be partially acceptable.	Acknowledges that other positions/assumptions may be valid, or uses supporting experience relating to another situation (transfer from one source to another) to support their own position. Objectively reflects on their own assumptions
Impact beyond classroom (how the role of the artist affects the social, cultural, academic, political, or intellectual realms)			
Response indicates they do not fully understand new information.	Response demonstrates understanding of new information.	Response uses information to make a connection to a broader idea or one based in another discipline or historical period.	New information is internalized and used to develop conclusion about a current issue; or to define an appropriate analogy with a current issue.
Defending a position			
No reference to supporting evidence.	Repeats information from other sources without justification, distinction between fact and opinion is not clear.	Can distinguish between fact and opinion but still demonstrates confusion recognizing value judgments.	Ability to distinguish between fact, opinion and value judgments. Uses facts to support opinion.

*In this rubric references to “contemporary issues” refers to issues present during the life of the artist, while “current issues” refers to issues being dealt with at the present time.

“Using the Classroom Dossier to Challenge Student Assumptions about the Middle East” – Gamze Cavdar, Political Science, POLS241 Comparative Government and Politics



Research Rationale and Strategy

Political Science 241 is an introductory course that teaches basic terms and concepts and introduces students to major ideologies that guide politics. The course also examines five case studies (i.e. UK, Mexico, Egypt, Russia and Nigeria) for deeper analysis of their political systems, comparing them to each other.

Over the last five years of teaching this course, Professor Cavdar has observed that students have a particularly difficult time in approaching the Middle East region, in general, and Egypt, in particular. The types of questions and comments Cavdar has received inside and outside the class reveal patterns in the way students envision the region. The common misperceptions are as follows: 1) the Middle East is unique and fundamentally different from other regions (particularly the West); 2) the Middle East does not change, evolve or progress; 3) the region lacks diversity. Cavdar has found that when students hold such assumptions, it is almost impossible to discuss any real and deep issue, such as the popular uprisings, Islamism, gender, etc. For instance, because students tend to think Arabs are synonymous with Muslims, any reference to Christian Arabs is often accompanied by student bewilderment.

Together with PhD student Amy Lewis, Dr. Cavdar proposed this research project because of the serious impediment student assumptions present for deeper understanding of political issues. The focus of the project is on in-class writing exercises that teach students that the region is neither unique, nor unchanging, nor uniform. Cavdar aims to achieve this objective by asking students three questions before any lecture on the region is given. Students are allowed 15 minutes to write their answers to the following questions:

1. How would you characterize the Middle East regimes on a continuum between secular and theocratic? (This question addresses the assumption about Middle East being fundamentally different.)
2. “One could learn about the Middle East politics by studying the early Islamic society of the 9th century.” Do you agree with this statement? Why/Why not? (This question addresses the assumption about lack of progress.)

3. Identify the major ethnic and religious groups in the Middle East (This question addresses the assumption about uniformity of a lack of diversity among Middle Eastern peoples).

After students answer these questions and turn them in, Dr. Cavdar provides a lecture that specifically targets these three assumptions. Students are also provided with dossiers that include maps, basic facts about demographics and history, and reading lists for politics as well as literature. Students may be further encouraged to deepen their understanding through the assignment of a novel such as *Birds Without Wings*, which illustrates diversity among various ethnic and religious groups while also demonstrating radical changes that took place at the end of the First World War.

At the end of the class, students are asked to answer the same set of questions. Pre and post-lecture responses are then examined. The central question that Cavdar is attempting to answer is:

- What progress, if any, is made in student understanding about the region and its people as result of the integration of in-class writing emerging from lecture and hands-on work with a dossier about the region, all of which are designed and directed toward a deepened understanding of the region?

Desired Outcomes

Middle East related issues, such as the ongoing uprisings, ethnic and sectarian tensions, border conflicts, water scarcity, environmental degradation, alternative energy, etc. are front and center in world politics and are now examined in many courses ranging from political science to engineering. It is therefore of utmost importance for students to have a basic understanding of the region. As a result of this study, it is hoped that the intervention will provide an immediate improvement of students' responses and long term impact on student attitudes. Operationally, significant improvement in students' responses will be defined as follows:

- Student responses show that they view the region as they would other regions, demonstrating that they understand that the region possesses diversity and changes over time.
- Students also show recognition that what they think they know about a region is not necessarily accurate.

Cavdar hopes that realizations such as these may prompt students to question their commonly-held assumptions about regions and to seek more information and deeper understanding of the world's peoples.

“Inkshedding to Improve Classroom Climate and Increase Content Retention in the Economics Classroom” Mairi-Jane Fox, Economics 211 -- Gender & The Economy

Research Rationale and Strategy

Economics 211 is generally offered in three sections of 40 students each semester. As a course that is taught without GTA support, integrating writing presents a challenge for instructors who endeavor to provide meaningful feedback on student writing but struggle to do so given the volume of work. One idea that Professor Fox has tried is the notion of “inkshedding,” a method whereby the instructor provides students with a prompt and a time frame in which to respond during the class period. Students write, and then, when the timer goes off, each student passes the paper to a classmate who reads and responds to the writing (within a time frame). This passing-along-of-the-paper can happen many times, allowing multiple students to respond to each other. The instructor’s role is to facilitate, answer questions, and otherwise interact with students as they pass papers and then is to read the responses in order to build an understanding of various students’ perspectives on the topic and gaps in understanding.

Inkshedding offers advantages, Fox believes, by being:

- a helpful aid in reducing the grading burden when there is no TA support
- a mechanism for increasing interaction with students
- a means for building student content retention
- a way of supporting a positive classroom climate
- a strategy for helping student learn to write to a specific audience.

In addition to these advantages, Professor Fox also found in her early efforts with this approach that students who were too nervous to voice answers in class were far more comfortable writing their answers in the context of in-class writing. Additionally, Fox decided that another way to enhance the writing component of this type of writing exercise was to shift the audience (and purpose) of the in-class writing when it was assigned.

The study therefore asks:

- Does “inkshedding” (1) improve classroom climate and (2) increase retention of information?
- Is my classroom climate improved as a result of the “inkshedding”?
- Do my students retain more content information as a result of the “inkshedding”?

Fox will probe these questions through use of a survey administered to students at the end of the semester and querying their impressions about whether “inkshedding” contributed to a positive classroom climate. She is also analyzing answers on exams that relate to the “inkshedding” content to see, informally, if student exam performance appears to improve as a result of in-class writing. If initial indications are positive, she will argue for a more systematic study as a follow up.

Desired Outcomes.

Since some gtpathways classes are taught in locations that do not receive GTA aid for grading, Fox believes that “inkshedding” may offer an attractive technique for instructors to integrate writing into these courses, especially if classroom climate and content retention can be demonstrated to increase through its use. In courses where there is GTA support, inkshedding may be a strategy for deepening student engagement with in-class writing while also supporting the important writing goal of developing student ability to work as collaborative writers and as peer reviewers of one another’s work.