

QEP Action Project Proposal:
Human Services Program Initiatives
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Overview

Writing is one of the most essential skills of the human service practitioner. In the human services field, human service practitioners are often tasked with writing well-constructed case reports, clearly expressing the meaning and significance of their professional judgments, translating observations into narratives, crafting appeals to governmental agencies, and writing proposals that will result in funding needed to support programs (Neukrug, 2008). The helping professionals' lack of writing skills can impede their career development and may impair the lives of their clients (Jurgens, Craigen & Milliken 2009).

The Undergraduate Human Services Program at Old Dominion University is one of the largest programs in the college and university (with over 600 majors) and growing steadily, especially with the advent of the online human services program. In spite of the large number of students, the program consists on one full-time online faculty and 5 on-campus faculty. The reality is that many human service majors or minors will complete the degree without ever being taught by a full-time faculty member. Currently, the program employs 30-40 adjunct faculty members per semester and several doctoral graduate teaching assistants. With a increasingly large student base and a large number of adjunct faculty members, the full-time human service faculty are concerned with the quality of teaching and the level of consistency that students are receiving in each of their human services core courses. Presently, grading and assignments vary considerably from one adjunct faculty member (or Graduate Teaching Assistant) to another. Further, as a program, we are acutely concerned with the students' writing skills. In fact, when the Exit Writing Exam was in place, the Human Services Program had one of the lowest pass rates within the college and university with average pass rates approximating 60%.

Thus, in order to improve consistency and quality, we are proposing to create one new assignment (and rubric) for each of our 10 core courses. There are 10 core human services courses (HMSV 339, HMSV 341, HMSV 343W, HMSV 344, HMSV 346, HMSV 368, HMSV 440W, HMSV 441, HMSV 444, and HMSV 491). This new assignment will align with the core mission of the QEP and each corresponding rubric will be based off of the QEP writing rubric. We are also proposing to include universal language in each syllabus that speaks to the need for writing in the human services profession, available writing resources at ODU (contact information and links to Student Support Services and the Writing Center), and APA requirements for all courses.

Overall Vision

The full-time faculty in the human services program stands behind the mission of the QEP. 50% of our program faculty is in some way involved with QEP, either in planning the QEP

initiative or through the faculty workshops. Also, our newest faculty member, Narketta Sparkman, plans to participate in the Summer 2013 Faculty QEP Workshops. This would mean that 4 out of our 6 total faculty are directly involved with the QEP initiative. Each faculty member fully supports this action project and every full-time faculty member will have some level of involvement in the project.

We envision that this project will improve learning through writing across the program to create a systematic and sustainable change. Each assignment for the core courses will be aligned with the 6 student learning outcomes (SLO's) as measured by the QEP rubric. In other words, when creating the assignment and corresponding rubric the principal investigator (Laurie Craigen) and co-investigator (Narketta Sparkman) will ensure that the assignment will allow the student to:

1. Clearly state a focused problem, question, or topic appropriate for the purpose of the task
2. Identify relevant knowledge and credible sources
3. Synthesize information and multiple viewpoints related to the problem, question, or topic
4. Apply appropriate research methods or theoretical framework to the problem, question, or topic
5. Formulate conclusions that are logically tied to inquiry findings and consider applications, limitations, and implications, and

Specific Strategies

In this section, we will outline the specific strategies and tasks needed for the completion of our Action Project.

Task 1: The first task is for the primary investigator (Laurie Craigen) and the co-investigator (Narketta Sparkman) to write assignments and corresponding rubrics for the 10 core courses in the human service curriculum. As stated above, the rubric will be based off of and adapted from the QEP rubric. (Laurie Craigen had success creating a new assignment and rubric based off of the QEP rubric during the faculty workshops she participated in). They will also develop a universal statement to be included in all syllabi. This statement (as mentioned above) will address expectations for writing, the importance of writing in the human services profession, resources for writing assistance at ODU, and expectations for APA 6th edition formatting in all papers. The primary investigator (Laurie Craigen) attended the faculty workshops during Spring Semester of 2012. She will use the knowledge gained in these workshops for this task. She will also share the resources and information learned with the co-investigator (Narketta Sparkman).

Narketta will participate in the workshops in the Summer of 2013. After the universal statement and each assignment/rubric are created, Laurie will email the assignment to all full-time human service program faculty members to review and make suggestions, if necessary.

Task 2: The second task is for the co-investigator (Jill Dustin) to coordinate the detailed assessment plan for this project. The main task will be to develop the survey for both adjunct faculty (and GTAs). Jill is an ideal faculty member to be involved with this task. She was involved in the early stages of the QEP initiative and she brings with her a great deal of knowledge and experience in professional writing in the human services field. (The assessment plan will be explained in more detail in the section entitled, Assessment Plan).

Task 3: The third task is for the Office Administrator (Saysha Malbon) to write an email in November 2013 to all faculty members (adjunct and graduate teaching assistants) who will be teaching in the Spring of 2014 to explain our new QEP action plan project. In this email, she will attach the syllabus for their assigned course and she will highlight the universal statement about writing as well as the new assignment (and corresponding rubric) that they will be required to use. In this email, she will also inform faculty that she will randomly select students from their classes to be surveyed (see Assessment Plan). She will also inform them that she will randomly select 10 faculty members to submit 2 sample papers mid-semester (all assignments will be due by March 15th). Thus, all faculty members will be asked to save two graded assignments in case they are randomly selected.

Task 4: Saysha will develop an electronic repository through blackboard for each of the HMSV 343W assignments to be uploaded. (This class was selected because it is a writing intensive course and there are several sections taught each semester of this course). Then, in November of 2013 she will email all adjunct and Graduate Teaching Assistant faculty who are teaching HMSV 343W in the Spring of 2014. She will inform them that they will be added to a separate blackboard page and will be required to upload all of the graded assignments (and rubrics) to the blackboard site (per the action plan guidelines).

Task 5: Towards the middle of the semester (after all assignments have been turned in), Saysha will randomly select 10 faculty to submit 2 graded assignments (with the rubric attached). She will upload these assignments (and rubrics) into a separate blackboard site. Saysha will set up blackboard so that the site will only be available to full-time faculty members.

Task 6: Saysha will randomly select a total of 25-30 students and 10 to 15 faculty members from the 10 core courses to be surveyed about their experiences using the new assignments (and rubrics). She will send the students and faculty the survey created by Jill Dustin

via a survey monkey link. (She will also send reminder emails to ensure completion of the survey). (See Assessment Plan for more details).

Task 7: During the Spring of 2014, the primary investigator will schedule a “grading luncheon” for all full-time faculty members. During this grading luncheon, the faculty will grade the 20 sample papers that have been uploaded by Saysha to a separate blackboard page (details of this task is included in the Assessment Plan section).

Task 8: During the Spring of 2014, the primary investigator (Laurie Craigen) and the co-investigators (Narketta Sparkman and Jill Dustin) will analyze the survey data (see Assessment Plan for more detailed information).

Assessment Plan

Assessment is a critical component to the QEP action plan. In this section, we have included 3 separate assessment plans.

Plan A: To assess how effectively the strategies were implemented (process), the impact they made on student learning (outcomes) and how strategies may be altered in the future to enhance effectiveness, both teachers and students will be surveyed about their perceptions about the effectiveness of using the new assignments (and rubrics) in their classes. (As stated above, the survey questions will be developed by the co-investigator, Jill Dustin, during the Fall of 2013. She will then put this survey on Survey Monkey). Then, Saysha will randomly select a total of 25-30 students and 10 to 15 faculty from the 10 core courses AFTER all assignments have been graded (around March 15th). She will send the students and faculty the survey created by Jill Dustin via a survey monkey link. In the Spring of 2014 (once surveys are completed), the primary investigator (Laurie Craigen) and both co-investigators (Narketta Sparkman and Jill Dustin) will analyze the results of this data using descriptive quantitative statistics. For the open ended questions on the survey, qualitative data analysis strategies will be used. Thus, the participants’ responses on the survey will be coded and a list of themes will emerge from this data analysis process. Each investigator is experienced in both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. We will use the data generated from this analysis to further enhance and develop writing in our program (and the results of this will be included in the final report to the QEP, per the QEP action project guidelines).

Plan B: To assess the impact the assignment had on students learning, all 6 of the full time faculty in the Human Services Program will grade a sample of assignments using the rubric. In March of 2014 (after assignments have been graded), Saysha Malbon will randomly select 10 faculty members to submit 2 papers. (While this is a random selection, all faculty members will be asked to save 2 papers in the Spring Semester given the chance that they are randomly selected

to submit these sample papers). As stated above, once Saysha receives the sample graded papers via email she will upload them to a blackboard “course” that she created. Saysha will make this course available to all Human Service program full time faculty members so that they will have access to these papers. Narketta Sparkman, the co-investigator, will coordinate the grading of assignments. (This involves getting the assignments copied for faculty to grade. It also involves making copies of the QEP rubric. Narketta will also develop a brief training for the program faculty on how to use the QEP rubric for grading assignments).

At the end of the Spring Semester, the full time faculty will convene at a luncheon meeting to grade these sample papers. As stated above, there will be 20 total papers and each paper will be graded by 2 full time faculty members to establish validity of the grading process. Thus, with a total of 6 full-time faculty members, each faculty member will grade 6-8 papers using the QEP rubric. The two scores will be averaged together to come up with one “final grade”. The benchmark will be that 80% of students receive a score of 80% or better.

Plan C: Per the guidelines of the QEP action project, the office administrator for the department, Saysha Malbon will be responsible for setting up a blackboard shell to upload the course assignments into an electronic repository within one semester of proposal completion for assessment by the QEP Office using the QEP Writing Rubric. One class will be selected; HMSV 343W (Methods). HMSV 343W is a writing intensive course and is often taken early on in the human service major’s curriculum. There are often several sections of this course being taught per semester. Thus, Saysha will notify all faculty teaching HMSV 343W prior to the start of the Spring semester to inform them that they are to upload 10 sample papers to the repository on blackboard (Saysha will add them each to this repository so that they can upload the assignments with ease).

Future Plans

The full-time faculty would like to continue using the new assignments (and rubrics), along with the universal writing statement in each of the core human services courses in future semesters. That is, if funded this project would immediately make an impact and inevitably would be a sustainable project. However, the program faculty would also need the following sources of support to continue with this project: (1) Results from the interviews with faculty and students may lead to improvements/changes being made to the assignments (and rubrics). Thus, support (release time) may be needed for a full-time faculty member to make these changes. (2) The continued assessment of the effectiveness of the assessments is critically important. In order to continue with this assessment, support is needed for a faculty member to coordinate these efforts. (3) The continued assessment of the effectiveness of the assessments would also require

our office administrator, Saysha Malbon, to select a random sample of faculty and students to be surveyed. Also, Saysha would also need to randomly select one faculty member per class to submit the sample papers and upload them to a blackboard page (for the full-time faculty to assess). (4) In order to assess the effectiveness of the assignments, the full-time faculty would also need to continue to grade a random sample of assignments using the QEP rubric. The faculty would need some financial support to complete this task.

Budget

The following budget will outline the timeline, tasks, persons responsible for the task, the fee associated with the task and an explanation of the fee. The total budget listed below is \$19,995.

Semester	Task	Person Responsible	Fee	Explanation of Fee
Summer of 2013	Coordinate the effort to create assignments and rubrics for all 10 core courses (and create assignments and rubrics)	Laurie M. Craigen	\$2000	It is estimated that this task will take 40 hours (at \$50 per hour for a total of \$1250)
Fall of 2013	Create evaluation survey: develop short answer questions for student and faculty interviews (development of assessment plan)	Jill Dustin	1500	It is estimated that this task will take about 30 hours (at \$50 dollars per hour for a total of \$1500)
Fall of 2013	Co-create assignments and rubrics for ten core courses	Laurie Craigen (Assisted by Narketta Sparkman)	\$6000	It's estimated that this task will take 5 hours weekly for 14 weeks) for a total of 60 hours at \$50 per hour (\$3000 each, \$6000 total)
Fall of 2013	Review and give feedback for all new assignments and corresponding rubrics	Core Faculty (excluding those involved with the development of the assignments/rubrics: Kathleen Levingston, Jill Dustin, Tammi Milliken, Mark Reh fuss	\$2000 (\$500 each)	It is estimated that this task will take 10 hours (at \$50 per hour for a total of \$500 per faculty member (Total of \$2,000)
Fall 2013	At the end of the Fall Semester, (1) e-mail faculty teaching in Spring 2014 semester, introducing the new QEP project.(2) attach assignments/rubric to all teaching faculty. (3) Develop an electronic repository for HMSV 343W courses so faculty can upload assignments to site.	Saysha Malbon	\$1250	This task is estimated to take 50 hours (at \$25 per hour for a total of \$1250).

Spring 2014	(1) Collect a random sample of assignments (& rubrics) to upload on blackboard site that she will develop (2) To randomly select a sample of students & faculty to assess and to send this list of faculty/students to assessment coordinator (Jill Dustin).	Saysha Malbon	\$1375	This task will be ongoing throughout the summer and it is estimated that it will take approximately 55 hours at \$25 per hour (total of \$1375)
Spring 2014	Coordinate grading of assignments and rubrics. Involves getting assignments and rubrics copied and ready for grading, and conducting a brief training on how to use the QEP rubric for grading. The coordination of the luncheon (establishing time, ordering food is also part of this duty).	Narketta Sparkman	\$1000	This task will take approximately 20 hours at 50 dollars per hour (total \$1000)
Spring 2014	To grade a random selection of assignments/rubrics	All Core Faculty: Laurie Craigen, Kathleen Levingston, Jill Dustin, Tammi Milliken, Mark Rehfuss, Narketta Sparkman	\$1120	This cost includes a stipend for faculty who attend the luncheon. Each will receive \$150. The luncheon is 11-2:00 (3 hours at \$50 an hour). The total sum of the stipend is \$1050. (The extra \$120 includes cost of lunch (\$20 per faculty for 6 faculty).
Spring 2014	Analyze the results of survey data using descriptive quantitative statistics. For the open ended questions on the survey, qualitative data analysis strategies will be used. The participants' responses on the survey will be coded and a list of themes will emerge.	Laurie Craigen, Narketta Sparkman, and Jill Dustin	\$3750 (\$1250 each)	This task should take approximately 25 hours each (at \$50 per hour) for a total of \$1250 each (\$3750 total)
			Total	\$19,995

References

- Jurgens, J., Craigen, L., & Milliken, T. (2010). Who or Whom?: Improving the Writing Skills of Human Service Trainees (Brief Note). *Journal of Human Services*, (30)1, 66-70.
- Neukrug, E. (2008). *Theory, practice, and trends in human services: An introduction to an emerging profession* (4th ed.). Belmont, CA:Brooks/Cole.