

QEP Improving Disciplinary Writing Action Project:

FINAL REPORT

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Project summary

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 750 majors) and growing steadily, especially with the advent of the online human services program. Currently, the program employs 30-40 adjunct faculty members per semester and several doctoral graduate teaching assistants. Thus, in order to improve consistency and quality throughout the undergraduate human services program, we created one new assignment (and rubric) for five of our core courses. There are 11 core human services courses (HMSV 339, HMSV 341, HMSV 343W, HMSV 344, HMSV 346, HMSV 368, HMSV 440W, HMSV 441, HMSV 444, HMSV 468, and HMSV 491). The five core courses selected were: HMSV 339, HMSV 343W, HMSV 368, HMSV 444, and HMSV 468. These five courses were selected because of their reputation for being writing focused.

While the main focus of this action project was on the development of the five new assignments and rubrics, we also provided a training session to faculty members and communicated with them on a regular and consistent basis. The faculty training (delivered online via Adobe Connect) discussed the QEP initiative and the faculty members' requirements and expectations for participation in the project. Another component of this project related to ongoing communication with the participants. For example, we regularly checked in with the five selected participants via email messages and sent them weekly writing tips as a way of engaging them in the process of "writing to learn" in their courses.

In addition to the development of assignments and rubrics, the trainings, and regular communication with participants, there was also a large focus on assessment in our action plan. In our assessment plan, students (within each of the five selected courses) completed the evaluation on the "Supplemental Questions Based on the NSSE Consortium for the Study of Writing in College Questions" as both a pre-test and post-test. In addition to the "Supplemental Questions Based on the NSSE Consortium for the Study of Writing in College Questions," both students (QEP Project Survey-Students) and instructors (QEP Project Survey-Instructors) were surveyed about their perceptions of the effectiveness of using the new assignments (and rubrics) in their classes. These surveys (for Instructors and Students) were only given as a post-test. Each of these evaluations was available online through Qualtrics (See Appendix A). Lastly, we asked for qualitative feedback at the end of the project and participants' emailed their overall perceptions of the action project in a narrative format.

A final task in our action plan involved a "grading luncheon." Present at this meeting were (1) The QEP Action Project Investigators (Laurie Craigen, Narketta Sparkman, and Jill Dustin), the five selected faculty members, the QEP Assessment Professionals (Worth Pickering and Tisha Pareides), and

the Director of Writing and Faculty Development (Remica Bingham-Risher). During this grading luncheon, the faculty graded a total of 30 sample papers using the QEP rubric. Each paper was graded two times during the process. During this meeting, the QEP staff assisted the faculty with the calibrating process. This was done through modeling and practice of grading assignments. The adjunct faculty were taught how to grade according to the rubric. They were then asked to grade the same sample assignment to see if the grading was in line with one another. Once completed, faculty randomly graded assignments. Extreme outliers were graded an additional time by investigators.

Action Project data assessment and findings

Assessments included pretests and posttests of both students and adjunct faculty/lecturer participants. There were no significant relationships found in the comparison of pretest views and posttest views of participants. However, this project yielded significant findings in the improvement of disciplinary writing including IDW SLOs and participant views of the project including outcomes of the project.

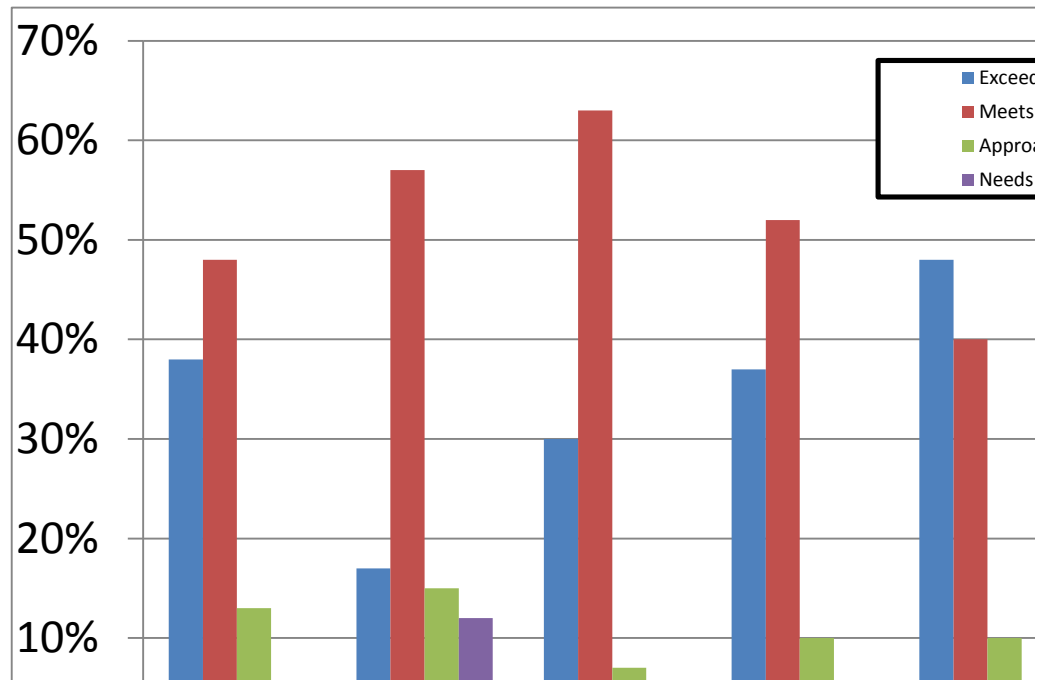
Significant results were found in the grading of students assignments according to the IDW SLO rubric. Thirty artifacts were graded twice by randomly assigning the artifacts to faculty participants. SLO 1 examined student's ability to clearly state a focused problem, question, or topic appropriate for the purpose of the task. Findings indicated that 38.3% exceeded the standard and 48.3% met the standard. SLO 2 examined students' ability to identify relevant knowledge and credible sources. Findings indicate that 16.7% exceeded the standard and 56.7% met the standard. SLO 3 examined students' ability to synthesize information and multiple viewpoints related to the problem, question, or topic. Findings indicate that 30% exceeded the standard and 63.3% met the standard. SLO 4 examined students' ability to apply appropriate research methods and/or theoretical frameworks to the problem, question, or topic. Findings indicate that 36.7% exceeded the standard and 51.7% met the standard. SLO 5 examined students' ability to formulate conclusions that are logically tied to inquiry findings and consider applications, limitations, and implications. Findings indicate that 48.3% exceeded the standard and 40% met the standard. SLO 6 examined students' ability to reflect on or evaluate what was learned. Findings indicate 41.7 exceeded the standard and 49.3 met the standard. Findings are graphically presented in the Table 1 and further detailed in Attachment F.

Positive views were found in the post assessment of the IDW project. Both instructor and student participants reported favorably of the overall project. Instructors view of the project design yield 100% of instructor participants agree or strongly agreed that the project was clearly explained, goals were clear, sufficient training was provided, adequate time was provided, and the stipend was sufficient for their participation. In regards to project training delivery 100% of instructor participants agreed or strongly agreed that the delivery was organized, clear, and effective. Furthermore, 100% of instructor participants agreed or strongly agreed that investigators were responsive and provided teaching aids. In regards to overall project outcomes, 100% of instructor participants agreed or strongly agreed that the disciplinary writing, new skills, professional development, and effective teaching outcomes were met; while 75% agreed or strongly agreed that the outcome of increased confidence and resources were met. These are positive indicators that the IDW Human Service project had a positive impact on instructor participants. Detailed results of post assessments can be found in Attachment H.

Students' view of the project design was also in favor of the overall project. Students' view of project design indicated that 48% of participants believed the project was clearly explained, 52% believed the goals were clear, and 62.5% believed the time was adequate. In regards to training delivery, 60% reported the project was organized, 100% reported it was clear and effective, and 72% reported their instructors were responsive. In addition 64% reported effective teaching style, 52% reported teaching aids were adequate, and 72% reported the content was applicable. In regards to the meeting of

project outcomes, 80% of student participants reported disciplinary writing outcome was met and 72% reported the resources outcome was met. In addition, 68% reported learning new skills and 76% reported meeting the professional development outcome. Students reported increased confidence (72%) and future employability (64%). These findings are indicators that faculty participants were adequately trained and were able to effectively deliver content to students so that the students could meet and exceed the standards of the overall project. Detailed results of student findings can be found in Attachment G.

Table 1: Human Services IDW Action Project Results (N= 30 artifacts)



The Alignment of the Action Project with the six IDW Student Learning Outcomes

Each newly developed assignment and rubric was aligned with the core mission of the QEP. More specifically, the 5 rubrics were adapted from the QEP rubric, which includes 6 specific learning objectives. These 6 learning objectives are (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 (6) Reflect on or evaluate what was learned.

Additionally, a large focus on our faculty training was on how the faculty members could incorporate each of the 6 learning objectives into their courses. While a large focus of this training involved dialog and discussion, we also presented a brief Power Point presentation (see Attachment B) to discuss how the faculty would integrate the learning objectives, not only in their assignments, but also in their instruction throughout the semester.

Sample Action Project writing assignments/materials developed and used

In our final report we have included a sample of the writing assignments as well as the materials we developed and utilized. They are as follows:

- A. All surveys used throughout the project (Attachment A).
- B. Outline for our training with faculty members (Attachment B).
- C. Sample of the newly developed assignments and rubrics (Attachments C, D, E).
 - Attachment C, HMSV 343W
 - Attachment D, HMSV 339
 - Attachment E, HMSV 444
- D. Charts of SLO outcomes (Attachment F).
- E. Charts of student posttest outcomes (Attachment G).
- F. Charts of instructor posttest outcomes (Attachment H).