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BCTLE Faculty Newsletter

Bedi Center for Teaching & Learning Excellence

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Faculty Newsletter

Linda K. Taylor
Taylor University

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Bedi Center for Teaching & Learning Excellence

Fostering Community, Inspiring Excellence

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October Skies

It's October. Our Indiana weather is once again teasing us. Maybe a day or so of summer, some cold rain tossed in, biting winds, and then, another warm day. But for many of us, those changing seasons are part of the reason we love it here. And what a picture of God and his grace in giving us his wonderful creation.

We hope you enjoy the changing leaves, the corn mazes, and everything you can make with all those apples!

Last month we focused on internships as an aspect of signature learning. This month, we'll be looking at writing-intensive courses and some of the creative ways our faculty build their writing assignments.

Signature Learning: Writing-Intensive Courses

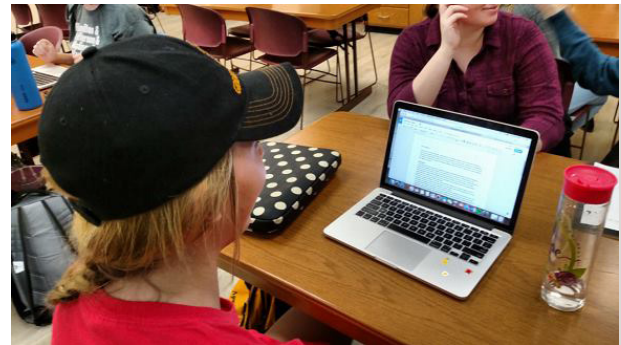
The Association of Colleges & Universities has defined 10 high-impact educational practices (<https://www.aacu.org/leap/hips>), and this month we focus on writing-intensive courses, defined as a university having courses that “emphasize writing at all levels of instruction and across the curriculum, including final-year projects.” Writing assignments include different types of writing for different audiences, including aspects of production and revision.

On September 17, Prof. Julie Moore, Associate Professor of English and Writing Center Director, gave a BCTLE workshop titled “Unraveling the Mystery: How to Compose Clear Writing Assignments.”

Moore explained the importance of professors describing writing assignments clearly and briefly. Remember the acronym D-I-G-S (as in, digging for great writing) to remind you what the students need to know regarding a writing assignment.

Directive (concise): Include the length you expect (word count or page count)

Identification of rhetorical context: What is the purpose of the writing? (Inform? Persuade? Analyze?) Who is the audience? (If you don't specify an audience, students will write to you as professor. So



is the audience other scholars? General? Community members? Christians?) Include the type of research required and needed (for example, will you accept research older than a certain date?).

Genre: What, exactly, are you asking them to write? An academic essay? An op-ed or opinion piece? A persuasive piece? A literature review? A creative piece of fiction or nonfiction? A news article? All of these require very different styles of writing, so your students need to understand what you expect of them.

Style: Be sure to clarify if you expect your students to follow MLA, APA, Chicago, AP, or Turabian. Also explain if you're looking for a formal or informal tone (Is writing in first person, okay? What about sharing personal anecdotes? Should there be an introduction or conclusion? An abstract?)

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Signature Learning (continued)

In addition, it's extremely important, especially with larger assignments, to give the students benchmarks along the way so you can monitor their progress and give feedback. Include prewriting, writing, and rewriting (revision). Allowing time for peer critique can also be valuable (check out [this short video](#) on

the value of peer critiquing). Professors not only can integrate peer reviewing into your classes but also should integrate the writing center's services in your students' writing process for help with outlines, drafts, and myriad writing techniques as they learn academic discourse appropriate to their disciplines.

View from the Ground: The Writing Center

We asked some student tutors in the Writing Center to discuss issues they see when students come for help. Whitney Martin and Braden Ochs gave their perspective.

(1) In your work in the writing center, what types of problems do you see when it comes to students being confused about writing assignments?

Whitney: When students are confused about their writing assignments, there are three primary problems that I see. The most common tends to be that they are unsure of how to write in the particular form assigned (i.e. a research, informative, or persuasive paper). The second problem is often that they have not fully read through the rubric or are unsure of what certain guidelines in the rubric mean. They may also struggle with reading comprehension and find it difficult to respond to an assigned text as a result.

Braden: One issue I do see is when students are confused with broad questions professors ask. Sometimes, professors will have them write to respond to broad questions, and students don't always know how to answer these questions. It's hard for them to brainstorm or have confidence in their answer when they don't know exactly what their professor is looking for.

(2) What piece of advice would you want to share with faculty in order to help their students succeed at delivering what they desire?

Whitney: I strongly encourage faculty to explain fully their writing assignments in class and to make themselves truly available for students to comfortably ask questions. I also advise faculty to express a genuine interest in the personal stories their students carry. When there is an acknowledgment of the importance of everyone's unique narrative, there is a greater chance that students will not only feel safer to ask questions but will be far more vulnerable in their writing and,

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Taylor Tidbit

The very first issue of the Taylor Yearbook was published in 1898 and was called *The Gem*. It was dedicated "To Bishop William Taylor whose honored name our College bears. This book is most respectfully and lovingly dedicated by its Editors."

The beginning of the yearbook pays tribute to the new president, Dr. Thaddeus C. Reade, who became president in 1891. Beside his photo is the following description:

"When Dr. Reade took charge of the College it was practically without funds or students. Today we have a University equal in rank to many of the larger and, a few years ago, more promising ones. The College is

out of debt, the laboratories are being supplied with all the latest and best apparatus. All the departments are strongly equipped with teachers of rare merit. Dr. Reade is a man of great business shrewdness and foresight, as is shown by his excellent management of the school; a man of great learning, as is shown by his excellent papers and addresses; and a man of broad sympathetic nature, as is shown by the help he has given and the interest he has taken in the poor boys of our school."

—courtesy of the Ringenberg Archives & Special Collections

View from the Ground (continued)

therefore, generate more authentic work.

Braden: I would encourage faculty to respond to students' emailed questions. Whenever a student comes to me not knowing what their professor would want in a specific instance, I always encourage them to ask their professor. I love to encourage communication between students and faculty, and I think it would be easier for students to communicate when they know their professor will respond.

Faculty Best Practices

Colleen Warren (English) explains that the English major has three tracks—English teaching, Literature, and Creative Writing—so their senior papers take two directions. For both the teaching and literature tracks, students complete a 20- to 30-page paper of literary analysis, choosing at least two texts (preferably from different traditions, time periods, etc.) to analyze. The creative writing track prepares a portfolio of work—a collection of poetry, a set of short fiction, a beginning of a novel, or a compilation of genres. This portfolio includes an introductory piece that analyzes influences and comments on process.

English faculty regard the senior papers as an opportunity for students to integrate what they've learned in the sum of their classes into a single project. They've been exposed to a wide range of literature, critical approaches, and writing techniques, and they expect students to engage all of these in their projects. It becomes, they hope, a culminating project that reflects their best work.

Regarding best practices, Warren explains that their departments use a “don” approach, working one-on-one throughout the semester with students, helping them organize the writing process. Faculty set deadlines for incremental portions of the students' projects, discuss the components of their drafts, and help them revise. The students register for a research hour in order to give this process more importance in their schedule.

Zack Carter (Communication) teaches several classes. In Intrapersonal Communication, his students complete a final paper/presentation focusing on their self communication. Through the lenses of a custom textbook, grounded in sociopsychology and Scripture, they develop weekly mini-outlines providing brief glimpses into the self based on that week's readings.

Then, they make those mini-outlines into one large outline and write a paper, communicating a self-analysis of their intrapersonal communication and how they perceive it to influence their relationships, personally and professionally, for Kingdom building. The papers are graded through the lens of writer's freedom to organize the requirements of the assignment how they see best fit.

In Family Communication, students research qualitatively three different family systems around the university (one faculty member, one staff member, one student), and frame it according to a theory and various textbook elements discussed throughout the semester. Then, students present their findings to the class. While each student's assignment is composed differently based on their respective qualitative interviews and family system dynamic they're analyzing, they are graded according to a universal rubric based on basic research paper organization. Specific elements of their creative construction are viewed through the lens of writer's freedom to say what they want to say in the conclusion.



In Interpersonal Communication, which is designated as service learning, students participate with The University Nursing Center (UNC) directly off campus, developing and maintaining relationships based on Social Penetration Theory. They participate in weekly reading reflections filtered through their experiences at UNC. At the end of the semester, students compose a final paper discussing their experiences through the lens of UNC, our textbook, and Scripture. Assessment is based on a general universal rubric, however, while each student's lived experience at UNC is different, the specific, creative manner in which assignments are constructed requires a specific lens in which to grade it (i.e. writer's freedom to organize assignment requirements how they see fit).