

RESPONDING TO STUDENT WRITING AT SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY: A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PROJECT¹

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ABSTRACT

This two-semester professional learning project focused on ways in which we as faculty members at San José State University respond to student writing and how these responses or feedback might become more effective. For the purposes of this project, “effective feedback” was defined as a response that a student is able to understand and use to actually improve his or her writing. The goals of the project were (1) to raise faculty members’ awareness of the importance of feedback as part of the dynamic relationship of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and (2) to enhance the ability of San José State University faculty members to provide effective feedback on student writing. The project was directed by Rosemary Henze and staffed by Betsy Gilliland and John Leih. To accomplish the project goals, we conducted a survey of faculty members, held a one-day symposium on campus, and funded eight projects, led by faculty members in various disciplines, to either do professional development within a department or conduct classroom research in one or more classes. The outcomes of these three activities suggest that there is considerable interest among faculty members on campus in learning about responding to writing, teaching others how to respond more effectively, and

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contributing more research on this topic. They also suggest that an interdisciplinary approach that places faculty members in leadership roles within their departments and provides incentives such as release time or stipends is key to the success of future professional learning efforts along these lines.

I. INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

a. Framing the issue

For years, faculty at San José State University and local employers in the Santa Clara Valley have expressed concern about the number of students who, upon graduating from SJSU, still have trouble with writing in English. For example, a 2003 survey of 146 SJSU faculty members across the disciplines found that 2/3 of faculty members believe that student writing does not meet college level expectations (Carroll et. al., 2003). We know that in recent years, approximately 60% of freshmen entering SJSU fail the English Placement Test, and approximately 20% fail the Writing Skills test on the first attempt (Schulze et. al., 2004). The reasons for students' trouble with academic English writing are complex, including inadequate articulation between K-12 and higher education institutions, an increase in the number of students for whom English is a second language, an increase in the number of "generation 1.5" students², and differing expectations due to different genres of writing in different disciplines.

Responses to problems tend to be based on how we define the problem. In the case of the perceived problem with college level student writing, deficit views tend to locate the source of the problem in the students, who are seen as deficient in some fundamental way (e.g., not

² Generation 1.5 students are those who have resided in the U.S. for part of all of their K-12 education, but who are influenced by a language other than English at home. (Harklau, Siegal and Losey, 1999).

knowing “enough” English or the right kind of English; not being motivated enough; not reading enough, etc.). Systemic views tend to locate the source of the problem in our institutions, including the K-12 school system from which most of our local students have come, or the local community colleges. It is easy to play the “blame game”, especially when one can point the finger at institutions other than our own. A third view might be called a resource-based view (Davis et. al, 2005; Ruiz, 1988). In this view, students and their families and communities can be seen as having valuable resources, or “funds of knowledge” that can, if tapped by educators, contribute to a meaningful education (González, 1995). This is not to minimize the very real social problems that exist in communities, including poverty, violence, drug abuse, etc. But all families and communities do also bring potential resources to the educational “table”. For instance, our students in many cases speak two, three, or four languages, which can contribute to their position as global citizens, not to mention increased “cognitive flexibility” and ability to view things from multiple perspectives (Diaz & Klinger, 1992). Increasingly, they also participate in “multiliteracies” such as text messaging, video gaming communities, etc., which to date are little understood and studied by educators (Luke, 2000). A resource-based view suggests that the problem of student writing might be located, at least in part, in our own need to build better bridges between the prior knowledge and experiences students bring to the classroom and the new knowledge and skills they need to acquire.

Defining the problem in this way does not remove the need to attend to systemic-institutional issues, nor does it let students off the hook; they need to be responsible for their own learning, with our support. But it does give us, as faculty members, a different perspective in terms of what we can do. Rather than throwing up our hands and saying “it’s the students fault” or “it’s the system’s fault”, it gives us a place from which to start looking at our own practices.

In this project, we looked very concretely at what faculty members can do to provide better feedback on student writing. This is one of the ways in which we can build better bridges between students' prior knowledge and what they need to know to be effective writers in their chosen fields.

2. Existing support systems on campus

Numerous support systems already exist on our campus to help students improve their writing. There are "academic English" classes such as LLD 1 and 2 for entering freshmen who receive low scores on the English Placement Test. LLD 1 also includes a required 2-unit lab component in the Language Development Center (LDC), where students are provided with small group and 1-1 support sessions. LLD 98 and 99a are additional academic English classes for upper division students who have failed the Writing Skills Test two or more times. The Learning Assistance Resource Center (LARC) provides tutoring in all subject areas for any registered student. The Peer Mentor Center also provides tutoring. The required 100W classes are designed to teach students the written and oral communication skills they will need to be successful in specific fields, and the 250W classes accomplish the same goal at a more advanced level for graduate students.

To support faculty members in teaching writing across the curriculum, the Center for Faculty Development offers workshops at least once a semester. Additional workshops have been offered through the MUSE program, and the Writing Requirements Committee now has an electronic handbook with many excellent resources for faculty members on teaching writing. Occasionally, a campus-wide event focuses on writing, such as the 2001 symposium on

“Generation 1.5 students and writing”, or the 2005 symposium offered through this project on “Responding to student writing.”

Feedback on student writing: The need for professional learning

Despite all these support systems for both students and faculty members, gaps persist, and needs continue to remain unfulfilled. One question that faculty are beginning to explore in more depth is how to improve the quality of feedback to students on their writing. Instructors in writing classes as well as discipline specific classes often spend an inordinate amount of time correcting and giving comments on students’ written work, whether through written comments, error correction, one-to-one conferencing, or peer review. However, we do not know to what extent this feedback is in fact useful to students. Does it improve their writing, or are we wasting our time? What does the research literature tell us about how to structure our feedback so that students can use it to improve their writing? And what do students themselves say? What kinds of feedback do they find most useful? Are there broad strategies in giving effective feedback that are applicable across disciplines?

Across our campus, different groups have been coalescing around the need to address these questions. For example, the Writing Requirements Committee decided in Spring 2004 that the issue of feedback on student writing was so important that they commissioned a video on this topic. The video will highlight practices that help students write better, and is especially designed for faculty who are not themselves writing instructors. The Teacher Scholars Program (offered through the Center for Faculty Development at SJSU), has for the last 2 years focused on student writing (Carroll et. al., 2003, and Schulze-Krohn et. al, 2004). One of the recommendations that emerged from the report by Schulze et. al. (2004), was that faculty need to

“provide useful feedback that students will ‘hear’ and that does not overload faculty.” (power point presentation).

What the literature tells us

Faculty at SJSU are not alone in grappling with this issue. Ferris (2003) writes that despite research going back to the 1970s, “there is misinformation and confusion about the best ways for teachers and peers to give feedback.” (p. xii) Contributing to the confusion is the fact that early (1970s and 1980s) research on teacher feedback indicated that it was of little use (Knoblauch and Brannon, 1981). However, this research focused on students writing in their first language. More recently, studies have begun to examine whether students who are writing in their second language have different feedback needs (Ferris, 2003, Goldstein, 2005). Given that many of the students attending SJSU are writing in their second (or third or fourth!) language, it is important to have the needs of these students, as well as those whose first language is English, in the forefront as we grapple with the complexities of how best to respond to student writing.

Feedback on student writing must be situated in the larger context of the classroom and the institution (Ferris, 2003; Goldstein, 2005). It is not enough to focus only on the formal characteristics of teacher commentary on student papers, for those comments take place within an ongoing dialogue between teachers and students as well as students and students. Feedback on student writing is part of the dynamic relationship of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. For example, how will a student understand a particular teacher comment about paragraph development if paragraph development has not (yet) been a focus of instruction? Feedback also takes place within programmatic and institutional contexts that can influence how feedback is given and understood. For instance, how many units are students carrying? What are the

expectations for writing in the students' other classes? How many classes are teachers teaching? And how many students are in each class?

How exactly does high quality feedback help students? Educational psychologists suggest that "it can enhance motivation because it fosters higher levels of self efficacy and control which, in turn, work to decrease feelings of anxiety and helplessness" (McVey, 2006, citing Bandura, 1993 and Bruning et. al., 1995). Self efficacy can be defined as knowing that one can accomplish something in the future because one has accomplished similar things in the past.

Because effective feedback is so closely intertwined with the classroom and institutional context, as well as with the resources and "funds of knowledge" students bring to the classroom, it is not wise to reduce it to a set of "cookbook style" directives. Different types of feedback work better for some students than others. However, speaking very broadly, we can extract a few general guidelines from the literature. For example, Ferris offers the following guidelines:

1. Identify sound principles for response to student writing.
2. Examine student texts and identify major feedback points.
3. Prioritize issues on various essay drafts.
4. Construct feedback that is clear and helpful.
5. Explain your feedback philosophies and strategies to your students and be consistent.
6. Hold students accountable for considering and utilizing feedback. (2003, p. 118)

Ferris goes into detail about each of these principles. For instance, if students are to submit several drafts of a paper, it is appropriate to give different types of feedback at different stages. A teacher might comment on content and organization on a first draft, and focus more on grammar and sentence structure in later drafts. Furthermore, it is important to provide positive,

encouraging comments as well as pointing out ways students can improve. Students need to know what they did well so that they can do those things in the future. This also serves to bolster their self-confidence and willingness to keep working on improving their writing. Vague, general comments such as “good” or “unclear” are usually not helpful because students are unlikely to understand specifically what was good, or what was unclear and how it might be improved. Specific feedback that points to the problem and suggests ways of improving is more helpful.

It is not the purpose of this report to reinvent the wheel. Both Ferris (2003) and Goldstein (2005) provide extensive literature reviews and very useful advice for instructors on specifically how to improve the quality of their feedback. Given that there is this body of literature and guidelines for effective practice, our project began by asking: How can faculty members on our campus become more aware of the importance of feedback on student writing and learn how to provide more effective feedback?

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The project was conceived as two distinct but interconnected phases. Phase I, in Spring 2005, was designed to raise awareness on campus of the importance of responding to student writing, to gather initial data from faculty members about how they respond, and to discover aspects of responding to student writing about which faculty would like to learn more. The activities during this phase consisted primarily of the administration of a faculty survey and a “Symposium on Responding to Student Writing”. The total funding for this phase of the project was \$14,021.

Phase II, in Fall 2005, was conceived as an opportunity to follow up on some of the ideas suggested at the symposium and in the survey results. This phase encompassed eight faculty-led

projects that focused either on professional development within a particular department, and/or on classroom research. Throughout the entire process, we tried to find time to read and incorporate new insights from the professional literature on responding to student writing. The total funding for this phase was \$19,700.

In the following sections, each phase and the activities within it are described so that others who might want to replicate the project elsewhere will be able to understand the chronology and processes of this one.

A. Phase 1: Spring 2005 Survey and Symposium

The Survey

We designed a questionnaire to gather information from SJSU faculty about their practices with regard to feedback and their opinions about which practices help students the most. In addition to the information gathering function, we also believed that the survey would serve as ‘advance advertising’ for the Symposium a few weeks later, and might help to surface people on campus who were interested in writing, particularly feedback.

In drafting the questionnaire, we looked first at an earlier questionnaire on “Faculty views of student writing” which was administered by the teacher scholars group in 2003 (Carroll et. al, 2003). We wanted to make sure that we did not reinvent the wheel and that we built productively on questions that were asked at that time. It appeared that the 2003 questionnaire focused on faculty attitudes about student writing and did not attend specifically to how faculty provide feedback, with the exception of item #11, which asked faculty whether they agree that “It is not necessary for me to correct even significant technical problems in student writing, as long as I can understand and evaluate the general ideas expressed.” Eighty-eight percent of the

respondents said that they either disagreed or disagreed strongly with this statement, indicating that most faculty members do correct technical problems in students' writing.

The questionnaire for the new project, drafted by Henze, Gilliland, and Leih focused on faculty members' specific practices with regard to feedback and on their perception of how effective these practices are in helping students to improve their writing. Once the draft was completed, it was then piloted by several instructors in the LLD department and revised based on their feedback; finally, Henze met with Steve Aquino, Survey Research and Evaluation Specialist for the SJSU campus, to do final minor editing (See Appendix A).

The questionnaire was e-mailed by Aquino to all faculty members, full and part time. We were told that there were around 1573 faculty members listed in the database. We allowed 2 weeks for completion. This resulted in a very low response rate of 97, or about 6%. At the Symposium a few weeks later, we administered a paper copy of the same questionnaire to any symposium attendees who were SJSU faculty members and had not already completed the survey. In this way, we added another 21 respondents for a total of 118, or a 7.5% return rate – still very low, but we were told that this is typical. Institutional Services then produced an analysis of the responses. A summary and commentary is found in the section on “Findings and Outcomes”.

The Symposium on Responding to Student Writing

The Symposium was held on April 29th, the culmination of three months of planning. It was attended by 85 people. Twenty of the attendees (24%) were from eight local community colleges and one local private high school, and 62 (73%) were SJSU faculty members. Three graduate students in Linguistics and Language Development also attended and worked as assistants in the registration area.

Advertising for the Symposium was done via the Center for Faculty Development, through members of Writing Requirements Committee, and by distributing fliers in department offices.

A \$50 stipend was offered to the first 100 SJSU faculty members who registered, provided they agreed to attend for the whole day. Thirty-three people took advantage of this incentive.

The highlights of the symposium included a keynote speech in the morning by Dr. Dana Ferris of CSU Sacramento, who is a nationally recognized expert on responding to student writing; a student panel discussing what they find effective in terms of feedback; and small group discussions led by a facilitator in which faculty discussed how they would respond to a particular sample of student writing. In addition, there was a short introduction by Rosemary Henze, a welcome by Robert Cooper, a library information update by Susan Klingberg, and a lunchtime activity to encourage networking and information sharing (see Appendix B, Symposium Program).

The symposium was evaluated by analyzing the evaluation forms as well as the written notes from the small group discussions (see Appendix C, evaluation form and summary of evaluations). A brief discussion of the outcomes of the Symposium is found in the section on “Findings and Outcomes”

Phase 2: Faculty Projects

Rationale for faculty projects

Both the survey and symposium functioned in part as a needs assessment, guiding us in determining how best to maximize our resources during the implementation phases of the project (Phase 2). Our main goal in Phase 2 became “spreading the wealth” – both literally, in terms of

our small funding potential, and metaphorically, in terms of encouraging faculty ownership of knowledge about responding to student writing. We learned from the survey and Symposium that faculty members who do not see themselves primarily as writing teachers need more support in order to enhance their confidence and effectiveness in responding to student writing. We also learned that peer review is a very contentious classroom practice. With strong advocates both for and against it and little evidence to support either position, faculty members had no clear guidance on how to proceed (in the symposium, Ferris came out as a strong advocate of well structured peer review, while student panelists for the most part thought it was a waste of time). Thus, we thought it would be wise to encourage classroom research on this issue to obtain greater clarity. Given these needs, we decided to use most of the funding for Phase 2 (\$19,700 total) to support individual faculty projects that would do discipline-based professional development, classroom research, or both.

Outreach and Application Procedure

The Fall 2005 project was officially approved by Robert Cooper on August 31. Immediately afterwards, an announcement was posted to all faculty seeking applications for individual faculty members to do small projects focused on responding to student writing. Faculty were initially told they would receive a stipend of \$1000, though later this was increased to \$1,125. They were also told they would receive coaching by one of the project staff (see Appendix D, Application instructions and form).

Outreach to potential applicants was done through multiple channels of communication. An electronic as well as hard copy application was made available. The project director worked with members of the Writing Requirements Committee to disseminate it to various departments and colleges. Susan Meyers, Dean of the College of Education, shared it with all the deans and

asked them to disseminate it to chairs in their colleges. The announcement also went to the Council of Chairs, who were asked to disseminate it to faculty in their departments. It was also sent electronically to the Center for Faculty Development, with a request that it be disseminated electronically to all faculty on their mailing list. The CFD also duplicated hard copies, but too late to be used given the tight timeline. Finally, we used word of mouth and hand-delivered hard copies to departments that might have missed the earlier dissemination.

While many faculty members told us that they had received multiple copies of the announcement, others were skipped over entirely despite our best efforts. For instance, a day before the deadline, we realized that no one in our own department, LLD, had received the announcement!

A total of eight faculty members applied from six departments representing four colleges: Child Development (College of Education); Social Work, Social Sciences, and Communication (College of Social Sciences); Urban and Regional Planning (College of Social Work, now College of Social Sciences); Geology (College of Science). Of these eight faculty members, three were lecturers or adjunct and five were full time, tenure track faculty members.

We (Gilliland, Leih, and Henze) then reviewed the applications against our original criteria published in the application announcement and decided to fund all 8 projects. Since the number was lower than the expected 10, we decided to increase the stipend from \$1000 to \$1,125. We also discussed and took notes on questions and suggestions we wanted to share with each of the project leaders.

Coaching

Each funded applicant was sent a letter of acceptance and congratulations, and was asked to get in touch with the staff person who was assigned as their coach before beginning the

project. These meetings took place over the next couple of weeks, and project leaders made small revisions to their projects based on input from the coaches. Some projects asked for and received additional coaching, but everyone had at least one meeting.

Human Subjects Approval

To enable the funded faculty members to start immediately, the project director applied for an expedited human subjects review from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the whole group of projects. After a very helpful meeting with Rhea Williamson, of Graduate Studies and Research, it was decided that two complete packets should be submitted –one for the classroom research projects and one for the professional development projects. Both types of project involved the use of identifiable data from students and/or faculty. Furthermore, the project director was told that if any of the individual project directors wanted to publish the results of their project, they should seek individual approval from the IRB. To reduce delays, all the paper work except for the names and titles of projects was completed before the projects were actually funded. As soon as the names and titles were known, the two packets were submitted for IRB approval. Approval was received three weeks after submission.

Meeting to share projects

At the end of the semester, project leaders were invited to a two-hour lunch meeting held at a nearby restaurant with a private room. All project leaders and staff except for one were able to attend – an amazing feat given everyone’s busy schedules! Project leaders each shared highlights of their projects and discussed common themes and recommendations for the future. Given that this was the only time we all met as a group, it was valuable just to have “face time” to get acquainted and hear what others had been doing.

III. FINDINGS AND OUTCOMES

A. SURVEY RESULTS (See Appendix A for questionnaire)

Key results are summarized below, followed in most cases by brief interpretive comments.

Percentages have been rounded up.

1. Who responded to the questionnaire?

A total of 118 SJSU faculty members responded, or approximately **7.5% return rate** (based on 1573 total addressees).

- 65% of the respondents were female, and 35% were male.
- 47% were monolingual English speakers.
- The majority of respondents were in the Colleges of Humanities and Arts (27%), Social Sciences (20%) and Applied Sciences and Arts (20%). Although all of the other colleges were represented in the survey as well, each made up only 10% or less of the total.
- 56% of the respondents teach primarily undergraduates.
- 63% of the respondents teach classes of 21-40 students. However, 14% teach classes with over 41 students.
- 42% of the respondents identified themselves as lecturers, while 50% identified themselves as full time faculty members.

2. Frequency of responding to student writing: The most frequent response by far was “1-4 times a week”, with 55% of respondents choosing this frequency. If we add those who say they respond to student writing every day (i.e., 5 days a week), we get 74%. The author hypothesized

that the frequency of response might go up as people teach more classes, but the data do not show evidence of this. Interestingly, a test of the correlation between frequency of responding to student writing and the number of classes respondents teach per semester yields little clarity. There is only a low positive relationship (.206) between the frequency of responding to student writing and the number of classes a person teaches.

Comment: A possible explanation for the low correlation is that many of the people who responded to the survey were lecturers who teach part time. Lecturers are often the ones hired to teach writing intensive classes such as 100W and the academic writing classes such as LLD 1 and 2, and LLD 98 and 99. These instructors may see their primary role as teaching writing as opposed to other content. If this is so, then even though they teach fewer classes, they might be likely to report high frequencies of responding to student writing.

3. Amount of time spent on responding to student writing: It is possible that someone might respond frequently but not spend a lot of time responding, or the reverse. Therefore this item sought to discover respondents' estimates of how much time they spend responding to student writing. Most respondents (64%) reported spending more than 20 hours a month in this activity (see Table 1).

Table 1: Amount of time respondents report spending on responding to student writing

Time spent	Percentage reporting this amount
More than 30 hrs per month	31 %
Between 20 and 30 hrs a month	33%
Between 10-19 hrs a month	23%
Between 1-9 hrs per month	13%

As with the previous item, the author hypothesized that the more classes one teaches, the more time one might spend responding to student writing. The correlation between these items shows a low-moderate relationship of .349. Again, the expected relationship between number of classes per semester and amount of time spent responding to student writing is not borne out.

Comment: Along similar lines to the comment on the previous item, the lack of association between number of classes taught and amount of time spent responding to student writing may be explained by the fact that lecturers, who are often part time and who often teach writing intensive classes, may spend more time responding to student writing for each class they teach, even though they do not teach as many classes as full time faculty.

4. Commenting on student papers: 84% of respondents say they *always* write comments on student papers. However, respondents are quite divided in how effective they think these comments are, as shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Respondents' perception of the effectiveness of comments on student papers

Perceived effectiveness of comments	Percentage of respondents
Not very effective	4 %
Somewhat effective	32%
Effective	31%
Very effective	33%

Comments: One could hypothesize then that this single activity is what takes up so much faculty time. But while respondents spend a lot of time writing comments, they are not sure if the comments are effective. Given the large time investment in responding to student writing, respondents' confidence that this time is well spent is surprisingly low.

What we do not know from the survey is any information about the type of comments faculty write on student papers. As Dana Ferris pointed out, a wide range of comment types exist. The data from the survey suggest that we need to “unpack” the category we are calling “comments” to find out how different types of comments function. This might explain why we see so much variation in responses about the effectiveness of comments; respondents may be answering based on widely varying types of comments.

It is difficult to capture this type of data. To do so, we need more qualitative, in-depth study in which we look at particular comment types and how students interpret and use them.

5. Correcting all grammar or sentence structure errors: 49% of respondents *often* or *always* correct all grammar or sentence structure errors. However, 76% of respondents think that correcting all grammar or sentence structure errors is only *somewhat* or *not effective*.

Comment: If, based on what we know from Ferris (2003), it is true that correcting all grammar or sentence structure errors is not an effective practice, then this is a gap between research and practice that needs to be addressed through professional development. Faculty members should be familiarized with what the research says so that they can make more fully informed decisions about their practice.

6. Writing conferences: A majority of 64% of respondents sometimes, often, or always hold individual writing conferences with students, and 67% believe that these conferences are effective in helping students to improve their writing. However, 34% rarely or never hold writing conferences, 19% believe they are only somewhat or not very effective, and 14% say they are unable to evaluate the effectiveness of writing conferences.

Comments: The literature says that 1-1 writing conferences are one of the most effective methods of responding to student writing. Yet 34% of respondents say they use this practice infrequently or not at all. Responses to the open-ended questions suggest that the variation may have to do with institutional constraints -- e.g., large class sizes, (64% of respondents teach classes with 21-40 students; 13% teach classes with 41 or more students); # of classes we are expected to teach. These two constraints lead to less time available for 1-1 writing conferences. Even if we think it is effective, we may not be able to do it. This is an area where, like the “comment on student writing” category, it would be useful to unpack the concept more carefully. Different people do different things in a “writing conference.”

7. Peer response groups or pairs: Responses to the two items related to peer response (or peer review) showed no clear trend. There was wide variation among respondents in both how frequently they use this practice and how effective they think it is (see Tables 3 & 4):

Table 3: Frequency of using peer response groups

Frequency	Percentage reporting this frequency
Always	12%
Often	19%
Sometimes	27%
Rarely	16%
Never	24%

Table 4: Perceived effectiveness of peer response groups

Effectiveness ratings	Percentage giving this effectiveness rating
Very effective	14%
Effective	21%
Somewhat effective	29%
Not very effective	16%

Comment: Like the other categories mentioned above (writing comments and holding 1-1 conferences), it would be useful to unpack what faculty are actually doing in these peer response sessions to be able to better understand under what conditions they are/are not effective. A comment on the open-ended part of the questionnaire sheds some light on why some faculty members are dissatisfied with peer response groups: “Peer responses tend to be far more superficial than I think appropriate. They tend to focus only on grammar, spelling, typos, not on the content or organization at a deep level.” Perhaps it would be valuable for faculty members to develop strategies to “deepen” peer response.

8. Sample of questions or concerns respondents had about responding to student writing:

The following comments were given in response to the open-ended questions on the questionnaire. Open-ended questions were asked at the end of each major section of the questionnaire.

- Institutional structure constrains faculty’s ability to support student writing. Reduce class size and teaching load.
- More info on what research tells us about effectiveness of various approaches.
- How to get students to understand, read, process, and use your comments to improve future writing assignment.
- Many professors don’t do anything with usage or style, only grade on content.
Comment: This statement appears to reflect a concern in the sense that unless all of us take some responsibility for teaching writing, students will not get a clear message re how important this is. But this is countered by a respondent who says he or she does not want spend time teaching students how to write; that ‘s the job of the English IA and IB instructors. So there is a clear tension here regarding whose responsibility is should be to respond to students’ writing, and how much of the responsibility should be shared by non-writing instructors.
- Need for more campus-wide support services for writing – e.g. tutoring, writing workshops etc.
- More information on checklists.

- Guidelines or benchmarks for student writing competencies after 100W (and other gatekeeper courses)
- Time consuming – would like to be both more efficient and more effective in giving feedback
- How to work with non-native English speaking students without correcting every error.
- Screening procedures that allow students to take a course when they are not really ready for it?

The limitations of the survey: One limitation is that we had a very low response rate of around 7.5% (118 faculty members). Thus, the results cannot be generalized to the whole faculty of SJSU, only to those who chose to respond. It is possible that those who responded did so because they have a particular interest in teaching writing.

These descriptive statistics point to some interesting findings regarding central tendencies (or lack of central tendencies). They are able to show us some general frequencies and perceptions of the effectiveness of certain practices, but they do not explain why or even how respondents understand a particular item. To answer the why and how questions, we need to do more in-depth, qualitative studies. But the descriptive statistics do point us in the direction of some questions we might want to explore further.

B. EVALUATION OF THE SYMPOSIUM

Highlights of the evaluation are presented here. For a more detailed evaluation summary, please refer to Appendix C.

Of the 85 people who attended the Symposium, 52 turned in evaluation forms. They were very enthusiastic about the event. Dana Ferris' keynote presentation received especially high ratings; 97.8% of respondents said her presentation was valuable, and 100% said would use

some of her suggestions in responding to student writing. 95% of the respondents found the faculty discussion groups valuable, and 91.6% found the student panel valuable.

When asked “What was the most valuable thing you have learned today?” the most frequent comment participants gave was that the symposium experience led them to change, refine, or question their own feedback strategies. Specific strategies they mentioned include

- being specific and clear when giving written feedback;
- asking students to write up responses to teacher feedback;
- following up to find out how students use the feedback they receive;
- giving indirect feedback (i.e. not correcting but pointing out errors or problems and expecting students to seek the best way to correct or revise);
- prioritizing the type of feedback to give (i.e., content or grammar);
- using rubrics and checklists to make expectations clear; distributing these when the assignment is given so that students can know how the assignment will be assessed;
- making instructions for peer review clear;
- saying something positive about students’ writing; and
- creating opportunities for 1-1 conferences.

Respondents also made some suggestions for follow-up. One of the most important was the need to offer more professional development specifically targeted for disciplinary content areas. In other words, participants noticed that those whose job it is to teach writing operate in a different context than subject area instructors, who teach writing in the context of other required content. Another need that surfaced in the evaluation was that faculty wanted more follow up on

the peer review process – i.e. whether it is or can be effective, and if so, how to design peer review in such a way that it really helps students improve their writing.

Both of these expressed needs informed the decision to focus the next phase of the project on faculty initiated professional development in departments and on small classroom research projects.

C. ANALYSIS OF THE FACULTY PROJECT REPORTS (PHASE 2)

The analysis that follows attempts to capture cross cutting themes that characterized more than one of the faculty projects. The first two points provide an overview of the projects and a sense of how many people were affected by them – a rough quantitative measure of “impact”. Following that, themes that emerged in multiple projects are articulated.

1. Overview of the 8 faculty projects

As noted in Section II, faculty members who applied to do projects in Fall 2005 had a choice as to whether they wanted to do professional development for their department colleagues (i.e. making the link between feedback and the discipline), or conduct a classroom research project instead, or a combination of both. Table 5 presents an overview of the faculty projects. For those wishing more information about the individual projects, Appendix E contains the abstracts written by each of the eight faculty grantees. A complete report may be requested by emailing the individual faculty member.

Table 5: Overview of faculty projects

Faculty Name	Department	Professional Development	Classroom research
Cava	Child & Adolescent Development		Students in 100W participated in and evaluated 3 types of peer review sessions.
Drabble	Social Work	Faculty in Social Work participated in a lunchtime workshop. <i>Follow-up workshop planned for Spring 06³</i>	Students in 1 st year MA Social Work course participated in and evaluated a voluntary peer review workshop; 1 st and second drafts were compared.
Fassett	Communication	Workshop for department & community college colleagues. <i>Workshop will be refined and offered again in Fall 06, and will be used as well in future GTA training.</i>	
McVey	Child & Adolescent Development		Students in an online Senior Seminar assessed the use of inking & a feedback form. <i>Revised and more extensive study planned for Spring 2006</i>
Messina	Geology, Science Education		Instructor compared writing improvement among grad students in Science Ed. 173 using two different feedback techniques.
Ochoa	Social Sciences,	<i>Workshop for faculty planned in Spring 2006</i>	Student in 100W developed and administered a survey about feedback in 4 other classes.
Schwab	Social Sciences	<i>Workshop for faculty planned in Spring 2006</i>	Students in Women's Studies 10 assessed various types of feedback
Weinstein	Urban & Regional Planning	2 workshops for colleagues in the department	

³ Italics in this table indicate an event planned for the future.

2. Number of people affected across projects

The eight faculty projects involved both other faculty and students. Other faculty members besides the eight LPP grantees were primarily involved by participating in professional development workshops. A total of 32 faculty members were involved in this way, through the projects led by Drabble, Fassett, Weinstein, and Ochoa. In addition, some faculty members were surveyed to learn about the forms of feedback they provide to their students (Ochoa). If we consider that the eight project leaders were probably the most deeply affected, then we can say that 40 faculty members were involved in and affected by these projects.

Three hundred and fifty five (355) students were involved, primarily as research subjects. They were surveyed and in some cases they participated in focus groups (Drabble, Cava, McVey, Messina, Ochoa, and Schwab). In Ochoa's project, students in a 100W class played a more active role, constructing the survey instrument to give to students in other classes, and also administering the survey and analyzing it.

Table 6: Number of faculty and students affected in addition to the 8 grantees

Faculty Name/Dept.	# of faculty involved	# of students involved
Cava, Child Developmt'		58 in 100W
Drabble, Social work	11 FT & PT	33 in 1 st year MSW course
Fassett, Communication	8 PT & CC	
McVey, Child Developmt'		37 grad students in senior seminar
Messina, Geology		19
Ochoa, Social Science	5	138 in 100W, Asian Studies, & Social Science
Schwab, Social Science		70 in Women's Studies 10
Weinstein, Urban & Regional Planning	8, FT & PT	
TOTAL	32 faculty members <i>or</i> 40 faculty members <i>if we include the 8 project leaders</i>	355 students

3. Collaboration across institutional boundaries

The “Responding to Student Writing” faculty projects encouraged collaboration across departments and institutional boundaries. At the very minimum, all faculty grantees met at least once with a coach from the LLD department. In addition, all but one grantee attended the final project meeting to share and discuss their projects with other grantees from different departments and colleges.

In addition to these project-wide collaborations, Drabble co-led a workshop for faculty in her department with a faculty member from LLD, Betsy Gilliland. Drabble reported that this interdisciplinary leadership enhanced the quality of the workshop. Fassett held a workshop attended by the Chair of the Communication Studies Department, Graduate Teaching Assistants in her department, and community college faculty who teach communication courses. In this case, although all participants were in Communications, they represented different institutions and levels of hierarchy.

4. The faculty projects enhanced SJSU’s institutional capacity to provide better writing instruction across disciplines.

The eight project leaders all engaged in substantial reflection, study, and preparation to be able to carry out their projects, whether they focused on professional development in the departments or on classroom research. As a result, they are now positioned to serve as mentors and coaches to other faculty members in the area of writing instruction, especially the issue of feedback.

Some of the project leaders noted specific plans they have to do just that. Fassett reported that she plans to use and expand the prototype of training she developed in this project

for GTAs in communication. She also plans to use the workshop prototype to develop future workshop formats (shorter as well as more advanced) for faculty in Communication Studies. Weinstein, who held two workshops for faculty members in Urban and Regional Planning, reported that faculty found these workshops very helpful. She may be called on in the future for similar professional development activities. Ochoa plans to offer a workshop for Social Science Department faculty in Spring 2006 in which she shares the results of her study.

Turning to individual faculty leaders within content areas other than English or Linguistics and Language Development led to greater potential for institutional buy-in, not only for this specific project but for attention to writing more broadly. It is difficult to get buy-in at the department level when the push is coming from outside the department. But when a faculty member inside the department is advocating for attention to writing, people are more likely to pay attention (John Leih's observation).

In addition to the human capacity developed in this project, faculty members also developed instructional and research tools that can be used or adapted by others. These are listed in Table 7 and will be available on the Center for Faculty Development website.

Table 7: Tools developed by faculty projects

Faculty Name	Tools developed
Cava	Power point presentation to prepare students for peer review
Drabble	Student feedback form for peer review workshop
Fassett	Workshop guide
McVey	Feedback form for students and instructors Survey to elicit student views of the feedback process
Messina	A. Rubric for assessing student writing B. Sample instructor comments plus tips from Paula Messina
Ochoa	A. Survey assignment for 100W students B. Administration of survey done by 100W students C. Survey of student responses to faculty feedback
Schwab	A Student questionnaire #1 B Writing Skills & Expectations (title evolved to become our rubric: Writing Elements) C Essay Organization Chart D Peer Review of Service Learning Paper E Student questionnaire #2 (not attached; hard copy only; ask Schwab for electronic) F Focus Group Questions
Weinstein	Workshop materials

5. The classroom research projects revealed both effective and ineffective feedback practices.

In particular, faculty projects found that the following practices are helpful in motivating students to revise and improve their writing: (These practices are either based on students' self report or on comparisons of writing improvement using different methods of feedback).

Feedback that is helpful

- Individualized, detailed comments at the end of a paper (Ochoa, McVey)
- Face to face meetings with instructor to discuss their writing (Ochoa, Drabble, Schwab). For example, Drabble found that as a result of her project, students wanted more peer review workshops; students also sought out the instructor during office hours more after the peer review session.
- Handwritten comments (as opposed to typed) that make the feedback feel more personalized (McVey)
- Peer review, when students are well prepared and session is well structured (Drabble, Cava, Schwab)
- Practice session in which students practice giving feedback as a whole class before being expected to peer review. (Schwab)

- Anonymous review by peers, because it “reduced the sense of vulnerability and self-consciousness about their writing” (Cava)
- Peer review of drafts from other classes (e.g., content classes rather than writing classes) (Cava)
- “Making the rubric available in advance provides guidance to those unsure of expectations, while allowing students to revise the proposed scheme gives students an automatic “buy-in” to their grades.” (Messina, Schwab)
- Pointing out patterns of error rather than correcting errors (Messina, Schwab) (However Messina qualifies this, noting that only students who are motivated make use of this type of feedback)
- Appending tips for correcting errors that have been pointed out (Messina)
- Discussing feedback as a whole group in class helps to learn from others’ mistakes (Schwab)
- Using red pen so students can easily see feedback (Schwab)
- Being required to fix errors after a paper is returned (Schwab)
- Reading exemplary student essays in class helped students to understand what was expected (Schwab)
- Making positive comments as well as well as constructive criticism (Schwab)

The classroom research projects found that the following practices are not helpful to students:

Feedback that is not helpful

- Instructor provides little or no feedback on their writing (Ochoa)
- Penmanship is hard to read (Ochoa, McVey, Schwab)
- Instructor uses red ink (Ochoa)
- Instructor provides unclear or ambiguous comments (Ochoa)
- Electronic feedback forms that are not easy to pull up via computer (a problem of articulation of different computer platforms? Only one student had a problem with this) (McVey)
- Technology dependent tools (such as spell check and grammar check, or instructor corrections using the “Track changes” tool in Word) tend to be accepted and used without students necessarily learning from their mistakes. The same mistakes tend to be repeated in subsequent papers (Messina).
- In peer review, the following practices were deemed unhelpful: receiving confusing advice or perfunctory comments; having reviewers be too critical; being inexperienced with the process; feeling self-conscious, vulnerable, unqualified to offer suggestions (Cava).

6. Several of the projects also point to issues that need to be taken up by students themselves.

Responding to student writing, as many researchers have pointed out, is one manifestation of a theoretical lens that sees writing as conversation, or more broadly, interaction.

When faculty members work hard at improving their ability to communicate, they expect a concomitant effort on the part of students. In other words, they want students to be active conversational partners, and feel disappointed when students “drop the ball” in what the faculty member sees as a reciprocal arrangement. The following comments from illustrate this dynamic:

If [students do not understand the instructor’s feedback] ..., what then? 10 do nothing, 10 ask someone else, **21 talk to instructor in class**, 8 go during office hours, 9 Email instructor, 4 other. My reaction to this is mixed. 20 out of 50 students do not follow up with the instructor if they do not understand the responses – not helpful. Also, seeking a two-minute transaction after class as sufficient may well not significantly add to their broader writing understanding. For structural issues, having an actual discussion during office hours could have the most potentially helpful impact, and is rarely student initiated. This needs more attention to effect different behavior.(Schwab)

The most startling realization to emerge from comparing these two sets of papers was that three of the nineteen students *submitted their identical drafts* as their “rewritten” essays for the latter assignment. Possible reasons may include students’ inability or unwillingness to identify the errors themselves and/or procrastination and subsequent end-of-semester time limitations, apathy, or a combination of these and other factors. (Messina)

A small, though significant proportion of students ignore instructor comments altogether, even when there’s much to lose as a result. It is unclear whether this is a default choice (based on the inability to comprehend the comments, poor time management, etc.) or an action based on previous writing critiques. (Messina)

Interestingly, few students reported going to the websites listed on the template when they were told their performance was weak in an area: 17.6% never did and 26.5% only did so rarely (8.8% Always; 14.7% Usually; 29.4% Sometimes)”. (McVey)

These comments not only provide self-report data from students, but also reflect faculty members’ frustration at not being able to reach a small but significant number of students. The good news is that these faculty members were apparently successful at eliciting honest self-reports about student behavior. The bad news is that these self-reports can potentially add fuel to a “deficit” view of some students as simply lazy or not interested in improving through the educational opportunities provided to them.

7. Students who were involved in research felt intrigued and valued.

In both Schwab's and Ochoa's study, students apparently found it interesting to be part of a research project. Whether this actually had any impact on their learning is unclear, but at least it caught their attention! In Ochoa's study, 100W students were responsible for designing and administering a questionnaire about feedback for students in other classes. This experience gave them insight into the processes of doing research. In Schwab's study, students didn't actually do the research but were very interested in having a voice in improving faculty effectiveness.

Schwab writes;

This research project caused me to focus my creative energies much more on responses to student writing and the entire cycle of writing tools and exercises, involving students more fully in this process, etc. Being a part of this research clearly intrigued them. They seemed to feel valued as participants – in itself an important outcome. They understood that my findings were also to be shared with the Department; student input would help me and other instructors become more effective.

8. Faculty who participated in professional development articulated the following insights and needs:

- Simple shifts in thinking can be often be very powerful. Participants in Fassett's workshop found the shift from thinking about "grading" to thinking about "responding" helpful (they felt less tension and dread, greater calm).
- Faculty want more support on how to assign letter grades (Weinstein)

- Adequate time has to be built in to professional development so that faculty can really engage with practice in reading student papers and commenting on them. (Weinstein).
- Faculty want more workshops with a focus on evidence-based strategies for responding to student writing (Drabble)
- Faculty wanted more and deeper professional development on giving feedback (Fassett).

9. The institutional pressures on our campus negatively affect faculty members' ability to provide effective feedback

This theme emerged in several of the professional development workshops as well as in individual project reports:

- The most overworked and underpaid faculty members on our campus – adjunct faculty – are often the ones responsible for providing the most writing intensive classes (Fassett). In other words, we “outsource” our writing intensive classes to faculty members who are paid less, have less secure status, and often work two or three part-time jobs.
- Writing intensive courses should have smaller enrollment caps. For example, Fassett wrote, “I teach 27 students in 100W...each student writes 8000 words...I’m to take up multiple drafts of assignments...and I’m supposed to provide substantive feedback (in addition to the preparation I do for my other three courses, research and service).”
- Ochoa writes of the need for systemic, institutional change to address issues of faculty workload –both number of courses and number of students per class. She particularly cites classes with 50 or more students. If faculty are to provide meaningful, effective feedback on student writing, the institution has to support them to be able to do so.

10. Providing incentives and support to both faculty and students attracted both faculty and student participants.

To begin with, this phase of the project operated on the assumption that faculty need incentives in order to volunteer for projects that demand their time. The main incentive for the eight faculty project leaders was the small stipend of \$1125, which was probably inadequate given the amount of time they actually put into the projects, but nonetheless symbolized in a tangible way our appreciation of their efforts. Other less tangible incentives might have been the networking and collaboration with other faculty members; the offer of coaching by project staff; and the group human subjects application, which removed the need for each person to apply individually.

The eight faculty projects in turn provided an array of incentives to encourage participation. The departmental workshops offered by Drabble and Fassett both included free lunch; Drabble also offered a gift certificate to Starbucks, and Fassett offered free parking for community college faculty.

To encourage student attendance at a peer review workshop, Drabble offered students an extension on a writing assignment. In McVey's study, students were given two bonus points on the final term paper if they completed the survey seeking their opinions about instructor feedback.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

A. Next Steps

Now that this survey the symposium, and the faculty projects have been completed, we should keep our institutional memory alive and build on what's already been done. Specifically, our campus should use these survey results, plus documentation from the symposium and the faculty projects, to support *evidence-based decision making* in the following areas:

1. directions for further research on writing instruction, including possible action research projects by faculty;
2. plans for more professional development in this area among faculty;
3. plans for a campus writing center (being resuscitated by the Writing Requirements Committee)
4. plans for addressing the faculty workload issue so that it does not impede our ability to respond effectively to student writing.
5. plans for addressing the status and stratification of writing instruction.

B. Reflections

Having led this project for over a year, I would like to use this concluding ‘space’ to reflect on what it means and how I see the “bigger picture” within which this project is nested. I will also suggest a few directions for “next steps”.

I have led other, larger projects in the past and so my reflections on this one are also informed by those other experiences. One of the things I always worry about when initiating a new project that involves other people is the “so what?” factor. Will what we do make any difference in the busy scheme of institutional life? How can I maximize the little pot of money I have to actually create some positive impact? Also, always at the heart of any project I am

involved with is the question, “Whom do I most want to benefit by doing this?” And because I have a strong desire to promote equity, I always wonder whether the projects I carry out help to achieve that.

I have to say that I am not passionate about responding to student writing. I enjoy it occasionally, and procrastinate and dread it most of the time. Even when the writing is quite good and a joy to read, still I find that the process involves considerable drudgery. Despite all of the excellent, evidence-based advice provided by Ferris, Goldstein, and the eight faculty projects, I still have to force myself to do it and do it as well as I can.

The reason that I wanted to focus on improving our responses to student writing is not, therefore, because I love sitting down with a stack of student papers to read. Rather, I have come to see it as one very concrete means by which we can promote greater equity in education. Unlike educational equality, which assumes that all students should have access to the same teachers, curriculum, and resources, equity in education is about providing different supports for different students so that they can all achieve the standards we set for them. Equity involves a fundamental recognition that students are different and have different levels preparation for university writing. They do not jump from the proverbial “level playing field” onto our campus.

Providing feedback on student writing, whether we do it through written commentary, peer review sessions, one-to-one conferences, or other ways, is one of the most individualized moments in instruction. It is therefore one of the key moments through which we are capable of providing different supports for different students. Clear, well-constructed feedback can actually make a positive difference, as this project demonstrates. It serves both instructional functions (teaching students what to do and how to do it) and assessment functions (showing them what they need to improve and giving them a sense of what they did well). It can also serve to

connect what students knew before (background knowledge) with what they need to learn, and can reinforce previous instruction given in the classroom. In all of these ways, more effective feedback can mean opening the institutional gateway a little wider so that students who have traditionally failed to “measure up” because their writing does not meet standards know more clearly what is expected and how to achieve it. Thus, improving our feedback to students on their writing is not just a technical skill; it is one of the very concrete ways through which we can materialize the notion of equity. If we miss that opportunity (by not doing it at all, or not doing it well), then we are unwittingly creating yet another differential structure that allows students with all the "cultural capital" to move ahead, and the ones who, for various reasons, do not have that middle class mainstream cultural capital, lose out yet again.

It is clear from this project that the effectiveness of faculty response to student writing is partially a matter of faculty development (which the project focused on), and partially an institutional issue. If faculty members are teaching four courses and have more than 20 students per class, it is always going to be difficult to impossible to provide effective, high quality feedback. Thus, while faculty can benefit and become more effective through projects such as this one, we should not be lulled into thinking that this will take care of our need to improve the quality of student writing. Faculty development must not be seen as the only answer to the problem. Institutional change is the other side of the coin. Specifically, the institution as a whole needs to continue to seek ways to reduce the faculty workload so that we can pay closer attention to students and their individual needs and so that we can develop our own research and scholarship in the area of writing instruction.

In addition, given that faculty members do not all have expertise in teaching writing, we need a strong institutional commitment to providing more support services in writing. There is

currently talk about a campus-wide writing center – a good idea, but one that needs considerable fleshing out to make sure that if realized, it will really serve the needs of our population.

Moreover, we need more consistency in when, during a student’s time on our campus, writing is addressed. It cannot be relegated only to GE courses and 100 W, which many students take in their final year after completing all the other courses for their major.

Lastly, our campus community needs to acknowledge that the bulk of writing intensive instruction on our campus is done by people who are not fully vested in the institution – part time faculty. Although we are certainly not alone in this (most other CSU campuses are similar in this way), it does present an uncomfortable picture in which writing instruction is socially stratified. We say that we take writing instruction seriously and want it to be “across the curriculum.” Yet we relegate it to part-time faculty, many of whom are excellent teachers – yet they often have to teach in two or three institutions in order to cobble together adequate salaries. This sends a mixed message: We take writing instruction seriously, but at the same time, it is just a “skill”, and the teaching of skills, as opposed to disciplinary content, can be relegated to teachers of lower status in the academy.

It is a positive sign that five out of eight faculty projects were led by full time faculty, and that many full time faculty members attended the Symposium. This level of involvement at all levels of the institution needs to continue to increase; one way to do this is to create more incentives for faculty at all levels and in all disciplines to focus on writing. Another way is to question and confront our own biases and assumptions about writing instruction as a skill. Ochoa, in her project report, points out that in her self described “random and anecdotal” review of green sheets for 100W, she gets an impression of

“faculty churning out students for whom the labor of writing is taught rather like administering a bitter herbal remedy, necessary yet bereft of the passion of life, and that seems to ... undermine the import of human communication... As a scholar and an author, I constantly think about the role of the writer in society and in particular how writers, critical and creative, can effect social change.”

The everyday, mundane practice of responding to students’ writing, when seen in this larger context, suddenly takes on a larger significance. It is not only a skill, but part of a larger conversation involving change of individual capacities and change in institutions.

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V. APPENDICES

- A. Faculty Questionnaire
- B. Symposium Program
- C. Symposium Evaluation form and summary of evaluations
- D. Application for faculty projects
- E. Faculty Project abstracts

APPENDIX A: FACULTY QUESTIONNAIRE

RESPONDING TO STUDENT WRITING

Dear Colleagues:

With this questionnaire, we are inviting you to become participants in a project that asks "How effective is feedback in improving student writing?" and "How can feedback (from teachers or peers) be structured so that students can more effectively use it to improve their writing?"

The easiest way to participate in the project is to take 5-10 minutes to fill out this questionnaire. Your responses will remain confidential. They will be used to better understand the needs and interests of faculty so that we can design relevant professional learning opportunities focused on responding to student writing.

If you are interested in becoming more involved in this project, please join us for a one-day conference on April 29th, here on campus, with a keynote speech by Dana Ferris followed by a student panel and faculty discussion. More details will be forthcoming.

This project is funded through a grant from SJSU's Learning Productivity Program.

Sincerely,

Rosemary Henze, Associate Professor, Linguistics and Language Development

Betsy Gilliland, Lecturer, Linguistics and Language Development

John Leih, Director, Language Development Center

1. How frequently during an average semester do you personally (as opposed to a teaching assistant or peers) spend time responding to student writing?

- Every Day
- 1-4 times a day
- 1-3 times a month
- 1-3 times a semester
- I never respond to student writing (skip to question #3).

2. On an average month, how many hours do you personally spend responding to student writing?

- More than 30 hours a month
- Between 20 and 30 hours a month
- Between 10 and 19 hours a month
- Between 1 and 9 hours a month

3. My answers to the first two questions are based on teaching:

- 4 courses a semester
- 3 courses a semester
- 2 courses a semester
- 1 course a semester

4. How frequently do you use the following methods of responding to student writing in your courses? (Please read all the choices before answering.)

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never N/A- Do not have TA
I write comments on student papers.					
A teaching assistant writes comments on student papers.					
I correct all grammar and sentence structure errors.					
A teaching assistant corrects all grammar and sentence structure errors.					
A teaching assistant writes comments on student papers.					
I correct all grammar and sentence structure errors.					

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never N/A- Do not have TA
A teaching assistant corrects all grammar and sentence structure errors.					
I correct only some grammar and sentence structure errors.					
A teaching assistant corrects only some grammar and sentence structure errors.					
I point out errors but I don't correct them.					
A teaching assistant points out errors but doesn't correct them.					
I audiotape my comments on student writing.					
I use a checklist to provide feedback on student writing.					
I require students to write multiple drafts of their papers.					
I hold writing conferences with individual students to discuss how they can improve a draft.					
I organize peer response groups or pairs so that students can give feedback on each other's writing.					

5. Are there any other methods you use to give feedback besides those mentioned above?

6. How effective do you think each of the following methods are in terms of actually helping student to improve writing?

	Very Effective	Effective	Somewhat Effective	Not Very Effective	Unable to Evaluate
Writing comments on student papers.					
Correcting all grammar and sentence structure errors.					
Correcting only some grammar and sentence structure errors.					
Pointing out errors but not correcting them.					
Audiotaping comments on student papers.					
Using a checklist to provide feedback on student writing.					
Requiring students to write multiple drafts of a paper.					
Holding writing conference with individual students to discuss how they can improve a draft.					

7. Please describe any other response methods you feel are effective in helping students improve their writing.

8. How satisfied are you with the way you currently respond to student writing?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Not Satisfied

9. What questions or concerns do you have about responding to student writing that you would like to see addressed in future professional learning opportunities on campus?

Please provide some background information to help us to analyze responses.

10. I am:

Male Female

11. Please indicate which applies to you:

English is the only language I speak.

English is my primary language, but I speak one or more languages.

English is not my primary language, but I speak one or more languages.

12. My primary assignment is in the:

College of Applied Sciences and Arts

College of Business

College of Education

College of Engineering

College of Humanities and the Arts

College of Science

College of Social Sciences

College of Social Work

Other (please specify)

13. I primarily teach:

Undergraduate courses Graduate courses Both undergraduate and graduate courses

14. How large are the majority of classes you teach?

Fewer than 15 students

15-20 students

21-40 students

41-60 students

Over 60 students

15. My present academic rank:

Professor

Associate Professor

Assistant Professor

Lecturer

Instructor

Other (please specify)

APPENDIX B: SYMPOSIUM PROGRAM

Responding to Student Writing: A Symposium on Feedback

Friday, April 29, 2005

10 am – 5 pm

San José State University, King Library Room 225

Welcome! We are very happy that you have decided to participate in the symposium and hope you will find it a valuable professional learning experience. We are especially pleased to see the diversity of disciplines, institutions, and role groups who are present, including faculty from SJSU and local community colleges representing a wide range of disciplines and departments; staff members and administrators from SJSU who are helping to improve student access to academic success; and graduate students interested in learning how to teach writing.

Sincerely,

The Symposium Organizers: Rosemary Henze, Betsy Gilliland, and John Leih

Symposium Objectives

- (1) to enhance faculty members ability to provide effective feedback on student writing. “Effective feedback” in this context means feedback that students can understand and use to improve their writing;
- (2) to construct knowledge and questions about responding to student writing that will serve as a guide for next steps.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the support we have received from many sources. This symposium is primarily funded through a grant from the Learning Productivity Program. In addition, we have received support from the Linguistics and Language Development Department, the Center for Faculty Development, and the Writing Requirements Committee. Student assistants include Andrea Zele, Karen Au, Mareike Schoene, Doris Lin, and Florence Yu. Faculty facilitators of small group discussions include Peter Lowenberg, Pim Pisalsarakit, Maureen O’Brien, and Barbara Kaiser.

Responding to Student Writing: A Symposium on Feedback

Friday, April 29, 2005
10 am – 5 pm
San José State University, King Library Room 225

Agenda

- 10:00 am Registration and coffee
- 10:30 am Welcome and Introduction
Rosemary Henze, Linguistics and Language Development
Robert Cooper, Associate Vice President, Undergraduate Studies
- 11:00 am Keynote address by Dr. Dana Ferris, Professor of English, CSU Sacramento
- 12:00 pm Lunch and informal discussion
- 1:00 pm Student panel
Dalila Ibañez, Parth Gandhi, Mareike Schoene, Kim Le,
Larasha Ludd, Vijay Vanniaranjan
- 2:00 pm. Survey results: Rosemary Henze
- 2:30 pm Library Resources: Susan Klingberg
- 2:45 pm Break
- 3:00 pm Faculty discussions in groups
- 4:30 – Wrap-up
- Please note: SJSU Faculty receiving a stipend must sign out and submit form when leaving

APPENDIX C
SUMMARY OF EVALUATIONS
FROM THE SYMPOSIUM ON RESPONDING TO STUDENT WRITING
APRIL 29, 2005

Overall, approximately 85 people attended all or part of the symposium. 82 people were pre-registered. Three did not show up, and six registered on site. In addition, approximately fourteen people worked as student assistants, organizers, or other roles.

The evaluation form included 11 closed-ended (Likert scale) items and 4 open-ended questions. Altogether, 52 evaluation forms were turned in. Similar responses to the open-ended questions were grouped together.

This summary was compiled by Rosemary Henze.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE THING YOU HAVE LEARNED TODAY?

This open-ended question sought an evaluation of the whole symposium. 42 people responded to this question. The most common types of response were as follows:

- Changed, refined, or questioned my own feedback strategies (25 people)
- Gained understanding of student opinions on feedback (9 people)
- Gained reassurance that I am doing the right thing (5 people)
- Shared knowledge and experience with other instructors (3 people)

In addition to these shared themes, there were a few comments that did not fit these patterns. One person noted that “There’s a huge divide between the way content and writing instructors evaluate student writing, which needs to be bridged through more discussion and clear, shared standards.” Another said that “Instructors are good at getting students to comment against instructors.” (We believe this refers to some critical comments made by student panelists about the ways past instructors have responded to their writing). And a third person said that “Students and faculty have different perceptions about what should happen in response.”

General suggestions:

- Writing instructors and content instructors would be more effectively served by separate discussions (1)
- More potty breaks! (1)
- Preliminary survey results should either not be shared (because too preliminary) or should be shared more carefully, with more attention to the details. (1)

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION BY DANA FERRIS

I found Ferris' presentation valuable: 46 people rated this item. Of those, **97.8% strongly agreed or agreed** that her presentation was valuable. One individual disagreed.

I learned some new techniques for responding to writing: 46 people rated this item. Of those, **97.8% strongly agreed or agreed** that her presentation was valuable. One individual disagreed.

I plan to use some of Ferris' suggestions in responding to my students' writing: 44 people rated this item. **100% strongly agreed or agreed** with this item.

What new ideas have you gained from Ferris' presentation?

24 people responded to this question either by identifying specific new ideas or by indicating that they got lots of new ideas without specifying what those were. Among the specific new ideas mentioned were the following:

- The importance of being specific and clear when responding to student writing (4)
- Asking students to write up responses to teacher feedback (3)
- Indirect feedback (3)
- Making peer review instructions very clear and structured (2)
- Using rubrics with just ✓+ ✓✓- ranking (1)
- Prioritizing what type of feedback to give, e.g. content or grammar (1)
- Data gathering for how to give feedback (1) (we're not sure what this means)
- The importance of teacher feedback and how it is the only way to improve student writing (1)
- Students like to get feedback (1)
- The importance of saying something positive to students about their writing (1)
- Self evaluation by students (1)
- Marking errors (1)
- The balance of affective, pedagogical, and interpersonal factors. (1)

Suggestions related to Ferris' presentation

- Have her books available for sale (2)
- Would like more information on the peer review process, including specific activities. (1)

STUDENT PANEL

I found the student panel valuable: 48 people rated this item. Of those **91.6% strongly agreed or agreed** that the student panel was valuable. 3 individuals disagreed, and one individual strongly disagreed.

I have a better sense of how students interpret my responses to writing: 48 people rated this item. Of those **91.6% strongly agreed or agreed** with this statement. 3 individuals disagreed, and one individual strongly disagreed.

What new perspectives on feedback have you gained?

27 people responded to this open-ended question either by identifying specific new perspectives or by indicating that in general that the student panel was helpful. Among the specific new perspectives mentioned were the following:

- Be as specific as possible in feedback (6)
- Need to push 1-1 conferences (4)
- An understanding that the students do value written comments. (2)
- Be specific in positive comments as well as critical ones (2)
- Students must learn to take responsibility and ownership of how to get access to help (e.g., on-line sources, tutors, office hours, writing manuals) (2)
- Those students are very needy, want a lot from teachers (2)
- Underscored difficulty students have in interpreting feedback (1)
- The value of re-writing (1)
- Students' level of participation and motivation for improvement vary greatly (1)
- Students' emotional responses (1)
- Use of summative feedback (1)
- Tell students in advance of faculty workload, especially for content instructors (1)
- Avoid over marking papers (1)
- Students spoke very negatively about peer review –makes me rethink whether or not I should do it. (1)
- Students view the situation very differently than most teachers (1)
- Student appreciate email feedback from instructors (1)
- I'm more curious now about the effects of feedback (1)
- I need to be very clear about why I do what I do (1)

Suggestions or comments related to student panel

- The panel did not represent the range of students at SJSU (mainly self motivated, high achieving students; all but one were female) (4)
- It was a little too long. Each student didn't necessarily have to respond to every question from the audience (2)
- Provide more time for audience questions (1)
- Student panel was very well done. I appreciated their comments, and it was a good idea to filter audience questions with index cards. (1)
- Make sure panelists are screened carefully. One was not able to express her ideas very well. (1)

FACULTY DISCUSSION GROUPS

The activity helped me to clarify how I respond to student writing: 43 people rated this item. Of those, **90% strongly agreed or agreed** that the activity helped them clarify how they respond to student writing. 4 individuals disagreed.

The discussion helped me understand how other instructors respond to writing: 41 people rated this item. Of those, **95.1% strongly agreed or agreed** that the discussion helped them understand how other instructors respond to student writing. 2 individuals disagreed.

What new ideas have you gained from the breakout session?

18 people responded to this open-ended question by identifying specific new ideas they gained from the breakout session

- Ways to improve 1-1 writing tactics (3)
- Different ways to grade an assignment (3)
- Have students do post-writing outlines (3)
- Have students self edit for one aspect at a time (3)
- Grading content on two levels : (a) Have students met minimum content requirements?
(b) What “deeper” requirements have they met (e.g. analysis)? (1)
- Calibrated peer review (1)
- Writing responses are so variable across faculty. It makes me wonder where the line begins and ends in terms of effective writing; what is right and wrong? (1)
- Unpack the prompt (1)
- Phone conference with students (1)
- Read written work aloud (1)
- Great idea about simply asking students with excessive writing errors to “see me” rather than rewriting their papers. (1)
- Highlight errors (mass errors) for class discussion (1)
- Suggestions to make peer review effective (1)
- How to apply what we learned today (1)
- Conference prompts (1)
- Indirect feedback is very helpful.
- I had no idea what was happening in remedial writing courses (1)
- I am considering ways of getting students’ responses to my comments (1)
- Importance of being conscious of cultural expectations and normalities of students (1)

Suggestions or comments related to the breakout session

- We should have more of this kind of activity (3)
- We need to have at least one example of the prompt/essay appropriately evaluated (1)
- Specific tasks in breakout should be shorter to allow more time for general concerns and discussion of feedback (1)
- Good packet of information (1)
- Have a breakout session on institutional limitations (1)

- I liked doing this exercise; it was very practical. Peter was a great facilitator (1)
- Quite combative; too many items to digest on pink sheet (1)
- Diversity can make comments and conferences challenging because we do not all think along the same lines (cultural differences). However, we must bridge the gap. (1)
- Choose one topic per group and allow people to choose which group to join. (1)

HOW PARTICIPANTS FOUND OUT ABOUT THE SYMPOSIUM

51 people responded to this item. The most frequent responses were “flyer in my mailbox at SJSU (49%) and “email from the Center for Faculty Development at SJSU (21.6%). A few people found out from another email that was not from the CFD (11.8%), “other means” (11.8%), and from a flyer that was not in their mailbox (5.8%). None of the respondents found out via the SJSU website or the Center for Faculty Development calendar.

REGISTRATION PROCESS AND FACILITIES

51 people responded to these two items. All respondents rated these as excellent or good.

LUNCH: 50 people responded to this item. All but two rated the lunch as excellent or good.

APPENDIX D

Responding to Student Writing

Faculty Project Application: Fall 2005

Due date: Sept. 23, 2005

Submit hard copy to: Rosemary Henze, extended zip 0093

Background: In Spring 2005, as part of a Learning Productivity Program grant, we conducted several activities on the topic of Responding to Student Writing. We held a one-day symposium on April 29th and also administered a faculty survey. This semester, we hope to both broaden and deepen faculty involvement by offering two opportunities for faculty members to conduct small projects. We will select up to ten SJSU faculty members who will receive #1000 each to conduct projects of either type A or type B or a combination (see below). Project staff (Rosemary Henze, John Leih, and Betsy Gilliland) will work with those faculty members to fine-tune the plan if necessary and to support them in carrying it out and documenting the process and results.

In order to apply, faculty members must have either attended the Spring 2005 Symposium or viewed the video of Dana Ferris' keynote speech (this will be made available in the IRC)

Faculty will only receive the full stipend after they have completed the project and submitted all documentation of the process and the results, by Dec. 15th 2005 latest. If necessary, they can ask for an advance of \$500 to cover expenses such as materials.

Faculty from all disciplinary areas are encouraged to apply.

A. Discipline specific workshops or other professional development for departments or colleges

Faculty may conduct a workshop or other form of professional development for fellow faculty members in their department or college. The workshop or other format) must focus on improving faculty's ability to respond to student writing, with the ultimate goal of helping students to improve their writing. It should draw on ideas and strategies recommended during the symposium and should include content that is specific to the department's or college's discipline(s).

We will suggest that faculty members doing the workshops partner with one another as evaluators. In other words, the partner will observe the workshop or other professional development, collect feedback from participants and provide feedback to the presenter.

These projects, by involving more faculty than those who attended the symposium, are intended to *broaden* the dissemination of effective ways to respond to student writing.

Selection criteria for type A (professional learning in content areas) projects:

1. The project must provide a professional learning opportunity for faculty members at SJSU in a particular department or college.
2. It must focus on enhancing faculty members' ability to respond to student writing, with the ultimate goal of helping students to improve their writing.
3. The professional learning opportunity must take place within the Fall 05 semester and before Dec. 15th.
4. The applicant must indicate how she or he plans to use the information from the symposium (or the video of the symposium, or any of the recommended books listed below) to develop the professional learning opportunity.
5. The applicant must have clear objectives and a plan for assessing the effectiveness of the professional learning opportunity in achieving those objectives. Explain how both process and outcomes will be documented.
6. The applicant must indicate how the 1000 will be spent. Note that we will only handle a maximum of two payments to each recipient. We will not handle smaller portions of money being spent to pay participants in workshops, etc. That will be up to the recipient to handle.

B. Classroom-based inquiry projects

Faculty may carry out inquiry projects in their own or other people's classrooms. The inquiry project must focus on one or more strategies for responding to student writing and must seek to discover how effective these strategies are in terms of student learning. It should help us "close the loop" between the type of feedback we provide as faculty and what students do as a result of our feedback. It should draw on ideas and strategies recommended during the symposium. Projects that focus on peer review will be especially welcomed, given the questions and controversy that arose at the symposium. These projects are intended to *deepen* faculty knowledge of effective ways to respond to student writing.

Criteria For Type B (classroom research) projects:

1. The project must enable the faculty member to gain insight into the use of one or more feedback strategies and how students respond to these strategies.
2. The applicant must have one or more clear research questions that can reasonably be addressed in a short term project
3. The applicant must indicate a research design.

4. The classroom research project must take place within the Fall 05 semester and before Dec. 15th
5. Applicant must indicate how she or he plans to disseminate the results of the project.
6. The applicant must indicate how the 1000 will be spent. Note that we will only handle a maximum of two payments to each recipient. We will not handle smaller portions of money being spent to pay participants in workshops, etc. That will be up to the recipient to handle.

Application form:

Name	
College	Department
Title	
Email	Telephone

Attach a one-page description of the project. Projects will be selected using the criteria explained on the other side.

APPENDIX E: ABSTRACTS OF FACULTY PROJECTS

College Students' Attitudes about Peer Review in an Upper Division Writing Workshop

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This report discusses findings from a pilot study designed to assess students' attitudes about peer review of their writing drafts. Fifty-eight students from an upper-division writing workshop in a major state university were asked about their experiences with, attitudes about, and satisfaction with three different formats of peer review. Writers engaged in one-on-one, group, and anonymous feedback sessions. Each session considered drafts of assigned papers for the class. An additional session reviewed drafts for papers assigned in content classes. A majority of students expressed positive experiences with the review process. Reviewing anonymously received the most support. Students reported that reviewing drafts from other classes was exceptionally beneficial to their writing process. When students were shown the benefits of review, were given clear guidelines for the activity, and felt emotionally comfortable with the process, they expressed positive attitudes towards peer response. The report concludes with suggestions for integrating peer review in content classes, limitations of the study, and areas for future research.

Responding to Student Writing Faculty Report

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In order to investigate strategies for improving writing skills among students in the helping professions, I conducted a combined professional development and classroom research project on responding to student writing in the School of Social Work. Our department is concerned about improving our feedback on student writing because some of our students who show great promise as social workers in the community struggle to demonstrate professional level writing skills in the classroom. Faculty members are highly motivated to support improved writing skills among students, but are often hindered by a lack of training in providing effective and efficient feedback.

The classroom research component of the project involved implementing and evaluating a special peer review session in support of a writing assignment in two MSW classes. First year students from two of six cohort groups in the Masters of Social Work program participated in special voluntary lunchtime structured feedback sessions for a class writing assignment. Student evaluation of these sessions suggests that MSW students find structured peer review sessions helpful for improving skills and increasing a sense of support related to writing. At the same time, review of “before and after” papers indicate that students with more serious problems in writing may need additional opportunities for coaching and revision based on instructor feedback.

The professional development component of the project involved facilitating a faculty workshop on responding to student writing for faculty in the School of Social Work, which was

co-led by a faculty member from the Linguistics and Language Development department and a faculty member from the School of Social Work. The workshop was provided over the lunch hour and was designed to provide concrete information and resources that faculty could immediately apply to their review of student writing. Findings from the classroom research component of the project were included into the workshop content. Evaluations indicate that faculty gained specific knowledge and strategies for providing effective and efficient response to student writing. Faculty were particularly appreciative of the team approach that afforded opportunities consult with both an expert in writing and a colleague from their discipline.

Responding to Student Writing: A Workshop for Communication Studies Faculty

**Deanna L. Fassett, Ph.D., Department of Communication Studies
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I used Dr. Ferris's work to develop a four-hour workshop for communication studies faculty (primarily adjunct and part-time faculty at SJSU and faculty from Silicon Valley community colleges) on responding to student writing effectively and in the specific context of our curricula. Communication studies faculty, in their emphasis on oral communication skills, often neglect explicit attention to writing process in their instruction; moreover, we often find ourselves struggling with effective response as few of us have been taught to provide feedback to student writing. I developed the workshop in light of the following learning objectives: (1) Participants would discuss their past experiences with response to student writing and share best practices (both what works for them as instructors, but also what has worked for them in the past as students); (2) Participants would identify and practice at least two specific feedback strategies they could put to use at the end of the semester or in preparation for subsequent semesters; and (3) Participants would begin to articulate a sense of themselves as writing teachers, as people

responsible for nurturing students' growth as writers and not just as speakers. Though attendance at the workshop was disappointing, community college and SJSU adjunct faculty were equally represented. Moreover, departmental support for this workshop suggests that, with better scheduling, it can become the first of many pedagogy-themed workshops offered by our department for and with our community college colleagues. I plan to offer the workshop again in a modified format in Fall 2006.

Providing Online Feedback for Student Writing: Is Inking the Answer?

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Feedback has long been recognized as a key component for successful learning (e.g., Estes, 1972; Gagne, 1977, 1985). And, the most effective feedback is that which is immediate and also provides explicit information on how performance can be improved (Bruning, Schraw, & Ronning, 1995; Winograd & Hare, 1988). This means that learners need to know not only if their work is correct, but, when it is not, they must be helped to understand the source of their mistakes and how to avoid making them in the future. Additionally, good feedback can enhance motivation because it fosters higher levels of self-efficacy and control which, in turn, work to decrease feelings of anxiety and helplessness (Bandura, 1993; Bruning et al., 1995). After attending the symposium last spring, it became clear that many instructors spend a great deal of time providing feedback on student writing but it is a) not necessarily the most effective in terms of improving the quality of writing and b) often not well received or acted upon by students. The present study explored this issue of feedback in the context of writing assignments in an online

course and specifically from the view point of the student.

In the course used for the project (Senior Seminar in Child & Adolescent Development), students write research-based essays on a bi-weekly basis and post them electronically to the course WebCT site. Providing prompt and effective feedback on writing is difficult in a fully online environment—especially on such a frequent basis. Typically, feedback on these assignments is emailed to students and consists of typing a series of general comments at the end of the essay with a few specific examples copied and pasted from their essays for clarification. This process is quite time consuming and, perhaps more importantly, does not have the same visual element as does the more traditional “pen in hand” approach that is standard when commenting on hardcopies of student papers. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence from students indicates they prefer receiving their corrected papers with handwritten feedback because it seems more “personal” and also makes the specific areas and issues that need to be addressed more evident. Underlining, arrows, etc. appear to have a benefit in their view.

Given the above, this study explored the use of a semi-structured feedback form combined with the instructor’s use of the “inking” or pen feature of a Tablet-PC for providing feedback on writing. The principle focus was to assess student views of this process.

Responding to Student Writing

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Exemplary communication skills are critical for classroom teachers of all levels and all subject areas. Science Education 173, Secondary Science Methods, is a course designed for prospective high school science teachers. Reflection papers are an integral component of the curriculum; they are reviewed as drafts, and graded as revised submissions.

The first paper's drafts were reviewed for organization, mechanics, and style. I identified specific mistakes and included exhaustive suggestions on how each paper could be improved. The first papers' revised versions showed significant improvement in all nineteen cases. However, I was surprised to observe the same types of errors were repeated in the second papers' drafts. The hypothesis tested in this study is whether students' learning and skills application are improved by *fewer* editorial notes on the initial drafts (i.e., is it possible that students make corrections when an instructor's detailed comments are included in reviewed drafts -- without fully understanding the reasons behind those comments?).

I changed my review strategy for the third reflection paper by including only an itemization of the *types* of mistakes noted, general comments, and detailed descriptions/examples of the kinds of mechanical problems encountered (where appropriate). Although students were given a longer period to rewrite this assigned paper, the overall improvement rate *decreased* from that of the first paper. The most startling realization to emerge from comparing these two sets of papers was that three of the nineteen students *submitted their identical drafts* as their "rewritten" essays for the latter assignment. Possible reasons may include students' inability or

unwillingness to identify the errors themselves and/or procrastination and subsequent end-of-semester time limitations, apathy, or a combination of these and other factors.

Writing in the Margins:

An Assessment of Faculty Commentary on Student Writing and Student Response Regarding Such Remarks

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This research project, conducted during the Fall semester 2005, sought to identify the variety of remarks that faculty offer to students and those that, in particular, motivate and enable students to incorporate sound writing practices. Participants included five faculty and one hundred and thirty-eight students in the Department of Social Science. Based on assessment material provided by participating faculty and queries developed by students enrolled in the Social Science 100W Writing Workshop, the faculty member in charge of the 100W course developed a survey consisting of open-ended questions as well as various scales of response including Likert, evaluation, and frequency. The instrument was administered over a three-day period to four classes, one lower division GE course from the Asian American Studies Program and three upper division courses, one offered in Social Science and the other two in the Women's Studies Program. The data seems to indicate that students favor individualized responses from faculty including face-to-face meetings and extensive written commentary at the conclusion of their writing assignments. In addition, students indicated that the paucity of commentary regarding their writing, lack of clear penmanship applied by faculty when crafting comments, and their uncertainty regarding the meaning of certain editorial marks and the use of certain color ink, particularly red, by faculty contributed to their lack of motivation in improving

their writing. However, given the relatively small size of the sample, the study ought to be expanded in a subsequent project in order to appropriately evaluate the range and depth of these initial responses.

Responding To Student Writing: Research Findings Report

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This research project was designed for instructors teaching writing as part of across the curriculum focus, rather than English or 100W courses. My original research question was, “*What combination of response tools and methods work best for our students who need it most?*” A related and germane question also became, “*What breadth of writing focus is realistic and helpful during a non-English course?*”

Participants in this project were the 70 students in my two classes this semester. The research process included Student Feedback Tools and a follow-up Focus Group to assess what range of tools and responses from the Seminar and other sources students find most helpful. From this feedback, I proposed developing a brief, practical set of recommendations for other across the curriculum instructors and share these with the Department of Social Sciences Department faculty. Given the limited remaining timing of the Fall Semester, it was agreed that the presentation to Department Faculty could be in the Spring Semester to follow.

My research findings spotlight a profound irony:

- Students report non-English and writing classes generally do NOT focus on writing; students note instructors apparently assume they should have these skills by now and it is not their problem.

- This at a learning evolutionary time where more than several students note, “I know my writing sucks but don’t know how to fix it.” By far THE most common suggestion was for MORE writing practice.
- The overwhelming majority of students found ALL writing exercises attempted useful to them.

Responding To Student Writing

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I prepared a two-workshop series designed to help faculty in Urban and Regional Planning improve their skill at responding effectively to student writing. In the first workshop, held on August 30, I led a lecture and discussion designed to improve instructors’ skills in responding to student writing, and the group also watched the first half of Dana Ferris’ lecture. Eight faculty attended, including both full-time faculty and lecturers. For the second workshop, on December 13, the group held a follow-up meeting to discuss what strategies they were able to use and how well these worked. Both workshops were successful in that faculty self-reported finding them helpful, and the discussions clearly engaged all participants. However, because I allowed workshop participants to digress somewhat from my agenda onto the topics of most interest to them, the workshop focused more than I intended on assigning letter grades and less on providing written feedback. Finally, at the end of the second workshop, participants expressed a desire for me to lead more workshops on teaching strategies in future, evidence that they found the experience helpful.