

Project proposal for the AANAPISI Grant:

A Professional Development Workshop: Improving the Teaching and Assessment of Student Writing in GE Courses

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Project Summary:

During the 2012 – 2013 academic year, the AANAPISI Grant funded a project to improve the teaching and assessment of student writing in GE Courses at San Jose State University. The culminating product of that project is a manual titled “Providing Feedback on Student Writing” that details the best practices for assessing student writing. The following proposal, for the 2013 – 2014 academic year, aims to capitalize on last year’s project by broadcasting the manual in a series of professional development workshops for GE faculty, giving them support and guidance in this most vital area of pedagogy.

Target Audience:

Any professor teaching a course with a writing component at San Jose State University may participate. If any of the proposed workshops are webcast or recorded (and then posted on AANAPISI’s website), any professor in any location may participate.

Need for the Project:

In the Project Narrative of the AANAPISI grant, one weakness listed at SJSU is the “inconsistency in the teaching and assessment of writing in undergraduate courses across SJSU.” The narrative further details this issue:

Although our GE structure and guidelines give students many opportunities to write, we do not have common strategies or consistent evaluation rubrics to encourage or assist students to improve their writing as they move through their GE courses. There is also wide variation in the quality of teaching and assessing student writing in GE courses and in the majors. A common and widely disseminated approach, relevant to all students but particularly sensitive to the needs and untapped potential of students for whom English is not the primary language, is clearly needed to realize the writing proficiency outcomes to which our GE guidelines and course requirements are committed.

While the manual “Providing Feedback on Student Writing” addresses the consistency issues mentioned above, this project proposal targets the dissemination of the information in the manual. In order for faculty to improve their assessment of student writing, and therefore turn out better student writers, faculty must be made aware that this support exists. By hosting a series of hands-on professional development workshops throughout the year, faculty can be guided through assessment practices, can test-drive those practices on the

writing they are currently assessing, and can ask any questions they might have about the teaching and assessment of student writing.

In order for students to become better writers, instructors must know how to provide the type of feedback that enables that goal. This opportunity for professional development will give instructors the knowledge they need to facilitate student success.

PROJECT DESIGN:

Location: The Center for Faculty Development was created to host professional development activities and is the ideal location for this workshop. Furthermore, the general education guidelines at SJSU articulate that faculty must help students “reach a level of understanding that leads to clarity, conciseness and coherence in writing. To facilitate meeting these objectives, the Center for Faculty Development and Support, and/or Departments, are encouraged to provide resources/training on the evaluation of writing.”

Workshop Content: The one hour workshop will braid PowerPoint slides with hands-on activities that are based on the assessment practices in “Providing Feedback on Student Writing.” Specifically, faculty will be given best practices for making in-text marks, end comments, and rubrics. Participants will examine multiple pre-created samples of the same piece of student writing that have each been marked up by a different strategy. After discussing both the instructor and student outcomes for the various types of feedback in the samples, faculty will have the chance to assess an unmarked sample of student writing in groups. The discussion that follows will again examine the outcomes of marking methods, but will largely focus on discerning what errors most affect clarity and readability in the piece.

Faculty will also be asked to bring one of their assignment prompts – and a rubric, if they have one – for a group discussion about the components of these vital documents, and the cohesion between them and instructor feedback. If possible, instructors will receive a free copy of *The Everyday Writer*; they will also receive a copy of “Providing Feedback on Student Writing.” At the end of the 1 hour session there will be a quick survey, using clickers, to determine what was most and least helpful to the participants. Outside of the workshop I will make myself available by email, phone, or in-person to help instructors with any questions they may have about assessing student writing.

Advertising: The workshops may be advertised on the Center for Faculty Development’s website, as well as through electronic and paper flyers similar to those used for the AANAPISI writing workshops. Also, announcing the workshop briefly at some of the beginning-of-the-semester department meetings could also prove beneficial, if possible.

Schedule: August – October will be used to prepare the materials for the workshop. One workshop will be scheduled for November 2013, and two will be scheduled during the Spring 2014 semester.

A note to the AANAPISI committee:

When I hosted a trial of this professional development workshop with the Health Sciences I faculty last semester, I found that we could have used the entire hour for questions (they came with many). The hour also proved very useful for them to simply talk to each other about how they handled various writing-related situations. These byproducts of the workshop suggest that it might be fruitful to schedule a few “Writing Instruction Q&A”-type sessions at the Center for Faculty Development. Once or twice a semester, an hour could be set aside for faculty to drop in and get whatever help they may need with any part of writing instruction – prompts, rubrics, assessment, etc. While I would be there to help them, it would also provide a platform for them to develop more of a community within the University, and a chance for them to help each other.

Thank you for your consideration,
Sara Cook