

Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

Iterative Writing Through Paper Workshopping

Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

To improve students' writing skills, the instructor uses "paper workshopping," an iterative writing process through which students begin with an unstructured paper and work through revising multiple drafts. For example, in a human sexuality class, students may receive a prompt about cultural practices that influence sexual behavior. Students are instructed with minimal guidelines to free-write a one- or two-page response and to bring their paper to the next class. The goal is to allow students to respond freely without focusing on structure or mechanics. The instructor wants students to go in different directions because these papers are used to motivate discussion during class. On the day the assignment is due, students form small groups of two or three to share what they wrote, ask each other questions, and get feedback. During this discussion, the instructor asks the students to think about what they would have done differently and to take notice of things they did not initially consider. After the discussion, the instructor adds another layer of complexity by introducing a different element to the prompt. In the example provided, the instructor may ask students to think about how culture influences behavior of the opposite sex.

Students have two weeks to work through the next two drafts. For the second draft, students receive only

a few more structural guidelines—the paper must be at least two pages and should be organized in a logical manner. This second paper may build on the original response, or it can be a completely new paper. Students are required to schedule a meeting with the professor to discuss their second paper. Meetings are short (5–10 minutes) and can occur during office hours, outside of class, or during class on specific days when the instructor knows there will be spare time for this. During this meeting, the instructor reads the paper and provides the student with immediate verbal feedback. Students then have whatever time is remaining in the original two-week window to draft a third and final version of the paper. The guidelines for the final paper are a little more specific, requiring students to adhere to APA writing conventions. And while the instructor does not set a specific length or structure requirement, students usually turn in longer third drafts.

The instructor plans out the syllabus so that students are consistently working through different phases of multiple papers simultaneously. For example, if a class meets on Mondays and Wednesdays, students turn in an outline of the assigned readings on Monday and engage in class discussions over the topic. At the end of the class, the instructor provides the writing prompt, with the first draft due in two days. The following Monday, students turn in another outline for a new

set of reading assignments, discuss the new topic, and receive a new prompt. The instructor calls this “leapfrogging” the assignments, which encourages the students to develop time management skills, learning to regularly set aside at least one or two hours to complete their writing. This is part of the reason that

the guidelines are so open. The instructor points out that, over time, students’ writing seems to naturally improve. Students also seem to struggle with time management in the beginning, so the instructor is more flexible early on, but this improves toward the end of the semester.