

Title III Grant, Strengthening Institutions Program Innovations in Learning Project Proposal

Project Title: “I Don’t Know Much About History”

Project Description:

This project aims at developing a learning community incorporating English 151A, History 117B, and English 162. The goal of the community is to teach our students how to perform well beyond their perceived limitations. To accomplish this we will link several of our key assignments in a variety of creative ways.

History 117b: Our key focus is on improved critical thinking skills demonstrated via written assignments. We will enhance the students’ understanding of U.S. History by in-depth reading, discussion, and writing. Thus, instead of experiencing history as a compendium of dates and events, they will see that history is often open to disparate even contradictory interpretations. And, that they (by taking these courses and regularly debating the history) are active participants in this ongoing dialog. The U.S. History course is our common frame of reverence in that students will utilize the content of this course to develop most of their critical thinking aptitudes. For example, the history textbook will provide the source material for the Developmental Reading course and several of the writing assignments in the Fundamentals Composition course will be about historical topics.

The Reading 162 class materials and assignments have been adapted to meet the needs of this specific learning community. For example, there is no outside “reading” textbook assigned for this course. Instead, students will read from their U.S. history textbook. This will provide them an opportunity to analyze this material in a group setting. From these readings, students will be able to identify the main idea and supporting details in a paragraph. Students will be able to distinguish between fact and opinion and evaluate the validity of the opinion based on their reading of primary sources. Vocabulary words are building blocks of comprehension, so I will work closely with the other two instructors and devise a list of the top 50 words associated with this period of U.S. History. We all agree that words derive their meaning not in isolation (taken from the dictionary) but as they are used in the context of historical time. Finally, students will make inferences (logical conclusions) based on what an author has stated. Students will use the evidence and information the author presented to arrive at the inference the author wants them to make. For example, a writer might describe the numerous benefits of colonialism, yet not state directly, "Colonialism is a good form of government." Students will have to make this inference from the text. This will encourage the student to make valid inferences, sound conclusions and form unbiased judgments.

The goals and techniques in this learning community is to make the students critical readers and learners. Through this LC, the Instructors would have empowered the students with strategy building skills to help them read critically and to meet rigorous academic challenges they would not be able to meet on their own.

The English 151A class material and assignments are not radically different than any other section. However.

English 151A: Fundamentals of Composition is a developmental course geared toward preparing students for college writing. The class aims to develop the students' grammar, writing, and reading skills so that they can successfully pursue college-level courses that require writing effective essays, using authoritative sources, where necessary, and critically reading college-level texts and material. English 151A has the following student learning outcomes:

The student will:

1. Write fluent sentences in a variety of patterns (simple, compound, complex, compound-complex).
2. Write a basic paragraph (topic sentence and supportive detail).
3. Write an informal essay with a logical structure.
4. Identify main idea and relevant, supportive details in a reading; word parts (prefix, suffix roots) in vocabulary; and contextual clues.
5. Use beginning critical thinking skills in reading, identifying literal and inferential reasoning.

As part of the Learning Community with the English 162 and History 117b, this section of English 151A builds on the course's student learning outcomes by incorporating reading and writing assignments from the History 117b text—*Major Problems in American History*. The following is an example of a comparison/contrast essay assignment:

Compare/Contrast Essay

Topic Assignment: Write a compare/contrast essay on a topic related to Chapter 10 or Chapter 11 from your History 117b textbook. Chapters 10 and 11 cover many topics related to social, economic, and political changes that occurred in the U. S. after World War II.

Suggested topics:

- How America fights a Total War. Students can choose from four separate wars of the Twentieth Century—World War I, World War II, The Cold War, Vietnam—and explore how the relationship among the federal government, big business, the news and entertainment media, and the American people change during wartime.
 - How Brown vs. Education changed school policy for African American children and sparked several key events of the Civil Rights Movement.
 - How Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* changed many people's opinion about the environment
 - Study one of several counter-cultural movements of the 1960s and assess their successes and failures.
 - Explore America's involvement in Vietnam through the eyes of protestors in the U.S. and American combat veterans.
-

- Write a critical review of any historical fiction movie depicting some major event or personality of the Twentieth Century.
-

Such an assignment would serve as a one of the writing assignments that helps students learn how to expand the paragraph structure to a longer paper. It also introduces the students to the skill of writing about what they read and using sources for supportive details. All three of the learning community instructors work in companion in helping the students complete the assignment.

Project Outcomes:

- Students will learn to differentiate between fact and interpretation and develop a comprehension of their interrelationships. In addition to acquiring a knowledge of U.S. History (the who, what, where, and when of historical scholarship), students will understand the significance of this content in relationship to broader course themes (the “why” question).
- They will develop individual interpretations of historical events—students’ voices resonating with original, thoughtful, and creative ideas supported by relevant data and expressed clearly using formal and informal writing style.
- They will learn to appreciate a variety of historical perspectives.
- They will learn to organize, write, and edit college level essays of various lengths.
- The students will use their writing and research skills when constructing in-class essays for the midterm and final exam in History 117b.

Assessment Strategies:

The student’s learning outcomes are assessed by the successful completion of their coursework.

The students will fill out a student questionnaire at the beginning and end of the semester which will evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching strategies.

The instructors will evaluate whether the students have benefited from the activities and instructions by reading their written assignments.

A comparison of the mid-term and the final will reveal student progress in critical thinking skills.

Project Implementation Timeline

Fall semester 2007: The instructors will meet once every four weeks to design assignments and compare student progress in their classes. The project will be completed at the end of the semester.

Faculty Responsible for Development and Implementation

Susan Cunningham

Cecile Davila

Darren Bardell

Technology and Software Requirements

Documentaries already present in library

Video equipment present in classrooms

Computer on wheels available from audio-visual center