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Feedback on WDI-Funded Proposal for GGR348

Final Report

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Introduction:

The purpose of the funding for the GGR 348 (“*The Great Lakes - A Sustainable Resource?*”) Writing Initiative was to assist in improving student writing skills (organization, use of library resources, presentation, logic and grammar) in this third year geography course. A significant portion of the course grade (45%) consists of a research paper. I have developed a set of criteria, in concert with Tyler Tokaryk (Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre (RGASC)), for assessing student work. These were applied by the TA to provide students with timely, meaningful feedback on their writing assignment. The feedback highlighted both strengths and weaknesses in students’ writing. The research paper consists of 3,500 words on topics (given to the students) that are relevant to the Great Lakes. This assignment is comprised of – a proposal (2.5%); an annotated bibliography (2.5%); draft paper (15%) due week 8 of the semester; and final paper (25%) due at the end of the semester. Each part was graded and feedback given to the students.

In addition to these components, the students engaged in a peer review process in week 7 of the course, wherein small groups (3-4 students) read selected sections of each other’s draft papers and provided comments to each other. This component of the course counted as part of student participation (5% of final grade). Students were required to fill out a form for each paper on which they commented and submitted these forms for the TA to grade. The TA assisted in the class during this exercise.

In the past, without additional TA funding, I have spent about 1 hour commenting on the students’ proposals; 2- 3 hours on students’ Annotated Bibliographies; 30-40 hours on students’ draft papers plus additional time (30 minutes each) for discussion with them if they chose to meet with me. I provided detailed feedback on the draft paper based on the grading rubric. It should be noted that the students are told in both the lectures and in the syllabus that the draft paper must be submitted in a form that represents 75-80% of a finished paper with graphs, tables and references. I also spent about 20-25 hours on grading students’ final papers.

The funding provided in 2015 allowed the TA to:

- train at the RGASC;
- grade the Annotated Bibliography;
- work with students during the peer review exercise;
- grade the peer review forms;
- read each student’s draft paper and provide comments to the student;
- met with 18 students to discuss their draft papers.
- identification of strengths and weaknesses in writing skills and recommendations for improvement, including referrals to appropriate sources for remediation such as the Academic Skills Centre (RGASC), published papers and books on academic writing;
- improve student writing abilities regardless of initial strengths or weaknesses.
- understand the writing cycle, and particularly the importance of editing/revising as part of that cycle;
- to receive and use timely feedback;
- to become better writers and editors of their own work

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For 2015, there were 44 students involved in the process from the draft report stage onwards. Only 40 final papers were submitted and graded.

Criterion-Based Evaluation

The assignments (or components of an assignment) and the expectations for each were clearly communicated to students, as were the grading criteria for each assignment. Criteria for assessment were based on the following main components:

1. Quality of Response to the Task
2. Organization of Scholarly Content
3. Presentation

Students were shown where they have / have not met expectations (see Appendix 1) and the reasons for the assessment. Providing this kind of information allowed students to understand what was expected, and how / where they needed to improve for the final paper. The assessment of the success of the enhanced TA contact time and provision of feedback to students is seen in Appendix 1 where the grades for the final papers are compared to the draft papers. As seen in Appendix 1, there was a marked improvement in the final paper.

Lessons Learned

Need to reinforce in class and on Portal the process for writing the paper- it is step-wise;

Need to emphasize more strongly the fact that the draft MUST be 75-80% complete;

Make meeting with the TA mandatory;

Post on Portal at the beginning of the term a comprehensive list of common mistakes. Devote 30 minutes in lecture before the draft is due to reviewing these mistakes;

Build a tutorial slot into the timetable for 2017 (course is not given in 2016) to provide time to assist students with writing issues.

Summary of Changes Based on TA Feedback (2015)

Student	Draft Paper %	Final Paper %	% Change	Major Comments	Major Changes
1	81	87	6	Missing citation information, and was not in APA	Added citation information
2	66	52	-14	Missing citation information, and was not in APA, no primary sources, poor structure	Few changes made
3	22	80	58	Poor conclusion, and missing citation information, and late	Made some changes, paper was not late
4	74	80	6	Poor tone, and flow, and not in APA	Changed to APA
5	40	45	5	Missing an augment, just summarized scientific articles, too similar to Annotates bib	Fixed spelling and structure

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6	74	75	1	Missing citation information, and was not in APA, not well written ecological section	Some improvements on the ecological section
7	53.6	76	22.4	Paper was late, and poor spelling and grammar	Some improvements and paper was submitted by the deadline.
8	75	74	-1	Poor thesis statement, not in APA	Few changes made
9	57.6	63	5.4	Paper was late, and poor spelling and grammar	paper was submitted by the deadline
10	73	76	3	Poor flow, and thesis statement	Strengthened thesis statement
11	78	61	-17	Was missing key information, and not in APA	No changes made
12	61	62	1	very poor introduction	Better flow
13	81	86	5	intro and background needed work	made changes
14	60	67	7	Major structural, spelling, grammar issues. Not in APA	Structural changes made
15	42	70	28	Paper was late, and poor spelling and grammar	paper was submitted by the deadline
16	23	81	58	Paper was late, and poor spelling and grammar	paper was submitted by the deadline
17	90	93	3	great paper, no major comments	made all minor changes
18	73	77	4	too much fluff, and poor intro sentences	made changes, removed fluff and kept the opening sentences scientific
19	82	76	-6	Fluff and not in APA style	No changes made
20	76	83	7	intro and background needed work	added supplementary information
21	70	76.5	6.5	Poor thesis statement, not in APA, and lacking key supporting evidence	APA and thesis fixed
22	88	90	2	Good paper, no major comments given	made all minor changes
23	71	77	6	missing key supporting evidence	added supplementary information
24	88	90	2	Good paper, no major comments given	made all minor changes
25	61	77	16	not APA, is missing key citations, need more primary sources	made citation changes and added some sources

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26	92	98	6	Good paper, no major comments given	made all minor changes
27	73	76	3	Paper was late, and poor spelling and grammar	paper was submitted by the deadline
28	84	88	4	not APA, and was missing key citations,	APA
29	52.2	85	32.8	Paper was late, and poor spelling and grammar, poor thesis and missing key information	greatly improved thesis, and content of paper. Paper was also submitted by the deadline.
30	55	64	9	not APA, poor thesis augment and needed more primary sources	APA and thesis fixed
31	51.2	76	24.8	paper was incomplete, with major sections missing	paper completed, and added information
32	96	99	3	Good paper, no major comments given	made all minor changes
33	77	84	7	poor thesis statement and poor arguments	thesis strengthened
34	77	80	3	APA, spelling and grammar issues	made most of the changes
35	57	67	10	Paper was very repetitive and incomplete	removed the repetitive sections
36	54	57	3	Poor thesis statement, not in APA, and lacking key supporting evidence, structural issues, spelling and grammar issues	thesis strengthened
37	80	87	7	APA, spelling and grammar issues	made most of the changes
38	74	72	-2	poor thesis statement and poor arguments	no major changes made
39	65	72	7	poor thesis statement and poor arguments, spelling and sentence structure	sentence structure and thesis improved
40	55	60	5	background information was not relevant to the topic, poor thesis statement, poor arguments	removed the background section and changed it.
Average	67.5	76	8.5		

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Appendix 1

Summary of grade changes (draft paper vs. final paper)

Class Average	2008 No TA Funds provided; instructor graded	2009 No TA Funds provided; instructor graded	2010 No TA Funds provided; instructor graded	2011 TA funds provided by RGASC	2012 No TA Funds provided; instructor graded	2013* No TA Funds provided; instructor graded	2015 TA funds provided by WDI
Draft Paper	67	67	70	70	64	63	68
Final Paper	74	70	73	75	72	71	76
Difference	+7	+3	+3	+5	+8	+8	+8.5

* After 2013, the course was offered every other year.