**Does Your Teaching Toolkit Include the Write Stuff?**

Cori J. Myers, Lock Haven University  
Richard Van Dyke, Lock Haven University

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**Abstract**

This country’s competitiveness and economic vitality rely on the ability of higher education institutions to ensure graduates possess the requisite knowledge, skills and abilities for the global marketplace. Businesses clamor for graduates with such skills as critical thinking, communication, interpersonal interaction, teaming and creative thinking. Educating today’s diverse, technologically-savvy, and multi-tasking traditional-age college students—the millennial generation—requires a myriad of innovative learning activities to address various learning styles and preferences. This interactive workshop utilized the insights of the writing-across-the-curriculum movement (1970-present) to develop an effective model for reaching out to the millennial student. Participants also shared pedagogical practices currently used in the classroom.

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**Teaching the Millennial Student:**

Research indicates that millennial students share the following traits: technological literacy, reliance on social networking, collaborative disposition, structured lifestyle, openness to diversity, and preferences for learning by doing and experiencing (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005; McGlynn, 2005; Kolb, 2005). When translated into classroom practice, the millennial’s characteristics suggest that instructors should integrate active learning strategies and use of technology into course design as well as include group work and a sufficient variety of tasks to keep student’s interest and attention. Such active learning strategies may include case studies, sharing personal experiences, role playing, simulations, peer teaching, and various writing assignments. At the same time, instructors will likely need to address this generation’s structured lifestyle by providing courses with clear expectations and adequate feedback to guide learning activities.

**Writing-Across-the-Curriculum (WAC) and Course Design:**

When selecting and sequencing active learning strategies, workshop facilitators argue, faculty will want to consider the effectiveness of formal and informal writing assignments not only to develop writing skills but also to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate understanding of new material and conceptualize applications for it. Kuh (2003) reports that students who problem-solve, practice writing, and receive feedback tend to have greater knowledge gains and skill development. Writing assignments facilitate such learning outcomes as content knowledge, communication skills, and critical thinking skills (McLeod, 2001). Various in-class writing assignments can be paired with other learning activities providing an enjoyable, yet effective learning environment. Labeled writing to learn, this use of writing tasks that mix collaborative activity, written expression, and continuous feedback loops has been a hallmark of Writing-Across-the-Curriculum since its inception decades ago. More recent research confirms the wisdom of this approach suggesting that student involvement in the learning process and well-designed active learning strategies relate positively to such outcomes as knowledge acquisition, cognitive development, communication skills, interpersonal skills and group work, creative thinking, and educational attainment (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Kember and Leung, 2005; Astin, 1984).

**Sharing Practices**

Workshop facilitators presented practical tips for professors of today’s business students by highlighting recent research and sharing writing-centered examples and experiences from their teaching practices. Specifically, the facilitators provided examples of writing assignments from a business writing course as well as a capstone seminar.
in strategic management. The business writing course provided such informal writing opportunities as freewrites, threaded discussions, and peer reviews while including a wide variety of formal assignments from writing a business memo to a grant proposal. The strategic management course utilized such writing assignments as case studies, reflective papers, developing exam questions, chapter exercises, writing exercises (intended for students to improve writing style and mechanics), peer evaluations, and journals. In both courses, the facilitators found creative ways to use a combination of assignments that promote both write to learn and the more formal, graded write to communicate objectives. Workshop participants likewise shared successful learning strategies used in their courses.

References


Cori J. Myers is assistant professor of business administration at Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania (LHUP). She teaches primarily undergraduate courses in human resource management, international business, management concepts and strategies, and strategic management. Previously, she worked in private industry (hotel management) and held positions at LHUP in such areas as human resources, continuous improvement, strategic planning, and assessment. Her research interests include student learning styles, experiential learning, assessment and student learning outcomes, accountability, and organizational governance.

Richard Van Dyke is assistant professor of English at Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania. He directs the writing center, coordinates writing assessment, and teaches the full range of writing classes, including business writing. His research interests include place-based writing, digital rhetorics, and the relationship of writing to the circulations of global capital.