Transcript - 2022 INCLUSIVE Summit: Disciplinary Matters Writing Session

7/13/22

EMILY: OK. Well, I guess, we'll get started. Welcome, everyone, to the Inclusive Summit Session, Disciplinary Matters. How can faculty best support diverse student learners within their disciplines? And in this session, we are focusing on the writing discipline. And today, we are so thankful to have Elizabeth Sanders Lopez from Georgia State University join us and present a wonderful session. So take it away, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH SANDERS LOPEZ: Thank you so much. I appreciate it, Emily. Emily is here from Every Learner Everywhere, and I'm sure has tons of great experience to share, but also is going to keep us straight. So she'll be monitoring the chat for us and maybe making a note if we get really energetic about our conversation, letting us know when it's time to stop. So thank you for that work.

I thought what we would do is we get started. I have a Google Doc to maybe guide our discussion, be a place that we can, if we desire, capture some of our ideas but also share some of the ideas that I'm bringing to the session.

So by way of introduction, I'll tell you that I'm an associate professor of rhetoric and composition in the English department at Georgia State University in Atlanta. I have been a classroom teacher for over 30 years and also in the field of writing and rhetoric. And I've taught writing classes at all levels, from first-year writing through upper-division writing courses to graduate-level writing courses. And so I've been thinking about curriculum development and writing instruction for a really long time.

And I work in the administrative side as well. So this idea of how not only I as a classroom teacher need to think differently about my students and think about how to release some of my own hold over instruction and really invite students in to be active participants in the learning environment is critical, I think, for me as a teacher, but also for those that I work with and mentor at the administrative level and as we work on curriculum design.

So one of the things that really caught my ear in the keynote this morning was when Dr. Garth McCullough said that one of our goals is to think about how students experience

our courses. And it seems to me that can be one of the hardest

things to do, whether you're a new teacher or whether you've been a teacher for many years.

Once you're a teacher, in some ways you're no longer a student. Your perspective really does shift. And so one of the struggles that I have that perhaps we'll talk a bit about if it's also your struggle, is how to not just think about the teacher perspective, what I think is important in a class, what I think is critical about a class-- but to try to see my courses through my students' eyes and to invite students to show me what my courses are like and to change what we do based on their feedback and input, and that that perhaps gets us closer to equity in teaching.

So let me share my screen and pull up the Google Doc. I think that Emily can put the Google Doc into the chat as well for you. So that if you want to pull it up on your screen or add something to it or have it for later, please feel free to do that. If you would prefer to just listen and contribute either verbally or in the chat in our Zoom, that's perfectly fine as well.

So I thought a good starting place, rather than me presenting, would be to ask for your ideas and to really begin thinking about, what's your assessment of what's working well or what's effective in your own classrooms or curriculum? I sort of seeded this with a couple of things of my own and things that I think are common to the discipline of writing across the board.

Disciplinary best practices indicate that we tend to think a lot about student reflective writing. That's been a theme in our literature within the field of writing for a long time. We also tend to talk a lot about collaboration, to get students involved through peer review, or through group writing or other forms of collaborative activity.

So I'm wondering if there are other things that you feel like are going well in your classes. I think it's always good to start with the positive rather than to jump right into things we need to fix. Any thoughts to share there, either again, in the Google Doc or in the chat? Or feel free to unmute and share them aloud.

AUDIENCE: I think, since you have access to edit, you [AUDIO OUT]

ELIZABETH SANDERS LOPEZ: Let me take a look here and see if I need to make an adjustment too.

EMILY: I just did it. It let me do it, so it should be good. If you refresh the document, it should work. So I've got it set up with anyone who's got the link and can view, should be

able to do it at this point. I'm hoping I've got my settings properly. I see some typing. That's a good sign.

And so in addition to things that are working well, I think, one of the things we could spend a couple of moments discussing would be, what areas are coming up for you as needing improvement-- whether they're things that you've been thinking about a long time or maybe just something that's come up during the last couple of hours as you've been listening to the sessions, and you're evaluating your own work.

I know for me, one of the things I've spent a lot of time thinking about in the last several months is, how do I craft materials like syllabi and assignment sheets and the things that I am giving to students that-- how do I craft those in a way that are student-centered? And, in fact, an example that I'm going to share in just a moment relates directly to that and some of that work.

I'm glancing at some of the additions in the Google Doc. And I can so relate to this idea that students who are not used to active learning may resist a little, may not want to immediately contribute, or may not feel like they have something valuable to share. And perhaps their past experiences in classrooms have given them reason to be quiet or have silenced them in ways that are counterproductive. And so it can be a challenge to get students engaged in this process.

I'm really mindful that the example I'm going to share in a few minutes as well is a lot of work. That sometimes, getting students involved in active learning involves not less work on the part of the instructor, but a lot of prep work and really sophisticated facilitation skills that can take a lot of energy and a lot of focus.

Great ideas coming out. Helen, I see your notes in the chat as well, trying to figure out, especially during the pandemic, how to do group draft review and sometimes, finding ways to connect students not just on drafts of writing. Absolutely. Any other thoughts that you're coming into the session with? Anybody want to take a moment and express any of those verbally?

So I'm going to see if I can pop Helen's comment about group draft review over to the Google Doc for a second. That way, we get it captured. I think, that's a really important-- whoops. That's a really important idea.

Any thoughts from things that you might have tried in the past about how-- for those perhaps where draft review has been going more smoothly, any suggestions or brainstorm ideas that might help with group draft review?

I'm wondering what issues the students are having with draft review. In my experience, sometimes those issues have been logistics and access. Sometimes, it's just students having the ability to connect in time and space with other students.

I know that at my university, many of our students are not only taking classes, but work one or maybe more jobs. They have family commitments, and so their available time for work external to class can be really limited and very limited, especially in time. And so if we're setting up very restricted group review deadlines and timing, it can be really hard for students to meet those deadlines in a way that is meaningful.

So I wonder if having either students-- if the issue is time and that kind of perspective, having students guide the calendar for that work, or make decisions about when and who they do review with, if that makes any difference. That's just a brainstorm idea.

I wonder though, Helen, if the origin for some of your students is instead not just time and day, but also access or process. How meaningful is that review to them? How willing are they to be engaged in that process? And do they have the technology needed to make it work? And I think all of those might be important factors. Any other thoughts to share?

AUDIENCE: I have found that in terms of peer review, I use Google Docs for peer reviews. And right now, I have students doing annotative comments as the review elements. They would just highlight sentences or sections, and comment on their peer's review.

But I'm thinking about switching to something called Perusall. And I put the link in the chat. It's a little bit more powerful in terms of anchored discussions and have a discussion around writing versus comments on writing. And I think, part of the thing for writing development is to have those ongoing comments around the writing or discussions around the writing.

ELIZABETH SANDERS LOPEZ: I think this is-- really, thank you so much not only for that resource, but also for what you've just added. Because I think you're reminding us that sometimes, we and students get stuck in a perspective about review that is more an editorial perspective-- fix the sentences, make comments on this part of the text-- as opposed to really getting them to engage in conversation about all aspects of the text. And it might include discussion about a sentence or a phrase or a piece of the

argument, and depending on what kind of work it is, but it could be

a broader conversation.

And I don't know. I'm not familiar with that tool. So I'm really glad to know of it and get a chance to take a look at it. But I'm thinking about how so many of our tools can be used asynchronously or more flexibly, depending on how we structure them in class. Excellent.

And, Helen, I'm seeing your followup comment-- mental health and overwhelm. It's difficult to express how many students have come to us. I know just at my institution, I'm sure it's-- and I've been reading that it's true everywhere about not even being able to triage the number of tasks in front of them and not being able to cope in ways that in the past, we have assumed they could.

And I think that speaks to the culture of care that came up earlier today, and how we really need to see our courses in the context of the larger whole of their learning experience and their life experience. Absolutely. All right, I see some excellent contributions in the Doc. Anything else that someone wants to highlight?

So I have one example that I was going to share, but I wanted to, again, let you get ideas out first. If you scroll down a little bit below the table on the Google Doc, you can see an activity. And let me talk you through what this activity was and how it was an effort to work on appetizing course materials and think about student involvement.

One of the concerns that I had had and the staff that I work with on curriculum development at my university had had was the degree to which students, number 1, understood the assignments they were being given. And I have an assignment that relates to our 1,000 level or first-year writing course.

And not only how much students were understanding these assignments, but how interested they were in them, that it seems to me sometimes we get stuck in our own silos thinking about what an assignment needs to be, how we're going to meet learning outcomes for a course. And in that process of trying to do something good by crafting an assignment that we think create good learning, we miss the student experience and what students really need out of an assignment.

So one of the strategies that we've begun to use-- different teachers have done this in different ways in our program-- is to have students write and craft and create robust input for all of our assignment sheets. And so this example comes from the second major writing project in a first-year writing course that has four projects total.

So at the point where this is enacted, students have already gone through about a month of class and had a first major writing project already assigned. And the goal is to have instructors come to class with only the minimal non-negotiable material needed for that assignment, keeping it as short as possible so that students have the ability to craft and add to and write the assignment itself, rather than to get trapped in a lot of educational teacher talk.

And so the first step would be to have an instructor craft the basic assignment template for whatever project you have in mind, keeping that as short as possible. The elements that seem important to us-- and so when we have tried this in courses in our program-- is number 1, just having an assignment rationale or a purpose statement. So why is the assignment being given to students?

Now, that's going to be edited and changed by students, we hope. But having a brief rationale seems important at the start. There may be some required learning outcomes that tie this assignment both to the course but maybe also to the program. Many of us work within programs where the learning outcomes for our courses and sometimes for individual assignments are prescribed and non-negotiable. And so if that's true, you need to have those learning outcomes clearly specified.

Any other non-negotiable assignment parameters? So if there is a particular skill that is tied to this assignment for the course and maybe scaffolded into if there is a required length, if there's a deadline that needs to be met so that you can then move to the next unit or module in class, all that should be specified at the start.

In our courses, in many cases, by the time you've gotten to assignment number 2, the grade weights of all the major projects are usually established-- whether those were established at the beginning by an instructor or by the curriculum you've been given. Or even if those are negotiated at the start with student input, you probably have a percentage you're working with by the time you begin the project-- so establishing a grade weight indicating what that should be.

If there is a grading scale that will be used or has to be used for the project, that should be included. If you're using any kind of a grading rubric, again, these could be things that are prescribed by a program or curriculum. Or you may have complete flexibility.

Once those basics are ready and given to students, the next goal would be to have an instructor introduce that and to have students working in small groups ideally. Duly noted, Helen's comment about how tricky this can be.

So you might think about your own students and strategies depending on the modality of your class, for getting them engaged in this work-- but to have students talk through and answer the questions about the assignment, about what it is and why it's important, what their tasks are, to set deadlines or to determine how that might work, and to talk about how they would like to be graded and how they think they can be successful with the project.

And this is more than just students interpreting a teacher handout, but really having students be co-creators in constructing the assignment itself. And then once this small group or student work has happened, to move into a whole class discussion to reach some consensus. Because at some point, you'll need to move on and have students doing the work that the assignment requires.

So I'm going to push down. There's a sample PDF linked. Let me go ahead, and I'm going to share that PDF on screen as we're talking. Give me a second. I'm going to go out and come back in. That'll be the easiest way of me being able to find it and get it available for you. Hang on.

Forgive my clunkiness here. All right. And this is just one example of how this has worked. So in the particular composition class that I had in mind for this, we introduced just what you see on this first page of the PDF.

And this was the second project. It happened to be a supported argument on literacy. And so the major purpose was for students to write an essay with research support-- so not a full-blown lengthy research paper, but an essay with a primary source, which was their first paper.

So the first paper in the course had been students writing about their own literacy and their own experience with language use and writing and then to think about their literacy skills and potential career applications. So how can they imagine expanding their own experience and applying that outside of the classroom, perhaps to future goals?

Now, this is a class for first-year students. Some of them may have a clear sense of why they're in college and what their plans are. Some of them may already be working in some capacity within the field of their choice. Others may have no idea where it is they're headed and not a lot of clarity surrounding why they're in school even.

So we've seen a range of responses to this. But the teacher, in this case, provided simply these brief non-negotiables-- the purpose, learning outcomes for the project, and the non-negotiable parameters that the students needed to start with their first paper as

a primary source, that they would use two additional sources. They would use MLA, and that they had to produce a narrative of 500 to 750 words. Now in your courses, there may be fewer parameters that are required or more, depending on the way you structure your class. And then there's a standard grading scale that's used in that particular course.

So what I want to show you is perhaps some of the unexpected or interesting things that came out of a group of first-year students collaboratively working on the questions from the prompt and trying to determine what this assignment was and how to set parameters that they felt comfortable with.

So more or less, seeing how students created their own buy-in into what the assignment was and why they were doing it, getting students to think about and having some of our students talk about the value of their education and why their first-year composition class had the potential to help them with their future career.

What I found especially interesting, and you can read these details later, is that students spoke up very quickly in this class and requested that this not be a traditional academic paper. And to the degree to which it was within the instructor's power to change or to suggest a broader range of formats that met student skills and desires for the way they could express themselves, that became very possible.

This assignment only had the parameter of a 500 to 750-word narrative. That doesn't mean it has to be a traditional academic narrative. It can be presented in lots of ways. And so students wrote the assignment to be an academic paper, a web article, a blog post, or an annotated PowerPoint. That any of those forms might allow them, number 1, some choice and a way to showcase their own literacy skills.

They also very quickly asked if they could have someone else review their work, that this may not be an assigned peer partner in class. This may not be the instructor, but that especially because of the career focus of this project, a couple of students asked if they could share this with a professional in their field-- someone in their family who works in the area they want to work in, someone who could provide feedback on the document in a way that perhaps another student could not. Or that could they ask another trusted reader?

And this got me thinking a great deal about what kind of feedback students wanted, but also might speak to what Helen brought up earlier, which is if they're resistant to peer or group work, maybe part of their resistance is connecting with classmates. They

suggested that every student should be able to create their own deadlines and drafts to meet their time commitments.

Students in this particular class also had really interesting advice for each other. And I'll just point out in that last section on, how can I be successful? Students intuitively knew some of the things that might be most helpful to them versus things that would not. And what better resource to have students say, I need to prepare before I go talk to my instructor? Or I should go see a writing tutor. Or maybe I have a trusted friend I can ask.

So I would love not only any feedback about this as one potential way of getting students engaged with course material, trying to equitize the assignment by asking for students to write some of the criteria for and how they will be assessed and graded, but also any other thoughts you might have about things you've tried that might be in a similar vein.

I see Jason's comment in the chat. Absolutely. My philosophy is also that, that any feedback students get is valuable, whether it's under our own guidance in the classroom or whether it's external. That models a workplace environment, I think, in some ways and might be really valuable as a skill.

AUDIENCE: I have a question on the student choice. How does one assess like, do you go 500 to 750 words in the annotated PowerPoint? It has to contain that many words? I mean, how do you assess the equivalency between those different tasks? That's the struggle I have, typically.

ELIZABETH SANDERS LOPEZ: I'm with you there. I think, for this project, because one of the outcomes that the course has set is that students are able to gain proficiency with an extended narrative and able to produce paragraphs of text that might be building blocks for a larger argument, it's important that those paragraphs and building blocks exist in whatever document they choose.

So for this particular class, what we did is allow that flexibility that you see here. That students could produce either an MLA-formatted document that looks like and sounds like a traditional academic paper with more of an academic focus, and that that was an extended single narrative.

There were students who wrote a web-based article that was, again, an extended single narrative, but the audience shifted. And so the students who wrote a web-based article were writing more for public distribution, thinking about how those skills might appear on, let's say, a career blog as opposed to being an academically focused paper.

And then the annotated PowerPoint, I think, you could perhaps have students craft a quote or some touchstone that would go on a PowerPoint slide, but then embed the narrative paragraph or argument that goes along with that slide in the notes so that you still have a way.

Or they could attach a narrative that would be a script for that PowerPoint. Either way, I think, would be useful and still get to that 500 and 750 words, just not on a PowerPoint slide, which would be a little much, I think. Does that help, or does that make sense?

AUDIENCE: Yeah, that makes some sense. I mean, I was thinking, while you were describing the annotated PowerPoint, whether or not having students talk through their points might be an effective way. I mean, it shifts the focus off writing to speaking. And that was my only concern there, I mean, especially if it's a writing-based assignment or a rhetoric course or a writing course.

ELIZABETH SANDERS LOPEZ: Well, and I think everyone has to think about, again this is just one class in one example. I think, what I would hold up as the model is the student engagement piece and having students really in charge of what is negotiable and being-- I think, what this has called me to do is to be really open with what is negotiable and to think very carefully about how many things in my class I might have treated as non-negotiable that weren't.

So if in your class, the focus needs to be on an extended, more academic narrative for a particular project, then again that may be a parameter you need to set. And there are other places where there will be more student-crafted choice and material. And maybe the genre is not the place where that can happen for some assignments.

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

ELIZABETH SANDERS LOPEZ: Other thoughts about getting student engagement? I mean, I think, the key here and for me, the tie back to our larger conversation about equity in the classroom is that for me, this level of work means that every student in the course has a voice.

Regardless of their engagement in past classes, their background, their voice is valuable and necessary. That every student is part of a group that gets to write the assignment. All of their words are echoed in the formal documents that become part of the class record. And that these materials that so often have been under the purview of the teacher alone-- the handout, the grading rubric-- become class produce

And I think, this level of transparency that we need to bring to the classroom about what is set, what we have to do, what we're obligated to teach-- versus where there is flexibility, where we want students to engage, where we can maybe need to talk more about why we're doing things, where we can change how they're assessed. I didn't highlight that in this particular class, students requested to do some self-assessment. And depending on your philosophy of grading, that may look really different than this example. You may have more self-assessment on the part of students or less.

So I think that what I hold up to you as the example is not so much the PDF here with what happened in this particular class, but what you see in the Google Doc is the larger framework for doing this, and to think about how that might be more of a heuristic for your own courses.

I'm going to head back to the Google Doc and make sure I can pull back up the chat. Other thoughts that you would like to share? I was hoping in our last 10 minutes, we would talk a bit more about your ideas, questions you have, things you've tried. Or if someone wants to toss out a thorny problem, and what's not working in courses, or that you've been thinking about, maybe we can all brainstorm some ideas together.

I'm looking back to your notes in the Google Doc. I see the comment about more equitable grading. How do you think we get there?

AUDIENCE: Yeah, that's a tough question.

[ELIZABETH CHUCKLES]

Because there's a text called Grading for Equity by Mark-- or by Joe Feldman that I placed in the chat also. It's a fantastic read on equitable grading and how students who might enter your course writing, meeting 40% of your criteria actually achieve more in learning if they later achieve an 80% criteria at the end of the course, versus a student who enters the course achieving 90% of the criteria to begin with and then moves up to 95% of the criteria.

So I mean, it depends. I mean, equity in grading is a tricky subject because we have to question whether or not we're looking at, did they meet the grade marks that we determined? Or are we looking at their learning, the extent to which they learned through writing?

ELIZABETH SANDERS LOPEZ: And I think, this is always a

challenge in writing courses-- really, in all courses. And I wonder-- and this just tends to be my philosophy about a lot of things-- if the answer is somewhere in the mix of the two.

How do we accommodate both the amount of learning and growth and have an assessment that feels comfortable on some standard of success? Does a grade of a B in a class look the same in terms of the written outcome for students, when we compare paper 1 to paper 2 to paper 3 at the end of a course, for example?

This is such a tricky thing. And how do we maybe accommodate process writing, self-reflection, growth as a portion of that grade? What portion is also related to some assessment that's comparative? Is that comparative assessment ever fair? I mean, these are such important questions to be asking. And yes, a good reference to that book is a really good read and thought-provoking.

I'm noticing another key theme that comes up a lot in writing courses. Helen has said, how do you manage the paper load, for example, on offering multiple revision opportunities? I think that faculty response to written work and managing that workload in writing classes is always a challenge.

I know one of the things we talk about a lot in my faculty is the balance between student-to-student response, students responding to their own writing, students getting external response, and then student getting faculty or instructor response. And maybe some of the management of the paper load is by getting other forms of response, that not all of it is-- it's not always important that a faculty member is reading everything and providing written response, but really making that count when it does.

I know one of the conversations I've been in that we don't have time to even begin in the next five minutes is adaptive learning. I know that came up in the keynote this morning. And adaptive learning tools have the ability to provide some student response where they are, before you get involved or without you having to get involved. So that might be one strategy.

I see Sarah's comment about using tutors as another way of allowing students to get robust response in their work. Excellent, very much so. Peer review and Turnitin. Thank you, Paul. Another good tool, especially I think, when Turnitin is discussed as not just a plagiarism checking tool that's intended to harm them, but that they can use it and harness the power of it to get response and to improve their own writing.

Oh, I can tell people in the writing field like to write things. So there are a lot more comments coming. Yep, absolutely. Any other last thoughts about how we might help our students be more engaged? Any other tools or ideas, things you've tried or questions you want to toss out as we get toward the end of our time together?

EMILY: I'd like to add, so I actually teach marketing-- so not in this discipline. However, as we all know, content is a big part of marketing. And so when I first began, I had a lot of grading lot of papers.

And I was really adamant about the students when they write using proper grammar, and making sure everything they turned in grammatically was correct, and encouraged students to use the Writing Center. And of course, they never did or rarely did.

So I'm just curious if in your discipline, students are more likely to use the Writing Center, and if it does prove effective as a tool for students. Because I think, it's fabulous, and I highly encourage my students to go that avenue.

And then on the flip side, I've since switched my curriculum to adaptive courseware. And so we don't have any writing components currently, but I am curious if anyone here has made the plunge to adaptive courseware in the writing discipline and what their experience has been-- in two minutes.

ELIZABETH SANDERS LOPEZ: I think, the silence speaks volumes. I will tell you, some of the adaptive projects I've been working on the last couple of years have highlighted the challenge for writing instruction in that arena. That unlike some disciplines where there can be more content-driven work that just naturally fits within adaptive platforms, writing instruction can feel trickier. So I think that we have a lot of work to do in this arena.

EMILY: I see some comments coming in. So one, Margie Rue has made the decision to switch to adaptive. So we'd love to follow up and hear how that goes. Because that's the reason I switched, was time. The time that I gained from not having to grade as many papers with the courseware, taking that load was-- I'm a huge advocate for, for faculty because we know that that's the one thing we lack the most of, is time. Wonderful.

ELIZABETH SANDERS LOPEZ: We got last two comments here. Oh, we're at 2:55. So I think, we have to end so that we have the ability to go to our next session. I really appreciate all of your engagement, all the comments in the chat.

And all of these things in the Google Doc just speak to the exciting work that we're already doing, the places where we feel are the pain points, or where we need to push

and do some more work. So, thank you. I hope the examples that

I've shared and that others have shared are helpful to you as you continue to think about your own instruction.

EMILY: Thank you, Elizabeth. And thank you to everyone for attending. And as a reminder, please stay with us through the end of the summit today at 4:00. Following the final session, we'll have a short survey. And those who complete the survey will earn a digital badge for attending the summit and will be entered to win a raffle for $100 or a $50 gift card. So hope to see you guys soon in the next session. Thank you.

ELIZABETH SANDERS LOPEZ: Thanks, everybody.