



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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Communication: An Oral Approach

Instructional research at De Anza College indicated that minority students were dropping out or failing developmental English classes at the alarming rates of 60-70 percent. In hopes of improving this record, I decided to experiment with an oral approach to teaching writing.

1. **Lecture-to-Writing Assignments:** When I lectured (infrequently), I clearly organized and developed the lecture just as the students were required to develop and organize their essays and speeches. There was an introduction, a body, and a conclusion; there was a clear statement of purpose (thesis) and main points. Each point was developed by explanation, definition, and examples. Statistics and quotations were used when appropriate. During the lecture, students practiced notetaking and outlining.

Paragraph writing assignments were related to the lectures. On some occasions, the paragraph was a summary of the lecture (involving restating the thesis and main points); on others, it required students to develop a point related to lecture material by explanation, definition, or exemplification. In each case, students were told what to write and how to write it, and they were required to label each paragraph (summary, definition, explanation, etc.).

2. **Speaking-to-Writing Assignments:** Students were required to present an 8-10 minute expository speech. This speech was to have a pattern, clear organization with an introduction, body, and conclusion. It was to contain a clear statement of purpose (thesis) and some clearly related main points. Main points were developed by definition, explanation, demonstration, examples, and quotations. Each student was to submit an outline and a bibliography. During the speeches, students practiced notetaking and discriminative listening (involving identifying the purpose and main points and recognizing developmental materials for each point). This skill was then applied to reading assignments in the course.

After the assigned speeches, each student wrote his/her speech as an expository essay. This assignment emphasized both the similarities and the

differences between oral and written discourse. It also helped students learn to write with an audience in mind and to properly acknowledge and cite the sources for their quotations.

3. **Discussion-to-Writing Assignments:** Most of the assignments involved this activity. Students were required to read an essay from the text or one selected by the instructor. The class and I discussed the essay, including such aspects as vocabulary, language and rhetoric, and content. On the first assigned essay, I led the discussion. Student groups conducted panel discussions on all other assignments. I participated less in each successive assignment.

After each discussion, students were required to write an essay in response to the assigned reading (and discussion). Essays followed the format established in the speaking-to-writing assignment and required the students to demonstrate an understanding of the assigned reading and the ability to show how their ideas and examples correspond to or depart from those of the subject essay.



Ninety-five percent of the students passed the course, and 85 percent passed the department essay exam on the first attempt (the other 15 percent passed on the second). The general student body in conventional classes had a 68 percent pass rate in class and a 51 percent pass rate on the department exam.

The oral approach is a natural and logical approach to teaching communication skills. It contains elements of experiential learning and field theories that many educators favor for nontraditional students. It is especially valuable in developing an enjoyable cooperative learning environment in which every student is both teacher and learner.

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Accommodating Special Needs Students

Many community colleges are currently developing internal systems for identifying learning disabled and other special needs students and then finding the most appropriate accommodations to assist the student academically and socially. For the most part, these accommodations are extremely individualized and tied to the nature of the identified disability. The process of tracking the students, determining the accommodations, and providing counseling and advising involves much clerical support. Frequently, institutions are not able to add additional staff to accomplish these tasks, so counselors are assigned the task of noting accommodations and communicating this information to students' instructors and tutors. Such was the case at Genesee Community College (GCC). Counselors found themselves spending hours on the manual tasks associated with communicating information to the faculty and staff, and they were frustrated by their inability to spend sufficient time with faculty to answer questions or with students to monitor progress. A system was designed to alleviate these problems.



GCC's flexible mainframe computer system allows for user system development. The POISE DMS software provides an automated system for tracking student information and producing information sheets for each instructor. The system is designed (1) to allow counselors to have access to accommodations and (2) to produce information forms without the intervention of clerical or professional staff. The components of the system include (1) a series of screens for data inquiry, update, and addition; (2) a user-written batch that takes information keyed into the file and uses it to produce Accommodation Information Sheets.

Initially, students with learning and physical disabilities are identified with a "Handicap Code." Then pertinent information—the student's name, identification number, advisor, and courses—is placed in a file for counselor access. Counselors then flag specific fields that possibly require accommodations. By selecting from a "menu" of accommodations, the data entry is reduced to a single keystroke per accommodation. The final screen shows the students' schedules, the list of accommodations with appropriate flags, and comment lines for additional information. [A flag is also used to identify students who do not wish that any information be divulged.]

Then students for whom forms should be produced are identified—a process accomplished with the POISE sort routine, using either the date of last update or updater's initials for sort selection. The user-written batch is run and creates a record in an intermediary file for each instructor listed in each student record. The form, a modified version of the screen used by the counselors, is printed in the Computer Center and mailed to campus faculty. [All the individuals involved seriously respect the confidentiality of student information.]

Counselors can retrieve the accommodations information for an individual student at any time. If a new student is identified, a record can be created easily by any of the counselors. The data in the file can also be used for tracking. For example, the file includes an accommodation for use of a tape recorder. The counselors can sort the file to see how many students have been identified with this particular accommodation, and that number can be compared to the available inventory of recorders. In the same way, all students with a need for test readers can be identified and the appropriate number of readers hired. Perhaps the most useful field is that pertaining to books on tape. Since those requests must be processed well before the beginning of the semester, the information can be generated easily and in a timely manner. Book orders can be managed without handling individual folders, and this added efficiency has helped the staff serve the increasing numbers of students.



The most positive advantage of automating the system is that counselors have more time to spend with faculty members and students, information is shared across the system, and counselors need not worry about security issues or access privileges. This concept is one that may prove helpful to a limited staff grappling with the problems associated with assisting students with handicaps.

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