



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## POW-WOW: OPPORTUNITIES FOR WRITING

While journal writing has become a staple of English composition courses, traditional journal writing can be redundant and boring. A modification to journal writing we call POW-WOW, an acronym for "Practice Our Writing—Write on Whatever," can help students approach writing in a unique way.

By definition, a pow-wow is an American Indian social gathering. Dancing and socializing offer time for sharing lives and practicing traditions. POW-WOW in composition class allows students time to write about what is going on in their lives, reflect on their writing and thinking, and practice their composition skills. It is a special unstructured time (the first 10 minutes of class) for students to compose at their computers.

My students write more now. E-mail and chat rooms have increased opportunities to write friends and the instructors. They can ask questions of their instructors without risking peer judgments, and often preface their questions with, "I know this might be a dumb question, but..."

On occasion, outside events interfere with students' concentration in class. When students write about what is on their minds, they sometimes get beyond their concerns and are more willing to concentrate on class activities. One student commented: "POW-WOW provides a good transition between talking to my friends and getting into the learning mode for class." Some say POW-WOW time is a good outlet for stress, that participation in POW-WOW relaxes them. One student likes to participate in POW-WOW because he never had the chance to "just write about stuff" that is in his head. Plus, students have observed that POW-WOW provides an opportunity to formulate other points of view about an idea or activity instead of just talking to someone else about it.

POW-WOW provides opportunities for instructors to take attendance and return papers while students are writing. Instructors can observe students' composing

processes in a casual and nonthreatening way and read what they are writing.

Composition instructors know that most students do not seize many opportunities to write or take time to revise their writing. However, composing for 10 minutes at the beginning of each class provides time to write and think, work out topics, generate ideas, and define the structure of assigned papers. It is a time when grammar, spelling, and mechanics take a back seat, and students can work solely on the message in their papers.

Instructors can get some additional help in identifying individual writing styles during POW-WOW sessions. Becoming more aware of students' unique composing characteristics can alert instructors to any attempts they might make to plagiarize the work of others.

POW-WOW increases student motivation and on-task work. Students often come early and begin to write, enjoying the opportunity to personalize the structure, topic, and style of their writing. Implementing POW-WOW time as a regular activity at the beginning of class immediately engages students in composing activities and sets the instructional tone.

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## DONATIONS FOR THE HOMELESS

While trying to teach our Social Service Technology students about the homeless people in our community, it occurred to me this was an excellent opportunity to help develop their sense of caring for others. In addition to what was being learned in the classroom, students could respond to some community needs. I decided to involve students in a service learning project collecting personal items, hats, gloves, scarves, coats, toys, and canned goods for individuals in homeless shelters.

Committees were formed during class time. One committee made posters and signs announcing the project and inviting everyone in the college (administrators, support staff, faculty and other students) to participate. Another coordinated the collection. Yet another was responsible for obtaining the collection boxes and placing them throughout the college, collecting items from the boxes, and placing everything in storage until time for delivery. A transportation committee arranged for trucks and vans to transport the boxes and bags to the homeless shelter. Another contacted the college and the city newspapers about this worthy project being carried out by college students.

Feedback was solicited from the students, and the project was critiqued for necessary refinements. Then, after all exams were taken, the students loaded trucks, vans, and cars and transported the many boxes and containers to the shelters.

Over the years, this service learning project has continued to be an overwhelming success. Many times students have held bake sales to raise extra money for donations, and they have collected items from their places of employment, family members, and neighbors.

Community agencies currently receiving donations are three homeless shelters (one founded and operated by one of our graduates) and a battered women's shelter. These agencies work in partnership with the University of Toledo to provide training for our students through a Social Service Technology internship class. Many of our students also volunteer at these same agencies, and many are able to secure employment there after they graduate.

This service learning project has evolved into a working partnership between the University of Toledo and community agencies, and all benefit. The needy benefit through the hard work and generous donations of the students. The students benefit by developing into more caring, compassionate professionals and being involved with key community agencies as part of their service learning projects. The agencies benefit from the donations that help to lighten their operating costs. And

the Social Service Technology Program and the University of Toledo benefit as these agencies partner with us in helping train our students.

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