Building Blocks for Effective Scholarly Writing: Lessons Learned from the First Year of Implementing Writing Intensive Courses in an Online Graduate Nursing Education Program

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Purpose

The purpose of this multiphase project was to establish a process to weave academic and scholarly writing back into the curriculum as a threaded curricular initiative. This poster describes the fourth step in this project: **Implementation.**
From the FNU Strategic Plan:
Goal 1: *Continue to expand current programs and explore new programs that support and enhance the mission of FNU.*
Objective 2→Develop courses for the new DNP Curriculum
Goal 6: *Students- Further develop a successful and diverse student body with excellent scholarly abilities.* Objective 1→Develop the scholarly ability of students.

Background and Significance

Students with earned degrees are presumed to be competent academic writers. undergraduate However, a large segment of incoming graduate students fail to meet the minimum standards of academic writing, leaving them ill-prepared to supplement their academic writing skills to become proficient scholarly writers. Even more problematic is the smaller yet significant number of students who lack basic skills in standard written English (SWE). Traditional "brick-and-mortar" universities often provide remedial resources and writing assistance; however, many online graduate education programs do not have sufficient resources to assist students to develop their writing skills to meet the expectations required for the scholarly writing in graduate programs. Implementing writing across the curriculum (WAC), including writing intensive and writing attentive courses, in MSN/DNP programs has gained attention as one way to address this gap; however, the there is a lack of evidence regarding the best practice to improve graduate students' writing using this methodology.

As a way to address the writing deficit that exists for many incoming graduate students, faculty at an online graduate nursing education program re-introduced WAC as a thread in the graduate curricula (MSN and DNP). The first step to address writing was the requirement that all students take a writing intensive course (Introduction to Scholarly Writing) at the beginning of their program of study. This course was designed to prepare students to write at the level expected for nurses holding undergraduate degrees, thereby providing a base to build on for scholarly writing in the graduate program. The purpose of this presentation is to illustrate the outcomes from the first year of implementing the scholarly writing course in the writing intensive curriculum, including what worked and what did not—and the changes that were made to improve the course.

The FNU Writing Initiative

- Faculty perceptions of students' writing (in)ability
- Need for graduate students to be scholarly writers
- Curriculum change to MSN+DNP lead to increased pressure to prepare students for scholarly writing
- Curricular thread added to Course Peer Review Form
- Writing course required for all students entering the MSN+DNP
- Writing intensive courses strategically placed in curriculum
- Writing attentive courses to build on previous writing content

WI Courses in FNU Curriculum

PC700 Scholarly Writing—first term for ALL students
Writing-intensive course each "level" or year in the program
Year 1: PC700 Intro to Scholarly Writing
Year 2: PC713 Principles of Independent Practice
Year 3: PC704 Translating the Evidence to Advanced Practice

All other courses with any writing assignments (including case studies) to be Writing Attentive courses
Process for assuring students are learning: Designated e-portfolio written assignments

Ultimate product—Final DNP Scholarly Paper
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Writing Intensive/Writing Attentive Courses defined

- Writing to learn course content
- Assignments require logical, sequential writing.
- A rubric, which assesses both content (80%) and writing (20%), is utilized.
- Writing is assessed and focused feedback provided

Academic Writing Rubric

	4 Distinguished	3 Expert	2 Proficient	1 Novice
Clarity of topic	Strong thesis statement or identified topic in first paragraph. Clear description of topic with appropriate subordinate/supporting ideas.	Thesis statement or identified topic in first paragraph. Clear description of topic, supporting ideas are missing or inconsequential.	Thesis statement or identified topic in first paragraph. Lacks clear description of the topic and/or appropriate supporting ideas.	No Thesis statement or clear topic.
Organization and continuity	Essay consistently flows from thesis/topic in logical flow of ideas; the argument/theme is identifiable, reasonable and sound; counter arguments are presented and countered appropriately; conclusion that ties the essay together and does not introduce new ideas.	Essay generally flows from thesis/topic in logical flow of ideas, the argument/theme is identifiable, reasonable and sound; counter arguments are presented and countered appropriately; conclusion that ties the essay together and does not introduce new ideas.	Essay somewhat follows thesis/topic in logical flow of ideas, problems with (one or more) argument/theme; counter arguments; conclusion	Lack of logical flow; analysis is difficult to identify, no counter arguments are presented, and conclusion does not tie the essay together.
Accuracy-- Support for claims	Provides support for ideas/claims from the literature; distinguishes between facts and opinions; appropriate sources (<5 yrs old, peer-reviewed, scholarly--not popular press); appropriately cites sources (citing when needed--not too little or too much)	Provides support for ideas/claims from the literature; mostly distinguishes between facts and opinions; appropriate sources (<5 yrs old, peer-reviewed, scholarly--not popular press); minor problems with citing sources (citing when needed--not too little or too much)	Provides support for ideas/claims from the literature; infrequently distinguishes between facts and opinions; uses inappropriate sources; significant problems with citing sources (citing when needed--not too little or too much)	Little to no support for ideas/claims from literature; no distinction between facts and opinions, lack of appropriate sources, or appropriate citations.
Originality-- Synthesis of ideas	Consistently identifies connections between ideas; analysis is original, posing new ways to think of the material; critical thinking is evident rather than simple summarization of information.	Generally identifies connections between ideas; some critical thinking is evident rather than simple summarization of information.	Contains some connecting ideas; analysis is weak; mainly summarizes the information	Little to no connections between ideas; lacks original ways to think of the material, summarizes the information
Structure-- Syntax, punctuation,	Correct sentence structure, grammar, and diction; correct use of punctuation and citation style (APA	Contains 3 or fewer errors in sentence structure, grammar, and diction; correct use	Contains 6 or fewer errors in sentence structure, grammar, and diction; correct	Contains more than 6 errors in sentence structure, grammar, and

What Students Learn in PC700 Intro to Scholarly Writing

- Use effective written strategies to promote advanced practice and leadership in nursing
- Examine ways in which one's own culture may impact the effectiveness of scholarly written communication.
- Translate ideas and information into a scholarly paper
- Demonstrate competency using APA style and formatting.
- Access, evaluate and use information responsibly and effectively.

Introduction to Scholarly Writing Course Content/Assignments

- Review of concepts (plagiarism, APA formatting, information literacy, basic composition)
- Informative Essay
- Persuasive Essay
- Reflective Writing
- Peer review

Writing Expectations from Students Who Have Passed PC700 Intro to Scholarly Writing

- Use library resources for research (or know how to contact librarian for assistance)
- Use Turn It In as a screening tool to check for plagiarism
- Compose a descriptive informational paper
- Compose a persuasive paper
- Use APA correctly
- Know what constitutes plagiarism
- Be familiar with the FNU writing rubric levels (Novice, Apprentice, Proficient, Distinguished)
- Be familiar with peer reviewing

The Evolution of PC700 Introduction to Scholarly Writing

- N401 Communication—Bridge students, 20:1
- PC700 pilot—redesigned N401, outcomes ↑ to graduate level, 20:1
- PC700 roll out—160 students, 1 lead faculty (CC) and 5 course faculty (CF)=25-30:1
- Problems:
  - untrained faculty,
  - pilot course edited without quality control
  - results in disorganized and stressful start

What Worked? What Didn't?

1. Too much, too fast
2. Assignment sequencing
3. Grading criteria
4. Feedback process

Lessons Learned

1. Don't assume that students retained (or ever learned) the "how to's" of scholarly writing.

2. Spread the writing work evenly throughout the course: PC700 initially started with remedial grammar and APA instruction, leaving the bulk of the writing (Informative Essay, Persuasive Essay) to the latter half of the term.

3. Resist attempting to insert too much content into a single course. PC700 initially contained required remedial writing, which burdened the student and contributed to faculty burnout.

4. Recruit faculty with patience for assisting students to meet the goals of the course. Some faculty volunteers had rigid expectations, which led to increased student angst, and some students withdrawing from the course, and the program.

Implications for Practice

The decline in student writing ability is ubiquitous in higher education, and is not confined to either nursing or graduate education programs. It is not possible to compensate for years of poor writing preparation, particularly in an online distance-based graduate school of nursing. Courses that use writing as a means to learn content can aid in improving students' writing skills, while meeting course learning outcomes at the same time.

Further work

The new Writing Intensive Courses will be evaluated for effectiveness in improving student writing to produce graduates who are competent scholarly writers.

Contributors

Special thanks to the members of the FNU WAC Committee who contributed to this work:
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Conflicts of interest

There were no conflicts of interest relevant to this study.

References

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