Writing & Critical Reading Learning Goal

CAA Writing-Reading Learning Goal Subcommittee
Tuesday, February 25
Today’s Schedule

- Introductions & the Learning Goal
- Where We Are
- Principles & Best Practices from Bean’s *Engaging Ideas*
- Questions to Consider
- Small Groups—Discuss within & then Large Group
  - Strategies That Foster Critical Reading
  - The Writing Process
  - Response & Evaluation
  - Short Writing Assignments
- Takeaway Points & Resources
EIU graduates write critically and evaluate varied sources by:

- Creating documents appropriate for specific audiences, purposes, genres, disciplines, and professions.
- Crafting cogent and defensible applications, analyses, evaluations, and arguments about problems, ideas, and issues.
- Producing documents that are well-organized, focused, and cohesive.
- Using appropriate vocabulary, mechanics, grammar, diction, and sentence structure.
- Understanding, questioning, analyzing, and synthesizing complex textual, numeric, and graphical sources.
- Evaluating evidence, issues, ideas, and problems from multiple perspectives.
- Collecting and employing source materials ethically and understanding their strengths and limitations.
Where We Are

- 63% of seniors report they were asked to memorize facts and repeat information “very much” and “quite a bit.”

- 42% of faculty report the majority of exam questions required primarily recall or comprehension.

- From years of reviewing EWP submissions, papers are often focused on summarization or personal reflection.
Where We Are

• From the CLA, data suggest EIU seniors are below (24%) or well below (38%) where they should be on tasks related to critiquing or making an argument.

• From the CAA Faculty Survey:
  • The least common assignments were research papers and papers that use multiple sources.
  • Over a quarter of faculty respondents—28%—affirmed they “never (0% of the time)” use a rubric or evaluation criteria when responding to student writing.
Where We Are

- The faculty survey showed there is *some* emphasis on the writing process and revision:
  - Instructor sequenced writing assignments so they would build on each other: 27%
  - Students revised papers based on instructor feedback that was not graded: 27%
  - Students revised papers after instructor assigned a grade and gave feedback: 26.0%
  - Students revised papers after peer review: 13%
Principles & Best Practices

- The following principles and best practices come from “Chapter 1: Using Writing to Promote Thinking: A Busy Professor’s Guide to the Whole Book” in John Bean’s *Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom.*
Bean’s General Premise

“My premise, supported by an increasing body of research, is that good writing assignments (as well as other active learning tasks) evoke a high level of critical thinking, help students wrestle with a course’s big questions, and teach disciplinary ways of seeing, knowing, and doing. They can also be designed to promote self-reflection, leading to more integrated, personally meaningful learning” (p. 2).
Step 1

- Become familiar with Some of the General Principles Linking Writing to Learning and Critical Thinking:
  - Critical Thinking Rooted in Problems
  - Disciplinary Domains for Critical Thinking
  - The Link Between Writing and Critical Thinking
Step 2

• Design Your Course with Critical Thinking Objectives in Mind:
  • 2. “Problems, questions, or issues are the point of entry into the subject and a source of motivation for sustained inquiry.”
  • 3. Challenge and Support
  • 4. “Courses are assignment centered rather than text and lecture centered.”
  • 7. Courses “nurture students’ metacognitive abilities”
Step 3

- Design Critical Thinking Tasks for Students to Address:
  - A “disciplinary content-driven view of critical thinking” implies that students need to address tasks that “range from enduring disciplinary problems to narrowly specific questions about the significance of a graph or the interpretation of a key passage in a course reading.”
Step 4

- Develop a Repertoire of Ways to Give Critical Thinking Tasks to Students, such as...
  - Small group tasks tied to reading
  - Activities connected to questions, problems, and reading material
  - In-class writing that’s exploratory and/or writing-to-learn
  - Formal writing assignments supported by explicit instruction, drafts, and revision
Step 5

- Develop Strategies to Include Exploratory Writing, Talking, and Reflection in Your Courses
Step 6

• Develop Strategies for Teaching How Your Discipline Uses Evidence to Support Claims:
  • Focus on a discipline’s use of evidence and types of argument
  • Create writing assignments you want to read that are rooted in the context of your discipline and/or profession
Step 7

- Develop Effective Strategies for Coaching Students in Critical Thinking:
  - Talking about Your Own Learning, Reading, and Writing Process
  - Risk-free Exploratory Writing
  - Comments on Drafts
  - Conferences
  - Sample Papers
  - Scaffolding Assignments—Assignments that Build on Each Other & Long Assignments Broken into Stages of Development
  - Revision and Multiple Drafts
Step 8

- When Assigning Formal Writing, Treat Writing as a Process:
  - “Teachers can get better final products, therefore, if they design their courses from the outset to combat last-minute writing, to promote exploratory writing and talking, and to encourage substantive revision” (p. 10).
Principles & Best Practices Distilled

1. Disciplinary Problem Solving Through Writing
2. Assignments Centered on Learning
3. Critical Thinking within a Disciplinary Framework
4. Activities & Assignments For Student Growth
5. Class Time for Discussion, Activities, and Exploratory Writing
6. Focus on Disciplinary Evidence and Argument
7. Coaching Critical Thinking via Writing
8. Writing as a Process
Academic writing is joining a conversation.

- What are your discipline’s academic moves?
- What are the structures of arguments in your discipline? You might know them, but your students probably need to learn them.
- How is writing a mode of inquiry in your discipline?
Moving Beyond Summary

- Can we create assignments that provide “ill-structured problems” that don’t cater to specific right answers?
- How do we move beyond summary and facile reflection?
- What about analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and argument?
Structuring for a Messy Process

- Critical thinking via writing assignments typically requires a messy process.
  - How do we structure assignments that foster true revision of ideas and support, not just editing?
Small Groups

- In small groups (3-5 people), we’d like you to look through handouts and share what you could use in your classrooms and why. Questions to consider:
  - What works?
  - What do you want to try and why?
  - Other points and ideas from your own teaching?
Strategies That Foster Critical Reading

- In your group, look through this handout. Share what you could use in your classrooms and why.
  - What works?
  - What do you want to try and why?
  - Other points and ideas from your own teaching?

- Share with Large Group
The Writing Process

  - What works?
  - What do you want to try and why?
  - Other points and ideas from your own teaching?

- Share with the Large Group
Response & Evaluation

  - What works?
  - What do you want to try and why?
  - Other points and ideas from your own teaching?

- Share with the Large Group
Writing Assignments

  - What works?
  - What do you want to try and why?
  - Other points and ideas from your own teaching?

- Share with Large Group
Takeaway Points
Resources