Pacific NW Higher Education Conference

Report on Sessions

Thank you so much for the opportunity to attend the 2006 State Assessment Conference in Vancouver May 3-5th. As usual, the conference was extremely valuable due to the connections and interactions with colleagues from across the state and due to the great sessions I participated in. Julie Moore, Jennifer Whetham, Sandy Johanson, and I were co-presenters for a pre-conference session related to converting successful face-to-face class assignments to successful online versions of assignments (or how to create a successful online assignment from scratch). This long (4 ½ hour) presentation was extremely regarding and successful, and we got great reviews/feedback from participants.

I also attended an interesting session on Thursday morning led by a team from Seattle Central Community College’s English Division. At SCCC, they have developed a general writing outcome rubric which they are using to norm randomly selected student papers from their composition classes. The results of the norming session are then put into a database that they have created, and these norming sessions are used for both program-level assessment of the writing outcome and for campus-wide analysis of the writing outcome and for fine tuning the general rubric and written communication definition on campus. SCCC seemed to be quite a bit behind where we are in the process, but it was interesting to see that the same kind of roadblocks have been coming up for them as we went through for the Writing Outcome at GRCC.

Thank you again for this valuable opportunity to attend this conference. (Marcie Sims)
The one session I attended that I found very useful was the session that involved Classroom Assessment Techniques or CAT. This session gave me some wonderful ideas about how to assess the learning in my classrooms through using a variety of exercises. One of the best was also the most simple: Following a difficult lecture, ask all the students in the course to write at least one sentence telling the instructor what was most unclear to them. It could be a concept, a word or anything at all. Taking these responses I can read them later and use them to focus my next lecture, go over these concepts in a review or even to find new ways to teach the concepts. There were also more involved assessment techniques that I found that I could incorporate into the class as an exercise or an assignment as well as using it to assess learning. This session was very valuable to me because at times I am not sure if the students really understood the material and I had no way to assess this until after assignments and exams were turned in. This way I can find problems before they affect a student's grade. (Emily Kulbaki)

I attended the Teaching and Learning Conference this spring and both presented and attended sessions at this conference that helped me improve my own practice at GRCC. One highlight was the keynote speaker who shared with us the importance of seeing our teaching practice and study of teaching in our classrooms as scholarship. He defined the Scholarship of Teaching as a field and helped us to connect our practice as well as assessment efforts at the community college level with that scholarship. His talk was both validating and motivating to me, someone who does enjoy the study of teaching and sees it as scholarship.
I also attended a useful session on Program Assessment. At this session faculty shared how they significantly revised their process of program assessment on their campus so it is faculty driven and is part of the job description of all faculty. It prompted me to ask questions about our own program assessment process and how it is working well in places but could be more faculty centered in others.

Finally, I attended a wonderful session on deep reading put on by the Washington Center. At this session, I learned of two different techniques I can use to get students to engage with parts of the text they don’t understand or that puzzle them. The point of the session was to have students find these areas and use them as launching off places rather than end places for their reading and analysis. The session prompted a great discussion between my colleague and co-teacher, Lisa Trujillo, and I about how we approach teaching reading in our coordinated studies classes. (Julie Moore)

I was particularly impressed by one session I attended entitled “Creating Spaces for Students to Make Sense of Things.” The session was led by two faculty members from Bellingham – one from WWU’s Community College Teacher Education program, and one from Bellingham Technical College. Here’s what I took away from the session:

Rather than spoon-feeding information and ideas to students, these presenters showed how students learn more deeply when instructors provide them with a structured environment in which they have the opportunity to discover information and ideas on
their own. When students go through this process of discovery, then they are able to actually take personal ownership in what they learn. Providing this structured environment requires a teacher to walk a fine line between allowing students to discover things on their own and guiding them to the goals he/she has for the course.

BTC instructor Samuel Cheung discussed a class project he initiated in his electronics class in which he provided this scaffolded experience for his students to learn how to build electronic circuits. He showed us (conference participants) the projects several of the students had completed – they were quite impressive.

I am encouraged to work on creating these “discovery spaces” in my classroom – the challenge is to figure out what sort of scaffolds/guidelines students need to make the discoveries that will propel them to my course goals. *(Sandy Johanson)*