The Writing Initiative at PCCC developed over the past five years a program of student and faculty support and collaboration across disciplines at the general education course level. The Writing Initiative, which received a Diane Hacker 2012 Award, solidifies a targeted approach to student success by focusing on reforming curriculum, providing ample academic support, and creating opportunities for faculty professional development.

Elizabeth Nesius
Kenneth Ronkowitz
Passaic County Community College
Paterson, NJ
Our Timeline - 21 months to launch

PLANNING
writing the grant, CWC, January 2007

FUNDING
received (Fall 07)
Planning Phase 2

Hire Director
January 2008

Hire staff &
course redesign
Sp 08 – Su 08

LAUNCH
Fall 08
3 courses

Spring 2009
2 more courses
Goals of Initiative

- Increase Writing in 25 Gen-Ed Classes
- Build College Level Writing Center
- Introduce Technology to Students & Faculty
- Improve Information Literacy
- Improve Critical Thinking in Writing
Options for Using Writing Intensive Courses College-Wide

Looking at other WAC & WID programs using the writing intensive course approach:

1. Add writing competencies to *all courses*
2. Redesign *certain courses* as “writing-intensive” in *all sections*
3. **Redesign and designate some course sections as WI**
PCCC’s Writing Intensive Sections

• 28 distinct WI courses were selected to have a WI section(s) during the grant period
  – The first 24 were all General Education courses

• The redesigned section would have writing, critical thinking, and information literacy elements.
WI Course Requirements

- Distinct WI syllabus
- Writing
  - 2,500 words of formal writing
  - Additional short informal writing assignments
- Critical Thinking elements in at least one assignment
- Information Literacy elements in at least one assignment
- Use of rubrics for formative assessment
- Use of tutoring
- Use of ePortfolios
- Course LibGuide of resources
  - All course materials available to subsequent instructors
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
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<tr>
<td>AE-101</td>
<td>APPRECIATION OF ART</td>
<td>HI-201</td>
<td>U.S. HISTORY I</td>
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<td>BIOLOGY I</td>
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<td>MA-101</td>
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<td>RL-101</td>
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<td>HI-102</td>
<td>WESTERN CIVIL II</td>
<td>SO-202</td>
<td>CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY</td>
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A writing-intensive course incorporates discipline-specific writing extensively into the course, and the writing contributes significantly to each student’s grade.

The course content is the same as the “regular” sections of that course.

What changes is not the what, but the how: pedagogy and assessment.

The instructor uses writing assignments to promote the learning of the course content, as well as to increase the students’ critical thinking and information literacy skills.

Student learning is assessed to a greater degree by writing (rather than testing).
Getting the ball rolling...
Ken was hired in December 2007 to start in January 2008

Initial faculty were self-selected and had been involved in CWC discussions.
The courses were ones with a large number of sections (Intro to Lit, Western Civ, Intro to Psych)

Elizabeth was hired in Spring 2008 to start in June (along with an Educational Specialist and a 50% grant-funded technology support team member)
AT THE LAUNCH, we were piloting 3 courses - but also piloting the design approach, assessment materials and the training and development process.
What were faculty concerns?
Professional Development Cycle

- Marketing
- Formal Training
- Informal Training
- Peer training
- 1:1
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Faculty Institutes (61 faculty)
Writing Across Disciplines Days (75 faculty)
Off-Campus Conferences
College Writing Committee
WI Roundtables
Department Chairs Meetings
Faculty Institutes

TOPICS ADDRESSED

- Aligning course & Initiative goals
- Critical thinking and information literacy for writing
- Rubrics (standard; instructor-created)
- Assessing writing for content and writing
- Using informal versus formal writing
- Creating assignments
- Using ePortfolios
- Using the Writing Center and eTutoring http://etutoring.org
- Collaborative course websites (using LibGuides)
- Incorporating media

- 14 Institutes were held
- First Institute had 24 participants and ran 4 consecutive days.
- The final 8 were 2 2-day (12 hours) sessions and had fewer than 8 faculty per session.
- In year 3, we began to train faculty taking over (not developing) WI courses and training adjuncts.
• The Initiative team met with faculty prior to Institutes to review the existing syllabus and any writing assignments.
• Some faculty were able to “test drive” materials in their regular sections prior to WI pilot semester.
The Tipping Point?

Year 3

- Significant improvement in assessment results
- Began developing science & math courses
What we started with...
was continually revised along the way...

“Art is never finished, only abandoned.”
~ Leonardo da Vinci

Leo never received a grant – but he did rely on patrons.
REVISIONS INCLUDED

• Course design timetable
• Training process
• Faculty involved (FT → more PT)
• The rubrics for writing and critical thinking
• FLEXIBILITY WITH REQUIREMENTS?? (e.g. paper portfolios, use of “tutoring” not just eTutoring....
Our Initiative has been recognized with the 2012 Diana Hacker Award for Two-Year Colleges in fostering student success in writing.
So... what worked?
TIME for us to plan & to train faculty. Faculty lead time before pilot to develop materials
Keeping the grant-built birdfeeder filled...

Additional $$
- Mentoring
- Additional professional development sessions (critical thinking etc.)
- Funding for conference attendance and presentations

- $250 day for training
- $1800 to develop course materials
- $1800 successful pilot semester
ASSESSMENT Levels and Methods

- **Class** (student portfolios)
- **Program** (student & faculty surveys, focus groups)
- **Grant** (Institutional Research)
Data Points

- **Writing** (using 1-12 scale based on CWE, 2 readers)
  - Average score 7.9% (Year 5)
  - Pass rate increase from 70% (don’t have Y2 data) to 81% (Year 5)
- **Critical Thinking**  Average score increase from 6 (Year 2) to 8.6 (Year 5) (1-12 scale)
- **Information Literacy** “passing” = 56% (year 3)
- **College Writing Exam**  Pre = 68% (first attempt) to 88% (year 5) & 95% for WI cohort
- Course Passing Rate (Yr 5) – 75%  78% for WI sections
- 3-year Completion pre = 6%  current 8.7%  WI=9.3%
The Ripple Effect

60% of WI faculty reported that they were using WI components in their regular course sections.
6 Big Ideas THAT EMERGED
There is no Field of Dreams. Just because you build it, doesn’t mean they will come and play.
You have to let them go when ideas don’t work, technology or critical thinking or information literacy? Portfolio products, paper folios, LibGuides, required e & F2F tutoring...
Faculty will use pedagogy/technology when they see how it helps *them* and *NOT just* because it helps *students*.
Student support is key
guidance, scheduling, academic, technology, recognition

BUT faculty also need the same support
Collaboration and Community

In departments, across the college and with other colleges and high schools

Grows the initiative and gives sustainability a better likelihood.
6

Is the goal better writing or better writers?

passing rates, retention, 3-year graduation rate...
Sustainability and Institutionalization is more than just funding

1. Staffing
2. Training
3. Assessment
4. Supervision
5. Leadership
6. Planning
Links to all our resources for the Initiative
http://www.pccc.edu/home/initiative

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