SoTL Grant Proposal:

Writing- and Speaking-to-Learn in the Large Lecture Course

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Abstract

The large lecture classroom continues to be one of the most useful, and challenging, types of educational settings. The purpose of this one-year project is to investigate the impact of employing writing- and speaking-to-learn strategies in large lecture survey courses within the history major (especially HIST 1121 and 1161) and as part of the general education requirements (LBST) of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at UNC Charlotte. The main objectives of this study are to evaluate student success using quantitative and qualitative means and to provide recommendations on the incorporation of specific student activities. The goal is to encourage practices that help students take responsibility for their own learning, to get more involved in large lecture courses, to organize and synthesize course material, and to motive them to improve their writing, oral presentation, and critical thinking skills.

Budget Request Page
January 15, 2019 to May 30, 2020

BUDGET: *Request by budget category.* <u>*Joint proposers must select one PI to be the lead and one department to receive this allocation*</u>.

Lead Principal Investigator: <u>Amanda Pipkin (Anderson)</u>

Principal Investigator 800#: <u>886587886</u>

Title of Project: <u>"Writing- and Speaking-to-Learn in the Large Lecture Course"</u>

Allocate operating budget to Department of: <u> History </u>

Fiscal Year One (January 15, 2019 to May 30, 2019)		
Faculty Stipend	Paid directly from Academic Affairs fund on May 15, 2019	3850
911250	Graduate Student Salaries	
911300	Special Pay to Faculty other than Grantee	
915000	Student (Undergraduate or Graduate) Temporary Wages	750
915900	Non-student Temporary Wages	
920000	Honorarium (Individual(s) not with UNCC)	
921160	Subject Incentive Fee	
925000	Domestic Travel	
926000	Foreign Travel	
928000	Communication and/or Printing	
930000	Supplies	85
942000	Computing Equipment	
944000	Educational Equipment	
951000	Other Contracted Services	
Year One Subtotal		4685

	Lead Principal Investigator: Amanda Pipkin (Anderson)	
Fiscal Year Two (July 1, 2019 to May 30, 2020)		
Faculty Stipend	Paid directly from Academic Affairs fund on May 15, 2020	
911250	Graduate Student Salaries	
911300	Special Pay to Faculty other than Grantee	
915000	Student (Undergraduate or Graduate) Temporary Wages	600
915900	Non-student Temporary Wages (see PD-17)	
920000	Honorarium (Individual(s) not with UNCC)	
921160	Subject Incentive Fee	
925000	Domestic Travel	
926000	Foreign Travel	
928000	Communication and/or Printing	
930000	Supplies	
942000	Computing Equipment	
944000	Educational Equipment	
951000	Other Contracted Services	
Year Two Subtotal		600
TOTAL FUNDS REQUESTED (Year One + Year Two)		5285

SoTL Proposals that do not receive SoTL funds may be eligible for support from the Office of Assessment and Accreditation. If your SoTL proposal is not recommended for funding, would you like for your proposal to be shared with the Office of Assessment for review and consideration for funding from that office?   YES X

NO _

<div align="center">**Budget Narrative**</div>

Summer Stipend:

- A Summer 2019 stipend is requested to complete data analysis and prepare recommendation reports. Principal investigator will not be teaching summer school during 2019.

Student Wages:

- $10 per hour for 5 hours per week for 15 weeks during Spring 2019 = $750
    To reimburse one student for helping with grading and fielding questions especially about technology relating to video components.

- $10 per hour for 5 hours per week for 12 weeks during Summer 2019 = $600
    To reimburse one student for helping with evaluation of quantitative and qualitative data and course redesign.

Prezi Software:

- $84 for advanced presentation software tools to incorporate more primary source analysis into daily lecture as well as help incorporate diverse media.

UNC CHARLOTTE
College of Liberal Arts & Sciences

Office of the Dean

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October 29, 2018

SOTL Grants Committee
Center for Teaching and Learning
ctl@uncc.edu

Dear Committee Members:

On behalf of Dean Nancy Gutierrez in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, I am writing this letter in support of the SOTL proposal submitted by Dr. Amanda Pipkin from the Department of History which is entitled, "Writing- and Speaking-to-Learn in the Large Lecture Course."   The proposed study aims to incorporate specific written and oral communication techniques in a large lecture setting in order to foster better engagement and retention of knowledge in a survey HIST course. The active learning activities are designed to increase student participation in and responsibility for their learning.

I fully support this proposal as it is directly related to priority #1 stated in the proposal guidelines, "Incorporating Communication (Writing and Speaking) Across the Curriculum." The writing-to-learn and speaking-to-learn activities will also encourage unique opportunities for students to further their creativity.

Sincerely,

Banita W. Brown
Associate Dean for Academic and Student Success
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Associate Professor of Chemistry

Project Narrative

Purpose

The overall purpose of this project is to incorporate Communication (writing and speaking) Across the Curriculum to enliven students' experience of the large lecture survey. I propose to incorporate the use of small risk writing- and speaking-to-learn strategies in a classroom of over 100 students to encourage students to learn through these active means. By measuring the impact of specific active learning activities on student success, I will prepare recommendations for my peers at UNC Charlotte and beyond in hopes of improving student writing, speaking, and critical thinking skills in large lecture classes in ways that will not significantly increase teacher workload.

Objectives

The objectives to be achieved with this project are to:

1. Measure the impact of specific active learning activities on student success by quantitative comparison of the midterm scores and the final scores of the students in my Spring 2019 HIST 1121 with those of previous years, and by qualitative assessment of students' perceptions of writing- and speaking-to-learn strategies.

2. Provide recommendations to other instructors of large lecture courses based on the usefulness of incorporating student activities – especially uploaded video presentations – intended to increase student participation, inspire students to take responsibility for their own learning, and help students organize and synthesize course material, as well as improve their written, oral, and critical thinking skills.

Research Questions

The research questions to be answered as a result of the project are as follows: 1. What is the impact of using writing- and speaking-to-learn strategies on students' communication and critical thinking skills? 2. What are students' perceptions of writing- and speaking-to-learn activities? 3. And, how do students' perceptions of writing and speaking to learn strategies align with their assessment results?

Rationale and Impact on Undergraduate Teaching and Learning

The need to enliven the large lecture class is a perennial and significant challenge. The projected growth of UNC Charlotte's student enrollment over the next decade underscores the value and importance of ensuring the success of large lecture classes. And yet, it is also vital that we take every opportunity to improve students' writing and speaking skills. One possible method to inspire students' active participation and skill-building while avoiding an impossible workload for the instructor is to ask students to write scripts for one-minute presentations on a series of key terms, and to upload the written work and video of their presentation to Canvas, to be graded pass/fail by the instructor. This study proposes to consider whether such techniques recommended by the Communication Across the Curriculum initiative are helpful in developing students' communication and critical thinking skills even in very large lecture courses. The study will focus on the findings for a single HIST 1121 course; However, the immediate goal of this study is to provide recommendations for how to improve the faculty and student experiences of the two main history department surveys (HIST 1121: the introduction to European history and HIST 1161: the introduction to American History), as well as the many large required LBST

courses taught by history and other CLAS faculty, and thus enhance student success early in their undergraduate careers at UNC Charlotte.

Literature Review

Although frequently the subject of controversy, the large lecture class remains a popular and effective way to introduce students to fundamental skills and information. Former general secretary of the American Association of University Professors, Mary Burgan proposed that the lecture is not only efficient and occasionally necessary, but is also helpful in providing students with identity-formation in the guise of a well-educated, well-spoken role-model.[1] Detractors have argued that lectures are ineffective and make students too passive.[2] But supporters insist that good lectures are incredibly effective, that students can learn in spite of their length, and that both instructors and students appreciate their efficient content delivery.[3] The key is to not use the lecture method exclusively, but rather to: "…incorporate various teaching approaches into the course to enliven the experience and get students to engage with history rather than just be exposed to it."[4] It is helpful to incorporate structured breaks that allow students to shift their focus and process information.[5]

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[1] Mary Burgan, "In Defense of Lecturing," *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 38, no. 6 (2006): 30–34.
[2] Kendall Powell, "Spare Me the Lecture," *Nature* 425 (2003), 234-236; Eric Mazur, *Peer Instruction: A User's Manual* (Harlow, Essex: Pearson, 2014).
[3] J. D. Walker, Sehoya H. Cotner, Paul M. Baepler, and Mark D. Decker, "A Delicate Balance: Integrating Active Learning into a Large Lecture Course," *CBE - Life Sciences Education* 7, no. 4 (2008): 361–67. Karen Wilson and James H. Korn, "Attention during Lectures: Beyond Ten Minutes," *Teaching of Psychology Teaching of Psychology* 34, no. 2 (2007): 85–89.
[4] Kevin Krahenbuhl, "Enriching the History Survey Course with Mini-Documentaries," *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods,* 41, no. 1 (2016): 22–34. See also: Toby Fulwiler, *Teaching with Writing* (Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc., 1987) and John M. Ackerman, "The Promise of Writing to Learn," *Written Communication* 10, no. 3 (1993): 334–70.
[5] The theory behind shifts in activities is described by Robert Blackey,"'We'll be right back': Introducing Constructive 'Breaks' into History Lectures," *Teaching History* 37, 2 (2012): 59-68.

The Communication (writing and speaking) Across the Curriculum initiative provides helpful examples of student activities that can be tailored to fit a large lecture section. Writing-to-learn can be defined as: "writing as a means of acquiring information, understanding, concepts, and appreciating significance in any discipline." [6] Studies suggest that writing-to-learn activities positively impact student learning and that employing these methods to supplement lecture improved students' engagement with the course, their ability to organize and synthesize material, and increased their retention of the subject matter.[7] The challenge is to decide how to regularly assign written work in a large class without drastically increasing the workload of the instructor. Fortunately, Writing across the Curriculum theorists encourage a broad range of types of written work, and in so doing they have: "kept the door open for a vigorous, intimate relationship between technological advance and writing."[8] WAC theorists' demonstrations of the positive impact of diverse forms of writing have provided the inspiration to propose using short, small-stakes, pass/fail assignments in conjunction with currently ubiquitous video recording devices, Prezi advanced presentation software, and student management software platforms such as Canvas to make writing (and speaking) assignments feasible in a large lecture class.

Many studies provide examples of successful writing-to-learn activities; More revolutionary is the attempt to incorporate speaking-to-learn techniques in a large classroom

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[6] Michael Carter, Miriam Ferzli, and Eric Wiebe, "Writing to Learn by Learning to Write in the Disciplines," *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 21, no. 3 (2007): 279.

[7] This is according to a National Survey of Student Engagement in 2008 according to the Colorado State University WAC program website (https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/principles/statement.pdf). For more individual studies of students' perceptions of these techniques see: Thomas L. Hilgers, "Doing More Than 'Thinning Out the Herd': How Eighty-Two College Seniors Perceived Writing-Intensive Classes," *Research in the Teaching of English* 29, no. 1 (1995): 59–87; And: T. L. Hilgers, E. L Hussey, and M and Stitt-Bergh, "'As You're Writing, You Have These Epiphanies': What College Students Say about Writing and Learning in Their Majors," *Communication Abstracts* 23, no. 4 (2000).

[8] Christopher Thaiss, "Theory in WAC : where have we been, where are we going?" in *Writing across the Curriculum: A Critical Sourcebook*, eds. Terry Myers Zawacki and Paul M. Rogers, (Boston: Bedford St. Martins, 2012), 92.

setting. However, this is a worthwhile endeavor. Increasing students' opportunities to speak-to-learn helps students "understand concepts better and retain them longer" and encourages students' critical thinking.[9] Although impossible for each student to present live in a large class, by creating brief video presentations and uploading them to Canvas, our students can benefit from regular incorporation of speaking-to-learn assignments. The frequency and the low-stakes nature of these videos, as well as the fact that they would be kept private unless the student offers permission to share them with the class, will make presenting seem less daunting when students are asked to present in front of an audience in the future. These videoed presentations will also help the students memorize data through repetition, provide them opportunities to reformulate their ideas, and teach them to speak persuasively and with less apprehensiveness.

Methods

To assess the influence of using writing- and speaking-to-learn strategies on students' communication and critical thinking skills in large lecture classes, I will incorporate many active learning assignments in my Spring 2019 HIST 1121 class of 110 students. These assignments will focus on helping students learn the main ideas and themes of the course. There will be one assigned weekly, and they will take two main forms:

1. The first type of assignment will ask the students to write a short description of key terms provided on an exam study guide as if they were the instructor and needed to teach the most important details and the historical significance of this term to their peers.[10] They will first

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[9] Gary Smith, "Learning to Speak and Speaking to Learn," *College Teaching* 45, no. 2 (1997): 49. Karen Curto and Trudy Bayer, "Writing & Speaking to Learn Biology: An Intersection of Critical Thinking and Communication Skills," *Bioscene: Journal of College Biology Teaching* 31, no. 4 (2005): 13.
[10] This also incorporates the ideas of Ros King that by asking students to teach the material inspires people who learn in different ways and spurs original, critical thinking. See Ros, "Teaching to Learn," *English Subject Centre Newsletter* 7 (2004): 4-8.

draft this written script based on their textbook reading, then I will ask them to supplement this script after the lecture and to revise it to use as the basis for a one-minute long video teaching segment, which they will video and upload to Canvas. Submitted as written texts and oral presentations, these will be evaluated as pass/fail. These assignments will motivate students to keep up with the class readings, better prepare them for understanding and retaining the content of lectures, and help prepare them for the exams.

2. Similarly, the second type of assignment will ask students to prepare for the discussion of a short reading of a primary source by taking notes on the reading. Then following our discussion of the reading, they will prepare a two-minute report including the main points and what the reading teaches us about one of the main historical events we study in the class. They will video their presentation and upload it to Canvas. These will take the place of reading quizzes and the written and oral components will be graded and commented upon more thoroughly (than the first type of assignment outlined above). Students will be asked to review the videos after they receive comments, and they will have the opportunity to revise and resubmit one of these assignments.

I will study the results using both quantitative and qualitative methods. First, I will compare Spring 2019's midterm and final exam results with the results large sections I taught in 2018 and 2016. Second, I will ask students for their feedback on writing-to-learn activities following the midterm and the final exam review session. Lastly, I will compare the quantitative and qualitative results to evaluate how student perceptions compare to their assessment results.

Evaluation

The expected outcome is that those students who complete their writing- and speaking-to-learn assignments will score higher on the midterm and the final exam when compared to

previous students' test results. I will complete a comparative statistical analysis with standard deviation to measure the impact of these active learning strategies on the students' test scores and consider complicating factors.

I also expect students will express the sense that their comprehension of the subject, ability to organize information, and present it in written and oral formats will also improve. I will use themes found in the literature to code the qualitative survey items. Moreover, I foresee that student perception will correlate with their improved test results and will analyze the results as well as any divergence.

Knowledge Dissemination

The results of this work will be disseminated to the UNC Charlotte history department Faculty Research Seminar in the Spring of 2019 and (if granted) through the poster presentation event for SoTL awardees to my UNC Charlotte peers in other humanities departments and other colleges. Externally, I will submit these findings to the journals: *The History Teacher* or *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods*.

Human Subjects Approval

Human Subjects Approval from the UNC Charlotte Institutional Review Board would be obtained before asking students to participate in this study.

Extramural Funding

No extramural funding is being sought for this project.

Timeline

Semester	Objective
Spring 2019	Obtain IRB approval
	Develop survey and integrate to Canvas
	Complete data collection
Summer 2019	Complete data analysis
	Prepare recommendations based on insights of the work
	Revise HIST 1121 based on the assessment results
Fall 2019	Prepare poster presentation and prepare journal article
Spring 2019	Present findings to the UNC Charlotte history department Faculty Research Seminar
	Submit journal article

References

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