Supplemental Instruction

Writing Fellows Initiative

I created the Writing Fellows Program with the Director of the Writing Program at Cal Poly as a way to handle writing instruction in my writing intensive ECON 303 with a scaled up enrollment. We promoted it as a joint venture between the College of Business and the Writing and Rhetoric Center. Writing Fellows are undergraduates who enroll in both ECON 303 and ENG 399: Peer-to-Peer Writing Tutoring course. The ultimate objective was for Fellows to be seamlessly integrated into ECON 303. During Fall 2013, we hired Fellows as writing instruction tutors (supplemental instruction) to service ECON 303 but also other classes in the OCOB to give them practice and confidence. During winter 2014, they worked within the ECON 303 classroom environment. This was extremely helpful to students but very time-consuming for me. During spring, the plan was for the Director of the Writing Program to train both faculty and Fellows to work together within a classroom environment. This was not successful because she had a lot of other responsibilities that quarter and was not able to devote the time an effort to this essentially “volunteer” venture. As such, I reverted back to the winter 2014 model and added some additional instructor led workshops.

Writing Fellows Sustainability

One of the lessons learned during this Promising Practices year is that the Writing Fellows Initiative, while a great idea for faculty, students, and Fellows, is not sustainable unless it is housed in a program and someone, by job description, is responsible for its administration. Given my scaled up enrollment, I cannot manage the Fellows program without a course release. However, giving me a course release from a course with enrollment bottlenecks seems somewhat counterintuitive. Further, reducing my class size is probably more cost effective than a course release, but creates more enrollment bottlenecks. Similarly, while the Director of the Writing Center is 100% behind the Fellows program, the demands of her own job take priority and thereby the integration in the spring did not occur. Therefore, I do believe the Fellows program is not sustainable in its current form. However, I do believe that it is a perfect fit for the Supplemental Instruction (SI) model currently meeting with a lot of success at CSU Fullerton. However, we would have to build the SI infrastructure at Cal Poly and likely house it in Academic Programs.

Alternative Supplemental Instruction

During the spring 2104 redesign launch, I switched from Fellows only to Fellows plus Instructor led supplemental writing instruction to determine specifically what type of additional instruction is necessary to provide students with the writing support they need. I offered 16 hours of writing instruction in the form of writing workshops with groups of 10 students per 30 minutes time slots and the Fellows worked with the students during these workshops. The workshops were themed around the assignments: thesis workshops, the research question, annotations, literature reviews, and the art of the transition. Again, the purpose was to identify the specific type of supplemental writing instruction that is necessary and to find alternative ways of providing this instruction.