

Final Written Report

Professional Development Grant

“Making Writing Matter to Freshman Composition Students: One English Teacher’s
Experimentation with Ethnography”

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This is the final report for a professional enhancement project funded by an ATU Professional Development Grant.

A. Title page (provided above)

B. Restatement of Professional Enhancement Opportunity

Abstract of Conference Paper Presented:

Most of us in this room have probably taught freshman composition before and have been faced with various forms of student resistance. Some students complain that they are math majors, and they should not have to take more writing courses while others whine that freshman composition is just a repeat of high school English. Still others declare that they took English every year in high school and wonder why those courses were not enough. As a result, I am left wondering how to make freshman composition matter for our students. How do we get our students to invest themselves in their classroom writing assignments? This has long been an issue composition teachers have struggled with. While decontextualized and disconnected writing assignments have been the norm in many college writing classrooms, some teachers are beginning to realize there are other approaches that can be used to teach writing. Ethnographic investigation is one of these. Ethnography can be defined as the qualitative description of a subculture. In this presentation, I will describe this method. Specifically, I will talk about the textbook I use in class, the classroom activities I ask students to complete, and the writing assignments I give. I will also discuss student and teacher reaction to this ethnographic approach. Composition teachers who have used this method have found that it encourages students to be more engaged and invested in research. Students also develop a greater understanding of self and others and become better readers, writers, and researchers as they complete ethnographies.

C. Brief Review of Professional Enhancement Opportunity

I attended the National College English Association (NCEA) Conference where I presented a paper on April 7. The conference ran from April 5 to April 7, 2018. Therefore, I traveled to the conference on April 4, 2018 and arrived home from the conference on April 7, 2018.

D. Summary of Experiences

Almost every semester, I teach at least one freshman composition course. Therefore for a while, I have been grappling with the issue of how to best get students invested in learning how to write. Recently, I have been seeking solutions to this problem, and this research and presentation grew out of that. Every time I attend the CEA Conference, I gain invaluable critical feedback from colleagues regarding future directions for my research.

E. Conclusions and Recommendations

Presently in my specialty field of Composition and Rhetoric, there is not enough research or training commentary addressing methods that can be used in the freshman composition classroom to motivate student writers. For so long students have been given stall assignments that they have either seen before and/or are not interested in, but there is a better way. Consider the ethnographic approach to writing. As a result of this shortage of scholarship in my field and both positive and negative commentary that I have received on my scholarship at national conferences, including the 2018 College English Association (CEA) Conference, I will continue conducting inquiry in this area. I am currently working on an article on this topic.

Thank you for your continued support.

