

# Instructional FORUM

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A Journal of  
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*In This Issue, Articles Covering  
Collaboration,  
Classroom Tools,  
Classroom Strategies,  
and Administration*



PRINCE GEORGE'S  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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## Greetings from the Editor

Welcome to the 2019–2020 special issue of the *Instructional Forum*! I hope you enjoy this issue—it contains some thought-provoking pieces that I think can be very inspirational for our own classrooms. Longtime fans of this publication will notice a big change from this issue onward—the *Instructional Forum* is no longer just for faculty at PGCC! By opening up the *Instructional Forum* to faculty from community colleges of the area, we can all benefit from knowledge sharing and pedagogical practices in today’s fully-connected world. This issue contains a wealth of information, from research into using apps in the classroom to methods of restructuring classes to fit a “flex” (or “online-plus”) modality.

The classroom is ever-changing, and this school year has proven that adage more true than ever before. As I type this, the world is struggling to deal with the challenges of COVID-19. Much has been said (and will continue to be said) about how the Coronavirus will change social interaction, work meetings, and transportation. Colleges are far from immune to the changes that will surely come from the months spent in social isolation. Many of the articles in this year’s *Instructional Forum* are quite prescient, as education continues to find its place in an increasingly-digital world. The fact that this issue is the first digital-only issue of the *Instructional Forum* is just another (minor) way that the spring of 2020 will have forever changed education.

Cliff Starkey



### 2020–2021 *Instructional Forum* Call for Articles

For the 2020–2021 issue (Volume 35, Issue 1), the deadline to submit articles is **Tuesday, January 19**. There will be two primary subjects for this issue: a) “Global Perspectives in the Classroom,” and b) “College Classes and Practices During Required Social Distancing.” Please consider writing an article on what you are doing to effect change, adapt your classes, and increase student success, retention, and completion in relation to either topic. As always, the *Instructional Forum* will consider all articles about anything related to instruction at the college level.

We also welcome articles from each college’s various instructional support groups (such as the Library, the Writing and Tutoring Centers, the Honors Program, etc.).

We also would like articles from deans, department chairs, and all levels of administration!

Please consider sharing your instruction-enhancing thoughts and research through the *Instructional Forum*, because the work you do encourages and inspires your colleagues.

Submit your articles to [InstructionalForum@pgcc.edu](mailto:InstructionalForum@pgcc.edu), as attachments in Word (.docx). Articles could be from 500–2000 words. Please refer to the end of this issue for submission guidelines and documentation format, or email the editor for input.

## Teamwork Can Be Successful: Effective Collaboration through Blackboard

By Robert Goldberg, Professor of English, Prince George's Community College

In the “real” world, regardless of field or industry, collaboration is a way of life for a business. In fact, it is one of the most sought-after job skills by employers, right up there with oral and written communication skills: “An analysis of 2.3 million LinkedIn profiles revealed that oral and written communication skills were by a large margin the top skill set sought, followed by organization, teamwork, and punctuality” (Guffey, 2019, p. 3).

But what is collaboration? Many people automatically think it means working in groups. Yet, when students hear “groups,” they shudder. Many describe horror stories of unsuccessful groups. This is because they are groups, not teams. Teams, on the other hand, succeed because of collaboration. As such, collaboration should be fostered.

Collaboration is simply when two or more people work together toward a common goal: to build, create, write, or achieve something. This is teamwork. Groups, however, often do not collaborate. Individual members of a group stick to their assigned tasks. Ultimately, speaking figuratively (or even literally), group members bring their parts together, staple the pages, and submit them. For a document, such as a formal report for the eyes of the CEO, this will likely lead to a failed report. Why? Here is an example from a “team” project submitted in one of my Business Communication classes several years ago. The team literally stapled their individual parts together. How do I know? First, the paper color was different. One student used a bright white paper, with a hint of blue in it. One student used a slightly less bright paper. The third student’s paper looked dingy, almost brown, by comparison. Furthermore, each student used different font types, line spacing, page margins, and highlighting features. The final clue was the content: large chunks of text overlapped sections. This is the product of group work; the students (I cannot call them team members) did not collaborate—not even on the final revising, editing, formatting, or proofreading.

Collaboration is essential in business. Teams that function well lead to new ideas, better products, higher morale, and increased productivity. Teamwork “can lead to improved morale as employees gain more authority and ownership over the projects they are working on” (Magloff, 2019). Effective teams, through the process of synergy (through which the whole—the finished product—is greater than the sum of its parts, or greater than the work the individual team members could do on their own), work more efficiently and quickly, enabling the team—and the team members—to do more (and higher quality) work. We see the effect of true teamwork/collaboration in the sports world. For example, in college basketball, often a team that would be viewed as a long shot to win against an “elite” team succeeds, despite not having “superstars” on its roster. This is evident in the NCAA national championship basketball tournament (fondly known as “March Madness”), where unheralded teams overcome the odds and beat higher ranked teams. (If you are familiar with this time of year, then you know to always bet on the 12-seed over the 5-seed!) These teams succeed because they work as a team, a cohesive unit, while the superstar-studded team often fails because the superstars may not work as a unit.

With the importance of collaboration obvious, it becomes clear that this skill must be taught and ingrained into our students to enhance their chances for success at the next levels, and especially in their careers.

Many courses at the college level employ “group” projects. Some may even call them team projects. (Some faculty might use the words interchangeably; I do not.) I teach EGL-1320 Writing for Business. This is one of the English Department’s composition II courses (equivalent to EGL-1020 Writing about Literature, EGL-1100 Writing about Issues and Ideas, and EGL-1340 Writing about Technical Topics). One of the embedded course learning

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outcomes is, “Work collaboratively with classmates.” The goal of this outcome is to infuse the importance of teamwork and to provide an introduction to working with team members. In my course, the term project is a collaborative project that culminates with a formal business-style report and a formal team presentation (that integrates PowerPoint). The teams (typically 3–4 students) begin the term project by collaborating on a topic and by preparing a collaborative informal project proposal. Then, the teams work collaboratively to conduct research (primary and secondary), analyze the data, write their formal reports, and, ultimately, prepare and deliver their formal presentations.

The challenge, especially at a commuter campus, is getting the students to collaborate—to really work together as team members rather than go about their individual tasks as solitary group members. How to accomplish this is an ongoing, ever-learning, evolving process.

Fortunately (depending on one’s perspective), Blackboard provides all the necessary tools for effective collaboration. Instructors can create team (in Blackboard, called ‘group’) pages, and each team page contains a variety of tools, including blogs, discussion board, email, file exchange, journals, wiki, and even a “VoiceThread,” and a few others. The tools I make available to my students are the wiki, discussion board, and email, though I am intrigued by the VoiceThread feature. These features, when made available, appear on the team’s Group Page, in a box labeled “Group Tools” (and they appear as Group Discussion Board, Group Wiki, and Send Email).

The email tool is obvious. It allows team members to send emails to other members of the team. I find, though, that many students prefer to exchange cell numbers and text each other.

The Group Discussion Board link opens to a page where team members can create discussion forums. This allows for asynchronous communication of ideas. For my on-campus classes, I create a single discussion forum

for each team, which they can use to post comments and questions, and share links to research; this is participation. In class, I explain the benefit, but since students have time to discuss things in class, they often do not use this tool. For my online section, I make the Discussion Board (DB) mandatory, and I create four distinct discussion forums (a team member introduction forum, a topic selection forum, a term project discussion forum, and a PowerPoint discussion forum). On the assignment sheet, I tell students that participating in the discussion boards is mandatory, and I calculate this as part of a “teamwork” component in my grading rubrics for the collaborative assignments. I find mixed results with this; in past semesters, the math has shown that 50 percent of the teams use the DB (and the distinct forums) extensively, while 50 percent only do the minimum. My recent observations during the fall 2019 semester suggest this pattern is holding steady. This suggests to me that my students are beginning to collaborate, to some degree.

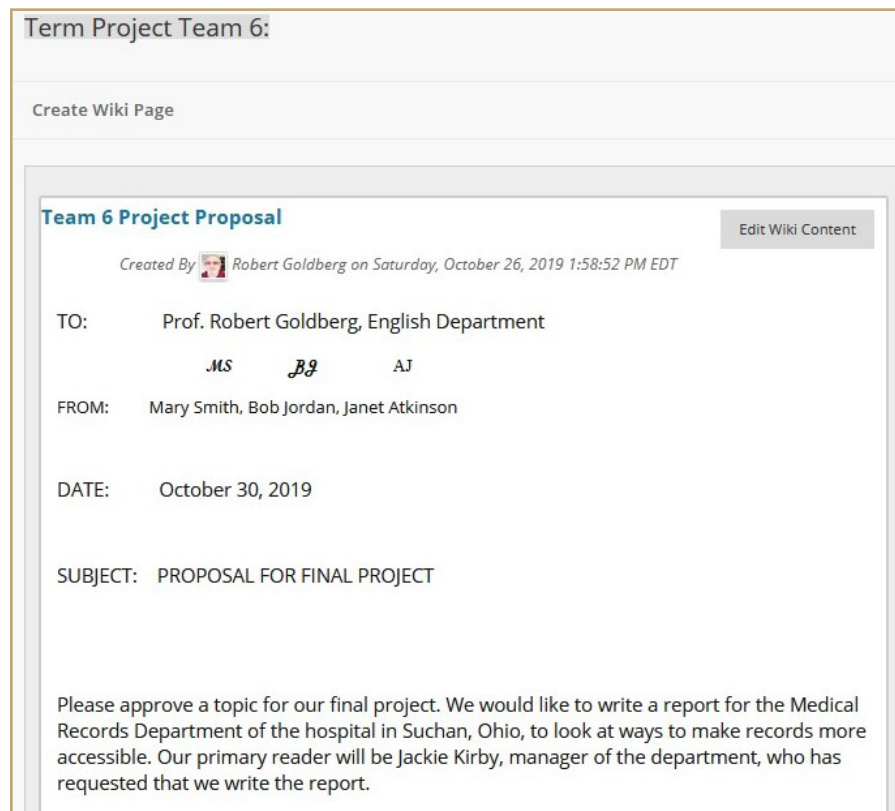
The Group Wiki is the key to full and active collaboration. While the discussion board is designed for talking about the topic and issues—essentially having conversations—the wiki is where the team actually creates its document. Don’t think about this in terms of, for example, Wikipedia. The concept is the same—people (you and I) can go into Wikipedia and edit virtually any page on Wikipedia (some pages are locked). Of course, the issue with Wikipedia, or any other public wiki, is that it is open to the public; no password is required. And some people maliciously change content in Wikipedia (which is why its use as a scholarly source is frowned upon). However, the Blackboard wiki is more secure. First, students have to log into Blackboard using their Blackboard login credentials. Second, the wiki tool is located on the Blackboard Group Page, and only students assigned to that Group Page have access to the Group Wiki. Importantly, instructors have access to all of the teams’ Group Pages, thus to all of the Group Wiki pages.

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Once team members find their way to their team's wiki, this is where the magic happens. Students have two options: to "Create Wiki Page" or to "Edit Wiki Content" (if a page already exists) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Create Wiki Page / Edit Wiki Content



Regardless of which option students select, the wiki editing page opens, and it will look somewhat familiar: it is essentially a word processing screen (see Figure 2). The only difference is when students select "Create Wiki Page," they will have to enter a name for the wiki page.

Here, students can enter the content for their collaborative document. They can type content directly into the composing screen, or they can use the Ctrl+C and Ctrl+V function to copy content from their word processing program and paste it into the Blackboard wiki document. Once finished

entering content, students scroll to the bottom and click "Submit." Each time students enter content and click "Submit," the wiki creates a "history" list. This list allows students to view previous versions and to compare what changes members have made. The list also allows the

instructor to see what work each team member contributed and also compare different versions. This allows me, as an instructor, to see the level of collaboration for each team member; this enables me to determine if individual grades need to be adjusted up or down, due to lack of participation or for excelling and making up for the lack of participation of a team member.

The Blackboard wiki does have some drawbacks. It does not function as smoothly as other wiki/collaboration tools. Recently, as I was attempting to demonstrate a wiki feature to a class, I got an error message preventing me from opening the wiki page. One team was already logged in. Ideally, team members should be able to work together in the wiki, from their own computers, seeing real-time changes. The Blackboard wiki does not support this function. Blackboard, the company, says this

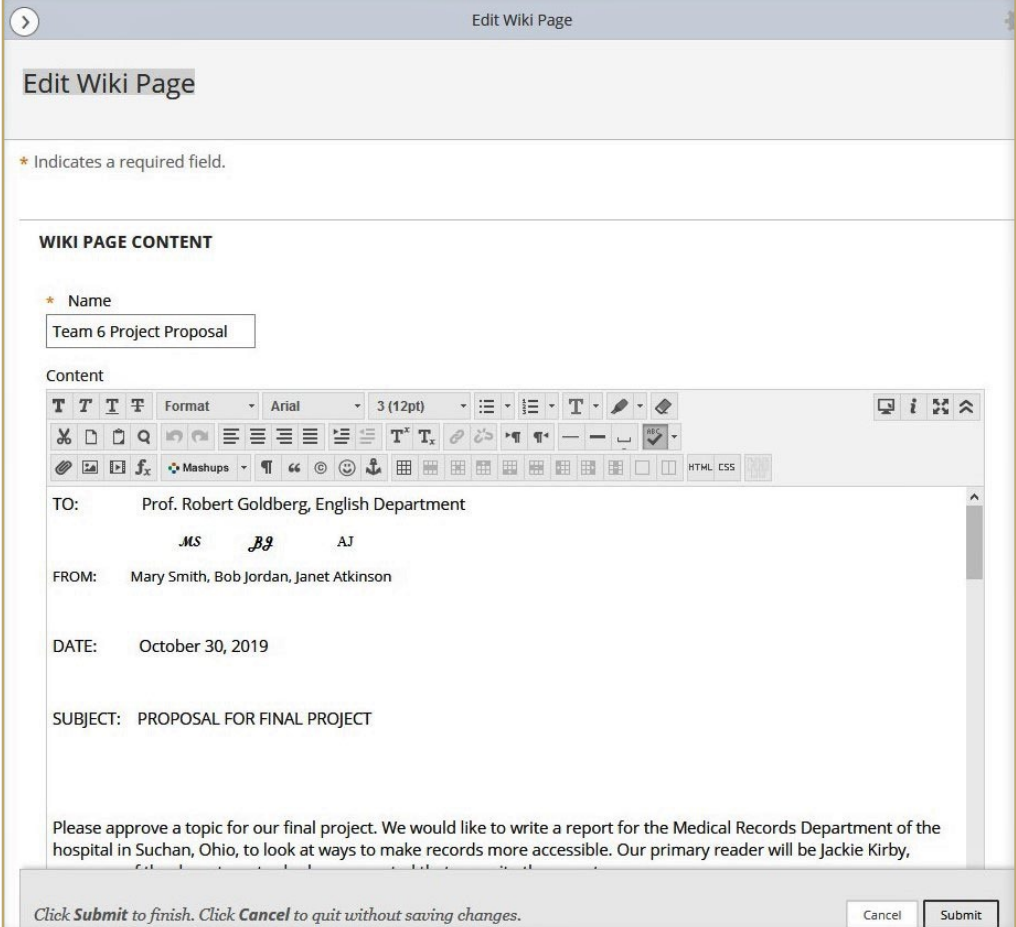
is by design, ostensibly as a security feature. Other tools, such as Google Docs, function more appropriately. However, with Google Docs, each team would have to grant me "editing" rights in order to view their content and the document history. And instead of everything being in one place for me in Blackboard, I would have to check both Blackboard and Google Docs. (I have experimented with allowing teams to use Google Docs; I did not enjoy the experience. It required several emails to some teams that could not figure out how to grant me the required rights.)

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More insidious is that the formatting in the Blackboard wiki does not match Word or even Google Docs. When text is copied from Word into the wiki, the formatting changes: including font types, line spacing, and indentation. When the revised content is copied from the wiki back into Word, some of the formatting is restored, but not all. Students have to upload their assignments for grading—they cannot be graded in the wiki—and they must be in Word format in order for me to add comments while grading.

Ultimately, the success of collaboration in the wiki depends on student participation. Typically, my student participation is around 80–90 percent in my on-campus and online classes. This semester seems to be an anomaly. In my online class, participation in the collaborative term project, as I write this, is right at 50 percent—even though students know that failure to participate via the wiki results in a grade of zero on the assignment (even if they do their work elsewhere). Nonetheless, the tools for collaboration exist and function well enough for a team to be successful. It is rare for team members to be online and attempting to work in the wiki at the same time, so the wiki function is not a major hindrance. Even the formatting problems are easy to surmount. The point is, collaboration is a reality in the “real” world, and Blackboard provides students with tools to gain experience working with team members.

Figure 2: Word Processor Layout



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## A Brief Report on Our Session on Icebreakers from CPD&E Day

By Laura Miller, Assistant Professor of Humanities, Prince George's Community College  
and Annette Savoy, Associate Professor of Humanities, Prince George's Community College

At the October 30 College Professional Development and Enrichment Day (CPD&E Day), we had a “fantabulous” one-hour session with our Prince George's Community College faculty and staff. Our topic, “Icebreakers as Positive Learning Tools in the Classroom,” was designed to challenge common assumptions about using icebreakers and to generate new ideas about connecting these activities with deeper learning.

We have all participated in icebreakers and have probably led them ourselves in our classes. One challenge we face as instructors is creating a link between icebreaker activities with course learning outcomes and concepts. Our goal for our session on CPD&E Day was to demonstrate how icebreakers could be a useful and meaningful learning activity for students—not just a time filler. Some of the sub-topics in our session included using icebreakers to enhance communication among students/staff/faculty; identify barriers and boundaries; promote empathy, group work, and collaboration; create a safer learning environment; and engage in self-reflection.

Learning involves taking risks. For students to take risks, they need to feel safe in their classroom community (Frank, 2001). Icebreakers, when planned well, can encourage open dialogue amongst students and promote self-disclosure in a safe environment. Instead of an icebreaker as a “one and done” exercise on the first day, these activities can be integrated into class sessions throughout the semester to promote collaboration and connect concepts to life experiences. They can also be done in online courses to create a sense of community and engage students in active learning (Watkins, 2005).

One activity we demonstrated in our CPD&E Day session involved participants choosing their favorite and least favorite jelly beans without tasting them. Many made their choices based on appearance, color, and past

experiences and preferences. We connected this activity with the idea that we, as humans, tend to make assumptions and form stereotypes about people we have just met based on appearance, experience, and assumptions. This activity was linked to course learning outcomes in an introductory Interpersonal Communication course.

The results of our session showed that more than half of the participants felt the activity was thought provoking and could be applied in the classroom and/or meetings. The overall tone in the room was positive and participants shared their icebreaker ideas and challenges.

In fact, we had no idea that 24 participants would show or even be interested in learning more about the topic. We were both expecting six or eight participants. We were happily wrong! We had a couple walk-ins that were willing to stand up in the workshop due to lack of seats. We were even more surprised when we sat down to review our evaluations to see such positive data. During the workshop we noticed a lot of positive reactions: participants having fun, being engaged, sharing ideas, and collaborating.

Let's break the ice and continue to facilitate positive learning in our classrooms and meetings.

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## Break a Leg!

By JaQuon Epps, Instructor of Social Sciences, Prince George's Community College

Sociology requires students to examine the relationship between the individual and society. Much attention is given to theorizing the ways in which societal processes facilitate the production and maintenance of a particular phenomenon. This skill can be quite difficult to nurture as many students believe the discipline squarely focuses on the importance of networking. Though they are not completely incorrect, it is imperative to assist students in seeing beyond this limited perception and cultivating their reasoning skills. To do so, I create opportunities for students to view themselves as the subject of analysis. I have learned that my syllabus is a script given to an ensemble cast of performers whose characters are on a path to self-discovery. The classroom is our stage and it must be shared. Lights, camera, action!

Establishing a collaborative atmosphere encourages students to personalize the material, learn from their peers, and develop a sociologist's eye. Students begin by completing an introduction that features their academic goals as well as photographs and a song that represents their innermost being. This brief slate is presented to the class as the maestro plays the actor's chosen song in the background. This not only encourages transparency but disrupts the preconceived notions held in regards to their peers. At the start of every session the class listens to a song that has some relevance to the current chapter. We analyze this major agent of socialization by dissecting the lyrics, addressing critical response, and discussing the artist's public persona. Students have the opportunity to make connections and contribute to class discussion regardless of their mastery of the material. It also encourages students to adhere to their call time as they desire to discuss their favorite artist.

In this voyeuristic society, I find it imperative to give assignments that help students walk a mile in each other's shoes. It bolsters their ability to comment on social institutions and recognize patterns. To assist my students in developing a sociological perspective, I require them to critically examine their world through photography. Students must choose an approved term from each chapter and photograph an aspect of their lives that is connected to it. They must analyze this image through the lens of three theoretical paradigms by addressing the function it serves

in society, the inequalities associated with it, and how they both are reproduced through micro interactions. For example, during our discussion of the leisure industry, I define the term recreation and display a photograph of my hockey stick. I then discuss the physical and communal benefits of recreational sports and the lack of minority representation at the professional level. I close by explaining that economic and spatial exclusion from youth hockey leagues experienced by minorities makes hockey a symbol of whiteness and leads to the aforementioned disparity. The Canadian Colored Hockey League of 1895 and contemporary minority players have disrupted this problematic reality. Students are encouraged to produce similar analyses based on their own personal experiences. This assignment encourages a soliloquy unlike any other through which they ponder not only their place in society, but the role they may play in the reproduction of inequality. The photographs that students submit are embedded within the PowerPoint for each session. The cast brings each other into a deeper awareness as they engage in dialogue about their interpretations and reasoning. By strengthening their analytical skills, they position themselves to uncover how matters they once deemed trivial have greater social implications for others. This contextualizes the conditions and grievances of various social groups and arms students with the compassion needed to fight for equality. Students are still charged to display knowledge in a traditional manner, however, the key to successful teaching is innovation. Exposing students to various mediums and requiring them to be active participants has been effective.

An instructor's enthusiasm is most important when fostering a meaningful classroom experience. Creating an environment that I am thrilled to call home has rendered the long days and occasional headaches miniscule. I enjoy the music, photographs, and conversations as they posit minority lives as sources of knowledge rather than tools of appropriation. Sharing the stage generates a sense of belonging that keeps students engaged and accountable. The cast feels acknowledged and valuable as they are entrusted and encouraged to lead, if only for five minutes. There are no small parts in this production. Take my cue and do not fear being upstaged. End scene!

## Supplementing Instruction with *Nearpod*, *Kahoot*, and Low Tech Gamification

By Francois Guidry, Associate Professor of English, Prince George's Community College

One of the most common challenges for students is retaining information such as basic processes and terminology. For example, students in English courses often struggle with grammatical concepts. Students in biology are often overwhelmed with the need to memorize a large number of terms. In many cases, the retention of this information coincides with repetition: the more students practice, the more familiar the concepts become. This process can quickly turn into a series of rote exercises that do little to motivate or engage students. Students and teachers have become familiar with notecards and other learning techniques to answer this challenge, but these processes tend to be solitary and not all that engaging to students in the modern smartphone culture. According to a recent study of student engagement, the key is to provide or “simulate authentic environments in which students could apply new knowledge and skills, which ultimately lead[s] to a greater understanding of content and evidence of higher-order thinking” (Schindler et al.). Fortunately, there are several free and relatively simple tools available to enhance the classroom and stimulate both memory and new learning as well.

### PowerPoint and *Nearpod*

Both instructors and students are very familiar with PowerPoint. Its strengths and weaknesses are fairly well known. In some situations, a concise presentation is far more valuable than any lecture or activity. However, long presentations can cause many students to slip into what is known as the “student coma,” a type of malaise where students view the presentation in a passive state, waiting for a seemingly endless parade of slides to end.

One useful and free alternative available online is *Nearpod*. As with PowerPoint, it offers a basic slideshow, but it also includes a variety of activities for students to complete. At its core, *Nearpod* presents information on the screen projector while simultaneously providing activities and supplemental material on each student's smartphone. The instructor can allow students to complete the slideshow and activities at their own pace or as part of the classroom-paced option.

The interactivity of *Nearpod* is what sets it apart from other instructional tools and approaches. At any point in the slideshow, instructors can add a variety of activities for students to complete. Some of the more popular options to explore are:

- “Open-Ended Question”  
Students are asked a question and their responses are displayed on the overhead screen for all to see. This can function as a useful tool to assess what students already know about a given topic but also as a way to gauge what has already been learned. After all the responses are visible, it is fairly easy to move into a class discussion about some of the responses.
- “Draw It”  
This activity presents each student with a picture or a blank slide depending on the instructor's choices. Students must respond by using the simple drawing tool to either create an image or modify an existing image. In the case of an English class, parts of a sentence or entire paragraphs can be circled to help students identify various items such as subjects, appositives, and introductions. In a biology class, an organ can be displayed, allowing students to highlight specific parts of the organ or circle areas that do not look healthy.
- “Time to Climb”  
This activity features a competitive race where each student must answer questions to win the “game.” Students can use this activity to help review terms and apply concepts depending on what the course requires. Similarly, the instructor can provide a prize such as extra credit to encourage students.

All of the activities on *Nearpod* contribute to a report that instructors can generate. In this way, the entire presentation can provide assessment data and results to help gauge the class's progress and guide future lessons. The learning curve for *Nearpod* is not particularly steep. Anyone familiar with PowerPoint can use this tool.

Supplementing Instruction with *Nearpod*, *Kahoot*, and Low Tech Gamification**Kahoot and Gamification Apps**

Another popular approach for engaging students is gamification. If students work competitively to achieve a goal and ideally a reward, they are often more motivated than they are with traditional approaches to studying. *Kahoot* is one of the more popular and free tools available online to instructors. The entire premise of *Kahoot* is a contest where students earn points by answering questions on their smartphones. There is even music attached to the activity to generate both interest and suspense. All of the basic question types are available from multiple choice to true/false. Perhaps most useful is the ability of instructors to search for *Kahoot* activities designed by others. Instructors then have the option of using or even editing these activities to fit the needs of their particular classroom. As with *Nearpod*, *Kahoot* generates limited data at the end of the activity for assessment.

In addition to *Kahoot*, there are a variety of apps available to help diversify the teaching of basic concepts. For instance, one of the most important skills to develop in an English course is proofreading; however, it is not always the most exciting skill to master. Fortunately, there is a free app for the Apple iPad called *The Grading Game*. This app allows users to take on the role of teaching assistant at a university and then grade student writing on behalf of the professor. The new teaching assistant must use the touchscreen to find all the errors in a given piece of writing before the time limit expires. There is quite a bit of humor involved because the professor makes loud angry noises if the student writing receives a high score. This app works best if displayed on the overhead project as classmates take turns using the iPad. The students in their seats see some of the errors but wait and see if their classmates find them. In this way, an app like *The Grading Game* adds a fun dimension to the often mundane but essential skill of proofreading. It has also proven very effective. Students in my developmental English classes have seen their scores on the final editing exam increase by 10 percent since I began using the app each semester. Similarly, nearly 90 percent of all my students expressed interest in repeating the *The Grading Game*, and half of my students wanted instructions about finding similar games for their smartphones.

**Low Tech Gamification**

Although technology is a great tool for helping students learn and remember basic concepts and terminology, it is not always available. Many students simply do not have access to smartphones, laptops, or tablets. In other cases, the Wi-Fi at a particular institution, building, or classroom may not be reliable. The good news here is that with a little flexibility, teachers have plenty of options for generating interest in basic concepts.

Many instructors are familiar with using modified versions of popular game shows, such as *Jeopardy*, into their classroom instruction. What may not be as obvious is the ability to adapt party-genre games as a teaching tool.

One effective activity that uses this approach involves getting students to trick each other. This works best in groups. In a nursing class, each group can briefly write down a particular process for handling a patient; however, they intentionally include an error or two that they hope the rest of the class misses. For English classes, groups can “hide” grammar errors in sentences. If the errors in a group’s work are not found, that group wins the game. This activity forces students to reverse their thinking and consider what other students might miss when learning and reviewing content.

**Experiment for Effectiveness**

With a minimal investment of time, instructors have a range of online and offline tools to adapt to their classroom. Even if a particular activity or app proves ineffective, it can often spark an idea for a separate and more fruitful approach. These tools do not replace the time-worn practices of memorization techniques or group study sessions. Instead, they can act as a supplement to help students keep key terms and practices in mind.

**Works Cited**

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# Blackboard Virtual Library Methods for Advancing Student Success

By Marianne Giltrud, Assistant Professor, Librarian for Instruction and Reference, Prince George's Community College

## Background

The Association of College and Research Libraries Assessment in Action Project (AiA) (Brown & Malenfant, 2017), a three-year project with more than 200 institutions, studied the influence the library had on student success. Three key findings are addressed: 1. Students benefit from library instruction in their initial coursework; 2. Library use increases student success; 3. Information literacy instruction strengthens general education outcomes. This article articulates the degree to which a library can provide equity in access by offering a diversity of modalities in learning and thereby influence student success.

To harmonize our efforts with the findings of the AiA project, the library identified action items under the Teaching, Learning, and Student Success (TLSS) FY20 and FY21 Area Objective 1: Increase completion rates (graduation, credit certificates, and CE programs); Unit Objective 1: Provide equity in access by offering a diversity of modalities. Two new initiatives emerged from this endeavor. Both initiatives were designed to accommodate students who need academic support but may experience challenges getting to campus. Therefore, identifying methods by which the library could leverage virtual instruction services to advance student success was critical. Commencing in the fall of 2018, the library launched the “Information Literacy Unbounded Program.” This initiative identified ways in which the faculty could embed information literacy learning into their course or program. It included our regular face-to-face or embedded librarian information literacy learning instruction, library workshops, and face-to-face research consultations. Whereas our offerings were more traditional, we launched a learning community in collaboration with faculty to enhance learning using flipped learning and the librarian mentor. Included in this was a more virtual focus of instruction and student interaction. “Course Guides”—a portal of library resources for a specific course or

program with virtual synchronous instructions sessions and virtual research consultations—were designed to facilitate reaching the students where they are and when they are.

In the fall of 2019, the library launched “Embedding the Library: Blackboard Learning Tools Integration (LTI) Virtual Library” as a means of connecting with students, faculty, and course sections exponentially. The Blackboard Virtual Library integrates content into every course section and appears directly in the Learning Management System. The Virtual Library includes digital learning objects, instructional course guides, interactive instructional videos, library assignments, A–Z databases, e-books, Ask a Librarian Chat, and more. The research tutorial with interactive instructional videos and quizzes was designed, developed, implemented, and evaluated to provide a framework for ongoing assessment. Moreover, a new and improved Ask a Librarian Chat feature was added that uses Zoom Open Meetings to share the faculty librarians’ screen while interacting with the student. It soft-launched in early December 2019. Thus, these multiple means of representing content reinforces deep, reflective, critical analysis that flows from the students to ensure student success.

## Literature Review

### *Library Use and Student Success*

Thorpe et al. (2016) conducted a study to ascertain if library use impacted student GPA and retention rates. They found that the “data reveal a correlation—although perhaps not causality—between student use of the library and higher retention rates” (Thorpe et al., 2016, p. 374). With the focus on academic success, teaching and learning, and library usage versus the typical service point usage, the library can articulate the degree to which it can influence student learning at all levels.

## Blackboard Virtual Library Methods for Advancing Student Success

Moreover, LeMaistre et al. (2018) investigated the relationship between the use of online library resources and student success. Their study analyzed EZproxy logs to see if students' use of online library resources were a predictor of GPA, retention, and academic standing on a diverse student population. EZproxy is an electronic vehicle that delivers e-content to users no matter where they are searching. Therefore, by studying these logs a picture of the differences between library users and non-users by demographics and enrollment variables supported the hypothesis that there was a "statistically significant relationship between library use and student success" (LeMaistre et al., 2018, p. 118). Importantly, the study found that students of "nontraditional age (age 25 and up), Pell recipients, nursing students, and students who earned a higher GPA were more likely to use library resources than their counterparts" (LeMaistre et al., 2018, p. 125). These are remarkable studies that indicate innovative methods of linking library use to student success are valuable.

## Results

### *PGCC Blackboard Virtual Library*

In addition to the Association of College and Research Libraries AiA Project, these two studies further confirm the value of academic libraries and student success. To enunciate the degree to which the Prince George's Community College Blackboard Virtual Library contributes to academic success is reflected in Table 1.

**Table 1. Usage Statistics for Blackboard Learning Tools Integration (LTI) Fall 2019**

PGCC Blackboard Virtual Library Usage Statistics Fall 2019	
<i>Courses with Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI)</i>	<b>784</b>
Launch Counts	11,172
Research Guides	2,472
Research Tutorial	4,616
Chats Answered	162
<i>Note: Data for Table 1 compiled from LibGuides CMS (Fall 2019)</i>	

To explain, 784 unique courses had Blackboard Virtual Library embedded directly in their Blackboard shells. What this means is, that of the 784 courses a total of 11,172 individuals launched the tool and that indicates an average of 142 uses per course. These are separate from other counts that may be collected by the library and give a level of granularity and specificity related to a course. Nevertheless, many survey courses have significantly higher usage as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Select Use of Blackboard (LTI) Virtual Library by Course (Fall 2019)**

PGCC Blackboard Virtual Library Usage Statistics Fall 2019	
<i>Course</i>	<i>Visits</i>
EGL-1010	1,956
PAS-1010	496
EGL-1320	404
NTR-1010	317
<i>Note: Data for Table 2 compiled from LibGuides CMS (Fall 2019)</i>	

Comparatively, the Research Guides—portals of research and instructional resources—were accessed by 2,472 individuals within the Blackboard Virtual Library. These are separate from other library statistics, meaning increased usage. Significantly, 4,616 usages of the Research Tutorial were found. From these results, it can be inferred that many students use library resources that are not typically accounted for in traditional library counts. Therefore, by using the Blackboard Virtual Library, student success can increase. Face-to-face Information Literacy class sessions for the same period were approximately 50 sessions. Whereas the reach of information literacy as identified in the select high usage in the 1000-level courses in Table 2 provide a higher degree of access, use, retention, and beneficial outcomes, the information literacy pedagogy in the research tutorial and research guides helps to close the gaps in access to teaching and learning resources and thereby improve general education learning outcomes.

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## Conclusion

The results show a positive connection between library usage and student success and provide evidence of innovation in the realm of the 21st Century library that increasingly focuses on digital and virtual spaces of learning. The next steps for the PGCC library include creating a Library 1010 Blackboard self-enrolled course that will be a repository of instructional course guides, digital learning objects, handouts, quizzes, and other teaching and assessment tools to provide greater access to and varying modalities of library learning resources for faculty and students.

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## Perusall: Digital Active Annotation Tool in ESL Reading Classes

By Jill Woodward and Elena Neunaber, ESL Instructors, Community College of Baltimore County

The use of annotation as an effective reading strategy is part of metacognition, viewed as the foundation of understanding text (Holschuh, Lampi, 2018). For reading to be “active,” learners are instructed to use annotation. As far as the different types of annotation go—highlighting, underlining, writing comments on the text—research shows that highlighting and underlining are less effective for comprehension than making comments in the margins (Fowler & Barker, 1974). Perhaps that is because making comments fully activates and displays the metacognitive process. However, it is important to note that while making comments is the most effective form of annotation for improving comprehension of printed text, readers of digital texts rarely employ this strategy (Schugar et al., 2011). As current trends in education push course content increasingly to digital or online formats, it is important to transfer active reading strategies as well, especially the kind of annotation that is most likely to increase reading comprehension. *Perusall*, an educational app created for digital annotation, addresses this disparity between the efficacy of print versus digital annotation.

The first and foremost advantage of digital annotation in a classroom setting is social interaction over a text. Digital annotation with comments and interaction between peers transforms text comprehension from a private and isolated activity into collaborative practice. Employing digital annotation becomes a high impact teaching strategy because it increases reading comprehension, engages learners to interact with text, and facilitates their interaction with each other.

Over several semesters, we have used *Perusall* in advanced and academic ESL reading classes. *Perusall* is founded on extensive patent-pending behavioral research at Harvard University and is easy to access and use for both instructors and learners. Students can purchase textbooks and novels directly from the site, or instructors can upload PDF or other files for students to access for free. It is an excellent way to front-load assignments before in-class discussion: a sustainable method of saving paper and time to teach effectively. The assignments can be distributed both

asynchronously and synchronously. In the latter case, it becomes a true social interaction tool that responds to students’ current interests of immediate communication in real time.

The social aspect of annotating digitally as a group cannot be overlooked. An ESL classroom tends to have learners of various linguistic abilities, and some students may not feel at ease communicating with their peers due to limited vocabulary or other verbal and nonverbal constraints. Engaging in a collective activity thereby fosters social interaction over a text and allows otherwise “quiet” students to react and respond meaningfully.

Subsequently, an instructor can scaffold annotating activities based on the level of text difficulty. A complex reading may call for a guided discussion when students are required to answer questions to elicit a particular response. Another approach is to let students read and comment unguided, which enhances their metacognitive awareness. The outcomes of instructor-guided and unguided annotation are presented in Table 1:

**Table 1. Guided vs. Unguided Annotation**

Instructor-led (Guided)	Individual (Unguided)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• initiates use of new online tool</li> <li>• serves as a moderator</li> <li>• requires full-class participation</li> <li>• encourages collaboration</li> <li>• assesses material retention</li> <li>• front-loads reading before class discussion</li> <li>• uncovers confusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• challenges students to read more actively</li> <li>• generates responses to a variety of subjects not limited by a teacher</li> <li>• triggers critical thinking skills</li> <li>• may be used to monitor compliance</li> <li>• makes collaboration more “social” and unrestricted</li> </ul>

As part of the assessment, *Perusall* provides a simple “confusion report” that recaps areas students misunderstood, agreed or disagreed with each other about, or were most engaged with. *Perusall*’s data analytics automatically grade submitted annotations to ensure that students complete the reading. Examples of the best annotations

*continued next page*

### Perusall: Digital Active Annotation Tool in ESL Reading Classes

can be upvoted by an instructor and brought to special attention in class.

The student response to the use of the *Perusall* app was and continues to be overwhelmingly positive. To survey students' attitudes after a semester-long use of *Perusall* in class, we asked them what they liked the most and the least about the app. Table 2 shows the feedback received:

**Table 2. Results of the Survey to Identify Effectiveness of *Perusall* in ESL Reading Classes at CCBC (advanced and academic levels)**

What did you like the most about <i>Perusall</i> ?	What did you like the least about <i>Perusall</i> ?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion</li> <li>• Useful for debate and writing comments</li> <li>• Learned about annotating and highlighting</li> <li>• Read everyone else's comments, share opinions with classmates</li> <li>• Easy to log in and navigate</li> <li>• It takes less time and is very clear when answering questions</li> <li>• It's easy to use when responding to a teacher or another student</li> <li>• It helps learn new words</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was a bit tricky in the beginning</li> <li>• Struggle to get through it</li> <li>• More practice is needed</li> <li>• Too many features</li> <li>• Long readings</li> </ul>

As shown above, the positive responses prevailed over the negative. The latter referred to students' initial perception of the app and general remarks about the assigned readings. When students were asked whether they found using *Perusall* in the reading class valuable, the reactions were unanimous: 100 percent. The question *Was Perusall helpful in learning about annotating?* also received an overall positive answer. Table 3 lists the reasons why ESL students would recommend using *Perusall* in the classroom:

**Table 3. Selected Student Comments**

Why would you recommend using <i>Perusall</i> ?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I could see my classmates' comments</li> <li>• It will help to build our thinking capacity</li> <li>• It's new and upcoming; need to give it a chance</li> <li>• It makes reading and annotating clear and easier to use. I also like the fact that it highlights the parts someone is trying to respond to</li> <li>• We can relate many things in our life and experience with the reading</li> <li>• It helps to be creative with your ideas</li> </ul>

In conclusion, *Perusall* is a free online digital annotation app that requires students to both highlight and comment and makes it a convenient tool for active reading. It allows to front-load assignments before in-class discussion, fosters social interaction over a text, monitors compliance, helps uncover misunderstandings, and either guide discussions or choose to let students read and comment unguided. As seen from the responses of surveyed ESOL classes, annotating on *Perusall* promotes text comprehension through active engagement and collaboration. The use of *Perusall* in the classroom is without a doubt a high impact teaching practice that fosters active reading.

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## Abandoning OERs for a Textbook just before Adopting OERs became an Institutional Priority: The Progression of THE-1010 and its Unexpected Insight into Student Learning

By Antoinette Doherty, Professor of Humanities, Prince George's Community College

The theatre program faculty of Prince George's Community College reached a consensus in the fall of 2016 that the adopted OERs used in the 2015–2016 academic year were not meeting the expected goals for THE-1010 Introduction to Theatre (now PRF-1010). The hope was that by removing a potential obstacle in the cost of the textbook student learning would increase. However, while the OER textbook was serviceable, it was not particularly comprehensive or inspiring. Some of the additional source materials—including Films on Demand and other videos through the library—became unavailable and left faculty members scrambling to replace them. It seemed that both student success and the instructor experience, due to unreliable resources, suffered as a result. This was a disappointing outcome; a great deal of time and effort was invested by the faculty member who identified the OER textbook—determined to be the best available at the time—and created the OER supplementary materials for the online textbook.

Deciding to abandon the OER textbook and supplementary material and return to using a physical textbook was a difficult decision, but it seemed the best avenue to student success. In order to fulfill the objectives of this General Education course, an academically rigorous survey course, faculty felt there should be a standard, hard copy resource that all class members used.

At that time, THE-1010 was only offered as a face-to-face or online course. I received approval to create the course in a hybrid format. Because I was creating the new format of the course, leading the effort to facilitate selecting a new textbook was the first and most important part of my course development path. Many of the textbooks reviewed by the faculty were too expensive, more than \$100 for a student to purchase. One potential textbook cost \$150. Ultimately, the program faculty chose a loose-leaf version of an established theatre textbook that included the e-book and online learning tools. Selecting this version instead of the traditional bound textbook cut the student's cost in half.

Selecting the textbook, developing the content and layout for the Blackboard master shell following the specific PGCC standards, collaborating with the book publisher to become familiar with the textbook's supplementary online learning tools, and connecting the publisher content to the new Blackboard shell was a detailed and time-consuming endeavor. The course was ready to launch in the spring of 2018. I had the opportunity to teach a section of both the hybrid and the online class using the new textbook. Previously, I taught two sections of the online class using the OER content. Before that, I taught multiple sections with different textbooks.

In recent years, at the end of each semester, I ask students to fill out a brief survey regarding their experience in my class. They rate their overall class experience, how much they learned, how much they enjoyed the class activities, how they felt about the textbook, and there is some space for additional comments. As I taught the first section of the hybrid with the new, physical textbook, it became clear to me that, although the students demonstrated that they were learning more in the class, they seemed to like the class much less than the sections I taught with the OER textbook. This observation, that students achieved higher grades in the semesters using the new, hard copy textbook, is supported not only by the students' grades that I collected in my gradebook, but also by data provided by Prince George's Community College's Office of Research, Assessment, and Effectiveness (Figures 1 and 2, page 16).

Students complained in writing and in person that they felt there was too much reading in the class. One student took to RateMyProfessor.com to warn future students that they needed to “get ready to read,” that there would be “lots of homework,” and that the class is “test heavy.” One student, upon leaving the class for the final time, told me that she “learned a lot” with a begrudging tone that clearly communicated that that was not the plan when she registered for the class.

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## Abandoning OERs for a Textbook just before Adopting OERs became an Institutional Priority:...

The student reaction was somewhat perplexing. The course with the OER content had an OER textbook, the same projects, and the same number of tests on the course content as the course with the new textbook. However, I did not get such complaints from the students in the OER class sections. The most significant difference for the students between the new textbook class sections and the OER class sections was that students had a quality textbook that they had to buy in the former and a free, lower-quality textbook in the latter. Perhaps investing money in the textbook made students feel more obligated to do the class readings, and, as a result, improved their grades, albeit in a way that was not as fun as they expected in a theatre class.

I was eager to continue working on the class so that the benefits gained in student learning with the new physical textbook could be sustained while increasing the course's likability factor. I made some adjustments to my summer class, also using the physical text, to try to further enhance my interpersonal connection with the students, but in the end, while the reaction was not as intense, I still received some less than glowing feedback about there being too much reading.

In the fall of 2018, inspired by studies on the benefits of using OERs, it was announced during the opening week of meetings that the faculty at PGCC should try to embrace

OER content in as many classes as possible. So, after the fall 2018 semester, the new textbook was abandoned in search of better OER content for the course. Hopefully, the gains in student learning with the physical textbook will not be overlooked as the course moves forward. At the very least, the forward-thinking theatre faculty had a head-start on navigating the pitfalls of OERs, the lower quality and inconsistent availability of the OER materials and the students' motivation to use them, and the detrimental effect OERs could have on student performance and how faculty perceives their effectiveness teaching the course.

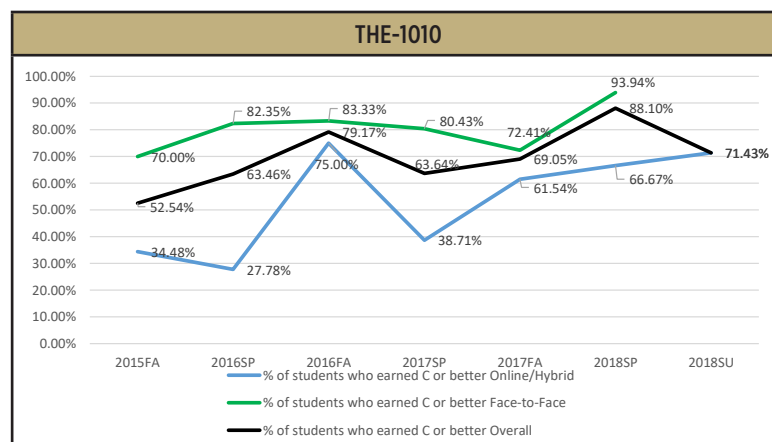
The first attempt at using OERs and the transition back to using a physical textbook was done at a time when using OERs was not an institutional mandate, so the student success rate was not unintentionally skewed by any possible preconceived notion of a hoped for outcome of using either OER material or textbooks. Each effort to improve student learning through experimenting with the course materials provided valuable information to build an even more effective course. In time, hopefully, newer and better OER resources should evolve that will incentivize students to use the free resources incorporated into the class. This should result in the best of all worlds: students simultaneously liking a class in which they are learning.

**Figure 1. Student Success Rates in THE-1010 (2015–2018)**

Percent of students who earned C or better			
Year	Online/Hybrid	Face-to-Face	Overall
2015FA	34.48%	70.00%	52.54%
2016SP	27.78%	82.35%	63.46%
2016FA	75.00%	83.33%	79.17%
2017SP	38.71%	80.43%	63.64%
2017FA	61.54%	72.41%	69.05%
2018SP	66.67%	93.94%	88.10%
2018SU	71.43%	—	71.43%

*All data was provided by Prince George's Community College's Office of Research, Assessment, and Effectiveness (RAE).*

**Figure 2. Success Rates of Online/Hybrid vs Face-to-Face**



## Do Students Benefit More from Previewing or Reviewing Course Material?

### Investigating the Impact of Assignment Timing on Assessment Performance

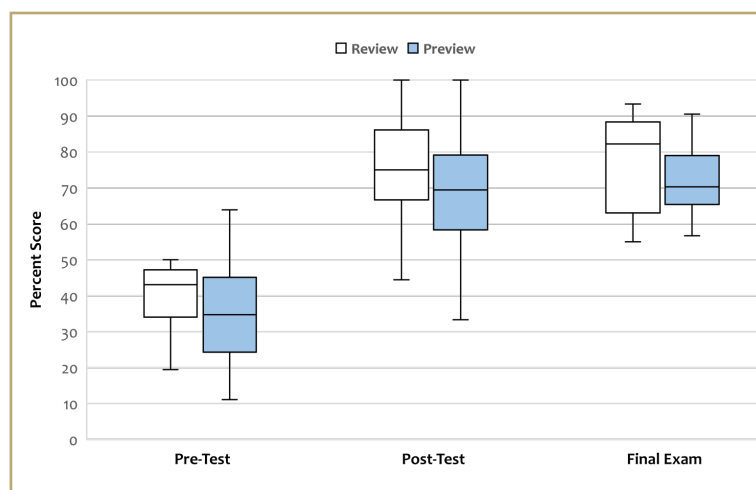
By Robin Minor, Associate Professor of Biology, Community College of Baltimore County

Encouraging undergraduate students to study outside of class is an ongoing challenge faced by all educators. Like Prince George's Community College, the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) has a very diverse student body. Given the broad ranges of our students' levels of readiness, outside work commitments, and family obligations, any encouragement and structure we can provide to our students to help guide their studying should benefit them. Thoughtfully crafted and appropriately timed assignments can provide an incentive to focus on the course material outside of class time (Hoef, 2012) and lead the student to desired learning outcomes.

Some instructors have reported success using assignments completed prior to lecture as a means to increase student preparedness for lecture and improve exam scores (Lieu et al., 2017; Shumway, 2018). It is unclear, however, whether the same assignment would have different effects on student learning if it was completed before or after the presentation of a topic during class. To investigate the impact of the assignment timing, I created a novel series of assignments targeting lecture concepts for 15 topics in a nutrition course (BIOL 256 at CCBC, [https://www.ccbcmd.edu/~mediaCCBC/Programs and Courses/Common Course Outlines/Biology/BIOL256.ashx?la=en](https://www.ccbcmd.edu/~mediaCCBC/Programs%20and%20Courses/Common%20Course%20Outlines/Biology/BIOL256.ashx?la=en)). The assignments were posted in Blackboard for students to complete throughout the semester. The assignments were due at the start of class either on the day the material was started in lecture (preview section) or the class following when the material had been finished in lecture (review section). On-time completion rates for the assignments were above 90 percent for each section. In total, the assignments were worth 10 percent of the overall course grade.

The students in this study were predominantly pre-nursing majors enrolled in two sections of nutrition. Both sections ran in the spring of 2018 and met two times per week for 85 minutes. Data were included in the analysis only for students who completed the course; thus, 16 students in the review assignment condition and 22 students in the preview assignment condition were included in the final analysis. Data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2016.

Figure 1. Percent Scores on Assessments



The main outcome variable was performance on the final exam (Figure 1). The average final exam score in the preview section was 72 percent while it was 76 percent in the review section. The box plots showing grade distributions reveal no major differences in final exam scores, however. To evaluate whether there were differences in the starting ability of the classes, which might mask effects of the assignments if one class started at a different level than the other, a prior-learning assessment was created that was comprised of 36 short multiple-choice questions about the course material. Students earned two points of

*continued next page*

Do Students Benefit More from Previewing or Reviewing Course Material?

extra credit for completing the questions before the second day of class and again after the last day of lecture (four points total, just under one % of the total course grade). Pre-test results (Figure 1) show there were no differences between the sections at the start of the semester. Post-test results show both sections improved by the end of the semester, but there was no difference in the level of improvement. The post-test scores were similar to the

final exam scores, which makes sense as they were both general, cumulative questions about all course material.

To understand more about the students' opinions about the assignments, two surveys were created and administered in conjunction with the second (Figure 2) and final/fourth exams. The survey given at the final exam included a question that asked "Was it helpful to complete the reviews AFTER class?" or "Was it helpful to complete the previews BEFORE class?" The positive response was 100 percent yes in both sections!

A follow-up question that asked whether they would have preferred to complete the assignment at the opposite time (as a preview rather than a review, for example) was also not different between the sections (Figure 3), with more than 80 percent of students responding they would prefer to keep the assignment the way it was assigned.

Figure 2. Exam 2 Student Survey Sample

Please help me improve class assignments to support learning!

How much time do you estimate you spent completing the 4 previews for the micronutrient topics? 2 hours

How much time do you estimate you spent studying (aside from the previews) for this exam? 6 hours

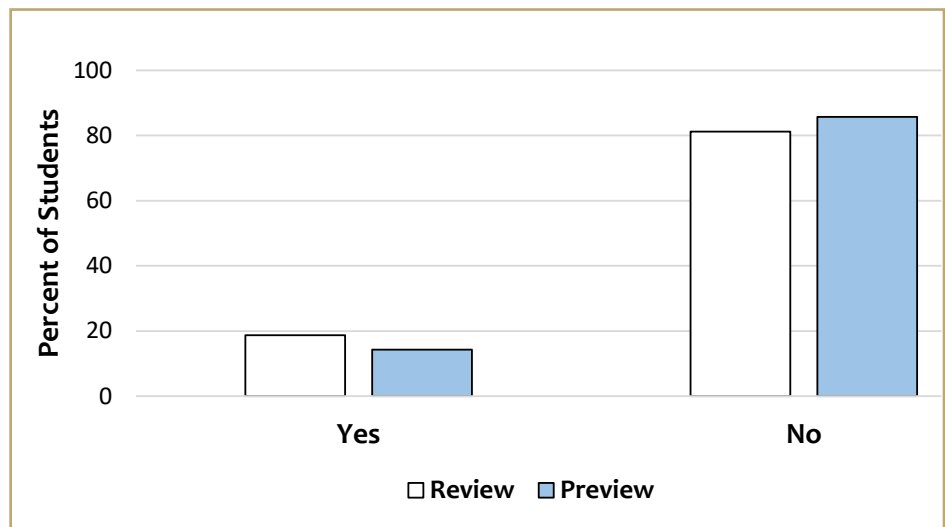
I THINK THE PREVIEWS...

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Not Sure or N/A	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Were useful--I think they helped me learn the material.	(1)	2	3	4	5	6	(7)
Were too time consuming--they should be shorter.	1	2	3	4	5	6	(7)
Were about the right length.	1	(2)	3	4	5	6	7
Were too brief--they should be longer.	1	2	3	4	5	(6)	7
Were unnecessary--I would rather have the time to study on my own.	1	2	3	4	5	6	(7)

Please provide any additional comments you think might help:

Love the ~~pre~~ previews! It gives you time to see what we will learn about more in depth in class!

Figure 3. "Would you prefer the assignment as a preview/review instead?"

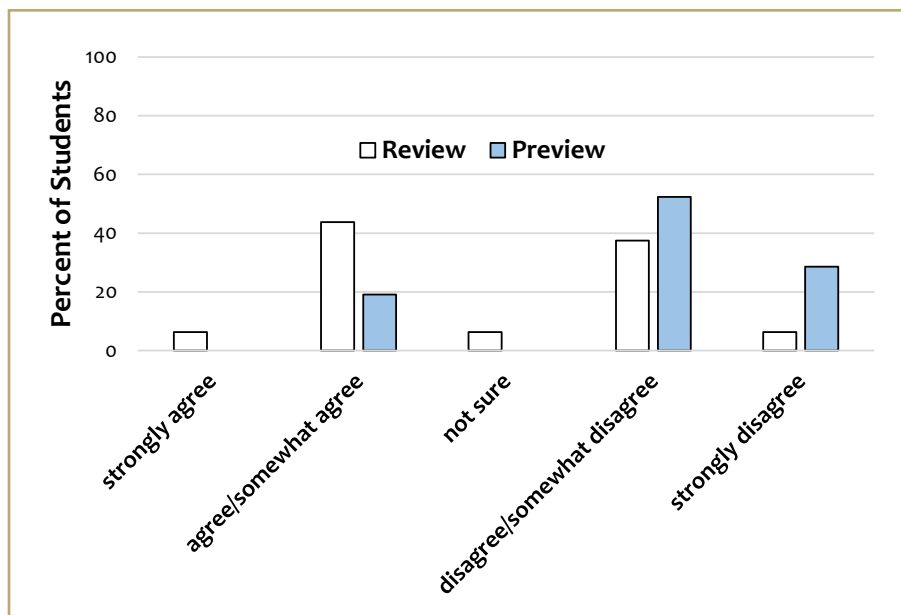


## Do Students Benefit More from Previewing or Reviewing Course Material?

Another interesting finding was the difference in student responses on the length of the assignments (Figure 4). More students in the review section (49%, compared with 19% in the preview section) agreed or strongly agreed that the assignments were too short. One student commented “I would like them to be more complex,” about the reviews on the second exam survey. Because the review section students had already covered the material in class and were already thinking ahead to the next exam, they may have been thinking more detailed and complex assignments might be better study tools for the exams.

Ultimately this study does not support the hypothesis that the timing of these topic assignments impacted learning in these nutrition sections as reflected through exam scores. Anecdotally, the preview students did respond that they felt more prepared for class because of the assignment timing, but if the goal is higher assessment scores, the content of the assignments may be a more effective approach. Overall, the most encouraging findings from this study were that these students appreciated having assignments that helped them to work through the course material, and that in some cases they were even willing to say they wish the work had been lengthier and more challenging.

Figure 4. “Assignments Were Too Short”



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## The Presentation of Test Anxiety in a Community College Sample

By Ryan Messatzzia, Associate Professor of Social Science, Wor-Wic Community College

*“I know this stuff. I don’t know why I’m not doing better.”*

*“I just get so nervous that my mind goes blank.”*

*“I have never been good at tests.”*

If you are like me, you hear some variation of these phrases from your students each semester. While statements such as this can be indicative of a lack of academic preparation, they could also allude to a larger problem—test anxiety.

While not recognized as an official mental health condition, there is a consensus in the existing literature that test anxiety has a significant impact on a student’s academic performance. Numerous researchers (Eum & Rice, 2011; von der Embse & Hasson, 2012) have confirmed a negative correlation between test anxiety and academic achievement. For example, when compared to low test-anxious peers, college students with high test anxiety have a greater propensity for earning “F” grades (Barrows et al., 2013) and lower overall GPAs (Hsieh et al., 2012; Talib & Sansgiry, 2012).

Test anxiety also appears to be a quite prevalent issue. Recent investigations have found that 28 percent (Fernandez-Castillo & Caurcel, 2015) to 38.5 percent (Gerwing et al., 2015) of college students at four-year institutions experience high levels of examination distress. However, there is a significant dearth of data about the presentation of this test anxiety in two-year community colleges.

Fueled by this gap in the literature and my personal experiences as an instructor, I decided to investigate the phenomenon at my institution. I surveyed 270 students enrolled in sections of an introductory psychology course, which constituted 8.7 percent of all credit students enrolled at Wor-Wic Community College (WWCC) during fall 2017 semester (WWCC, 2018). Participant demographics are illustrated in Table 1.

Students were asked to complete three psychometric scales—the Westside Test Anxiety Scale (WTAS, a 10-item instrument measuring cognitive symptoms of test anxiety), GAD-7 (a seven-item tool measuring symptoms of general, non-test related anxiety), and Study Skills Rating Scale (an eight-item scale assessing academic preparation). All three of these scales have shown validity and reliability in previous studies (Cassady, 2004; Rajiah & Saravanan, 2014; Spitzer et al., 2006).

The results of this cross-sectional research were eye-opening to me. (Tables 2 and 3 depict the score distributions for the GAD-7 and WTAS respectively.)

More than half (50.9%) of the students surveyed exhibited moderately high to extremely high test anxiety, dwarfing the prevalence found in previous investigations at four-year schools. (Interestingly, there was no correlation found between a student’s study habits and test anxiety, disputing the notion that test anxiety is the result of poor academic preparation.) Perhaps most alarmingly, results indicated that 46.4 percent of surveyed students exhibited moderate

**Table 1. Study Participants Compared to Overall Fall 2017 Semester Credit Student Enrollment**

Demographic	Study Participants		Fall 2017 Enrollment
	n	%	%
Sex			
Female	173	63.6	64.0
Male	99	36.4	36.0
Race			
Non-Caucasian	104	33.4	37.0
Caucasian	168	66.6	63.0
Enrollment Status			
New Students (first semester)	114	41.9	35.0
Returning Students	158	58.1	65.0
Age	272	M=23.0	M=25.0
Special Education Status in High School <sup>a</sup>			
Yes	27	9.9	—
No	235	86.4	—
Unsure	9	3.3	—
Unanswered	1	0.4	—

<sup>a</sup> Students self-identified this status.

## The Presentation of Test Anxiety in a Community College Sample

**Table 2. GAD-7 Score Distribution**

Anxiety Severity Level	n <sup>a</sup>	%
Minimal	72	26.7
Mild	72	26.7
Moderate	56	20.7
Severe	70	25.9
<sup>a</sup> Two surveys excluded for missing data		

**Table 3. Westside Test Anxiety Scale Score Distribution**

Test Anxiety Severity Level	n <sup>a</sup>	%
Comfortably Low	32	12.0
Normal	49	18.4
High Normal	50	18.7
Moderately High	50	18.7
High	40	15.0
Extremely High	46	17.2
<sup>a</sup> Five surveys excluded for missing data		

to severe non-test related anxiety, levels at which formal clinical assessment by a mental health professional are recommended.

Before discussing the implications of these results, several limitations of this study should be noted. While the sample was relatively reflective of the larger student body at WWCC, new students were slightly overrepresented. New students may be more prone to feelings of uncertainty and anxiety about pursuits of higher education, which could have skewed the results. The fact that students were surveyed in sections of an introductory psychology class is also worth considering, as students with mental health struggles may be more likely to enroll in such courses to gain a better understanding of themselves and/or their problems. As a result, the severity of anxiety and test anxiety levels may be somewhat exaggerated. Finally, it is significant to

note that online sections of the course were excluded from this study for logistical reasons. Since online students may present with different levels of anxiety than students enrolled in traditional face-to-face sections, their omission should be considered when examining the data.

Despite these limitations, the results of this investigation may have numerous significant implications for instructors, student support personnel, and administrators. In reference to addressing the test anxiety needs of our students, faculty could benefit from education on the signs of test anxiety to better identify those at risk of this problem. Counseling and disability office staff need to research the best treatment options (e.g., progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing, cognitive restructuring) and develop new support resources. Considering the limited staffing commonly found at community colleges, administrative support for such endeavors and cost-effective options (e.g., group-oriented workshops) will be vital.

The alarming rate of non-test related anxiety symptoms also needs to be addressed on our campuses. Professional development opportunities such as Mental Health First Aid could help college employees recognize the symptoms of anxiety disorders and teach how to intervene as frontline responders. On-campus outreach from counseling staff could help in destigmatizing mental illness, especially if such efforts are paired with the building of an appropriate treatment infrastructure on campus. Support groups, student clubs focused on mental health advocacy, and partnerships with community-based treatment agencies could help address the needs of our students.

Considering the prevalence and potential impacts of these conditions, it is vital that we act to meet the needs of these vulnerable individuals to help them reach their fullest potential.

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## The Presentation of Test Anxiety in a Community College Sample

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## Using the Flex Modality to Teach a Managerial Accounting Course

By Ron Krug, Associate Professor; Assistant Chair of Business and Economics Division, Allegany College of Maryland

In the spring 2019 semester Allegany College of Maryland (ACM) introduced the flex modality for a limited number of courses. Having achieved early success, some additional courses were added for the 2019–2020 academic year. In fall 2019, Managerial Accounting became the first business or accounting course offered via the flex method. I was the instructor for the course. In this paper I will discuss the “nuts and bolts” of offering flex courses (technology needs, classroom needs, etc.), the pros and cons of using this interesting modality, and the rewards and challenges my students and I experienced. I will also share the opinions of some of my colleagues at ACM who have used flex.

Flex courses are fully-functional online courses that provide additional means for students to learn the course material. No student is required to utilize the extra learning techniques made available in this format. They may simply take the course as they would any other online course. However, ACM’s early results, though entirely anecdotal, indicate that almost all students utilize one or more of the learning methods not usually available in a traditional online course.

In flex courses students have the option (but not the obligation) to do any of the following:

1. Attend face-to-face classes offered regularly and for as many hours as a course scheduled as face-to-face (e.g., 375 hours of class time for a three-credit course).
2. Participate in the classes synchronously and remotely via computer using Microsoft *Teams*.
3. Watch videos of the classes asynchronously on the course’s learning management system (Brightspace).

Students can switch among these options at any time. For example, a student can attend a class meeting face-to-face one day, participate live on their computer another day, and not attend at all on the third day. There is no in-class attendance policy, and instructors generally do not include class participation (except online) in their grading system.

So far ACM students have been pleased with the convenience and wide range of learning options provided by the flex method. Instructors have reacted favorably as well,

although there are challenges, technological and otherwise, that are truly unique to this method.

ACM uses Microsoft *Teams* as its communication platform for flex courses. Through *Teams*, students may participate in class synchronously through their computers or watch videos of the class sessions on Brightspace at their leisure. The instructor has a desktop computer loaded with *Teams* that is used to “invite” team members (students) to participate in the class. A student “accepts” the invitation to participate in the class remotely. Students in the classroom do not need to participate through *Teams*.

Students participating remotely cannot be seen by anyone in the classroom, but can easily be heard through a speaker attached to the ceiling. They may also participate by typing on their computers. The text appears on the instructor’s screen. On in-class group assignments, remote students can be assembled into a team so they can work together. A camera, also attached to the ceiling, allows the students to see the instructor or the students in class. Alternatively, instructors may choose to display the computer screen. An instructor may shift the view from the classroom to the computer screen anytime during the class.

Not surprisingly, in my class a few technical glitches occurred. For example, on a few occasions remote students could not access a class session or lost contact during the class. Unfortunately, some of the problems were caused by instructor error. Two classes were not recorded because I accidentally failed to begin the recording process. Tapes were not available for these classes. On two other occasions I inadvertently provided the students watching on tape with the classroom view instead of the computer screen view. So, as I was working with, and referring to, Excel spreadsheets, PowerPoint slides, websites, videos, and other materials the viewers were supposed to see, what they actually saw was an overhead shot of me interacting with the desktop. On a couple of occasions, I neglected to stop taping while students worked on 15 to 20-minute group assignments. Without editing, students watching the videos would have been subjected to long periods of silence. Fortunately, I was able to have the dead time edited out so that students received a continuous stream

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of information. (Note: The class ran for 75 minutes per session. With the exception of pausing for in-class group work, taping was continuous. I did not edit the tapes into shorter podcasts, although that option was available. Instead, throughout the class period I would intermittently state that students watching on video might consider pausing or stopping, as the direction of the class was about to change (e.g. new material, new exercises or problems). In this way I was encouraging the students to view the videos in portions analogous to podcasts, rather than all at once.

Classroom attendance was spotty and impossible to predict. Enrollment was limited to 12 students. At times up to 10 students would attend class in person. More typically, only four or five students would appear. There were only two students who regularly attended in person, while three others regularly participated remotely. On three occasions almost no one attended, in person or remotely. Lacking the opportunity for student interaction, I simply taped those sessions as straightforward lectures. While the remote students were free to participate in class discussions, few did unless prompted. It was important for me to solicit their participation, either by calling on them by name or more generally requesting input from “the folks at home.” Once called upon, most enthusiastically participated.

I could not compel my students to attend class, but used various means to encourage their active, real-time participation, with limited success. I also asked non-attendees why they didn’t take part in the class sessions. Some stated that they treated the course like any other online course, and were confident that they could master the subject matter independently, using the learning tools available on Brightspace. Some could not participate live because of work or family obligations. Others claimed that they probably learned as much from watching the videos as they would have from attending the class itself. Finally, a few students admitted that they didn’t attend class simply because they weren’t obligated to, and it would not directly impact their grade.

While students had the choice of attending class in person or remotely, almost all consistently used one method to the

exclusion of the other. It was rare for a student who attended in person to also participate remotely, and vice versa.

To date, relatively few instructors at ACM have taught in the flex modality. Most I have spoken with have reported experiences similar to mine. One stated that none of his students participated remotely. They either came to the classroom or eschewed live participation altogether. Another claimed that one of his students usually participated remotely from the ACM library, even though she was on campus and could have easily walked to the classroom.

All of my flex-teaching colleagues agree that the student experience would be enhanced if a technician were present to make adjustments as needed. For example, the classroom camera can be moved electronically to show any part of the room—the instructor, the students, the white board. But the instructors, busy concentrating on their delivery of material or working with students, don’t think about changing the camera angle regularly to maximize the learning experience for the remote students and those watching the videos later. Likewise, they are unlikely to shift the view from the classroom to the computer screen and back as often as they should. A technician could also attempt to reconnect remote students whose connection has been lost.

### Summary

The flex modality can significantly enhance learning in online courses for students willing and able to utilize the additional features it offers. Flex courses are “online-plus.” They offer virtually all of the features of a typical online course while providing additional opportunities to learn from the instructor and other students live or from video recordings of live classes. Teaching a flex course is rewarding despite its challenges. The final course average in my Managerial Accounting flex course exceeded the average of any online section of the course I had taught previously. I’m now looking forward to using formal assessment tools to measure student learning and skills development in Managerial Accounting using flex, and comparing the results to face-to-face and online-only sections.

## Driving Assessments: Reflecting on Assessment Practices at PGCC

By Anthony Fulton, Professor of English, Prince George's Community College

For the past seven years, I have worked as an assessment coach here at Prince George's Community College (PGCC). Essentially, I help to shepherd our assessment process, assisting faculty in developing and administering assessments. To my colleagues, I am sometimes known as “the assessment person,” or even “the guy who does that Tk20 thing.” This became very apparent during the 2019 fall semester, as we prepared for the renovation of Marlboro Hall, which houses math, English, humanities, and social sciences. Faculty cleaning out their offices would happen upon old assessment documents from the late 1990s and early 2000s, and, unsure if they should discard these materials, would send them my way. I inherited many boxes of materials, predating my arrival to the college in 2010. These documents from an earlier era of assessment provide a helpful perspective on our current assessment efforts. Specific passages in materials from 2001–2002 can foster a detailed reflection on how assessment at PGCC continues to evolve.

### Past Efforts at PGCC

Analyzing assessment documents from 2001–2002 suggests an assessment process centered in the disciplines. Departments designed a schedule for assessments and then developed course assessments, focusing on course outcomes. Faculty planned and administered assessments. The Office of Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research would then produce an Outcomes Assessment Report, a slim booklet with a purple cover, for each course assessed.

One key passage from the 2002 Course Assessment Handbook seems to encapsulate the process, as well as foster a reflection on our current efforts. Under the heading, “Course Assessment Controlled by Faculty,” the handbook states:

Because you as a faculty member teach the courses, you are in the best position to know what the course content should be, what the students should learn, and how best to determine if they have learned. When you design a course assessment, the information that you receive from analyzing the results can provide valuable insight into how the course can be strengthened to improve student learning. (3)

### Current Assessment Efforts

While there are many similarities to these past assessment efforts, the College's current assessment efforts appears more centralized and standardized. While faculty are the content experts and develop their own assessments, there are standardized templates and guidelines for rubrics and multiple-choice assessments. In addition, there are general guidelines for course outcomes and aligning outcomes.

This current effort, referred to as PGCC's “all-in-one” assessment process, began in 2012. In each area, faculty develop four-year assessment cycles, planning assessments of program courses, high-enrollment courses, and General Education courses. The Academic Affairs Assessment Committee (AAAC), made up of faculty who help to shepherd the process in their departments, shaped policies and reviewed assessment materials in all departments.

When the four-year cycle ended in 2016, departments developed new five-year cycles, focusing more on program-level and General Education assessments. The AAAC was renamed as the Teaching and Learning Assessment Committee (TLAC), after Academic Affairs became Teaching, Learning, and Student Success (TLSS) during the 2016–2017 realignment process.

Essentially, there is one key contrast to the 2002 assessment handbook. Instead of being “controlled,” assessment is “driven” by faculty. This may seem like a subtle change, but “driven” could put more emphasis on forward momentum. Upon reflection, that is what has been happening since the “all-in-one process” began. Faculty continue to drive the process, shaping it, and improving it by engaging in interdisciplinary conversations. Over the course of these two assessment cycles, faculty have helped to create improvements to the process, specifically how assessments are developed and submitted, how the data is analyzed, and how we “close the loop” by developing plans for reassessments.

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## Driving Assessments: Reflecting on Assessment Practices at PGCC

**Driving Assessments: Example**

To illustrate, here is a brief example of how faculty have shaped the process. During the initial four-year assessment cycle, the English Department began assessing their 2000-level literature courses. While required for the General Studies Program in English, the courses often had low enrollments. In looking at the data, faculty were concerned that they had to make conclusions and develop action plans based on small sample sizes of less than 10–15 students. The initial solution would be to continue running the assessments until each course collected a suitable sample size (about 30 students). However, that would have meant at least six or more assessments running at once for multiple semesters or even years, if certain courses only ran one semester per academic year. In the department's view, this was not a particularly feasible solution.

Conversations between the department, department chair, assessment coach, and assessment coordinator helped to develop a creative solution. While each course focused on different time periods and different kinds of literature, all had similar outcomes in regards to writing, research, and critical thinking. We concluded that the department could implement a common rubric to assess all of the 2000-level literature courses collectively. In other words, we could treat them not as different courses but as different sections of a single course.

We continued to develop the idea over the next few years. The courses were assessed collectively, using a common rubric in the spring semester of 2019. A suitable sample

of more than 80 students was collected. The faculty analyzed the data in the fall and found that students across the courses were meeting requirements in regards to key aspects of writing, including thesis statements, organization, analysis, and citation.

This solution, first, gave the faculty a picture of what students are learning as they move from 1000-level to 2000-level English courses. Second, this solution helped to drive the assessment process. In addition to fostering substantive, interdisciplinary conversations, it made the assessment team rethink ways of administering assessments and presenting the data.

**Conclusion**

These efforts at driving the assessment process continue as we explore ways of expanding the rubric template, exploring the use of juried grading of assignments, and revisiting the ways in which General Education courses are assessed. Documents from the early 2000s often refer to the “nitty-gritty of assessment,” and, to me that means engaging in interdisciplinary conversations to drive the process.

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## Signature Assignments and General Education Assessment at Carroll Community College

By Michelle Kloss, Associate Vice President of Curriculum and Assessment, Carroll Community College

Recently, Carroll Community College adopted signature assignments in all of its General Education courses. This common signature assignment is an assessment, task, or project that is embedded in the course and specifically adapted or created to measure at least four of the College's General Education learning goals. Beyond serving as a means to assess student learning outcomes, though, signature assignments foster engaged and inclusive student learning. According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), signature assignments are a key means by which students integrate learning and reflection across a program of study as they tackle thought-provoking unscripted problems ("The LEAP Challenge: Education for a World of Unscripted Problems"). Signature assignments elicit a student's best work, moving them beyond memorization to exploration of complex issues with multiple perspectives and solutions ("Integrating Signature Assignments into the Curriculum and Inspiring Design"). They also allow students to practice skills employers have long prioritized, such as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, research, and writing. Beyond these core proficiencies, a comprehensive signature assignment affords students an opportunity to integrate and apply learning, as well as complete significant writing exercises—competencies that also are of value to executives and hiring managers (*Employer Research Supports High-Impact, Applied Learning Practices*). Finally, signature assignments provide all students with the opportunity to create substantive, real-world deliverables, which signifies equity-mindedness and responsiveness to different ways of learning and knowing (Budwig et al.; Egan et al.).

### Signature Assignments at Carroll

Carroll's path to signature assignments began in fall 2017, when its General Education Committee commenced a review of the College's General Education goals and requirements. The committee, comprised of faculty from each academic division, surveyed best practices in General Education curriculum and assessment, ultimately selecting signature assignments as the mechanism by which to

assess revised General Education learning goals. The committee also recognized that signature assignments provided an opportunity to engage students in meaningful projects and activities. Carroll found the signature assignment model used by Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) to be especially useful in framing its own approach. SLCC developed a "capstone in progress" in which students complete signature assignments in every General Education course, collecting those assignments in an ePortfolio to document progress towards mastery of learning goals (Peden and Reed 35). SLCC signature assignments must address at least two General Education learning outcomes, include a student reflection, and demonstrate a real-world application of disciplinary knowledge (*Signature Assignments Become a Signature Practice at Salt Lake Community College*). A framework for signature assignments outlined by Western Oregon University also proved valuable as Carroll planned its signature assignment rollout. At that institution, signature assignments share three universal features: they measure specific learning outcomes, are embedded within courses, and include a metacognitive component (*What is a Signature Assignment?*). Following its review of the use of signature assignments at other colleges and universities, Carroll's General Education Committee ultimately specified signature assignments should be course-embedded assignments requiring research and writing, with relevance beyond the classroom, and contain a reflective or metacognitive component encouraging students to make connections within and across General Education courses.

In fall 2018, a signature assignment was developed for each General Education course at Carroll. To assist faculty in adapting or creating a signature assignment, sample assignments from Carroll colleagues and external sources such as the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) Assignment Library were shared (*Assignment Library*). Lead faculty were provided with a Signature Assignment Template in which they laid out the essential components of the assignment, including General Education learning goals to be assessed,

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## Signature Assignments and General Education Assessment at Carroll Community College

assignment directions, the metacognitive/reflection prompt, and details such as assignment weighting and timing. Several workshops were held to support the design and refinement of signature assignments. One of these workshops was based on the NILOA *assignment charrette* process and now is delivered at Carroll each semester as signature assignments are changed or refined (*The Assignment Charrette Toolkit*). The *charrette* process supports the development of assignments that are effective, equity-minded, and aligned with learning activities and evaluative criteria (*Organizing Assignment Charrettes*).

Given the framework in which to develop signature assignments, many faculty at Carroll embraced the opportunity to engage and challenge students:

- For the signature assignment in the General Biology course, students research a body system and associated condition, then create a fact sheet and present their research to their peers. Students wrap up their signature assignment by reflecting on the process of completing each step of the project.
- In Carroll's History of the U.S. to 1876 course, students construct a unique identity in American history, composing eight journal entries about selected historical events from the perspective of their chosen identity. Students write a final concluding essay reflecting on the experience of looking at history from alternate viewpoints.
- Students in Issues in Social Justice complete a signature assignment in which they educate a target audience on an issue. The means and format of their assignment deliverable depends on the intended audience. If students aim to educate the general public, they format their product in a means accessible to many, such as a blog, infographic, or video documentary. If they aim to educate government policy makers, their product takes the form of a white paper or expert analysis.

- In the Introduction to Engineering course, teams of students design, build, and program autonomous robotic vehicles using the engineering design process. Students make a formal technical presentation of their vehicles and draft a final design report.

### Signature Assignment Reflection

While the reflective component was considered essential to the signature assignment at Carroll, it proved to be one of the more challenging aspects of the signature assignment launch. The reflective prompt in a signature assignment can take many forms: encouraging students to consider challenges and successes of a course and assignment, make connections within and between General Education courses, ascertain their progress in mastering key competencies, or ponder the implications of their learning. At times, this form of writing seemed unfamiliar to students, and some struggled with the task as a result. During the pilot phase of the signature assignment rollout in academic year 2018–2019, faculty gained valuable insights into specific steps that might be taken to encourage students to reflect in a substantive way; they refined prompts to elicit comprehensive and thoughtful responses (trying to steer students away from questions that could be answered briefly or perfunctorily), more closely aligned the reflection prompt to the content of the course and/or signature assignment, set a minimum word count, or adjusted the weighting of the reflection so that students allocated adequate consideration to the exercise. Carroll's General Education Committee also created a *Guide to Meaningful Reflection* for faculty, which reinforced the pedagogical value of reflection and provided examples of reflective prompts to more effectively support this component of the signature assignment. As students became more confident in writing reflections, the task grew more meaningful for them, as demonstrated in a response written by one student in the History of the U.S. to 1876 course:

## Signature Assignments and General Education Assessment at Carroll Community College

“When I first started this project, to be honest I was a little apprehensive. I never considered myself a creative writer, so assuming the role of someone over 200 years ago made me a little uneasy at first. As we learned about the topics discussed in class, I became so much more interested in the subject... I was way more involved with the information and trying to look at both political sides which helped me form an opinion for my character... Understanding and researching both sides to topics and issues within our country’s history is of vital importance to me, especially in today’s political climate. I think that this project was mainly about seeing both sides to history, and that made it so much more interesting and educational to me... It was very enjoyable creating someone to see history through their eyes, and not just summarizing events in history from a book.”

The signature assignment reflection holds the potential to engage students differently than other assignment components, ultimately making the content of a course seem more useful and applicable overall. The reflection is an inclusive and accessible exercise, as students relate course information to their *own* experiences and academic growth and draw their *own* connections about what they have learned in a given period of time. As recent research shows, students view reflective writing like this as a high-value activity, with application beyond an assignment grade, and therefore feel more invested in completing the task thoughtfully (Singer-Freeman et al. 15).

### Showcasing Signature Assignments

Carroll’s inaugural Signature Assignment Showcase, held in February 2020, allowed for public presentation of some of the first signature assignments completed by its students. Students who produced exemplary signature assignments were invited by course faculty to participate. To emphasize the value of and connections between General Education courses, and to promote further metacognitive inquiry, when students registered for the showcase they were asked to provide brief answers to four sets of prompts:

1. *Summary*: What was your project about? What answers did you come up with? How did you use the topic or focus of your signature assignment to answer the questions posed?
2. *Connection to General Education Learning Goals*: Which of the General Education learning goals did your signature assignment help you develop? How did the signature assignment help you develop these skills?
3. *Challenges and Successes*: What were the challenges that came up as you completed your signature assignment? What challenge did you overcome that you are most proud of? What challenge were you not able to overcome? What would you like to try next?
4. *Application*: How does the topic of your signature assignment connect to your field of study? Another course you have taken? Your life? How might you use the information from your signature assignment—or the process you used to complete it—in the future?

Fifteen students presented signature assignments from various General Education discipline areas at the showcase. Their display boards summarized their specific project as well as their responses to registration prompts. The showcase provided a forum for celebrating learning, highlighting both student achievement and the value of signature assignments overall. Additionally, faculty had an opportunity for recognition through a competitive Signature Assignment Faculty Prize, which acknowledges superior signature assignment design.

Beyond serving as the principal mechanism for assessing Carroll’s General Education learning goals, signature assignments enhance student engagement with key course content and make transparent Carroll’s General Education curriculum. Students are frequently reminded of the ways that course content and activities connect to Carroll’s eight General Education goals as they complete

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## Signature Assignments and General Education Assessment at Carroll Community College

and reflect on signature assignments. The overall structure of this assessment method, in which all students participate in substantive research, writing, presenting, and reflecting, aligns with inclusive assignment design. Moving forward, the General Education Committee will monitor results of signature assignment assessment each semester to hone processes and analyze student mastery of General Education goals. Course faculty will continue to routinely analyze signature assignment data and make adjustments as necessary. There will be a sustained focus on aligning instruction and learning activities with signature assignment design and evaluation, and the General Education Committee will continue to explore additional ways to recognize and celebrate signature assignments and the meaningful and reflective learning experiences they promote.

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## The Adaptation of Pathways in Business Management Virtual Learning Labs: How Redesigning Online Classes Increased Students' Success

By Thomisha Duru, Associate Professor of Business Management, Prince George's Community College

In the United States, 1,200 community colleges enroll more than ten million students each year—nearly half of the nation's undergraduates. Yet fewer than 40 percent of entrants complete an undergraduate degree within six years. This fact has put pressure on community colleges to improve academic outcomes for their students (Bailey et al., 2015).

Community colleges were originally designed to expand college enrollments at low cost, not to maximize completion of high-quality programs of study. The result was a cafeteria-style model in which students pick courses from a bewildering array of choices, with little guidance.

Bailey et al. (2015) urge administrators and faculty to reject this traditional model in favor of “guided pathways”—clearer, more educationally coherent programs of study that simplify students' choices without limiting their options and that enable them to complete credentials and advance to further education and the labor market more quickly and at less cost.

College students are more likely to complete a degree in a timely fashion if they choose a program and develop an academic plan early on, have a clear road map of the courses they need to take to complete a credential, and receive guidance and support to help them stay on the path (American Association for Community Colleges [AACC], 2019).

The redesign of my virtual classroom by adapting the pathway model and providing an instructional “guided pathway” for which all my assignments follow has proven to increase students' success. Within the Blackboard Learning Management System, my course work is now encapsulated in modules. Each module includes clearer, more simplified directions with instructions for students to follow. Students move through an automated process

for each module of assignments receiving real-time feedback and outcomes on assignments and exams. After the spring 2018 semester, one student wrote:

“This was an awesome class and I truly learned a lot in this class.”

While another stated

“Dr. Duru, I appreciate how organized your online classroom material is. I didn't have to hunt for course work. That made completing my assignments, going to work, and being a single parent that much easier. Again, thank you.”

The pathways model is an integrated, institution-wide approach to student success based on intentionally designed, clear, coherent, and structured educational experiences, informed by available evidence, that guide each student effectively and efficiently from her/his point of entry through to attainment of high-quality post-secondary credentials and careers with value in the labor market (AACC, 2019).

It is from my experience—coupled with students' feedback/evidence such as 1) fewer student inquiries/complaints, 2) fewer students failing, and 3) fewer students dropping for academic purposes—that I urge others to move to redesign their virtual courses and instructional material into more structured assignments that supports every student's completion goals.

### References:

- American Association of Community Colleges. (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.pathwaysresources.org/why-pathways/>
- Bailey, T. R., Smith-Jaggars, S., & Jenkins, D. (2015). *Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A clearer path to student success*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

## Instructional Forum Article Submission Guidelines

Article length is discretionary—a long article is not necessarily bad, but a long, wordy article might be. Articles can be a paragraph to several pages; accessible articles could be anywhere from 500–2000 words. Depending on the number of paragraphs there are in an article and the length of the article title, approximately 700–750 words fit per page. For specific word count questions, contact the editor.

- Keep formatting simple.
- Use Times New Roman, 12-point font.
- Use one-inch margins on all four sides (top, bottom, left, right).
- Keep things such as bold/italics to a minimum.
- Omit headers/footers, page numbers.
- Let text wrap—do not manually hyphenate words. Turn off hyphenation in Word.
- When referring to various colleagues, omit titles such as Dr., as well as Ph.D., especially if one or more do not have such a title or degree. Also, refer to people by their full name (first and last) the first time you mention them; after that, it is appropriate to refer to them by last name only.
- When mentioning a person's position, use the following standards:  
If the title is alone in a sentence, use all lower case letters, but capitalize the department:  
As the vice president for Student Affairs said, ...

If the title follows the name, use all lower case letters, but capitalize the department:

Dr. Smith, vice president for Student Affairs, believes...

If the title precedes the name, use initial upper case letters:

Vice President Smith argued...

- If you have research, use the APA or MLA style for documentation, and make sure your citations are complete.
- Proofread before sending the article to the editor.
- Submit the file in Word format (.docx).
- To include illustrations, note where they appear in your article, but please save and send them as separate loose files—NOT embedded in a Word doc.  
Photos should be high resolution JPEG (.jpg) files.  
Low resolution photos from the Web are not acceptable.  
Tables, figures, and graphics should be saved as .PDF files for submission.



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