

Final Written Report

Professional Development Grant

“One Step Toward Creating a More Student Friendly Online Freshman Composition Class:

Exploring Why Students Struggle”

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

A. Title page (provided above)

B. Restatement of Professional Enhancement Opportunity

Abstract of Conference Paper Presented:

Online courses are extremely popular in our universities today. Students scramble to get into them before they fill each semester while administrators keep adding just one more student here and there to online class sections. Some universities have whole degree programs now that are exclusively online while other universities even have whole colleges that consist of strictly online degree programs. Around graduation time each semester, these programs publically celebrate their online graduates; we read about how intelligent they are and how competent the online degree programs are in our local newspapers. However, online courses are not without their problems. Specifically in my online freshman composition II course, I consistently have a high fail rate not only on individual assignments but also in the course itself. What is causing my students to be unsuccessful in this online course? Are some of the students lazy as some professors guess, are some simply grossly ignorant of the technology (Blackboard) that we use to facilitate our online courses, or are some having problems with the course content? In this paper, I will explore possible reasons why students struggle in online freshman composition courses.

C. Brief Review of Professional Enhancement Opportunity

I attended the National College English Association (NCEA) Conference where I presented a paper on April 1. The conference ran from March 31 to April 2, 2016. Therefore, I traveled to the conference on March 30, 2016 and arrived home from the conference on April 3, 2016.

D. Summary of Experiences

Almost every semester, I teach at least one online freshman composition class. Therefore, I have been noticing the problem of low student performance in this type of course for a while.

Recently, I have been seeking solutions to this problem, and this research and presentation grew out of that. Every time I attend the CEA Conference, I gain invaluable critical feedback from colleagues regarding future directions for my teaching and research.

E. Conclusions and Recommendations

Presently in one of my specialty fields, Composition and Rhetoric, there is not enough research or training commentary addressing what causes student problems in online courses like freshman composition and then what helps need to be given to students as they struggle in these online courses. As a result of this shortage of scholarship in my field and both positive and negative commentary that I have received on my scholarship at national conferences, including the 2016 College English Association (CEA) Conference, I will continue conducting inquiry in this area and searching for better online classroom methods than we currently have in place. I can envision creating a series of articles from this endeavor.

Thank you for your continued support.