

# Closing the Loop 2015

Faculty comments, suggestions, and assignments using Assessment Committee recommendations based on data collected in recent years.

## Introduction

During Faculty Development Week we distributed a list of our committee's 2012 diversity recommendations, 2011 effective writing recommendations, and 2013 oral communication recommendations. These are attached at the end of this document. Everyone attending took time to read the recommendations and think about how they would make practical use of the information in their own teaching. We then had a discussion in which everyone shared, and we typed out a summary of the comments as shown below. We also matched committee members to interested faculty members to have follow-up discussions. Committee members reached out to their "pen pals" in the following weeks. Some people answered and some people didn't. We heard from faculty that they were surprised to actually have been contacted!

## Comments on the Diversity Recommendations

- I was at a table with almost exclusively science teachers. I was amused that we started by saying "diversity issues don't come up very often in our classes." Yet, we ended up spending a long time talking about how diversity is pertinent to a science class! Gender issues in confidence to master the material, religious implications for possible existence of alien life, historical contributions to science from non-Western cultures, the biology of the nature/nurture debate for sexual orientation, the importance of ensuring gender diversity when forming groups.
- AT the beginning of class, create a safe and cohesive learning environment.
- Diversity in the area of Math does not come up very often but I will let students express any feelings or ideas they have on diversity in the areas of their lives.
- Supporting WL and an appreciation of WL in our classes. Seeking professional development as a faculty member to seek out a more global perspective. Occupy Movement and moving to more global awareness. "Our multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-language, cultures will discover that our roots are made to produce flowers" – Harold Washington.
- Encourage students mingling – shuffling group members during activities.
- Join the LGBTQA Faculty/Staff group! Make flexible your gender pronouns.
- When it comes to diversity, most semesters I have students who prefer to work with only people who identify with themselves. I would like to learn about ways of how to make students get away from that way of thinking and be open to work with others.
- I'd add a recommendation about making the LGBTQQI community a priority. I believe strongly that this demographic needs support and to be celebrated as strongly as our other demographic groups.

- Continue challenging student perceptions of “doers of math”. For example, old perceptions/stereotypes persist for whom is capable of understanding mathematics. For future teachers, making sure to hold high expectations for students of all backgrounds (math or other) in an effort to lead them to do the same in their own teaching.
- Racial diversity is a frequent topic in my Music Biz and it’s so great to share perspectives. I will implement the superhero stance.
- Not sure about his one in the Developmental Math courses, but I may highlight diverse professionals in various careers and have a brief discussion.
- Diversity in the classroom: Everything that makes one different from another – relational differences but equally important to the creation of community’s meaning.

## Comments on the Effective Writing Recommendations

- I assign reflective journals that are fairly open-ended that ask students to reflect on what they have been learning in class and describe and reflect on the process that they have gone through to learn the material. I also ask the students to reflect on the evidence they possess that proves to them that they have actually understood and learned the content. I would like to experiment with making these reflective prompts a bit less open-ended to help the students focus their reflections and make it easier for me to provide feedback.
- Practice writing about a current event. We, as faculty should review with a critical eye their Business Communication. Focus on one suggestion in writing and only critique that.
- Many Math assessment tools are flawed and do not give much insight into how students are arriving at a solution to the Math problems. Students have trouble talking about Math and even more difficulty writing about it. I will not spend much time having students write about Math. They will do Math and sometimes explain. One-minute paper – give students one minute to write about what they learned from a lesson that I have presented.
- Have a template such as an article in the subject to emulate.
- Talking to colleagues I realized a good idea when it comes to writing papers, is to make it mandatory to go to the Writing Lab. I think this is a great idea.
- Although I would give explicit expectations for essay questions, I found my students didn’t understand the grammatical terms. To combat this I began to give examples of “poor”, “average”, “good”, and “excellent” essays.
- A point of concern for me in Speech is that I could spend enormous amounts of time grading grammar in my classes. I have students who have extreme problems. How can we assist the English department in this or create stronger criteria for them to utilize to prevent this bleeding over into other classes?
- I plan to incorporate writing activities into my College Algebra classes. Proper use of English and the ability to communicate abstract mathematical ideas are important skills for our students to master.

- Most of the required writing in my classes is reflective. This semester I seek to focus on students' ability to describe/explain processes and strategies. To that end, I need to model (and create with them) a set of criteria for effective math writing.
- I will require my students to write about their past experience with math and math courses. I will then ask them to give a written response to major exams.
- Based on Effective Writing recommendation 7 "These students have difficulty assessing themselves". I want to ask students to fill out a report or rubric about the experience/process of writing their paper. Hopefully, this will increase accountability as well as help them move accurately perceive their own work once they receive my feedback.
- Should be a required criterion for grading. Disciplines other than English can and should follow it.

## Comments on the Oral Communication Recommendations

- We really like the superhero pose – we would like to find a way to incorporate a small oral presentation. Be confident and build progression. Tell the students about our own insecurities in presenting – we are human too. Have the students present quiz questions to the entire class. Authenticity is the key. Students will respond.
- Even if imperfect, it is important and I will try to use it more. Encourage students to talk about how they got the solution (Math).
- Change to talking about how to talk in a panel. Include the audience. Use your research to incorporate what you do for your panel discussion. Field questions. Delivery.
- For Anatomy and Physiology – asking the students to memorize a few anatomical terms and write it on the board (in front of the class). Asking the students to draw a diagram on the board (in front of the class).
- Rubric and practice.
- Add in low-impact moments to speak before a more formal event. I like the idea of giving students an outlet to be vocal/energetic/carefree to build oral communication confidence. It relaxes and refocuses; maybe a lion growl?
- I used to have a presentation at the end of my Chem 201 class. I stopped giving it. However, I am thinking to start giving it again based on the recommendations of the Oral Communications report. I like the idea of phases and peer evaluation.
- I agree with all. I'd be happy to help with [recommendation] #4 and #7. Just unsure what avenue is best for such a seminar.
- I typically focus on this more with preservice teachers, but I want to find a way to get my students talking about their work and their interpretation of data/statistics. For future teachers, [I'd like to] bring back opportunities for presenting material/explanations with an audience in mind.
- I think this semester may be a good time to do something similar to your superhero pose thing. I think, as a musical ensemble teacher, I could try making them more comfortable being/performing in front of a crowd. We have 2 performances a semester (minimum), but I didn't feel that these performances are enough. Experience and exercises before these performances would make them much more calm and prepared.

- I removed oral presentations from my English 101 classes when I moved to hybrid courses, but you're making me think about bringing them back. I love it when my Lit students give their final case study presentations. One obstacle I find is grading the speeches. I don't think it's fair for me to include it in their grade – mostly because I don't know how to fully evaluate a speech. I usually give full or most points as long as the speech is decent.
- I'm going to re-evaluate my oral presentation assignment. Right now it's just an end-of-the-semester, just go up there and talk about your final paper, assignment. I have a rubric, but it is mostly for content and not as much focused on delivery. Perhaps I will change that in the future.
- I always have students participate by going to the board to work problems. Now, I will have the students prepare to "present" the solution to the math problem.
- I had the same experience as you! After the assessment, I reinstated a very structured oral presentation that we prepared for over a few weeks. It's going much better than in the past, with the additional instructions and prep.
- The good member of society must be able to communicate well in both the written and spoken forms, so the teacher must, as Carrie noted, provide specific directions for the presentations.

## Overall Comments:

- I am appalled at the poor writing in my classes. English 101 is not required for my classes. Formal business English should be taught as well as other forms. "Diversity" should be incorporated into every subject. Oral presentations should be part of every course.
- I have not designed learning opportunities based on information from assessment recommendations, but I do include learning opportunities for each subject discussed today: diversity, effective writing and oral communication. These learning opportunities are included on the course syllabus, on the grading rubric, and built into the classroom activities and projects. Effective writing has been the most challenging and I am changing how essay papers assignment are assigned because although students claim to know what a thesis statement is, a large percentage of students in fact, do not know or understand that a thesis statement is the controlling idea for the paper. I will have students do more writing in class with my immediate feedback for student success.

## Diversity Recommendations

In light of our findings on Human Diversity at Harold Washington College, the Assessment Committee makes the following recommendations:

- Harold Washington College should continue to create numerous artifacts and opportunities to celebrate, remark upon, and represent our exceptional human diversity. Specifically, faculty and administration at HWC should:
- Maintain the Human Diversity course requirement for graduation.
- Commit time and resources required ensuring the continuation and development of new celebratory events (such as Black History Month, Women's History Month, etc.) that highlight and expose students to cultural diversity.
- Create opportunities for students to engage in community-based experiences with diverse populations and to reflect on those interactions both personally and academically.
- Continue to highlight HWC's strong culture of respect for and engagement with human diversity in marketing the college.
- Institutionally, we should broaden some of our definitional boundaries so that our data and categorical definitions mirror the increasing complexity of human diversity represented in our student body and wider contemporary society. Specifically, faculty and administration at HWC should: Broaden gender categorization choices beyond the simple binary choice of female or male; Begin to collect consensual data on student self-identified categories of sexual orientation; Expand race and ethnicity categories to include the increasing numbers of students who identify as multi-racial or of mixed race; and, Review how Federal categorizations that require a simple "Yes" or "No" response to the label "Hispanic" function at the practical level.
- Faculty, through professional development, across all departments and disciplines, should be encouraged to review teaching materials, perceptions and practices, and to acknowledge and broaden human diversity categorizations and labels that adequately reflect considerable social change that has occurred in these areas over the past few decades. This would also continue to add value to the many positive experiences of human diversity our students report here.
- Build an ongoing partnership with the Student Government Association and all other student organizations. Furthermore, establish plans to support student groups as they reach across boundaries to increase connectivity among diverse student groups.

### Conclusion

Harold Washington College has exceptionally broad and complex human diversity and provides a college experience that makes a significant impact on students' reported experiences of human diversity, prejudice and discrimination.

In the seven years since our first Human Diversity assessment, there has been considerable change in our student population and their experiences of diversity and discrimination. In large

part, these changes are exceptionally positive with regard to student perceptions and experiences of Human Diversity, specifically on campus and in the classroom. These changes have registered in the questions we chose to ask our students in the first place, and subsequently in both the data and our findings.

We are a college that is younger, less heterosexual, and more Hispanic than it was seven years ago. We are a college in which students feel respected, accepted, and much less the subject of prejudicial and discriminatory experiences than in their lives before coming to Harold Washington College. This is clearly a testament to the faculty, staff, administration, and students of Harold Washington College. The ability to compare similar data from students in 2005 with students in 2012 provides us the opportunity to conclude that we have indeed become stronger in recognizing and supporting students' experience of human diversity over this timespan. This was an important strength for us in 2005, it is even more so now.

Some of these specific aspects of change are worthy of highlighting here. Student support services and staff have made significant changes to their practices, and the 2012 assessment results reveal that these changes have had a registered effect on how they are perceived by students. These assessment data register a strong positive change in this aspect of college life, and those working in these important areas should be commended for the impact registered here.

With regard to sexual orientation, there have been significant shifts in our wider culture. 2013 data from The Pew Research Center reports the growth in support for lesbian and gay people is among the largest changes in public opinion on any policy issue over the last decade:

"It's hard to think of anything so controversial that compares. Ten years ago, 47 percent of Americans said homosexuality should be accepted by society; today that number has jumped to 57 percent. Among women, it's even higher, 61 percent. For the young, born between 1980 and 1995, it shoots up to 74 percent. Even among so-called Generation X'ers -- today's 33 to 48 year olds -- fully 62 percent are accepting, compared to 50 percent a decade ago." Pew Research Center, "Growing Support for Gay Marriage: Changed Minds and Changing Demographics" March 20, 2013. Available at: [www.people-press.org](http://www.people-press.org)

With increasing tolerance and acceptance comes increasing complexity with regard to Human Diversity. Interestingly, this increasing complexity will also have to be encountered methodologically as our assessment culture progresses. Technological advances in teaching, learning and assessment also present a range of challenges to which we will continue to investigate answers. With the growth of on-line learning and the recognition of this in our new HLC accreditation criteria, we will have to become more complex in assessment strategies that reflect all of our students and do not prejudice those whose primary learning mode is on campus. The evidence in this assessment indicates that we are up to this challenge. A full 52% of this student sample completed this survey "at-a-distance."

Becoming a student at HWC decreases students' perceptions and experiences of prejudice and discrimination significantly. Through interactions with their fellow students, in their classes and with faculty, in the building and all our support offices, students report feeling accepted, respected and appreciative of this special environment. For our students, this is not their experience before coming to Harold Washington College, and an increasing number of students note that HWC's Human Diversity is a factor in their decision to study in our downtown urban environment. Faculty and administrators should be rightly proud of these important findings.

In these data, there is also evidence of increasing individualism; specifically students feeling their destiny is less shaped by their ethnicity and race. This may speak to the aspirational nature of our students, many of whom are coming to college to specifically make a change in their future pathway in life.

There is much in these findings to celebrate, and yet the survey also reveals some stark reminders of life outside the walls of HWC, where students do report experiences of prejudice and discrimination related to various aspects of human diversity. There is also the sense that, outside of college, they return to communities in which segregation and "sameness" are more likely to occur. Perhaps our challenge as a college will be to find ways in which our students can take their human diversity learning and experiences from HWC into other communities: into the world of work, into their neighborhoods, and into increasingly diverse families.

## Effective Writing Recommendations

Students at Harold Washington College will be able to:

- Compose texts across multiple disciplines and for various audiences, occasions and purposes.
- Construct texts for communication, information, and expression which adhere to the rules of Standard Written English; Compose texts that are focused, well-organized, and well-developed.

The data presented here demonstrates that only a proportion of our students are meeting the above SLO's and there are many who struggle in their Effective Writing skills. This is not unexpected, knowing what we know about our student body and their skills upon entry to college.

We recommend the following:

1. Students who place into English 100 should also be placed in English 125 as there is clear evidence that the Reading Section (125), which can also be seen as "wrap around" English preparatory support, is making a difference in student performance in Effective Writing. 25
2. Students who placed into pre-college English did not perform as well on the Effective Writing Assessment as those who came in at college level English. In light of



Reinvention Goal #4, the effectiveness of remedial courses needs to be re-examined with special focus on student learning outcomes, course content, and teaching/learning pedagogy.

3. Criteria for successful course completion from remedial courses to college-level English should be re-examined.
4. Application of completion criteria in transitioning students from lower to higher level courses should also be re-examined. The data presented here indicate that approximately a third of this student sample need more practice in the mastery of the basic writing skills.
5. The data clearly indicates that students who are asked to write more often in English, Humanities, and the Social Sciences perform better in Effective Writing than those who are asked to write less often. More frequent writing should be expected in those disciplines across the board.
6. The data also indicates that there is no correlation in the math and science disciplines between the frequencies of writing that students are asked to do and how they performed on this assessment. Numeracy issues rightly concern Math and Science Departments, first and foremost. These departments should be asked to review how and where student writing is expected in their courses and how math and science courses can contribute to improving effective student writing.
7. These students have difficulty assessing themselves as writers. They have more difficulty assessing themselves in terms of the specific areas of writing (Focus, Organization, Voice, Elaboration, Conventions, and Style and Diction). When providing feedback to students about their writing, faculty should provide specific feedback about where the problems are and how the student can improve in those areas. Broad statements about written work, in general, are not helpful and will not improve student writing. Professional development should be provided to work with all faculty in the best way to give useful feedback to students to improve student writing specifically.

## Oral Communication Recommendations

In light of our findings on Oral Communication at Harold Washington College, the Assessment Committee makes the following recommendations:

1. Harold Washington College should continue to have high standards for oral presentations throughout the curriculum, not only in the Speech Department.
2. Faculty should consider varying the types of oral presentations assigned, clearly identifying the scope of the assignment and reinforcing the concept of "audience."
3. An article in the Wall Street Journal (June 15, 2015) reports that speaking in public is people's No. 1 fear, more frightening than flying or death. In light of this, faculty should make every effort to put students at ease before their oral presentations.
4. All faculty would benefit from professional development focused on teaching oral communication skills and assessing those skills.



5. Building confidence in students' abilities to prepare oral presentations well and to present orally in class should be a pedagogical priority.
6. Further assessments about the efficacy of the HWC speech program are encouraged.
7. Speech faculty should provide professional development for non-speech faculty about creating strong oral presentation assignments, assessing those assignments, and teaching the skills associated with those assignments.

Further discussion about the purposes of assigned oral communication assignments should be encouraged between speech and non-speech faculty with the following questions posited:

- Are oral communication assignments designed to strengthen students' skills in public speaking or to provide another vehicle for transmitting information?
- If students are expected to improve their skills in oral communication, are those skills being taught in non-speech classes?
- Does content weigh more heavily than other areas of skill?
- Does delivery weigh more heavily than content?