**Sabbatical Report**

**Nancy Thompson, English Department**

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1. **SUMMARY**

**Preparation and planning**:

Most preparation and planning focused on devising successful search strategies, talking with colleagues at schools with characteristics similar to Clark’s who were willing to share information and expertise related to retention, and examining the strengths and challenges of my online 101 sections. I was interested in several criteria related to class success. One consideration was how many students actually completed my 101 sections online. A second was of those who completed, how many were successful with a grade of C or higher. A third was the question of whether students who successfully completed my 101 sections online went on to be successful in 102.

A challenge was in imagining how 101 sections could be redesigned in a way to both improve student success and retention and meet departmental outcomes. As it turned out, during the sabbatical the English Department’s composition task force completed a redesign of outcomes and approaches for teaching both 101 and 102. The new focus is on both reading apprenticeship and discipline-specific writing. I had been involved in the early stages of gathering information with that task force, including talking with members of other departments, and the information that came out of those talks (and ultimately the new model) dovetailed well with this project.

**Project products:**

As was proposed in the sabbatical application, I completed an annotated bibliography of literature related to retention in online composition classes. I also created a module in Canvas that contains a learning style diagnostic, a reading diagnostic, and a series of tip sheets and related PowerPoints that can be used in any class in Clark that requires writing. Almost all of these tip sheets/PowerPoints contain strategies keyed to three different learning styles (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic). These end products are all accessible.

**Research:**

As outlined in the proposal, I did research in both fall term 2019 and winter term 2020. My primary search strategy was to look for literature focused on increasing retention specifically in online composition classes. Additionally, I consulted with colleagues at Middlesex Community College in Massachusetts and Community College of Vermont. I was registered to attend the TASS conference in Florida in spring term; however, that conference was cancelled because of COVID.

Before shutdowns occurred, however, I was able to attend the CRLA Northeast Conference, held at Manhattan College in the Bronx. The theme of the conference was “Equity in Education: Are We Providing Our Students with the Tools to Be Successful?” Two sessions were significant to the sabbatical project. The first was “Empowerment and evidence-based learning: A collaborative and research centered approach to promoting academic success” presented by the Syracuse University Center for Learning and Student Success. It is an academic coaching model composed of four one on one sessions with a trained peer coach and four small group supported study sessions. Syracuse runs this as a controlled trial focused on two groups: in person coaching (treatment) or Blackboard (control). Blackboard organization provides students with online resources that students use independently and at their own pace. Preliminary results show higher GPAS of .11 for treatment group, higher levels of confidence, and lower levels of stress. 75% completed the program, and their GPA on average was 3.32.

Although this trial relies on face to face intervention, I came to the conclusion that similar strategies can be built into the Canvas environment. Peer group leaders can be identified in the first and second weeks of class, and the instructor can utilize Zoom as an “in person” coaching and support mechanism.

The second session was “Implementing equitable practice through writing fellowship in a first-year composition course.” The presentation detailed efforts at Manhattan College. Presenters noted that NAEP 2011 reported 27% of 12th grade students performed at or above proficient level. Females outperformed males and white, Asian and multiracial outperformed Black, Hispanic, and Native students. NAEP has not been updated for writing since 2011. However, SAT 2019 show similar trends. Students who met the benchmark have a 75% of earning a C or better in into college courses. It is noted, though, that readiness in English, reading, math, and science have all decreased since 2015 according to the ACT.

Similar to students at Clark, Manhattan students are often reluctant to ask for help. In this model, writing consultants are paired with composition faculty and expected to attend class weekly, lead weekly sessions, and hold office hours at the writing center. Again, I see practical applications for online composition classes. One possibility would be to offer embedded peer tutoring. Another is to build in Zoom drop in sessions with the instructor. Ideally, both embedded peer tutoring and instructor drop in sessions would work together to support student learning.

Doing the research and reading in creating the annotated bibliography was a vital part of the project. I was able to delve into the research and noted the following key points: 1. There is opportunity to expand the research into strategies for effective online first-year composition classes; 2. The importance of reducing cognitive load in the online classroom; 3. The importance of supporting students in learning how to learn online; this in particular cannot be assumed and cannot be passive; 4. The importance of authentic and transformative experiences in the online environment; 5. The importance of thinking beyond online community and presence in order to build specific *kinds* of supportive and challenging communities; 6. The importance of personal contact – for example, making phone calls – in retaining students in online classes. The annotated bibliography includes summaries of sources related to retention and success in online learning with emphasis on first-year composition classes.

**Self-enrichment:**

To be very honest, I was grateful for the opportunity to really breathe for two terms and to think deeply about the work I do and how to make it more successful and accessible to students. What I gained most was not tangible: it was a lessening of anxiety, a sense of being more fully engaged as a writing professional, and a sense of curiosity about what turned out to be sizable gaps in research on this topic. It became clear to me that this is an area ripe for data-driven studies.

1. **CHRONICLE**

September 2019: Assessed my 101 Canvas shells at their starting point, considering methods used to achieve outcomes, reviewing the data, reviewing several terms’ worth of interactions, determining critical junctures.

October 2019: Began researching, using databases, online sources from professional organizations, and print sources.

November 2019: Continued research.

December 2019: Compiled the annotated bibliography.

January 2019: Reassessed the class shells using information from the research. Consulted with colleagues at Middlesex Community College in Massachusetts and Community College of Vermont.

February 2019: Developed a Canvas module that contains an assortment of shareable writing resources for students. Resources are accessible and inclusive of learning styles.

March 2019: Attended CRLA conference in The Bronx. Discussions with professionals at Touro University and Berklee School of Music.

1. **SABBATICAL LEAVE OBJECTIVES**

Goals as stated in the application were “… improving retention in online English 101. The goal is to develop interventions and applications to improve retention. My hypothesis is that inteventions and applications that will work for online 101 are likely to improve retention in other online composition classes (102, 103, and tech writing). The project is focused on research and development. The finished product will be Canvas "plugs-ins" demonstrated to increase retention and sharable to other 101 instructors.”

I do not know whether the project was successful; my original application proposed testing to determine success, with calibrations to be made if needed, but contractual issues made testing a sticking point in that application. Therefore, rather than being awarded a one-year sabbatical that would have included testing, I was awarded a two-term sabbatical for research and development.

I was successful in producing the project’s proposed products: an annotated bibliography of literature associated with retention in online composition classes, and a module of Canvas materials that include multiple learning styles and that are presented in both text format and with brief videos.

Limitations**:**

During fall and winter terms, the English Department finalized changes to the outcomes and products associated with 101. The Department has also developed its own training for teaching 101. The end product does not conflict with those parameters in any way.

An important discovery from the research was that an important early intervention is personal contact with students, preferably before the class even starts. This is not something that can be turned into a product; it will be up to each instructor to do outreach with individual students with an aim of improving retention.

Additionally, another important takeaway from the research was the need to reduce cognitive load. Although I had previously designed online 101 classes with that aim, a result of the sabbatical was seeing the need to move even more in that direction. Again, this aligns with the English Department redesigns of English 101 and 102.

1. **STUDENT BENEFITS**

The purpose of the project is to increase retention and success of students in English 101 online. English 101 is a keystone class at Clark. Data indicates that the more successful a student is in 101, the greater the student’s likelihood of success in additional classes. Conversely, lack of success in 101 is associated with lack of success overall, including lack of retention at the College. The goal of the project was to provide accessible and equitable interventions for students.

1. **VALUE TO THE COLLEGE AND ENGLISH DEPARTMENT**

The end goal of the project was to improve retention in online sections of English 101. As mentioned above, 101 is a keystone class at Clark. Especially with a transition to more online offerings in response to COVID, increased retention in online sections of 101 is crucial. Additionally, the end products align with the reading apprenticeship focus of the English Department’s redesign of English 101 and 102.

1. **SABBATICAL PROJECT’S RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PROFESSIONAL WORK**

Not applicable**.**

1. **OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AFFILIATED WITH THE PROJECT**

None.

1. **OTHER GRANTS OR STIPENDS USED**

None.

1. **ORIGINAL APPLICATION**

Please refer to the document attached to this email.