

**Laney College**  
**Institutional Learning Outcome #1 Results and Discussion Notes**  
**Assessment Flex Day Panel – Thursday, January 15, 2015**

Panel Members

Ann Buchalter - Library

Karolyn Van Putten - Psychology

Suzan Tiemroth-Zavala- ESOL

Inger Stark- Sociology

Angela Cherry -Communication

Alicia Christensen, Mexican/Latin American studies

Jackie Graves - English

**Our goal was to focus on communication with emphasis in writing:**

What strengths do you find when you evaluate students' written work?

Alicia: Across the board, when they do testimonials or write their story they do better. When they write research papers few perform at the excellent level.

Suzan: We wait too long to teach them the complex writing that they need to have, if you wait until they are at the high levels they have a lot of catching up to do.

Angela: If you really engaged students by giving them a lot of examples, a lot repetition...was really key. Giving them written instructions for the assignment and going over those instructions [is good]. It may take more than you really feel is needed in order for them to understand what you are doing. Sometimes the people who go first are the best.

David: Giving specific instructions both orally and in writing is important.

Inger: One of the things that was startling to us is that we found an incredibly surprising low number of students did poorly on the first measure, "Understanding of assignment." Before we start asking what do our students need to do differently, we need to ask what do we need to do differently. I hope we create a work group where we dialogue about how to create an assignment. It's not that people are doing things wrong, but we can certainly improve in that area.

Jackie: We have a lot of work to do in our department as far as how we communicate expectations. We believe in academic freedom but it has created a wide array of expectations. We need to create more alignment in our department.

The way we ask students to do what we need them to do...the more clear we can be about expectations the better.

The more that students can see what excellence looks like the better students can do.

Personal writing vs. research, as a tutoring coordinator I also hear a lot about this. This is important for students to do. We don't want to deny that power. Our students come with a lot of life experience. Let's talk about how to incorporate sources. When it makes sense to them is when it's relevant to their lives. I try to engage the students with their experiences, with what they bring and recognize and honor that that voice is essential to bringing change in our world. Barack Obama would not be president if he didn't know how to tell his story. When our students write letters to the mayor and realize that their words have impact, then they start to engage. When they're trying to put on a mask and pose they lose their voice as a writer.

Karolyn: There's something inherent in the assessment intention...you're talking about a different group of people every time. Inquiry based learning project requires them to connect information from three different places. One section took a class with Phillipa [a librarian]. When it came time to apply the information that did not show up in the assignment. The class that got face-to-face instruction did not make the translation. They did pretty poorly on that assignment. I gave them tip sheets, PowerPoints...and yet that didn't stick. That puzzles me.

I have also noticed that when they're talking about their life experiences, they're doing fine, but the assignment asks them to do more than that. That might have something to do with their ability to make sense of research studies.

Now, I'm thinking about requiring research and personal writing before that final assignment. Reading research studies is not simple. It takes time. Yet, we're asking students in an intro class to read and make sense of it. I'm thinking that this semester, I'm going to find the study for them. I'm going to give them the leeway to work it into their life experiences. I watched the film "Beyond Beats and Rhymes" and thought here's a way they get practice in making relationships between "the world" and "the world of academia."

Suzan: Isn't there a way to take those life experiences and connect them to a project that is interesting to them?

*What are the problem areas you've noticed in students' writing?*

## **Audience**

**Lisa:** In the tutor training class, a lot of students love the class time. And the paper I assign at the end is an "Integration Paper." When I get the papers back, they either summarize the sources but not tell me why or they write a long experience. But no integration. I say you can rewrite this paper until you get 100. A few them it takes

the first two or three papers, but then they get really good at it. A lot of times they write what they teacher wants but has no soul, as Jackie said. Make the expectation of integration clear. When students read research they always say, “this thing is so far away from life.” What’s helpful is to explain how that person got to that point. Helping them to see the relationships...that they’re not outside of it [helps].

**Elaine:** The best system I have seen is at a university where they have “support teachers” in the classroom. The support teacher is like a TA and they can help students understand the assignments. It’s helpful to have some kind of support in your classroom. A person whom students can meet with and that person can help them understand. This would be amazing thing if we could ever institute anything like that.

**Cheli:** Repeated practiced really helps.

**Mark:** Peer reading question

Jackie: That is an integral part of our process in the English department. What you’re saying to them also brings up this question about audience. Students are writing for what they think the teachers want versus writing for a real person. For me, the sharing of our personal stories and experience is the most important work that I do as a faculty member. At the end of the semester, we have readings. We can share work in an online forum. The sustainability festival...and to rethink how we think about sustainability to include how we hold each other’s stories. As instructors the greatest examples we can share we students is our own vulnerability. I have to be willing to share my own stories. David Mullen does a “More than a notion” workshop where he begins by telling his own story.

## **SOLUTIONS**

**Angela:** Just being authentic. English 208 allows students to do the assignments in class. Also the writing center has been very good. Also engagement.

**Inger:** Class size. In the social sciences, we have 45, 50 students in our classes. There was one semester I had 237 students. It’s really hard. It is literally impossible to do a lot of meaningful writing when you teach five classes with 45 or 50 students each.

**Ann:** If there’s anything you want us to purchase [in the library], let us know. Things that we can keep on hand...it more accessing the people that are there to help them. It helps us if they bring in a copy of the paper to help find sources. Another thing is sending assignments to the librarians. We can help them one-on-one with finding sources and help them figure out what they’re looking at and where to go. Much like the writing center, the library is an excellent place for students to seek help. We can help you come with assignments—baby steps such as locating an article. They can email us a question with 24-hour turnaround. The form is on the web site. Encourage online students to use this new feature.

**Phillipa:** Intentional learning communities can help to alleviate the stress of large class sizes.

**Suzan:** The student equity plan has a lot of ideas for creating communities of students. In ESL we are experimenting with cohorts: Advanced ESL, Advanced Reading and Writing—that being a cohort where students take those classes together.

**Alicia:** How do we incentivize participating in the learning communities?

**Jackie:** I challenge each instructor to bring an example of excellence in writing to the writing center. It will be helpful for students to have models. English 208 ESL 218 writing workshops are helpful.

**Suzan:** For the workshops, send us information about your students so we can help them better.

**David:** It is better for the students have hard copies of the assignments for the workshop and tutors.

**Lisa:** Curriculum is an area that we have primary responsibility for. This kind of connected learning is all over the place. These are choices that as a department that you can make. It's not about money, it's about having conversations about what you want to do. There is some money for the meeting that need to occur across disciplines, especially if it connects toe English, ESL, or Math. I encourage faculty to think about the ways you want to link up and with whom.

**Angela:** I share the challenges that I've had, that's connecting.

**Karolyn Van Putten:** Let's put arms around faculty who are new.

**Inger:** Ongoing professional development structure.

**Marie:** Reinstate good news.

**Jackie:** When I think about the ILO of communication, we reminds me of how we communicate. With communication as an institutional learning , we have a long way to go.

Hi Cheli and David,

Thank you for facilitating a productive and intellectually inspiring panel this afternoon.

I really appreciate the faculty panel members' insightful comments about ILO #1 as well as the observations made by the working lunch attendees.

I understand there are several learning communities on the Laney campus already & that there are plans to establish new ones in the near future.

Nonetheless, I would like to clarify an idea I shared earlier.

As part of creating a visible support network for newly registered & continuing Laney students, I am hoping that funds could be allotted at some point to create a position for an "Intentional Learning Communities Coordinator".

Ideally, students could meet with said coordinator & be directed towards the best learning community (or communities) to facilitate & support studying with their peers in specific subject areas.

These intentional learning communities can both strengthen student study skills & motivate them to learn new things at a peer-to-peer level that will enhance their collective critical thinking & writing skills.

My idea is still in its nascent stage, so I will continue to give it more thought.

Best regards,  
Phillippa

Phillippa Caldeira  
Reference & Instruction Librarian  
Laney College  
900 Fallon Street  
Oakland, CA 94607

Email: [pcaldeira@peralta.edu](mailto:pcaldeira@peralta.edu)