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Student Success

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Student Success

How Rubrics Help Students Learn

By Kristin Murphy for The Chronicle for Higher Education, November 28, 2010

Some history professors at Utah State have mapped out learning objectives, creating a detailed scoring guide for student papers. Here is how three seniors who are history majors say they have used the rubrics, which spell out how the professor will judge their mastery of specific skills and knowledge.



Aurora Wallis Durfee

In a course about the United States in the Age of Jefferson and Jackson, Ms. Durfee says she frequently referred to the scoring guide's prompts about how to demonstrate "excellent mastery" of historical-thinking skills as she wrote a paper about Alexis de Tocqueville. They say, for instance, that a paper should focus on critical analysis rather than mere description and that the student's response to historical questions should be conceptually strong, logically formulated, and precisely stated.

"I found that the rubric helped me to narrow my focus and realize what I needed to write in order to have a strong paper," she says. A lot of the changes she says she found herself making in her work as a result of the rubric were to improve clarity and more directly respond to the question.



Ian Graham

In a senior "capstone" course focused on political culture, Mr. Graham frequently

turned to a rubric for help in analyzing sources and determining whether he had supplied enough evidence to make strong arguments in his research paper. He says he particularly relied on the portions of the guide about evaluating and analyzing primary and secondary sources.

The rubric reminded him to demonstrate his knowledge of the origins and context of the primary texts he used and to confront any issues related to the legitimacy of secondary sources head-on. The tool helped him more easily evaluate what he was reading and how he would apply it in an argument. "It made me a better writer and made me a better thinker," he says.



Casey Thacker

In a course on ancient Greek history, Ms. Thacker says using a rubric helped her be more deliberate in thinking about what she wanted to accomplish with the series of short papers she wrote and where she wanted to take her arguments in each one. The guide helped her improve on reading comprehension, she says, because she was asked to be so specific in her writing.

She says she found the guidance on secondary sources particularly useful. On that point, the rubric fully identified the writing goals she was expected to meet, including the need for careful evaluation of scholarly literature. The specificity of the rubric helped her figure out how to improve. "This is a continuing process," she says. "It's not just that you've learned a rubric and you know how to write better. But you are better able to develop your own writing skills and reading comprehension."



Spotlight



USING “FAMILY GROUPS” IN PSYCH 48 – FAMILY THERAPY

Janice Takahashi, Student Success/Student Learning Outcomes Coordinator, Professor
San Joaquin Delta College

Over the winter break I thought about how I could better teach and engage my students in the learning process. I was not satisfied with the depth of their learning, especially since most of these students were preparing for careers as paraprofessionals in counseling. In spite of the fact that there are individual reflective writing assignments, individual hands-on creative projects and contextualized examples of theoretical information presented in my lectures, learning was still on the surface. I thought about group work projects instead of individual projects, additional assignments and different ways of giving feedback and then I stopped. I realized that I was going about it in all the wrong ways.

I asked myself, what are the most important concepts that I want students to learn and apply in their own life as well as in their careers? How can I contextualize family systems theory? How can I help the light bulbs go off in their heads instead of hearing my words repeated back to me or worse yet, text from the book. I came up with the following learning goals. They need to learn that the “family” is a “system” and that the system is the main focus. They need to learn that there are many different and diverse family systems and that there is not one “right way”. They need to learn what weakens the system and what makes the system strong and resilient. What better way to learn this than through an in class “Family Group”?

Collaborative group learning is not a new concept but I “tweaked” it to help the students experience what I wanted them to learn.

The first day I randomly divided the class into assigned “Family Groups”, ten groups with about five in each group. They were all given a handout containing a statement of purpose for the Family Groups, explaining what I expected them to do and learn from this experience. I assigned extra credit Family points that can only be earned by the performance of the entire family group, not just individuals in the group. Family points centered around family performance on tests and quizzes as well as full family participation in discussing/answering group questions. This prevented the possibility of just a couple of people doing all the work for their group and allowed students to still be able to earn the grade that they individually aspired to. This is what they were given as an outline:

FAMILY GROUPS - EXTRA CREDIT (58 POSSIBLE POINTS)

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of your Family Group is to help you learn, understand and apply the information you are learning in class, not just earn extra credit points. Your goal is to understand the dynamics of a family system as well as try to create a functional (as opposed to dysfunctional) family system. Each Family Group might be different from the other or your own family system, as it is in the real world. Try to think “out of the box” when trying to solve Family Group problems and utilize the

information from class to help you understand and participate in your Family Group in new and different ways than you normally do. **This might require you to take a look at yourself as well as others in a different way.**

Your Family Group Meetings will be the first ten minutes of class (No meetings on Chapter Quiz days). Your Family Group should be prepared to discuss Family Group issues or work on a group question that I will give you when you walk into class. This means the members of your group need to be to class on time and be well organized. You will only have ten minutes. It would be appropriate for your groups to schedule additional time out of class (e.g. study, tutoring, support groups).

How to Earn Points

Special Assignments: 3 pts for each assignment when every Family Group member receives a “C” or better. (3pts X 5)

TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS 15

Click here for the complete article.

San Joaquin Delta College

STUDENT SUCCESS PROGRAM

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