AANAPISI COURSE RELEASE PROPOSAL

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Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI)

Title: Developing Essay Prompts that Generate Successful Student Work
Author/Participants: Maria A.N. Judnick
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Project Abstract:

Students often complain about the varied expectations for essays. I will create a prompt template and guide for each of the most frequently assigned essays in lower division Composition courses. I will offer a workshop and email the materials to interested faculty, TAs, and new hires.

Project Background/Significance:

Nearly every student at SJSU (with the exception of some transfer students) needs to take a Composition course through the English Department at some point in their academic careers. This proposal seeks to enhance their experience in the Composition classroom through the improved guidance offered in each essay prompt. My project will could be utilized by any of the Composition faculty at SJSU, thus potentially impacting the educational experience of thousands of students. My proposal clearly connects to the goals of the AANAPISI grant, particularly item C.

Goals of the Grant:

  a. Assess and reorganize the existing writing support services at SJSU;
  b. Enable more data-based decision-making about student retention and graduation at SJSU;
  c. Develop, implement, and integrate proactive writing strategies; or
  d. Change the SJSU writing culture from a policy-driven approach to an action-oriented approach.

Literature Review:

There are a plethora of online websites and suggestions specifically geared towards effective writing prompts for K-12 educators -- some of which I found encouraging and some of which left me feeling distressed. At the college level, pedagogical techniques for effective writing prompts appear to be generated most often by university writing centers or centers for teaching excellence. One of the most useful sites is maintained by the Debby Ellis Writing Center at Southwestern University in Georgetown, TX. Not only does the website provide many suggestions and models, but the Center also offers a wealth of outside resources and additional reading from highly respected institutions such as Yale University.

For research-based prompts, I will be consulting a 2010 report from the University of Washington's Project Information Literacy Program -- "Assigning Inquiry: How Handouts for Research Assignments Guide Today's College Students," by Alison J. Head and Michael B. Eisenberg – and their list of suggested sources.

Project Description:

1) I will use the free online program SurveyMonkey.com to ask instructors in the English Department and LLD (Stretch Instructors only) to identify all the topics / papers they assign in their lower-division Composition Courses (English 1A; Humanities 96 F/S - Stretch English; English 1B; and English 7).
2) I will consult with Richard McNabb, the Writing Programs Administrator, for any potential changes in essay requirements for each course and suggestions.
3) I will survey the Writing Center staff using SurveyMonkey.com to evaluate informal trends they notice in student writing – which prompts, for example, seem to necessitate the highest number of student appointments? Which elements of prompts appear to elicit the most confusion?
4) Based on what appears to be the most frequently assigned essay topics / prompts in each course, I will solicit sample prompts from Composition instructors. (Since the essay assignments are uniform in Stretch English, I will solicit prompts from each professor.)
5) I will create user-friendly templates for the most frequently assigned prompts. I will be incorporating best practices from my conversations with Richard McNabb, my data from the surveys, the sample prompts, the literature provided from other universities, discussions at the AANAPISI teacher workshops, and my own teaching experience. I will also create a best practices short guide with suggested language and helpful hints for faculty who have not yet assigned this paper / topic.
6) I will make available through email the templates and accompanying guides to all interested English Department faculty for potential adoption in the Fall semester. Teaching Associates hired for the Fall semester will be emailed these templates and guides to assist them as they set up their courses. New hires in the Composition Program will also receive copies so they can acclimate to the expectations of the SJSU Writing Curriculum. I will also ask if these materials could be included in the lecturer handbook that the English Department is currently creating.
7) I will offer a brief workshop on using the templates and guides for interested faculty before the end of the semester. I will also provide successful examples for faculty and solicit feedback.

Project Method/Design:

I will be utilizing the techniques outlined in the AANAPISI Two-Day Faculty Workshop in Summer 2014 to help design the templates and guide for faculty. I will also be following suggestions outlined in current pedagogical research and best practices from fellow SJSU faculty.

Project Timeline:

Weeks One-Three: Survey the Composition professors, LLD Stretch English instructors, and Writing Center staff. Consult with Richard McNabb.

Weeks Four – Five: Request sample copies of the most frequently assigned prompts for each lower division Composition class.

Weeks Six – Eleven: Create the sample prompt templates and guides. Write and submit the preliminary report in **Week Eight.**

Weeks Twelve –Fourteen: Begin to distribute the sample templates to interested faculty and the department. Moderate a short workshop for faculty on using the new templates.

Weeks Fifteen and Sixteen: Write the final AANAPISI report.

Necessary Expenses:

There are very few expenses associated with this proposal. I would need a small copying budget for the workshop.

Potential Contribution for Improvement of Student Success:

This project reinforces the quality education students already receive in the Composition Program at SJSU. This project enhances the structure and organization of the prompts students need to generate their own clear and effective essays. Students will benefit from these templates for they will spend less time worrying about fulfilling the requirements of the essay and instead focus more on their instructor's proactive writing suggestions. With a measurable and appropriate list of expectations set for each assignment, student confidence and satisfaction will also increase in their courses thus leading to improved retention and higher graduation rates.