

The Writing Intensive Experience In a Poultry Production Course

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Abstract

The writing intensive (WI) program at the University of Missouri is an unique attempt to increase written communication skills within the discipline of study of undergraduate students. A major portion of the WI experience is building of writing skills through revision of written assignments. Analytical and critical thinking skills are also a component of the WI course. The use of written assignments in a poultry production course is outlined.

Introduction

The writing intensive (WI) program is designed to improve on two major aspects of the students intellectual development. These include writing skills within their discipline (i.e., Poultry Science) and improvement in the broad area of critical thinking skills. A poultry production course does not appear to lend itself to either of these areas, but strategies were developed to effectively deal with both.

While the area and literature concerning intellectual development is broad, some generalized concepts may be made about intellectual development in college. Development may be divided in to four categories which may be summarized in the following statements:

- (1) *Dualism*: knowledge is known and factual, to learn is to memorize, the instructor is the giver of truth, peers are irrelevant, an exam should be a return of knowledge in a similar form, assigned tasks should be low-level and rote and a safe learning environment is considered supportive;
- (2) *Multiplicity*: acceptance that real answers may be unknown, student will follow instructors lead, instructor is the authority, but students may have opinion, the use of quantity and style in evaluations is seen as acceptable, subjective grading is feared, students begin learning how to learn, begin to see validity of multiple perspectives, by considering evidence we may know truth;
- (3) *Relativism*: knowledge depends on context, independent thinking analysis, synthesis, evaluation, the instructor shows how to use intellect to approach a subject, peers may have something to offer, evaluation of the student is based on the quality of the answer, analyze and support positions, sort evidence and take a stand, instructor should allow freedom to explore and relate to student as colleague in the inquiry process;
- (4) *Commitment in Relativism*: view of knowledge is personally constructed, making sense of the world, taking the best of what is offered, instructor should model and

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facilitate independent learning and collaborative inquiry, peers become partners, evaluation becomes source of information about learning, student should take stand and support such stand, seek new intellectual horizons, instructor should provide a secure climate for debate and tolerance of diversity (Perry, 1970; Kurfiss, 1977).

The WI experience seeks to encourage the student to become less dualistic and move towards a relativistic view point. This may be accomplished through following criteria designated for a WI course and through innovate assignment design. By nature of the relativistic approach one must, as a teacher, change the instructional approach. The general concepts of a WI course and their use in a poultry production course are discussed.

Methods

The WI course should be designed to provide for increased competence in several abilities (Figure 1). This is to be accomplished through a low student/teacher ratio (20/1), a minimum of two papers taken through a complete revision process, at least one of the papers should address a topic on which reasonable people can disagree and the writing should be distributed throughout the semester. Total writing should include at least 5000 words with 2000 or more in polished form. The writing assignments should constitute a major portion of the class grade. In the poultry production class, the above criteria were met through two assignments. The first was a position paper which consisted of a rough outline, final outline, rough draft, and final paper on a topic relevant to the poultry industry. Suggested topics included, but were not limited to: animal welfare, the family farm, sustainable agriculture, drug use in poultry, agricultural subsidies, environmental problems, food safety, repetitive motion disorders, education and literacy, drug testing, unionization, the federal deficit, cholesterol, heart disease and

Figure 1. Some Abilities Important In Writing Intensive Courses

1. The ability to pose worthwhile questions
2. The ability to evaluate the adequacy of an argument
3. The ability to distinguish among fact, inference, and opinion, and to use each appropriately
4. The ability to understand how truth is established in a discipline
5. The ability to deal with quandaries and problems that have no pat or unique solutions
6. The ability to give and receive criticism profitably
7. The ability to extend a line of thought beyond the range of first impressions
8. The ability to agree or disagree by measure
9. The ability to articulate a complex position in a way that adds nothing to its complexity