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# Increase Reading and Writing Requirements

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# Increase Reading and Writing Requirements

Submitted by Rebecca Ziegler

4/4/2013

## Discussion:

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What steps can we take to increase the amount of reading and writing that students are required to do at Georgia Southern University?

## Rationale:

In their book, *Academically Adrift* (2011), Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa found that students who were required to do at least 40 pages of reading a week and at least 20 pages of writing a semester did better on the test they administered, which measured critical thinking and problem solving skills. I have the impression (admittedly, undocumented) that not all Georgia Southern students are assigned to do that amount of reading and writing. As I understand it, a problem is that Georgia Southern faculty with large classes or heavy teaching loads cannot assign that amount of reading and writing and successfully monitor that the students have done it. I would like us to discuss ways that more reading and writing can be assigned at Georgia Southern and the students held accountable for it.

## Response:

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Marc Cyr (CLASS) said that when Christine Ludowise and Mark Welford were talking earlier about the QEP, he thought that the QEP might be the most effective avenue by which this could be approached.

Rebecca Ziegler (LIB), who submitted this discussion item, said she had proposed it as a QEP to the QEP committee, and welcomed this seconding it as a good QEP possibility.

Chris Geyerman (CLASS) didn't know that the reading and writing requirements need to be increased. He was more concerned with getting students to do what he assigns them to start with. The good students are a joy, but others try to figure out if they even need to buy the textbook. So it's not a quantitative question, but a mindset question. He agreed with Cyr, but did not know how this applied in colleges other than CLASS. He noted that when he saw a list of the courses with the highest DWF rates, which definitely goes to retention as well, in CLASS they are the ones that are reading intensive, so he thought there might be a link with that as well.

Janice Steirn (CLASS) said reading and writing – mostly writing – were the first things that flashed through her head too during the earlier discussion of QEP. She noted she gets seniors in capstone courses who are terrified to write a paper. She thought this was partially mindset, and that repetition would help with that. They don't expect to write, and they don't expect to read very much, and the way to change that mindset is to make them do both a lot. The problem is how to require writing, let alone help with raising its quality, when class sizes are so large. If they are learning composition in Comp I and Comp II, clearly they are forgetting it the very next semester. She suggested "writing across the curriculum" so that they can't forget it the very next semester.

Marc Cyr (CLASS) said he had taught composition. He had taught students in Comp I, had the same student in Comp II flunk a paper for some reason, and ask, "Why didn't anybody ever tell me that?" And he would answer, "Somebody did. I did. Two months ago." He thought there is a delete button that gets hit. The learning doesn't keep developing; instead everything is parceled out. When those students leave those composition classes, with a C or a B or an A, they're doing C, B, or A work. Two weeks later, it's a whole different story. You can't point at the composition people and say they're not doing their job.

Steirn said she wasn't trying to imply that they're not getting taught. She saw that same compartmentalization. Somewhere we have to be able to convince them that learning is not compartmentalized into little chunks that you can then hit a delete key on, but the learning is continuous. And reading and writing is key in every class.

Helen Bland (CHHS) wanted to have this discussion concurrently with the point re: class sizes and teaching loads because she thought we'd find that these two are inversely related.

Rebecca Ziegler (LIB) wondered if this should become a QEP, which she understood came with some funding. If faculty have classes that are too big, perhaps some of that funding could be used to hire graduate assistants who are good writers themselves to grade extra writing.

