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Improving Student Learning Outcomes: Teaching Effectiveness, Pedagogy and Savannah State University

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Savannah State University’s Writing in the Disciplines Guide

Engaging the Disengaged

Nat Hardy

Savannah State University
Savannah State University’s Writing in the Disciplines Guide

The Strengths

Importing good ideas from inquiring minds and other institutions.
Savannah State University’s Writing in the Disciplines Guide

When Professor Hale transferred from Fisk University to Savannah State, she introduced SSU to the concept of a Writing in the Disciplines Guide.
With fresh ideas and innovation, an institution does not need to reinvent the wheel to improve the curriculum.
The Strengths

A much-needed core text, *The SSU Writing in the Disciplines Guide* has promoted, in a limited sense, improved writing across the SSU curriculum.
Savannah State University’s Writing in the Disciplines Guide

Pedagogical Strengths

By incorporating The Writing in the Disciplines Guide into not only my Composition I and II courses, I have also made it a required text for World Literature and Humanities classes.
Savannah State University’s Writing in the Disciplines Guide

Pedagogical Strengths

Through using *The Guide*, I have witnessed a marked improvement in my own students’ writing.
The SSU Writing in the Disciplines Guide provides exceptional writing instruction across the disciplines, as well sample student essays, writing assignments, and writing exercises.
Savannah State University’s Writing in the Disciplines Guide

The student writing models in *The SSU Writing in the Disciplines Guide* provide a much-needed pedagogical window into student-centered writing.
Savannah State University’s Writing in the Disciplines Guide

The SSU Writing in the Disciplines Guide contains the entire range of student writing from the good, to the bad, and the ugly.
The accompanying rubrics for the student essays explain both the strengths and weaknesses while justifying the letter grade each essay received.
Savannah State University’s Writing in the Disciplines Guide

The Strengths

The Guide allows students to understand what it takes to write and “A” paper while appreciating the little effort it takes to write an “F” paper.
Based on my teaching experience from the Fall 09 and Spring 10 terms, the limited number of students who have purchased and use *The SSU Writing in the Disciplines Guide*, have benefited from this valuable writing resource.
When innovating, however, expect the unexpected.
The most popular complaints I hear from the 80% of students who did not or refused to purchase *The SSU Writing in the Disciplines Guide*, cite the cost of the text.
Since the Guide lists at $46.75, many of our students complain they cannot afford the extra financial burden, despite the fact that the text is intended to be used across the disciplines for the duration of their undergraduate program.
Savannah State University’s Writing in the Disciplines Guide

The Drawbacks

Placed into perspective, however, the Guide costs only $12.00 per year over a 4 year degree.
Since 80% of the students do not have the text, I often have to resort to using a pdf of the Guide in the Smart classroom.
Savannah State University’s Writing in the Disciplines Guide

The Drawbacks

The pdf works fine for lectures, however, outside of the class, students who do not own the book, cannot use the text as a resource, or prepare assigned readings in advance.
Moreover, using pdf version of *The Guide* during lectures also is counterproductive as it undermines the need and the requirement to purchase the text.
Savannah State University’s Writing in the Disciplines Guide

Campus Impact

How Writing Across the Disciplines impacts SSU
Savannah State University’s Writing in the Disciplines Guide

Campus Impact

The Writing Guide has made a positive, though frustratingly limited impact on the SSU campus.
Savannah State University’s Writing in the Disciplines Guide

Campus Impact

The reason for the limited impact is two-fold.
1. The primary reason for *The Guide’s* lack of sales and success is the refusal of faculty buy-in to writing across the disciplines.
Some elder and seasoned professors resist change and innovation and refuse to incorporate *The Guide* and writing across the disciplines into their classrooms.
Some professors justify this refusal, citing the ‘extra’ work of assigning writing assignments.
SSU Faculty were also invited to contribute and create *The Guide* but very few became involved in the end product.
The lack of faculty engagement with The Guide is, therefore, mirrored in the limited student response.
2. The second reason for poor sales is the fact that our student base is generally more financially strapped.
Savannah State University’s Writing in the Disciplines Guide

Campus Impact

Adding increased costs to the students’ textbook budget creates an even greater financial burden.
The question remains: How can we best help our students improve their writing for a reasonable price?
One solution to reduce this financial burden on our students would include relying more upon *The SSU Writing in the Disciplines Guide* and relying less upon Composition textbooks and manuals.
If SSU were to take this approach, *The SSU Writing in the Disciplines Guide* would likely need to be revised and expanded, which is a manageable next step.
Savannah State University’s Writing in the Disciplines Guide

Creative Solutions

The increased cost of an expanded *Guide* would be offset by the savings of eliminating a Composition textbook.
Savannah State University’s
Writing in the Disciplines Guide

Creative Solutions

Having an SSU produced textbook also generates
much needed revenue for the university and the
Liberal Arts Department.
This revenue can be used to support faculty development, offsetting the current and likely continued funding cutbacks.
SSU needs to create greater incentives for freshmen that will encourage ‘required’ book purchases at the beginning of term.
One possible approach is to lower the text price.
To reduce production costs, the text’s content could be made more economical by reducing and reediting the first edition through a more selective process.
Reduced text size could also be achieved through a more compressed layout in the second edition which could eliminate any excessive white space.
Savannah State University’s Writing in the Disciplines Guide

Creative Solutions

The SSU Writing in the Disciplines Guide could be bundled with the SSU Freshman Experience Text.
Savannah State University’s
Writing in the Disciplines Guide

Creative Solutions

The SSU Freshman Experience Text sells for $55.00 new and $41.00 used.
A bundle of the two required texts would cost approximately $102.00 combined.
Another way to reduce publishing costs is to use one publisher instead of the current two.
Savannah State University’s Writing in the Disciplines Guide

Creative Solutions

The SSU Writing in the Disciplines Guide is currently published by Fountainhead Press.
Savannah State University’s Writing in the Disciplines Guide

Creative Solutions

The SSU Freshman Experience text is currently published by Tapestry Press.
By using one publisher for both texts, SSU could pass the volume savings onto the students.
Finally, bundling the Freshmen text with *The Writing Guide* will ensure students have the book at the beginning of term and will bring the book to class.
Following the initial release of the *SSU Writing in the Disciplines Guide*, SSU needs to rethink its marketing approach in order to get both student and faculty buy-in to *The Guide*. 
Conclusions

The future success and learning impact of The Guide hinges on engaging disengaged students and faculty.
The success of *The Guide* will be determined by the cultural shift that must take place on the SSU campus in the coming terms.
Based upon the limited success of its first year, *The SSU Writing in the Disciplines Guide* is taking SSU on a visionary and necessary competitive new direction.
Savannah State University’s Writing in the Disciplines Guide

Conclusions

Through some creative marketing techniques and by requiring that all Freshmen students purchase *The Guide* for writing assistance across the disciplines, this approach will enable SSU to meet and surpass its desired expected learning outcomes.
By convincing students and staff of the necessity and value of *The SSU Writing in the Disciplines Guide*, the potential for improved student writing campus wide is a pedagogical possibility rather than an administrative projection.