Focused Inquiry Groups: Campus Investigators

A persistent impediment to educational improvement is that faculty have few purposeful, constructive opportunities to discuss and exchange the knowledge and experience they have gained in their classrooms and to build upon this knowledge by jointly exploring and testing innovative practices. Chabot College's Focused Inquiry Groups (FIGs) provide the collaborative enterprise needed to bring the knowledge of our faculty and staff together with the desire to seek and evaluate solutions to our students' learning needs.

What FIGs do:

- Create communities in which educators can share what happens in classrooms.
- Articulate, negotiate, and enact the most important outcomes for student learning.
- Classroom research to better understand the needs and experiences of students.
- Share insights and findings.
- Examine a wide range of evidence that describes patterns of student performance.
- Collaborate in the design of curricula, assignments, student programs, and assessments.
- Support professional development among educators.

This issue of Faculty Spotlight focuses on the work of multiple Focused Inquiry Groups at Chabot College. The summaries of their goals and work to date are teasers - more comprehensive information on these projects can be found on the Center for Teaching & Learning website and members will be detailing their work as well as strategies for adaptation into other classrooms and disciplines at workshops in upcoming semesters.
Adapting WRAC Course for Social Sciences
by Alisa Kleven - English, Michael Thompson – History, Rani Nijjar - Psychology

The WRAC (Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum) Center has partnered with the Social Sciences to provide an intervention for under-prepared students who need to improve their academic performance in college-level courses. Both Michael Thompson and Rani Nijjar are re-imagining the English 115 model to better support the needs of students in the Social Sciences, who require explicit instruction in discipline-specific reading and writing and for whom the lab is one vehicle to help students succeed.

GNST 115 History utilizes the established framework of English 115 to provide individualized tutoring for students enrolled in History classes. To accommodate more students, the tutoring sessions involve up to three students. In addition, workshops have been created to provide instruction on and discussion on basic skills related to student success in history courses. These include specific skills such as reading, contextualizing and analyzing source material and more general skills such as the textbook reading and notetaking, lecture notetaking, exam preparation and history paper writing.

Instructors in the History discipline have been provided with information about GNST 115 and encouraged to discuss it with their classes. In addition, after assessments in their classes, instructors were encouraged to approach individual students and discuss the benefits of individual tutoring. To date, enrollment in GNST 115 is very good. Currently there are 32 students enrolled (above the 25 students at which English 115 sections are capped).

While the results now are anecdotal and preliminary, they do suggest improvements in student comprehension and scores. These preliminary results appear to be largely the result of the individual (or small group) sessions. For example, three students (from another instructor’s History class) I have worked with as a small group, each saw improvement from one test to the next. Two students improved to the grade of “B” and one to a “C”. In fact, one student improved from the grade of “F” to the grade of “B”. Other students I am tutoring have also seen improvement in their scores. Individual and small group instruction appear to be the most effective and productive interventions and lead more directly to improvements in test and papers scores. The "one size fits all" intervention model doesn't seem to have much draw for students who want to see improved results on individual test scores and papers. Of, perhaps, equal importance to these improved results is the manner in which they have been achieved. Certainly, smaller settings appear to be more effective. In addition, the structure of a class (even one as loosely

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structured as 115) appears to focus student efforts. I presently hold both my office hours and my 115 tutoring sessions in the WRAC center. Students see me present in the Library for hours at a time. They, as I do, see distinctions between my office hours and my tutoring time. Students of mine drop by casually to ask questions and seek assistance during my office hours. Those students enrolled in 115, however, tend to view our meetings less casually and more as a part of a larger ongoing process to address their skills needs. They approach our meetings much more like a class (which, of course, is what it is).

Likewise, at the beginning of the Fall 2009 semester, instructors in the Psychology discipline were provided with information about GNST PSYC 115. Outreach for the PSYC 115 was communicated to faculty individually and at discipline meetings. Also, informational flyers of PSYC 115 were distributed to students in all sections of psychology in the first four weeks of the semester. In addition, following class assessments including quizzes, exams, and essay papers, instructors were encouraged to approach individual students and discuss the benefits of focused tutoring support. To date, enrollment in PSYC 115 is very promising. Currently there are 23 students enrolled, 90 percent of the students enrolled are currently enrolled in my General Psychology and Abnormal Psychology sections. This high concurrent enrollment in my Psychology class and PSYC 115 is an encouraging indicator that students are looking for the opportunity to build basic skills and succeed in their classes. Specifically, they are linking the success with the opportunity to have individualized instructor to student instruction. If PSYC 115 becomes an established semester course offering, the percentage of enrollment in this type of tutoring design will no doubt continue to grow and support a wider pool of students across all sections of psychology classes offered at Chabot.

The preliminary results from PSYC 115 show improvement in student confidence, motivation and indicate development of new reading and writing skill set. These findings are based on subjective student case study and quantitative course scores. For example, ten of the students enrolled in PSYC 115 have shown significant improvement in their General psychology exam performances. In each case, student scores increased from a grade of “F” to a grade of “B”. The key intervention between baseline measure captured by Exam 1 and post measure captured by Exam 2, was the 20 minute instructor led tutoring session with individual/or small group of three students. The remaining students have maintained their scores from Exam 1 to Exam 2. Students that are enrolled in PSYC 115, but have not followed up with scheduling appointments have shown the least improvement from failing to passing grade.

My experiences in PSYC 115 correspond closely with Professor Thompson’s experience in HIST 115, in terms of formal outcomes and anecdotal success of the pilot GNST 115 across the curriculum. Four workshops were originally proposed throughout the semester, but it became apparent very early on that the individual and small group instruction was the best approach to supporting students. As a final point, what can not be captured by quantitative performance, is student confidence seen by greater class participation and attendance, a decrease in anxiety and increased motivation to do even better on the next exam. It’s almost like the student has discovered ‘the secret’ to succeeding in class. These are the students who now raise their hands to answer questions and share study tips with others.
ESL Program Assessment Project
by Sandra Genera - counseling, Ramon Parada - counseling, Kent Uchiyama - ESL, Linnea Wahamaki - ESL

Our project is centered around a few fundamental inquiries: What are the needs of the English learners in our area? How well are we meeting those needs? How can we best restructure our program to meet the needs that we aren’t completely addressing? In restructuring our program, what can we learn from the ESL programs in our surrounding communities?

We are approaching these questions from a few different directions. First, we are working with Juan Carlos Bojorquez, a consultant with WestEd, to perform a community needs assessment. This assessment will gather information from English learners in our community, local organizations that serve immigrant communities, and members of our ESL program at Chabot. Initial interviews have already been conducted and Juan Carlos is now writing a survey that we will distribute to adult school students and parents of ELL students in the Hayward Unified School District. The ELL program at Hayward Unified has been extremely generous in allowing us to use their classes to distribute and collect the surveys. The rough draft of the surveys should be done this week, and after we have agreed on a final form, they will be translated and we can start distribution. The final report is scheduled to be finished in mid-January.

As another aspect of our project, we are visiting the community college ESL programs in our area to find what has worked and has not worked for them. So far, we have met with colleagues from City College of San Francisco, Laney College, and Ohlone College. We have at least one, possibly two or three, more visits pending, and are doing online research on some of the colleges we will not be visiting. The summaries of our findings at each college are available online at the BSI website. Each visit has raised new questions and opened our eyes to new possibilities, all of which will be very useful in the final stage of our project. The data we have gathered so far has already engendered several new lines of inquiry about our students and their goals; we will be consulting with Chabot’s Office of Institutional Research to find answers to these questions.

Next semester, we will evaluate all the data from these various sources and apply it as we review and rewrite the ESL curriculum at Chabot. It is too early to say exactly what shape the new curriculum will take, particularly with the constraints that may be put on it by the district’s current economic straits, but we remain hopeful - in fact, excited - about the prospects for our program, our students, and our community.

“Each visit (to a local community college) has raised new questions and opened our eyes to new possibilities.”
Outcomes and Assessment Coordination in ESL
by Linnea Wahamaki

Our ESL/SLO FIG has three goals:

1) Involve adjunct and full-time faculty who are teaching ESL 110A and ESL 110B in evaluating SLOs and assessing them in their respective sections in the Spring 2009 or Fall 2009 semesters.

2) Analyze data from the SLO assessment cycle for ESL 110A and ESL 110B. This will include a discussion of whether or not the SLOs and rubrics as currently written are effective or need editing. Furthermore, the assessment results of those SLOs will be analyzed to see how well they align with our curriculum at those two levels.

3) Provide a two-hour stipend to compensate participating adjunct faculty.

Kent and I held two separate meetings in the spring semester to meet with the ESL 110A/B instructors and explain the SLOs and rubrics for those classes. Each instructor was asked to collect data for the SLOs for their section. The instructors were invited to attend the staff development sessions in the spring/fall semesters to learn how to use the software program eLumen. At this time, we are waiting for the necessary files to be made available to us through eLumen so that we can all input our class data and then analyze our assessment results. We will then have a meeting to go over these results, and Kent and I will subsequently share our FIG experience with the BSI committee.

FIG participants:
♦ Linnea Wahamaki ♦ Natalia Ades
♦ Kent Uchiyama ♦ Christine Park
♦ Debbie Mejia ♦ Sean Connolly
♦ Dorothy Sole

Group Counseling for Continuing Students
by Jennifer Lange

The core issue in counseling and matriculation is finding new ways to deliver services in our current economic climate. Handling most students via one-on-one counseling is no longer a financially viable model. To meet the demand for appointments we initiated group counseling among relatively homogeneous small groups of students, such as those interested in pursuing a career in nursing.

In November and December 2009 we scheduled 19 group counseling sessions with registration filling immediately at 15 students per session. The earliest sessions had a high no-show rate, but with the beginning of registration for Spring 2010 attendance has increased. Ultimately, an estimated 275 students will be served during these group appointments.

FIG leader – Matt Kritscher
School of the Arts FIG Assessment
by Carole Splendore

This group, our initial course-level student learning outcomes focused inquiry group, had the goal to move 10 Art adjunct faculty in the disciplines of Fine Art, Film, Interior Design, Architecture, and Photography through the outcomes assessment cycle. The stages completed are the writing of SLOs and rubrics, the assessment of those outcomes, the recording of those assessments in eLumen, and the reflection upon the process. The participants gained new insights on their students, their course outlines, their outcomes, their assessment techniques, and finally, themselves. In addition to this, each participant developed three new assessment approaches, particular to assignments in their classes, to adopt, evaluate, and share the results to each other and to the School of the Arts Division as a whole.

This study showed that the Focused Inquiry Group model worked well as a pilot study to bring faculty from different disciplines in the same division together to discuss teaching and learning. Being adjunct, all of the participants were new to SLOs and assessment as a formal process. However, being teachers who were naturally reflective upon the learning that occurs in their classrooms, as most teachers are, they were able to have very meaningful discussions on the nature of that learning and how assessment is a useful tool in enhancing and articulating it. Being in related artistic fields, which focus on critical thinking, communication, creativity, and exploration, helped to foster commonality and understanding while faculty were grappling with new techniques and ideology. Participants, being adjunct, were particularly grateful for the opportunity to discuss teaching and learning with colleagues.

Although the SLO and rubric writing and assessment was necessary and meaningful work, it was the project-based experiments that validated the outcomes assessment cycle’s usefulness as to the enhancement of student learning both immediately and personally to each of the participants. It was these examples that the faculty were able to describe passionately and persuasively to other faculty in the SOTA division, many of whom could be skeptical about the purpose and usefulness of SLOs.

Five discussion meetings helped bring focus to the group and its work, and provided the incentive for the continued participation. It ensured uniform quality of the outcomes written and it kept momentum going through the project-based work. Therefore, it was the format and work beyond the introductory session on SLO writing that provided the framework for the excellence of the work that was accomplished.

FIG Participants in Spring 2009:
♦ Carole Splendore - group leader, Art
♦ Barbara Daher - Interior Design
♦ Len Cook - Photography
♦ David Hertz - Photography
♦ Linda Rhodes - Film
♦ Adrian Huang - Architecture
♦ Paul Chu - Architecture
♦ Keary Kensinger – Architecture (PACE)
♦ Peter Wolfe - Architecture
♦ Lisa Kokin – Art (Quest)
This ESL FIG aims to examine the viability and effectiveness of linking the teaching and study of a novel and some short stories to grammar points in the ESL curriculum.

What Helped
- The initial preparation of course content, teaching strategies, and timeline for the semester
- The regular meetings that discussed lessons taught—what was successful and what was lacking
- Planning for the next lessons/assessment strategies after reflecting on the lessons taught
- Student input and classroom assessment

What Didn’t Help
- Connecting flawlessly the required textbook grammar topics to the novel
- Disparity in usage levels between formal grammar and informal, conversational or literary style in the novel/stories
- More than usual preparation of materials and lessons taught for the first time
- Teaching the novel/stories as reading texts to be understood and responded to in journals and essays, and also teaching the grammatical items prescribed by the curriculum.
- Some student resistance especially in ESL 110B to a new strategy of extending the grammar study to the stories read. Some students feel more comfortable learning grammar from a grammar textbook.

What We Learned
- Coordinating the use of a grammar textbook with the novel and other stories is not an easy feat. It implies teaching the students how to read, understand and appreciate narrative and teaching them how to use and study a grammar textbook efficiently.

- However, we are looking forward to the “Author’s Chair” presentation after Thanksgiving break. Students will present their original stories and respond to stories that they will hear from each other. We’re looking forward to this show of what we might call “Moving Stories” in both the move they made to the U.S. and the emotive power of their stories.
Investigating the Reading Process
by Jane Wolford

The Reading Apprenticeship (RA) FIG consists of faculty from across the curriculum in Business, English, ESL, History, Life Sciences, Mathematics, and Physics. Each of our members has received professional development training in the RA approach to reading instruction. This metacognitive approach relies on faculty working together to make their own reading processes and strategies visible to each other. From our discussions we are beginning to understand the reading difficulties our students face in our classrooms. As RA-trained instructors we attempt to demystify reading by making visible to students how we read difficult text in our respective disciplines.

As FIG members, we come together every other week to share what we are doing in our RA classrooms, and what we are learning about the benefits and limits of the RA approach. This semester our discussions have focused on the following inquiry questions:

- What do you want to understand better about your students and how they learn?
- How can you more fully incorporate metacognitive routines into your classroom?
- How will you assess the impact of these classroom routines on student learning?

From these discussions we are developing specific inquiry questions for our RA sections. RA routines are embedded into eleven sections across campus this semester. We are collecting data from these sections and will assess the efficacy of RA in our classrooms.

We presented a Flex Day workshop this semester that included a demonstration of how RA routines are currently practiced in History (with primary documents) and Life Sciences (with a medical text). Workshop participants were also given the opportunity to engage in RA routines with difficult text outside their disciplines. The session was well attended and generated a lot of interest among faculty. We are looking to grow our membership by funding new faculty to receive RA training and join our FIG in Spring 2010.

As the semester winds down, our group is beginning to focus on sharing student work from our RA sections. We will look at student reading logs, responses to writing prompts, test results, and other kinds of student work. We plan to continue this focus into Spring 2010, as well as continuing to share our inquiry results. We look forward to mentoring new faculty in this exciting pedagogical approach.

FIG Members for Fall 2009:

- Nick Alexander
- Homeira Foth
- Katie Hern
- Cindy Hicks
- Ming-lun Ho
- Alisa Klevens
- Kent Uchiyama
- Jane Wolford
- Patricia Wu
Supplemental Instruction Methods in History
by Jane Wolford

As the History 27 (U. S. Women’s History) Semester Comparison Chart below illustrates, the withdrawal rate for this course from Fall 2006-Spring 2008 averaged 25%. There was a big jump in withdrawals to 35% in Fall 2008, which indicated the need for supplemental instructional support. I received BSI funding for Spring and Fall 2009 to support bi-weekly workshops for my History 27 students. Students receive a few extra-credit points for attendance. Data from Spring 2009 shows the withdrawal rate dropping below 20% for the first time in years. Approximately 28% of History 27 students attended on a regular basis, with more than 50% attending at least one or more sessions in Spring 2009.

For Fall 2009, 30% of my students are regular attendees. Eighty- seven students took my first midterm in mid-September, and eighty-five took the second midterm in mid-October. The workshop topics tie into what we are working on in class. The focus for the first session is organizational skills and note-taking. The next week we discuss effective strategies for multiple-choice test-taking. I have created ten “dummy” questions from material covered in class and we go over each one as a group, discussing why some answer options are incorrect, and how to reason through to the correct answer. By the third week we begin scaffolding information from an in-class video and a sixteen-page reading assigned as homework. Students use the scaffolding chart to write their first in-class essay. In the next session we use the Reading Apprenticeship metacognitive “think-aloud” strategy to make sense of a slave narrative that students are quizzed on in class. Our midterm review session is a quiz bowl game, complete with buzzer system and prizes.

This is a quick run-through of the first five weeks. We continue to scaffold our essays, think aloud as we read primary documents, and play quiz bowl in preparation for each midterm and final exam. Student response has been overwhelmingly positive.
Encouraging Texting During Class

by Jennifer Lange

The scenario is familiar – an instructor poses a question to the entire class and the same couple of students answer while the others either look confused or look expectantly at those who usually answer. I have tried multiple techniques to gain more participation in these exchanges in order to better assess class-wide understanding: calling on individual students, raising hands, writing answers on index cards, think-pair-share, and others. While all are useful, none seem to have the right balance of broad assessment, timeliness, and duration. At the Research & Planning Group for Community Colleges’ Student Success Conference in October I was introduced to a new classroom assessment technique that appeared to have all of these desirable qualities, plus an appeal for the millennial student – online text-in polling.

The website www.polleverywhere.com has a free option for higher education that allows for a maximum of 32 responders per poll question. Two types of questions can be created – multiple choice and free answer.

I decided to try out the site in my Anatomy 1 course (currently 28 enrolled). I created four questions on review topics that required understanding to comprehend the topic for that day’s lesson and four questions to serve as knowledge checks during the lecture/discussion. My intent was to run through the first four questions at the start of class to judge readiness and then to stop for knowledge checks as the lesson proceeded. The plan and reality did not match.

When I opened the site, the poll question displayed and the students seemed intrigued. But, their responses did not register. Troubleshooting later revealed the problem to be a version of Internet Explorer that was too old to handle the technology. The next day, running the newest version of Firefox, the polling technology worked excellent. Another minor hitch then arose; students waited
to see what the most popular answer was initially and then responded with that choice. This was easily solved by blanking the projector until everyone had responded. When revealing the poll results I could then begin a meaningful discussion on the merits of each option, working through reasoning why each was correct or incorrect.

On the third run I finally found the perfect mix for the text-in free answer question formation – it had 24 correct answers and I challenged the to see how fast they could get them all. Discussion started, students grabbed books and notes and started scanning, shouts of glee at finding one not yet given. Everyone participated! Once compiling the list of 24 tissues, we then began an exercise of categorizing their answers.

I will continue the trial of this program before drawing a conclusion on its ultimate learning value, but my initial suggestions are:

1. Check the voting system on the classroom computer before deploying (needs newer versions of internet browsers as well as Flash Player).
2. Display blank screen until voting has concluded (for questions with a single correct answer).
3. Work on embedding polls into Powerpoint to avoid time wasted switching between programs.
4. Pose free answer questions with multiple answers and/or talking points.

Investigating Outcomes of In-Class Tutors
by Angie Magallon and Cindy Hicks

The Learning Connection’s support programs are initiated by instructors who have considered - often with the support of various grants and the Center for Teaching & Learning - new pedagogical approaches and effective learning support interventions. Also, our focus is on very closely linking learning support interventions with classroom instruction. One of the learning support programs initiated by instructors is the Learning Assistant pilot program, which places trained peer tutors, selected by the instructors, in classrooms to work directly with students in the classroom setting, as well as outside of class. Trained by the tutor trainer and mentored by the instructor, the Learning Assistants are in unique positions: while tutoring the students, facilitating student study groups, or serving as model students, they bring additional eyes and ears to the student learning occurring in the classroom. As a result, the Learning Assistants are able to share with the instructor important information about what and how the students are learning.

Our questions are: How does the Learning Assistant intervention impact students’ retention, persistence, and success? In what ways, if any, do instructors who work with Learning Assistants reconsider or “tweak” their pedagogical approaches? How might the training of Learning Assistants best serve these peer tutors as they attempt to “integrate what to learn with how to learn”?
Upcoming CTL Events

Discussion/Sharing of Classroom Assessment
	December 4, 11:00-1:00

Share your thoughts and techniques on your classroom assessment of an SLO with faculty from across campus and gain ideas from your colleagues. What assessments do you have planned? How will you evaluate the student work? What information do you hope to gain from the assessment?

Entering Data in eLumen/eLumen Orientation
	December 2, 2:00-4:00
	December 4, 1:30-3:00
	December 8, 3:00-5:00
	December 11, 11:00-12:30
	January 22, 1:30-3:00
	January 28, 3:00-5:00
	January 29, 11:00-1:00

Drop-in to enter your SLO assessment data in eLumen while SLOAC members are available for assistance if necessary.

Reflection on Classroom Assessment
	December 11, 1:00-3:00
	January 22, 11:00-1:00

Discuss with your colleagues the outcomes you assessed for your students. How well did the assessment work? How do you analyze the data you have gathered? How do you act on your findings?

Please see the Center for Teaching & Learning website for more information and specific workshop locations.