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Students at LSC-Montgomery entering the allied health fields programs are expected to be able to read technical papers and write research papers in their courses, once they enter their programs. A&P and microbiology courses are prerequisite courses to the allied health field programs. Students are expected to get some training in writing research paper by the time they enter these programs – with this in mind both A&P (I & II) courses and the microbiology course have incorporated several writing components into the curriculum.

The next few paragraphs elaborate the components that were either incorporated or improved upon this semester:

A. Learning to Answer Essay Questions:

Many students have trouble answering essay questions and struggle with doing a good job at answering these questions. In order to help them with this and also help them learn how to summarize responses to a question, I have incorporated the following activity into the course (I have been doing this for several semesters now).

1. Students are assigned questions for each of the chapters for the course. In answering these questions, they are encouraged to incorporate their lecture notes with the relevant information from the textbook and then summarize their answers.
2. The change that was incorporated for this assignment was to request students to answer these questions after they had ‘learnt’ the concepts needed to answer the questions. They were instructed to first answer the questions using the information in their lecture notes and incorporating it with the textbook information, and other relevant sources (internet resources, journals etc.). They were encouraged to then learn the information from the notes they had made. Students were then requested to answer the questions once they felt confident that they had understood these concepts. They were however requested not to refer to their notes when doing the assignment - i.e., they were asked to simulate a testing situation. The basis for this assignment was to first of all ‘train’ them in how to write an answer in their own words and secondly in how to learn information – first make notes, understand the concept, then try and check for understanding by writing it out without any help from any source, then check their answers with their notes/textbook, identify areas that they need to relearn that then rewrite again.
3. Students were also highly encouraged to attend the seminars on ‘Note Taking’, ‘Textbook Comprehension’ and ‘Learning Skills in the Sciences’. These sessions were

intended to help them understand how to write notes, read the textbook effectively and help them understand the study skills most studied to their learning styles. Since this was not mandatory not everyone attended, but the attendance was encouraging nevertheless. Students had some very positive feedback regarding these seminars.

4. This exercise has been a real eye-opener for students. They now are aware of what it takes to answer essay questions. In terms of success of this effort – it is time consuming and hence not everyone did as requested/instructed. For me this involved additional grading in addition to exam (5 per semester), lab practical (4 per semester), lab assignments, quizzes and CD assignments that were a part of the curriculum, I had a difficult time keeping up with this additional grading as well as in providing feedback. It has been my experience that it will definitely benefit students to do this consistently for the first third of the semester and then hope that students can do this on their own from there on by applying it to other assignments.

B. Term Paper Requirements:

Students are required to write a research paper on a disease of their choice based on the topics discussed each semester. They are provided with a handout on the requirements for the paper. In addition there is a very detailed grading grid that is provided so that they can check their written assignment for completeness and be aware of the points assigned to each component of the research paper. They also are shown how to retrieve articles from the electronic databases available via the library system.

The changes that were incorporated this semester were the following:

I. Attending Student Success Seminars:

1. Met with Claudia Lange of the ELC and schedule several Student Success Seminars including the following: How to Write a Research Paper, Note Taking Techniques, Textbook Comprehension, Study Skills for the Sciences to name a few. The topic that was most relevant for the term paper was the seminars on ‘how to write a research paper’ and ‘textbook comprehension’ (hopefully they were able to use some of the skills picked up here to comprehend technical materials in a journal).
2. It was mandatory for students to attend the ‘How to Write a Research Paper’ as this was part of their requirement for the research paper. Except for some concerns with the schedule of these seminars (which was very easily addressed), I was mildly surprised that this did not meet with any resistance from students even though they had to do this outside of class time. Student feedback revealed that this was

somewhat useful – though it was mentioned that the lot of the information was general and not specifically aligned for this assignment.

3. The changes that will be incorporated for next semester is to request that students be given the chance to work on a couple of scientific journal articles during the ‘Writing a Research Paper’ seminar so as to get hands-on experience with how to summarize ideas, cite resources and how to conclude the paper.
4. The seminar presenter will be provided with specific journal articles and requirements of the research assignment will be discussed in greater depth. Perhaps it will help to break up this seminar into two sessions with assignments to complete before the second meeting. This will provide students with the opportunity to ask questions that might arise when they try and complete the assignment(s).
5. In addition to the above changes, students will be provided with additional websites with information on how to cite, what format to use and how to edit the bibliography.

II. Submission of a Draft for the Term Paper:

1. The idea for this was to discourage those students who try and put together a paper on the weekend before it is due. This will get them to start collecting their reference materials in advance, and start early so as to be able to seek input/feedback from the instructor.
2. Majority of the students turned in the draft as it was mandatory, but not all of them did. There was an increase in the requests from students to meet with me to provide feedback before the final submission, as compared to previous semesters. The number of such requests was not as much as expected though.

III. Accessing Electronic Databases

Students are given a quick overview of how to access the electronic databases. The handout provided on the library website is used as a guide. They are shown how to retrieve articles by using the right descriptors and Boolean operators. For further help they are highly encouraged to contact the library personnel.

The ELC staff is invited to talk to students about the facilities they provide particularly with writing assignments.