

**Using assessment to build a comprehensive  
writing program in sociology:  
A FACULTY PERSPECTIVE**

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# Department context

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**Very diverse student body with different levels of preparation**

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52% of sociology majors are from underrepresented communities, compared with 34% of the campus total;

58% are first-generation college students, compared with 42% of the campus total.

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**Disciplinary communication taught in large,  
content-heavy courses**

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Classical Sociological Theory for 300 students per  
year

# **Department context**

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**Disciplinary communication taught in large, content-heavy courses**

**“Before” conditions**



# “Before” conditions

First time frosh and students of color demonstrated low proficiencies in use of social theory and writing skills

Students of color demonstrated significantly lower proficiencies in use of social theory

**Only 56–57% of students of color met/exceeded expectations compared to their White, non-Hispanic peers at 79–83%**

# Curricular changes

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**3 papers of increasing levels of difficulty  
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5 homework assignments focused on discrete skills (slow reading, idea development, thesis statements, outlining, revision planning)

**5 section activities for TAs, corresponding to each homework assignment**

# **TA involvement**

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**4 hour pedagogy training (paid)**

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**detailed rubric and “norming” sessions**



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**smaller sections and student conferences**

**“After” conditions**

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Still achievement gaps among transfer, first gen, and late bilingual students in some measures, but

first gen students demonstrated similar skills in using social theory;

**no significant differences among racial/ethnic groups in writing skills or use of social theory**

# “After” conditions

“Many students said that 105A was the **first time they were receiving extensive critical feedback on their writing.**”

“For students who took an interest in improving their writing, the grading **rubric served as a valuable tool** for helping them recognize areas of weakness.”

“Having **pre-planned section activities was a helpful time-saver** and made planning for sections much more straightforward”

“The revision planning worksheet and student conferences were very productive and **pushed students to think and plan ahead** for their final essay. This was a new practice for many/most of them.”

# “After” conditions

“There was just the right amount of assignments throughout the quarter to help the class with papers. It **all went hand-in-hand.**”

“Homework and reading assignments were **all intentional** and on point.”

“I also really enjoyed the comparison chart and the homework because it didn't feel like busy work we get in other classes, it was extremely **helpful in the construction of my papers.**”

“The homework assignments were also productive and **not too much or like busy work at all.**”

“The assignments were always clear and helpful, as well as the paper prep assignments. **Your method ... really helped me learn.**”

# Ongoing Qs

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**Replicability and sharing best practices**

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**TA training and involvement**



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**Balancing content and DC skills**

**Thank you!**