The "research essay" (and research proposal) in the composition classroom

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Abstract

The research essay in the composition classroom has been a long common practice. However, many researchers and practitioners have questioned its usefulness in helping the students as writers within the academy and in more real world settings.  This study examines the research essay from a major/discipline/future profession/career perspective, in which students conduct research about their majors or a topic or focus within the discipline they are hoping to go into. The study took place during the fall semester of 2009 at a university in the south west. Approximately 25 first-time freshmen participated in the study.

The "research essay" (and research proposal) in the composition classroom

I have been teaching the "research essay" to freshmen students in my composition classrooms since the fall semester of 2006 at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. I have many different approaches to teaching the research essay. Since then, I have taught various versions of the research essay, the most recent version focusing on "careers/professions/majors/disciplines."

There has been much debate on how useful teaching the research essay is within the academic institution. One argument against teaching the research essay is that it is not preparing the students to write in the real world.  There is also the argument that teaching the research essay is a superficial and limited way of learning what kinds of writing is taught in the academic institution. While this may or may not be the case, there are still many composition instructors who teach the research essay.

The questions that I ask in this study and hope to answer are as follows:

- What should freshmen students research in the composition classroom?
- What kinds of heuristics can freshmen use to start their research in the composition classroom?
- What would be an effective genre to have freshmen students present their research in?
- How do students view the research essay in the composition classroom?
- How can the research essay be considered useful? Is there a certain context that composition instructors can place the research essay in to make it useful as a mode of learning writing?

Definition of terms

**Research** – For the purposes of this study, the term "research" will used as "investigation" and as a form of making "inquires" into a certain majors, disciplines, careers, and/or professions.

**Research essay** – For the purposes of this study, I will be defining "research essay" as a document that students create that includes questions that drive their research, in-text citations, and a reference page (preferences for this assignments is APA style). The students will not be making a traditional argument (i.e. pro/con, cause-and-effect), however, they will still be defining terms and "jargon words" that majors, disciplines, careers, and professions tend to use.

**Research proposal** – The research proposal is being used as a "starting point" for students to start formulating questions about their majors, disciplines, careers, and professions. There is no certain format for the research proposal other than the 100-150 word requirement.

Methodology

I designed the research essay assignment and the research proposal assignment prior to the beginning of the 2009 fall semester. I had developed this assignment from a previous version (identical) of them that I had used at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. Essentially, the

research essay and proposal assignments requires students to research more in-depth their majors, disciplines, careers, and/or professions.

Before the students started their research essays, we spent one week figuring out what they would be writing about. During this time, students wrote a 100-150 word research proposal. I had the students read sections in *The brief McGraw-Hill guide: Writing for college, writing for life* (2009) by Duane Roen, Gregory R. Glau, & Barry M. Maid as well as use the *OWL at Purdue Online Writing Resources and Lab*, dealing with how to research, how to develop questions, how to locate credible sources, how to write an essay in APA, and how use in-text citations.

The course that the research proposal and research essay was used in was English composition 1311 at the University of Texas at El Paso during the fall semester of 2009. The course met three times a week, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, for fifty minutes each day. The course contained twenty-five freshmen students. The resume and interview assignment lasted for approximately seven weeks, from October 2$^{nd}$-November 23$^{rd}$. The original due date was set for November 18$^{th}$ but I decided to change it to November 23$^{rd}$ to give students a little more time to write finish their research essays. The research proposal counted for 10% and the research essay counted for 20% out of their overall grade (30% out of a possible100%). For all assignment descriptions and grading rubrics, please see *appendices*.

During these seven weeks, students learned how to create a research proposal and why it is important. In order to help me teach the research proposal, I showed students example proposals from past students. I also used examples of APA formatting and style from *OWL*, as well as *OWL's* sample APA essay. I used Roen et al.'s *Guide*, pages 920-27 (i.e. how to write an essay in APA and an example APA essay). I also required that the students turn in a rough draft to me by October 9$^{th}$, either outling their ideas, developing their research questions, and what (if any) sources they have found or planned to use. Before their research proposals were due on October 14$^{th}$, I went over the grading rubric (see *appendices*).

I also had the students engage in activities during class time on using the University Library's databases to find credible sources (i.e. texts, journals, etc.). November 2$^{nd}$-4$^{th}$ I held individual and group conferences with the students to talk about their research processes, their writing, and what sources they had been finding and planning to use in their essay. Each conference lasted between 10-15 minutes, depending on the student's questions or if they had any writing for me to read over. On November 6$^{th}$, we met back in the classroom and I had the students engage in session of peer review, where they traded what they had written so far with one or two students. I had them follow a sequence of questions to consider when reading over the drafts (see *appendices*). This peer review session lasted the entire class time.

For the remaining class time after the peer review session, I held in-class "workshops," where students could come in and continue researching and writing their essays. As I have mentioned above, I changed the due date for the research essay from November 18$^{th}$ to November 23$^{rd}$ to give students a little more time to refine and polish their essays. Once they were done with their essays, I required them to submit an electronic copy to their PB Work's wiki pages, in their e-portfolios.

Below are the goals and objectives that the research proposal and essay met:

*Goals*

- Goal one: To introduce students to primary and secondary research by first developing questions they would like answered
- Goal two: To introduce students to various genres of writing and the use of rhetoric within various professions
- Goal three: To introduce students to various methods of professional and academic research (using primary and secondary sources) and writing

*Objectives*

- Objective one: Students will construct a research proposal containing research questions about their major/discipline/future profession/career
- Objective two: Students will construct an academic research essay within their major/discipline/future profession/career using primary and secondary sources
- Objective three: Students will conduct professional and academic research and build a list of references (i.e. a "reference page" in        APA style)

The overarching goal of the English composition course was to have the students construct an electronic, web-based/electronic portfolio, containing documents that focused on their majors, disciplines, future professions, or careers.

Method

I conducted a mixed-method survey using Surveymonkey.com. I chose to use Surveymonkey.com because of its user friendliness and because it is accessible. The survey was administered after the resume and the interview assignment was due, not prior. The survey contained eight quantitative questions that were based on the Likert Scale Model, with the answer options: Strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. The students were not required to reveal their identities or give out any personal information the survey. The survey was voluntary and no extra credit was given to those students who took the survey. Since I did not plan to publish this research in an academic journal, I did not seek IRB approval nor have my students sign a consent form.

Prior to having the students fill out the survey online, I asked them to share their thoughts on what they thought of the resume and interview assignment. The survey was administered during class. Twenty-one out of twenty-five students participated in taking the survey. The survey results are based on 100%. The questions that were asked in the survey:

1. The research proposal helped me focus on what I wanted to research on for my essay.
2. The research essay was a good research and writing assignment
3. I had difficulty locating secondary sources for my research.
4. I found that using the library here on campus was very helpful in locating my secondary sources.

5. I used the computers and the databases in the campus' library to locate my secondary sources.
6. I located and used primary sources such as interviews in my research essay.
7. I effectively learned how to integrate quotes into my writing and cite sources.
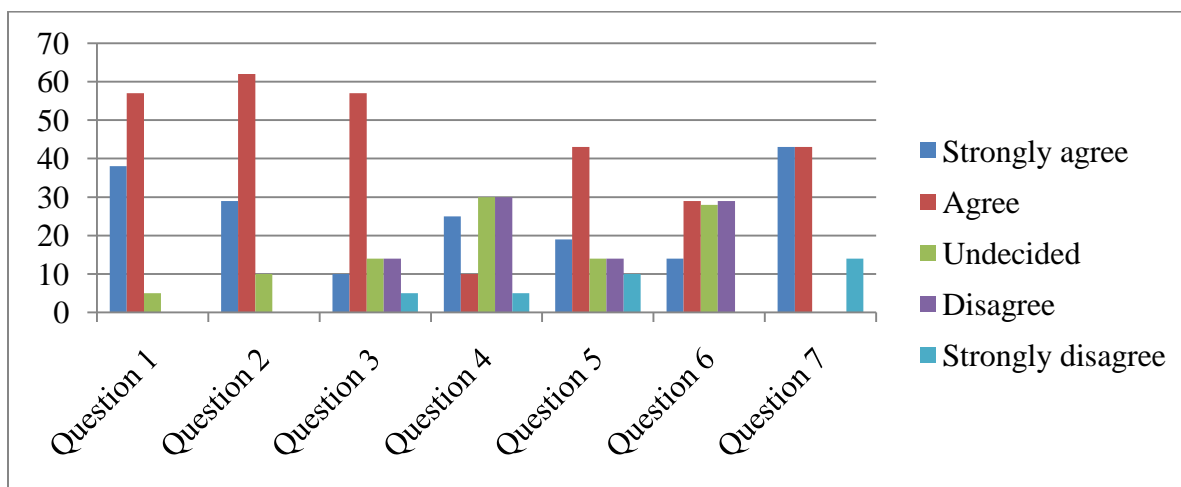
Figure 1.1 Survey Fall 2009



Figure 1.2 Survey Fall 2009 (raw data)

| Survey questions | Strongly agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The research proposal helped me focus on what I wanted to research on for my essay. | **38.1%** | **57.1%** | 4.8% | 0 | 0 |
| 2. The research essay was a good research and writing assignment. | **28.6%** | **61.9%** | 9.5% | 0 | 0 |
| 3. I had difficulty locating secondary sources for my research. | 9.5% | **57.1.%** | 14.3% | 14.3% | 4.8% |
| 4. I found that using the library here on campus was very helpful in locating my secondary sources. | 25% | 10% | **30%** | **30%** | 5% |
| 5. I used the computers and the databases in the campus' library to locate my secondary sources. | 19% | **42.9%** | 14.3% | 14.3% | 9.5% |
| 6. I located and used primary sources such as interviews in my research essay. | 14.3% | **28.6%** | **28%** | **28.6%** | 0 |
| 7. I effectively learned how to integrate quotes into my writing and cite sources. | **42.9%** | **42.9%** | 0 | 0 | 14.3% |

Quantitative data analysis

For question one, "The research proposal helped me focus on what I wanted to research on for my essay," 38% of students strongly agreed and 57% agreed. The research proposal assignment served as a "prewriting" activity for students, an opportunity for them to get their ideas onto paper or screen. The 100-150 word requirement I think helped the students to think more concisely about their research questions. While many of the students only wrote about a page long proposal, it served as a springboard of sorts for their research essays. The second question, "The research essay was a good research and writing assignment," 28.6% of students strongly agreed and 61.9% agreed. Of course, on what scale are the students basing a "good writing assignment" can be asked. The focus on the students' majors/disciplines/future professions/careers might have made them see the assignment in a useful or helpful light.

Question three, "I had difficulty locating secondary sources for my research," 57% of students agreed that they did have difficulty in locating secondary sources. Even though the students had the university library—both physical and electronic databases—they might not have been familiar with using it efficiently or effectively as a resource for finding information. We did cover using the electronic databases for findings texts and finding articles in the online journals (please see *appendices*). Many students either did not feel comfortable or take the time to use them. However, there is a slight contradiction and possible confusion about using the university library and its electronic databases in questions four, "I found that using the library here on campus was very helpful in locating my secondary sources, and five, "I used the computers and the databases in the campus' library to locate my secondary sources." In question four, while 30% disagreed that the using the university library was helpful in finding sources for their research questions, 25% strongly agreed that it was useful. There were 30% of students that were undecided, which alludes back to the assumption that they are not yet familiar or comfortable using them. The 30% of students who are undecided might also be contributed to the fact that they were not use to this kind of assignment.

For question six, "I located and used primary sources such as interviews in my research essay," the numbers reflect a wide range with 28% of students who agreed, who were undecided, and who disagreed. Many of the students used their interviews from writing assignment #two (i.e. the "interview" assignment) as sources in their research essay. However, many students might have felt that the research essay required new primary sources (i.e. interviews) or that the interviews they did for writing assignment #two did not fit into their purposes for their research essay. Finally, in question seven, "I effectively learned how to integrate quotes into my writing and cite sources," 42.9% of students strongly agreed and 42.9% of students agreed. As mentioned earlier, this was the first time that many of the students did an assignment of this nature, so it is difficult to gage what they knew about integrating sources in their writing before taking this course.

Below are the responses from the final question (question eight): "What did you like or not like about the resume and interviews? Please respond below."

*What I liked about this research essay is that I was able to interview some of my friends that are still in High School from different schools who are in different sports and was able to get their input on many points that I wanted to hit. They were able to tell me about their practices and their games and how it all works out. This also opened my eyes about different things that I did not know before about coaching.*

*I liked that once again in my project I had the opportunity to involve other people and get an idea of their personal experience*

*I like it. Very good work Mr.*

*I think we should have practiced more with citing sources.*

*The one thing I did not like about the research assignment was that in my field of interest, teaching, most of the theories that came to it were about teaching the younger students who need more help than the high school students. It was pretty hard to find some research focusing on the older student, but there were some that I did find.*

*The proposal helped me write my paper effectively. The paper practically wrote itself because of the proposal.*

*It was a good assignment that helped me have a better understanding of my topic*
*The research*

*I think that it is a great assignment but it was a little hard to write a lot. It was a great project though.*

*It was hard finding sources sometimes.*

*The amount of excessive time to do the assignment. A month is too much time. It didn't encourage me to use my time wisely and therefore I am barley starting on the essay with only a week and a half left.*

*I liked it because it made me learn more about the facts of my major; this helped me decide what I really want to.*

*I didn't like that it was based on our majors only wish I could have done different kind of research*

*It was interesting and it was nice to be able to pick your own topic. I thought that it was good to go more in depth into what your major/future career will be.*

*What I mostly liked about the research essay in the way it was based on what I want to major in The limitations of sources that the library had to offer were very limited.*

*A lot of sources*

*I liked the fact that we got to chose our topic and base the research essay on our own interests. It helps when you are actually interested in the subject and are learning about something that intrigues you.*

*I thought it was a good assignment.*

Qualitative data analysis

From the responses in question eight, many of the students liked the continuation of the focus on the major/discipline/future profession/career. Many of the students found that they could their interviews from writing assignment # two in their research essay. The comment that there was "too much time" was interesting. I suppose the student was inferring that there was too much time to procrastinate, or possibly the research essay assignment did not have enough "check points," like the interview assignment, along the way. The only "check point" during the assignment was their research proposal, but after that, the students were on their own in finding sources and writing their essays (except for the in-class "workshops").

Many of the responses indicate that many students had difficulty in locating secondary sources for their research; these responses mirror the results in questions three, four, and five. While the students were shown how to use the university library's electronic databases, many of them did not know what keywords to type in order to find sources dealing with their research questions or topic. Three reasons I attribute to the students' difficulty in using the university library's electronic databases in locating secondary sources:

1. Even though students were required to create a research proposal, asking research questions, their questions were general because they were still not familiar with knowledge of their major/discipline/future profession/career
2. Even though many students visited the university library, they sought out texts *directly* dealing with their research questions and/or topic, thereby eliminating texts that could *indirectly* deal with their research questions and/or topics
3. Even though students had plenty of time to locate sources on their research questions and/or topics, they did not use this time effectively, either putting it off to the last minute or "looking once" for possible sources and then giving up and settling for what they found on their first trip to the library or their first trip through their electronic databases

Perhaps more emphasis on having the students develop a plan or "research schedule" in which they have to decide how much time they will devote to locating sources or what kinds of questions they could ask the instructor and/or the librarians in locating sources would help them to more effectively and efficiently use the university library's electronic databases. Another factor that might improve the students' experiences while writing the research essay is to have "check points" along the way, in which, similar to the research proposal, they are required to either turn in drafts or progress reports.

Findings in the students' writing

*The research proposal*

The research proposal was writing assignment # three in the overall assignment sequence for the fall semester. There were six assignments total. The research proposal was meant to act as a bridge from the primary research (i.e. interviews) the students did in writing assignment # two, where the students could further develop any unanswered questions or follow any new ideas to research from their interviews. The students had a week (seven days) to write their research proposals and then post them to their PBWorks' wiki pages.

The basic criteria in the research proposal was that students needed to address the area or topic they wanted to research—dealing specifically with their major/discipline/future profession/career—and to develop a research question/s that they would like to answer by conducting primary and secondary research. While the research proposal assignment was designed into a "pass/fail" kind of assignment, it turned into one. That is not to say if the students just wrote something and turned it in they got an "A," but that those students who did the research proposal did put time and effort into it. Those few students that chose not to do a research proposal received no credit. All of the students who did a research proposal did detail out what they planned to research within their career/discipline/future profession/major. So, it is safe to say those students who did a research proposal helped them with their research focus when it came to developing research questions and narrowing their focus to a certain area or topic.

*The research essay*

The research essay was writing assignment # four in the overall assignment sequence for the fall semester. There were six assignments total. The students were required to research something dealing with their major/discipline/future profession/career. For those students who did a research proposal, they used that as their starting point (a "springboard" of sorts), as well as their interviews from writing assignment # two. As mentioned above in the quantitative and qualitative data analyses sections, many students mostly struggled with locating secondary sources for their research questions and topics. One of the classroom activities (please see *appendices*) did involve instruction on how to effectively and efficiently use the university library's electronic databases. The activity required students to work in groups of three, each playing a role (i.e. researcher, methodologist, and reviewer). The activity also required the students to find a certain kind of source using the university library's databases and then to create a short presentation on how they found that source. The students were given two class periods to complete this activity. Once they were done, they evaluated their groups members as well as themselves (please see *appendices* for peer and self evaluation forms).

Regardless of this activity, as well as constantly being reminded to use the university library's databases, many of the students relied heavily on using the Internet (i.e. search engines such as *Google*) to find secondary sources. In many cases, the same information could be found using *Google Scholar* or *Google Books* that could be found using the databases. Once the students found the sources they planned to use in their research essays, the next step they faced

was incorporating them into their own writing. This aspect of the research process was difficult since many of the students had never done this before. During the course of the research essay assignment, I addressed the issue of integrating sources. As a class, we came up with examples together. However, teaching students how to integrate sources was difficult because it depended on the kind of source each students had as well as how they were planning to use it within their essays. There is no "one-size-fits-all" philosophy when it comes to teaching students how to research and how to best integrate/incorporate sources in their essays. The best way that I have found is by using examples from past student essays and by creating a discussion in the classroom based on the students own examples of using sources and incorporating and integrating quotes within their essays.
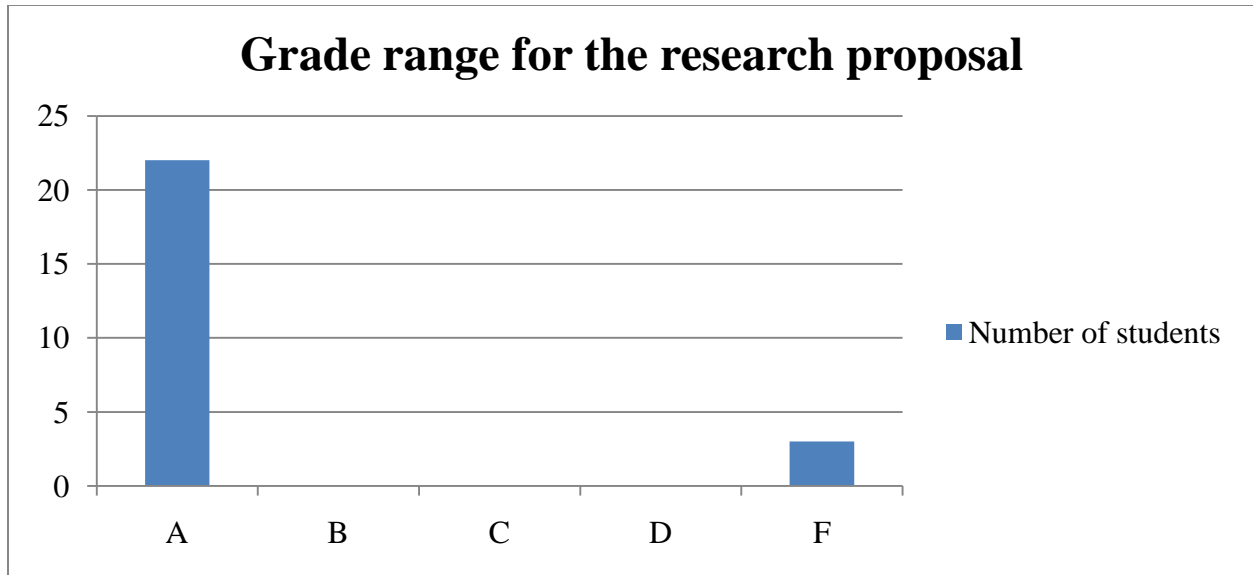
Another challenge for the students was writing in APA style. At the beginning of the research essay assignment, we talked about APA, what it stood for as well as why we should be using that certain style of writing in this class. I showed them the APA section on the *OWL at Purdue Online Writing Resources and Lab* quite a few times and had classroom discussions about writing in APA. For the most part, many of the students followed the convention of APA to some degree in their research essays. Beyond the convention of APA, many students wrote definition-type research essays, dealing with their majors or a topic within their disciplines. We held many "workshop" sessions during the research essay assignment and I also met with individual students to conference about their research process and their writing. About one week before the research essay was due I had the students engage in a peer review session during class time. For the peer review session, I used a combination of guiding questions from a fellow colleague (Frances Johnson from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi).

I had each student pair up with a partner. Many of the students selected someone they knew, but quite a few sought out someone they did not know. There was a wide range of "drafts," some students had a highly detailed outline of their essay while others had almost a full draft. I walked around the classroom while they discussed their essays, seeing if they had any questions about the guiding questions. After one peer read and commented over their draft, I had the students find another peer to read and comment on their drafts. The peer review session lasted the entire class time. The outcome of the peer review was questionable. While it seemed as if students were engaging in the list of guiding questions I gave them (please see *appendices* for the list), most of the responses they gave one another were short "one-liners," such as "good essay!" or "nice job!" A few groups did discuss their essays to some extent, focusing on things such as how to properly cite a source in APA or the question of "what is a good introduction for an APA essay," as well as where the thesis sentence should go in the essay. I have tried various approaches to peer review sessions in the composition classroom but yet none of them seem to have the effects they should have on the students' writing or reading over one another's essays.
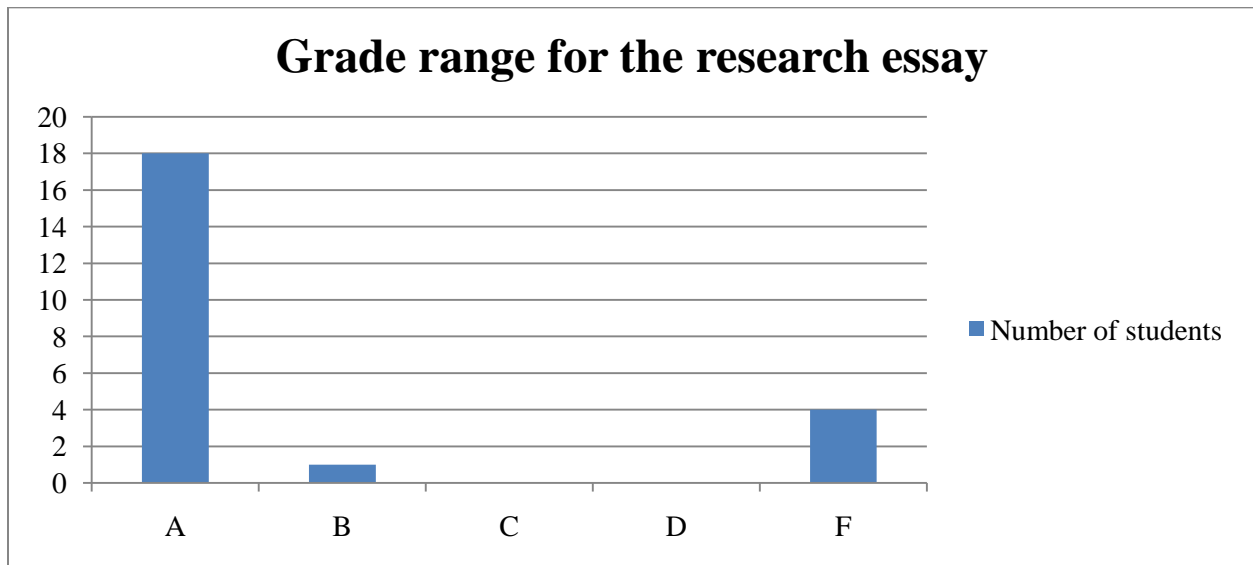
Overall, many of the students' research essays were consistent in their use of sub-headings, font styles and sizes, and how they cited sources. Despite the amount of time we spent discussing APA in class, there were only a handful of students who ended following the "proper" APA style (i.e. citing of sources, reference page, title page, etc.). This lack of adherence to the APA guidelines I contribute to the fact that many of the students had never written anything in this style before. So they were facing a complicated task in a short amount of time, one that also

dealt with somewhat compromising how they have come to know writing to what the assignment was requiring to do, write a research essay in APA style.

Grades for the research proposal

**Grade range for the research proposal**

(Bar chart showing "Number of students" by grade. A = 22, B = 0, C = 0, D = 0, F = 3. Y-axis from 0 to 25.)

Grades for the research essay

**Grade range for the research essay**

(Bar chart showing "Number of students" by grade. A = 18, B = 1, C = 0, D = 0, F = 4. Y-axis from 0 to 20.)

Data analysis of the research proposal and essay assignments

The grades for the research proposal were largely "A's." The three "F's" was due to the fact that those three students did not turn in a research proposal, which means that they received no credit for it. That is not to say that the students that did submit a research proposal automatically received an "A." While the research proposal was somewhat of a "task-based" assignment (i.e. a step in the writing of a research essay), there was still a set of criteria that the students had to meet in order to receive an "A" (please see the *appendices* for the research proposal grading rubric). During the research proposal assignment, we did have a few "workshops," where we discussed what should go into the proposal. One important thing that I would like to point out is that it was during this time many students struggled with their research question(s).

Similar to the research proposal, the grades for the research essays worked out the same way. Those students who engaged in the "workshop" sessions we held in class (i.e. asking questions about APA, about citing sources, building a reference page, or just talking about their research and writing), earned "A's." The one student who earned a "B" did so because she turned her research essay late. The four students who made "F's" did so because they did not turn in a research essay. The grading rubric for the research essay (please *appendices*) did include some "task-based" criteria, such as conferencing with the instructor, providing drafts, and proof of sources. As I mentioned, many of the students showed consistency within their research essays, even if they did not show strict adherence to APA guidelines. Quite a few students also visited the University Writing Center, which added a few points (three points) to their overall grade on their research essay.

Limitations

The major limitation to this study was that it was conducted with only one composition instructor and one group of students. For more accurate results, the study would need to be conducted with multiple composition instructors and multiple sets of students. Another limitation, and a possible continuing limitation, is the grading rubric. The reason that I say this is because I am not sure if there is a "correct" way in which to construct or re-construct the grading rubric for the research essay. I think it will depend on the instructor teaching the research essay and their preferences when it comes to focusing on various elements in the students' research and in their writing.

Conclusion

Based on the results from the survey, many of the students saw the research essay as being useful or helpful in better understanding or learning more about their majors and/or disciplines. However, teaching students how to locate credible sources, ask and develop research questions, and how to write in a convention such as APA, is a challenge no matter what the writing assignment is, be it a research essay, a literature review, a feature story, etc. I think an important element that I learned during this study is that students could benefit from having more "check points," such as a research proposal, along the way when they are in their early research

stages. By having these early check points, students might be able to develop better research questions and figure out earlier on what it is they want to research and write about.

While peer review has its uses in helping students with their writing, with this kind of approach to the research essay (i.e. focusing on majors/disciplines/future professions/careers) group and classroom discussions seemed to benefit the students' research and writing more. I think many times peer review sessions tend to place the writing outside of the context in which it is being written, allowing the reader to bring their own expectations and intentions on what the writing should or should not convey (i.e. writing for a "general audience"). For more general writing assignments and activities peer review might work effectively, but for research and writing that focuses on a certain major or discipline, I think that structuring the classroom around workshops were students can bring their ideas and questions to class to talk about and develop further (i.e. clarity of subject matter, organization) is much more beneficial to their writing.

One aspect of this research proposal and essay assignment that I would like to improve on is the grading rubrics. I do not feel as if they are structured as "pass/fail" assignments, but I do think that they could be slightly improved. I think placing more emphasis on "task-based" elements (i.e. research schedules and plans, drafts, and proof of sources) would benefit the students and their writing.

Appendix A

Fall 2009 Writing Assignment #3 (The Research Proposal) (10% of your grade)

This writing assignment comes before WA 4 (the Research Essay) and essentially is an "introduction" to the research paper.

The proposal writing assignment is meant to help you get a hold or a better understanding of the topic you are researching. **The Research Proposal itself is around 100-150 words** and basically explains these four areas (or more):
- o  What is the purpose of your research? What question(s) are you asking? Why?
- o  Why is this topic important for you to research and write about?
- o  How do you plan to go about researching this topic?
- o  What types of research have you found so far on this topic?

You are also encouraged to share any links, articles, or sources that you have researched about your topic in the research proposal.

This assignment will be due on **October 14, 2009 by 3:00 pm** (electronic submission to your PBWorks' wiki pages wiki pages)

Writing Assignment Breakdown

- •  1 Research Proposal (100-150 words) dealing with your research for your career/profession

Appendix B

Writing Assignment # 3: Research Proposal Grading Rubric

This is a progressive-formative rubric, which means that the requirements to complete the writing assignment below will eventually grow with the following writing assignment that you will put into your portfolio. It does not mean that you have to repeat some of these requirements, but it rather suggests that you see these 6 separate writing assignments as a semester long project. Each check mark indicates that you have engaged in the required tasks in order to complete the assignment. A check mark indicates that you receive full credit.

**Due on: October 14, 2009 by 3:00 pm** (electronic submission to your PBWorks' wiki pages wiki pages)

**GRADING SCALE**

8 check marks = 98: A, 7-6 check marks = 89: B, 5-4 check marks = 79: C, 3 check marks = 69: D; 2-0 check marks = F.

**Name:**_____

- Is your research proposal and abstract relatively free of non-standard academic uses of English? Are deviations of style/usage appropriate and effective?_____
- Is there a logical flow to your ideas?_____
- Does your research proposal incorporate/explore/develop multiple perspectives from your initial research in detail?_____
- Are they any biases?_____
- Does the research proposal identify the writer's own perspective in detail?_____
- Does the writer exhibit appropriate appeals and an awareness of audience, purpose, and context?_____
- You have proof (i.e. list of sources, working bibliography) that you have been "reading around" about your discipline/area of interest _____
- Is the research proposal between 100-150 words_____

Total Grade: _____

Appendix C

Fall 2009 Writing Assignment #4 (The Research Essay) (20% of your grade)

In this essay, you will need to locate at least 10 credible sources that specially deal with your content or subject (i.e. public school teaching, public accounting, nursing, etc.). This document will require you to cite secondary sources, integrate and synthesize secondary sources into your own writing, and construct a reference page (electronic submissions to your wiki pages). **You may work in groups of no more than 2 for this assignment.**

This assignment will be due on **November 18, 2009 by 3:00 pm** (uploaded to your student PBWorks' Wiki Page)

Writing Assignment Breakdown
- 1 research essay, with 10 credible sources (primary & secondary) in APA format

Appendix D

Writing Assignment #4: The Research Paper Grading Rubric

This is a progressive-formative rubric, which means that the requirements to complete the writing assignment below will eventually grow with the following writing assignment that you will put into your portfolio. It does not mean that you have to repeat some of these requirements, but it rather suggests that you see these 6 separate writing assignments as a semester long project. Each check mark indicates that you have engaged in the required tasks in order to complete the assignment. A check mark indicates that you receive full credit.

**Due on: November 23, 2009 by 3:00 pm** (uploaded to your student PBWorks' Wiki Page)

**GRADING SCALE**
18-16 check marks = 98: A, 15-13 check marks = 89: B, 12-9 check marks = 79: C, 8-6 check marks = 69: D; 5-0 check marks = F.

**Name(s):**_____

- Is your paper relatively free of non-standard academic uses of English? Are deviations of style/usage appropriate and effective? _____
- Is there a logical flow to your ideas? _____
- Is each paragraph unified? _____
- Are there effective transitions between your paragraphs? _____
- Integration of multiple sources (i.e. primary and secondary) within writing_____
- Conferencing with instructor (composition)_____
- Does the essay incorporate/explore/develop multiple perspectives in detail? Any biases? _____
- Does the essay identify the writer's own perspective in detail?_____
- Does the writer exhibit appropriate appeals and an awareness of audience, purpose, and context? _____
- Does the introduction encourage the reader to read the essay? _____
- Does the essay demonstrate both critical and reflective capabilities in self-analysis of sources and multiple perspectives? _____
- You stayed in contact with your instructor (composition) during the construction of WA#4 as well as the necessary documentation to prove it (i.e. emails, plans, class meetings/discussions, individual conferences) _____
- You have proof (i.e. list of sources, working bibliography) that you have been "reading around" about your discipline/area of interest _____
- You have proof that a peer has read over a draft of your essay (i.e. written comments, questions) _____
- You have proof of any rough drafts, as well as a final essay, that shows both primary and secondary sources (if any) properly cited_____

- If working with a partner on this project, the team has shown a collaborative effort in learning and writing of the essay (i.e. planning, dividing up of tasks, separate written sections, separate rough drafts, peer revision within the team as well as editing) _____
- If you have conducted additional interviews dealing with your topic, please provide any notes you have taken _____
- You have shown that you have fully reflected on your primary and secondary research in order to effectively give a classroom presentation _____

Total Grade: _____

Appendix E

Activity: Using the University Library's Electronic Databases

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Purpose: To introduce students to the university library's electronic databases as well as help them develop a method of using those databases

- ➤ The goal of this activity is to teach students how to develop a method of using the university library's electronic databases when searching for a source and present it

- ➤ The objective of this activity is to have students collaboratively develop a presentation that explains their method of using the university's databases when searching for a source

- ➤ The outcome of this activity is that students will understand various methods of finding different types of sources using the university library's electronic databases

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**Part 1**:

Step 1: Please get into teams of 3(one team will have 4 members) NOTE: If we are at unequal numbers, then we will adjust

Step 2: Each team member will have a role to play:
- Researcher – This is the person who will be using the computer to search
- Methodologist – This is the person who will be documenting the steps that the team took in order to find their source (i.e. the *what*, *how*, and *why* your team is doing in order to find this source)
- Reviewer – This is the person who helps with the search and then checks the Methodologist's work

Step 3: Once you are in your team, please open get on UTEP's main homepage and locate the link to the university's library

Step 4: Go to Nugget – Library Catalogue (website address: http://lib.utep.edu/)

Step 5: Team instructions:
- This team will find a book (dealing with engineering, health sciences, or education)

**Part 2**:

<u>Step 6</u>: Create a short presentation to present how your team went about finding your sources (use PowerPoint, MS Word, interpretative dance, etc.) to create your presentation

<u>Presentation requirements</u>

In your presentation, your audience needs to know:
- Your names and your role in your team
- The type of source you located
- Your methodology for finding that source (*what* did your team do, *how* did you do it, and *why*)
- Challenges/things you learned
- Allow questions from the audience

Appendix F

Self & Peer Evaluation Form (for Activity)

Name:_____

You will need to fill out an evaluation on each one of your group members as well as yourself. Below are the criteria and the scale you will use for evaluation.

1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = fair, 4 = good, 5 = excellent

Communication: ____
Collaboration: ____
Overall contribution to the project: ____
Comments:

Appendix G

(List of questions adopted and slightly adapted from Frances Johnson, TAMU-CC)

1. Read over the entire draft first.

First set of questions:

1. Is there a research question(s)? How is the research question(s) addressed in the essay?
2. Is there a thesis? Does there need to be one?
3. Is the thesis clear and well written so that it strongly asserts a focusing idea? Can you "echo" it back to the writer to show you understand the direction of the essay? Then, what can you suggest to narrow the thesis that may make it more specific and interesting
4. Can you see the logic of how ideas in the draft progress to the conclusion? Do you see how the conclusion advances the thesis into the essay's whole idea? Has the writer avoided merely restating a thesis as a conclusion?
5. What about the essay did you find most worthwhile knowing? Can you use your enthusiasm for some of the essay's ideas to encourage the writer to develop more thinking?
6. Are the sources in the paper integrated smoothly into the writer's ideas? Can you suggest or imagine other sources?

Second set of questions:

1. As the essay's audience, can you point to a place in the essay where you became confused or where the writer might analyze ideas more carefully?
2. Can you suggest new ways for the writer to frame or support his or her ideas? Can you think of additional points, insights and specific details that could add interesting thinking or better guide other readers?
3. What did you find least effective about the essay? Explain specifically why you think something isn't working.
4. Has the writer followed standard formatting? Can you point out some problems with grammar, punctuation, titles, and/or spelling? Has the writer followed APA style of documentation?
5. How near to completion is this draft? What steps should the author take to complete this assignment? Be specific and helpful by listing the three most important steps the author should take:
   a.
   b.
   c.