6-4-2018

Teaching teachers to teach writing, critical thinking, and information literacy: A case study of a faculty learning community as a campus-wide pedagogical intervention strategy

Christine Bachen
Santa Clara University, cbachen@scu.edu

Nicole Branch
Santa Clara University, nbranch@scu.edu

Laura Doyle
Santa Clara University, ldoyle@scu.edu

Tricia Serviss

Julia Voss
Santa Clara University, jvoss@scu.edu

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Teaching Teachers to Teach Writing, Critical Thinking, and Information Literacy

Case Study of a Faculty Learning Community as Campus-wide Pedagogical Intervention Strategy

Christine Bachen, Nicole Branch, Laura Doyle, Tricia Serviss, & Julia Voss

Transdisciplinary team

Laura, lecturer in civil engineering

Nicole, head of library instruction & assessment

Diana, lecturer in political science

Julia, assistant professor of writing studies

Chris, associate professor of communication & director of assessment

Denise, writing center director & lecturer in writing

Trish, assistant professor of writing studies

Introductions

What drew you to this session?

What do you hope to take away?

Institutional context about Santa Clara University

"The Jesuit University in Silicon Valley"

- 5438 Undergraduate Students
- 3130 Graduate Students
- Faculty: 556 (full-time), 360 (part-time)

Robust Core Curriculum

What got things started?

Series of disconnects about critical thinking, writing, and information literacy

➔ Students' perceptions of and claims about abilities
➔ Direct assessment of student work
➔ Faculty's perceptions about students' proficiency

Students' self-reports of writing

First years

54% prepare 2 or more drafts

77.1 pages produced (sd = 55.4)

78% agree SCU contributed to their writing development

Seniors

38% prepare 2 or more drafts

117.5 pages produced (sd = 86.9)

83% think SCU contributed to writing development

Source: National Survey of Student Engagement 2015

Direct assessments of students' writing skills

SCU 2015 pilot writing assessment
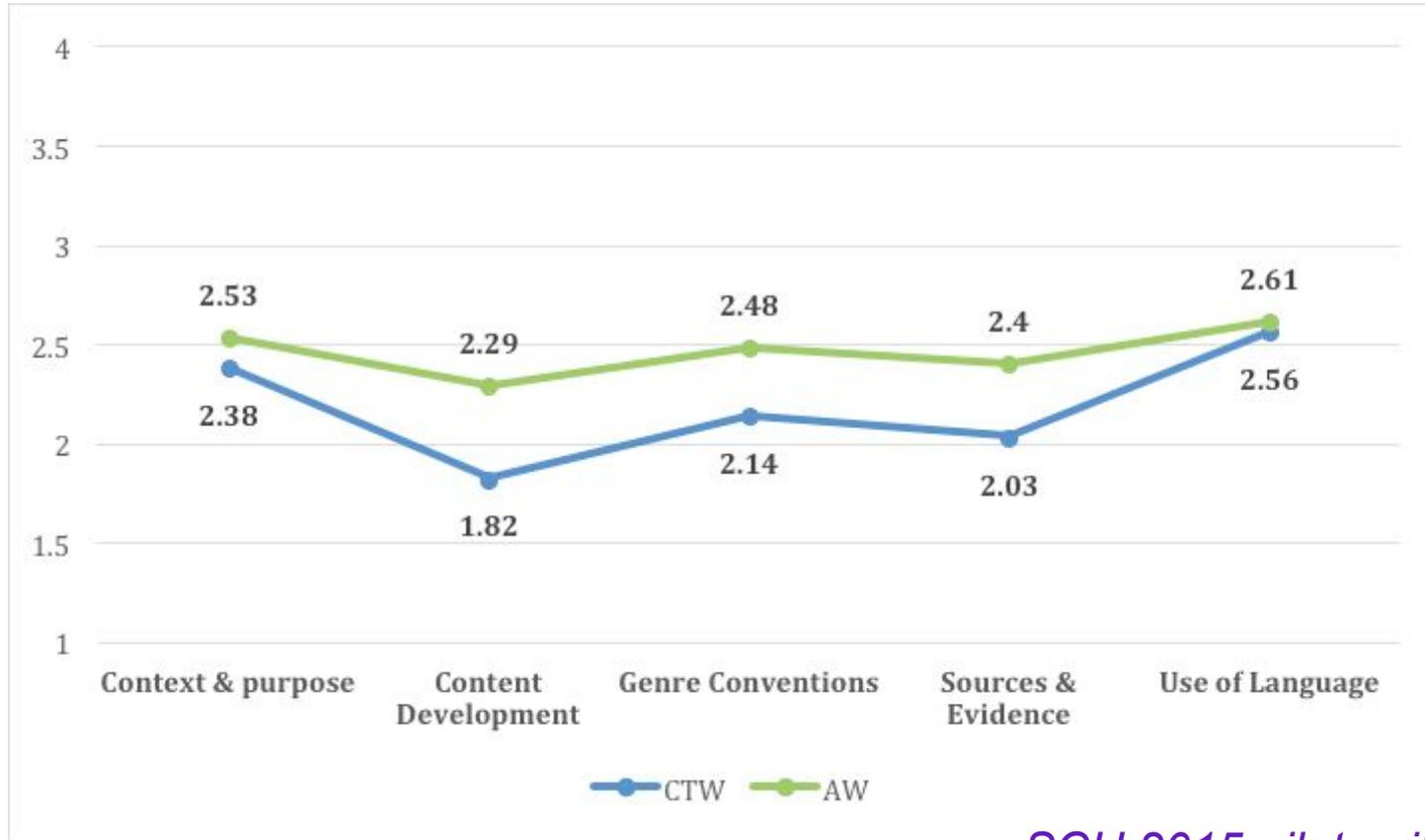
Info literacy from the faculty perspective

70% of faculty agree that improving their students' research skills related to locating and evaluating scholarly information is an important educational goal

49% of faculty agree that their students have *poor* skills locating and evaluating scholarly information

The Opportunity: Develop a two-year project to improve student outcomes

Teaching and Learning National Institute

Evergreen College, Olympia, WA

Summer 2016

The Student Writing and Research Learning Initiative (SWiRL)

➢ cross-disciplinary support for writing and research instruction for students

➢ resources for writing and information literacy instruction in writing-intensive courses, particularly for faculty without formal training in the teaching of writing and information literacy

# SWiRL Initiative Timeline
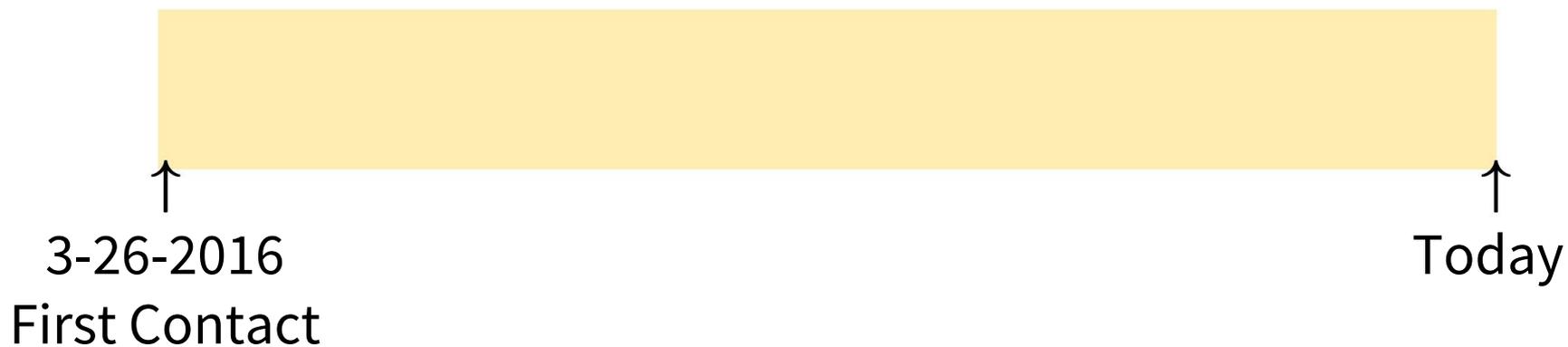
3-26-2016
First Contact

Today

SWiRL Initiative Timeline

July 2016

SWIRL Team Meetings

SWiRL Initiative Timeline

July 2016

● SWIRL Team Meetings

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July 2016

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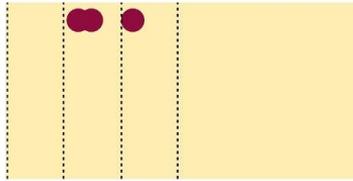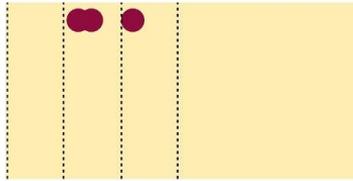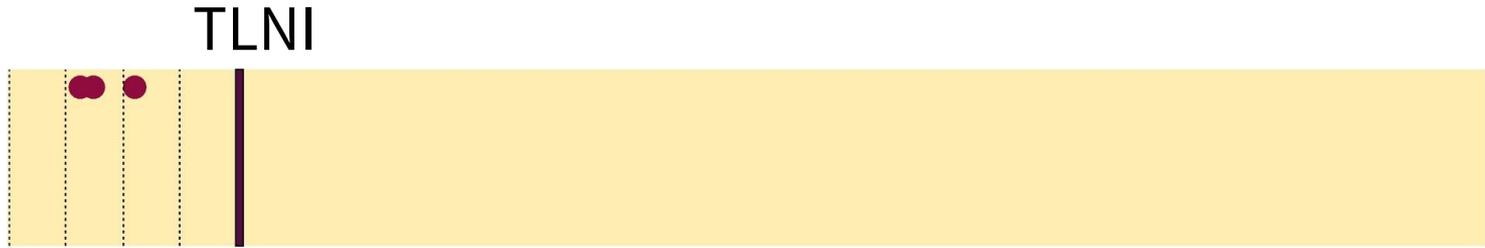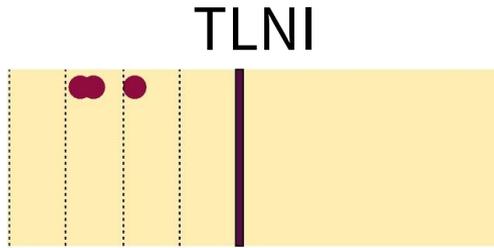
Initiative for Student Writing and Research Learning (iSWRL)

Project develope...
July 31-August 4.

Team members:
Branch (Library),
Morlang (Politica...

I.   PROJ...

Brief Description

We will form an ...
disciplinary supp...
write very well, b...
assessment of st...
that their conten...
Written Commun...
well and are not ...

This project will p...
courses, particula...
literacy. Addition...
excellence goals ...
instruction ought ...

Full Description

SCU is interested ...
literacy, and with...
competencies. W...
and based on the ...
more to improve ...

We offer two cou...
Additionally, we ...
taken in their jun...
on disciplinary wr...
increase, as most ...
valuable preparat...
communication, ...

PART THREE: TIMELINE

YEAR ONE (2016-2017)
Phase one (Fall 16):
1) Create case by gathering and analyzing data. This includes setting up communication avenues, designing schedules, planning focus group (questions, group composition, timing, goals, etc.) that will take place in the winter quarter.
   a) We have baseline data including samples from CTW, AW, and disciplinary writing (through multi-state writing study).
2) Identify stakeholders from past faculty development.
3) Plan focus groups for winter.
4) Develop digital surveys that parallel f2f focus groups.
5) Share year one calendar of events with community. Communicate it out to community.
      End of fall quarter: LAUNCH initiative!

Phase two (Winter 17):
1) Facilitate three focus groups that would:
a.   establish common language,
b.   solicit different strategies for teaching information literacy and writing,
c.   identifying and empowering different kind of teachers/teaching across disciplines,
d.   identifying research-based practices that we can then promote.
2) Facilitate 3 student focus groups that would ask them to describe
   a.   Their understanding of critical thinking, writing, information literacy as terms/concepts
   b.   What effective strategies they have been taught and/or use to perform critical thinking, writing, and information literacy
   c.   Identify which classes they've taken that have included substantial critical thinking, writing, and information experiences

Phase three (Spring 17):
1)   Draft documents that form a resource bank/archive.
2)   Plan year 2 workshops (call workshops **TUNE-UPS!**)
3)   Identify ten key/committed people for faculty development activities.
4)   Develop ongoing outreach strategies that addresses how to distribute information, how to keep communication going, develop multiple teams.

Phase four A (Summer 17):
1)   Use year one learning to develop assessment mechanisms like information literacy and effective written communication rubrics.
2)   Form a dossier of rubric-like materials useful to start conversations with wider group.
3)   Solicit sample rubrics from peer institutions/listservs.
4)   Pursue questions like: what level of work would we hope to get from our students upon graduation?

Phase four B (end of Summer 17):
1) Share some support for research-based writing instruction with new faculty at orientation.

SWIRL Team Meetings
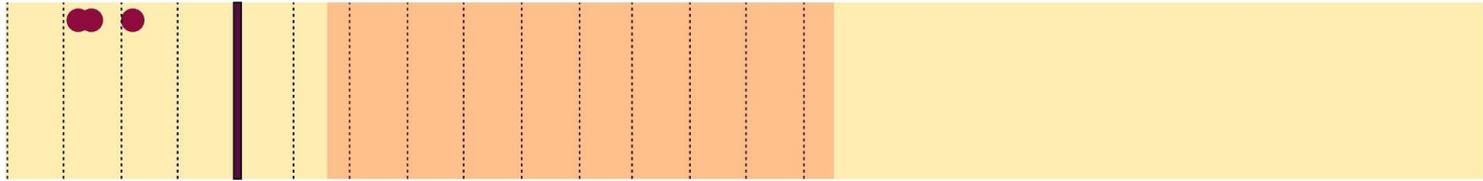
SWiRL Initiative Timeline

2016 - 2017:
Data Assessment Phase

SWIRL Team Meetings

SWiRL Initiative Timeline

2016 - 2017:
Data Assessment Phase

● SWIRL Team Meetings

SWiRL Initiative Timeline

2016 - 2017:
Data Assessment Phase

First Year Writing
Pre- and Post- Surveys

SWIRL Team Meetings

SWiRL Initiative Timeline

2016 - 2017:
Data Assessment Phase

First Year Writing
Pre- and Post- Surveys

NSSE Writing Module to
first year and senior
students

● SWIRL Team Meetings

SWiRL Initiative Timeline

2016 - 2017:
Assessment Phase

11-4-16: Meeting with
administration

SWIRL Team Meetings

SWiRL Initiative Timeline

2016 - 2017:
Assessment Phase
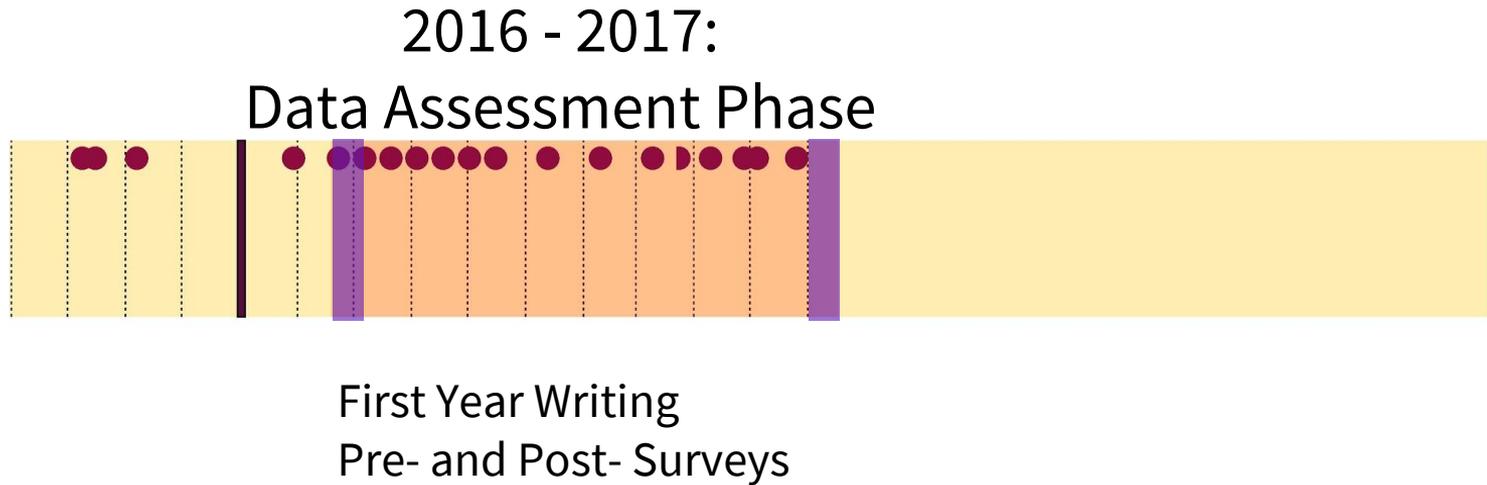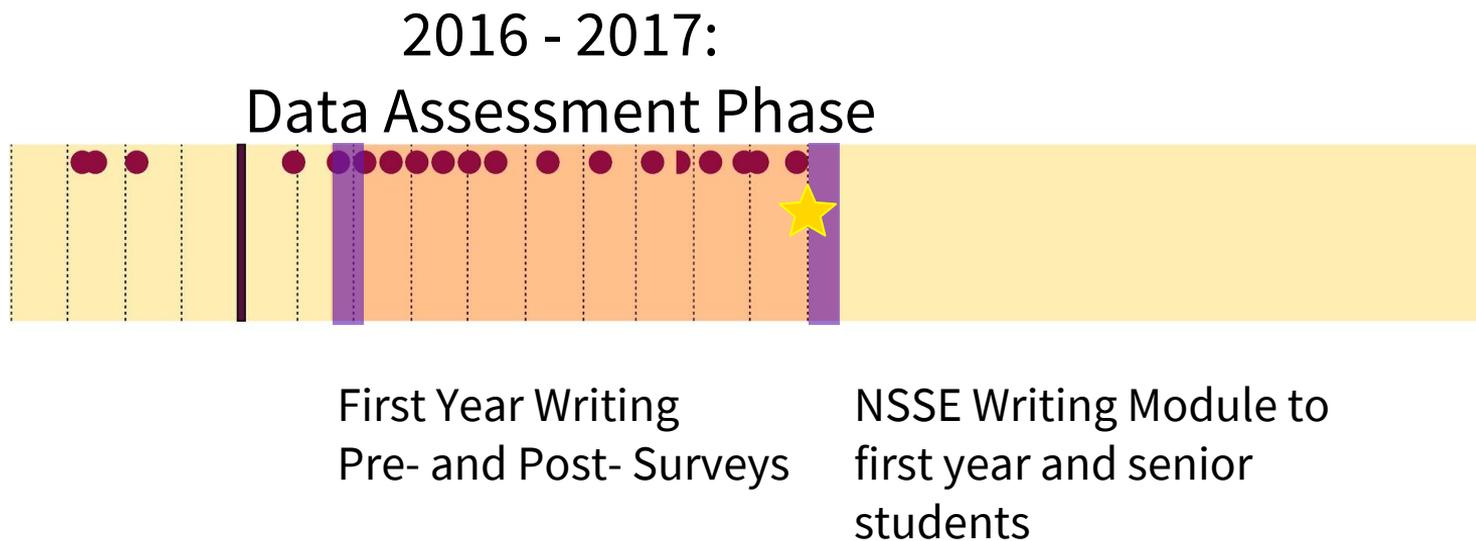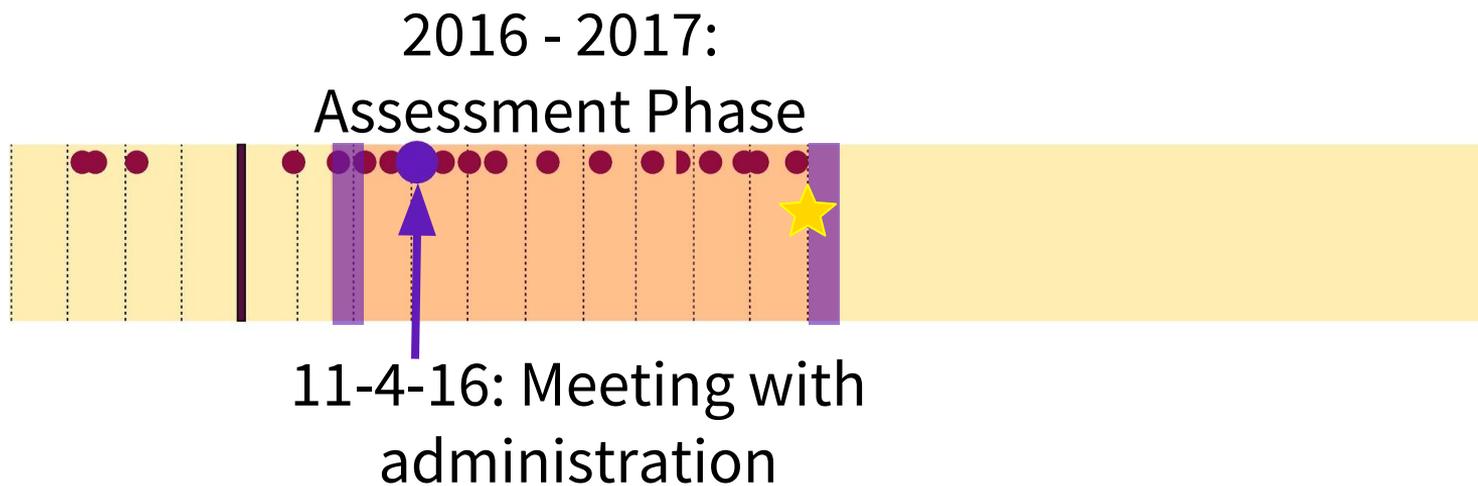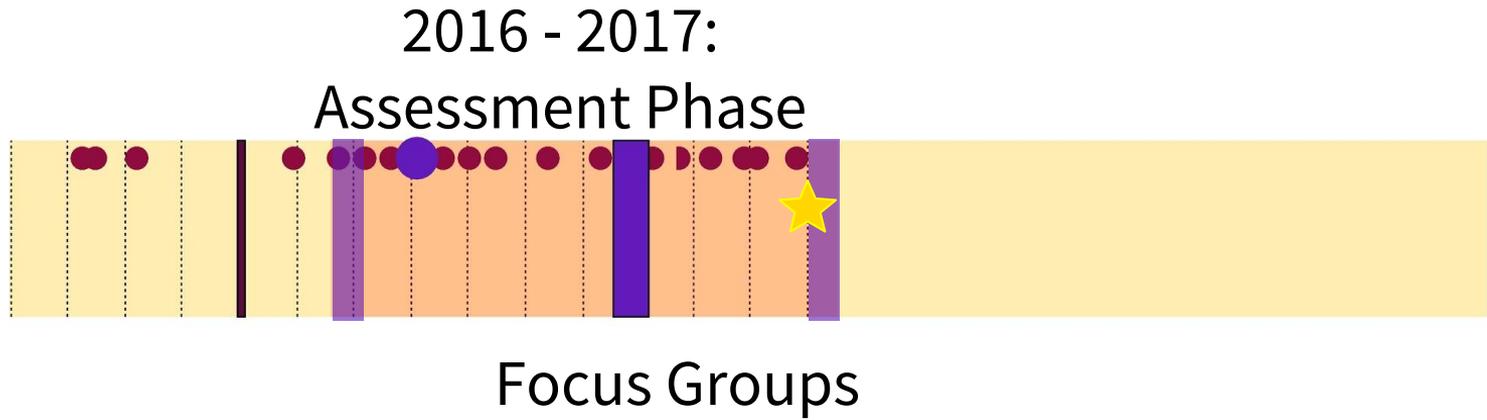
Focus Groups

● SWIRL Team Meetings

Excerpts from student focus groups
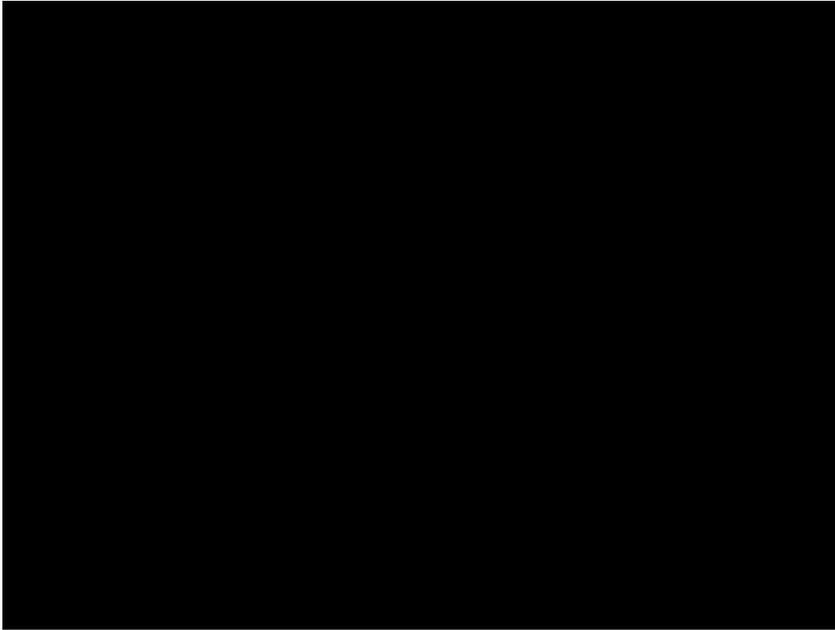
Excerpts from faculty focus groups
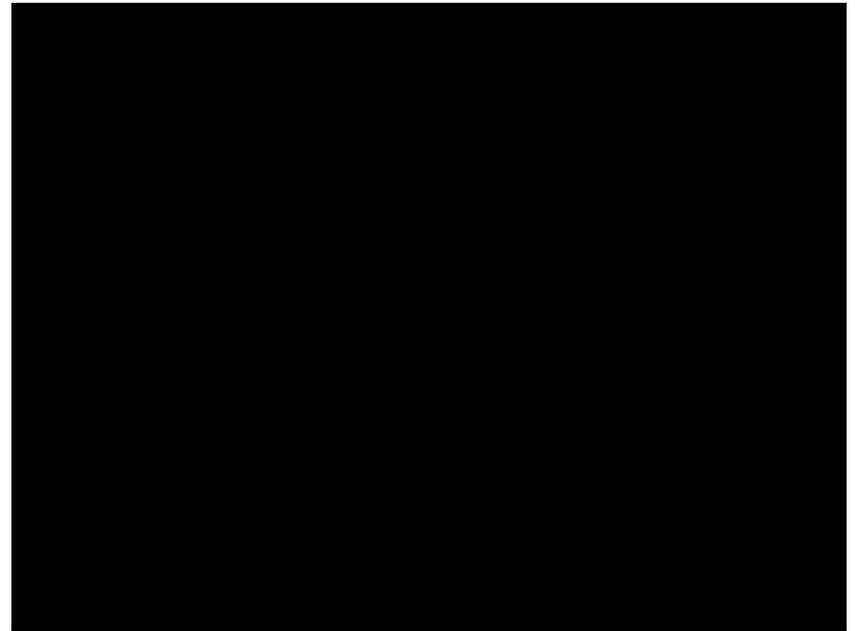
Key takeaways from focus groups

Students

➢ First-year writing course offers only meaningful writing instruction at SCU.
➢ Uncertain about cross-disciplinary writing expectations and how to translate terminology

Faculty

➢ Perceive deficits in student disciplinary writing
➢ Identify additional frustrations with students' critical thinking, research skills, ability to synthesize information

Both groups crave dialogue and opportunities to bridge gaps

FLC Action Plan

1. Think beyond first-year writing courses. FYW can't teach students everything they need to know about writing.

2. Support disciplinary faculty who assign/assess writing and research; help them to teach writing in the context of information literacy and critical thinking as well as assign/assess.

3. Create sustainable faculty development initiative in pursuit of SWiRL (student writing and research learning)

SWiRL Initiative Timeline

2016 - 2017:
Assessment Phase

4-27-17: University
Grant Awarded
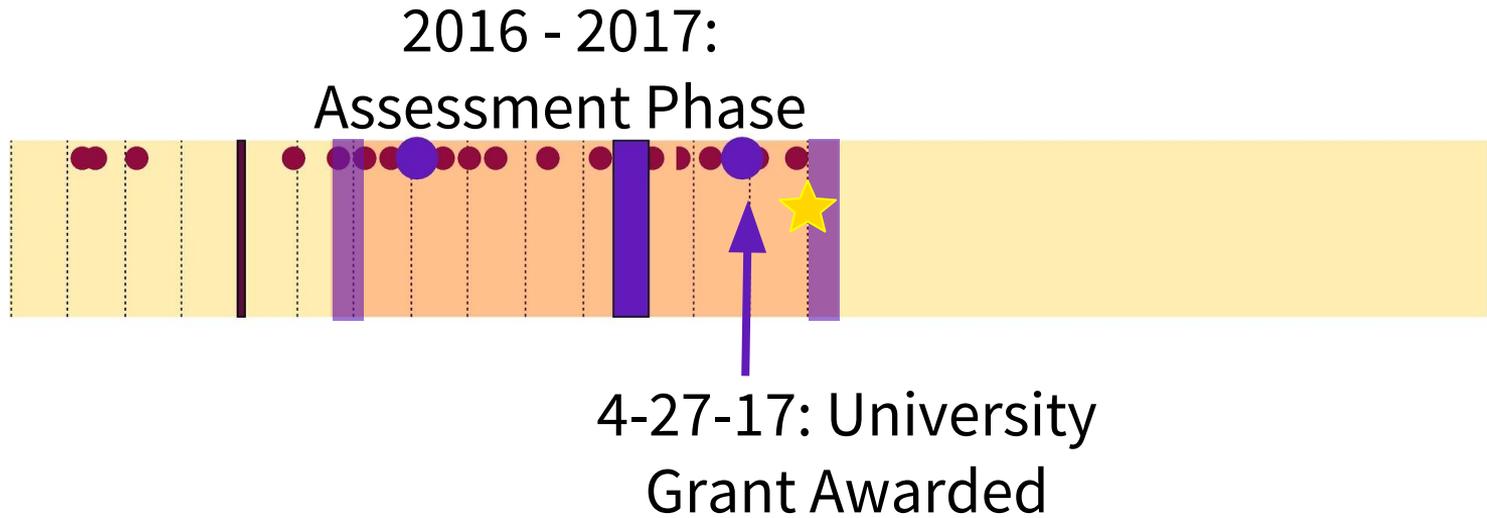
SWIRL Team Meetings

SWiRL Initiative Timeline
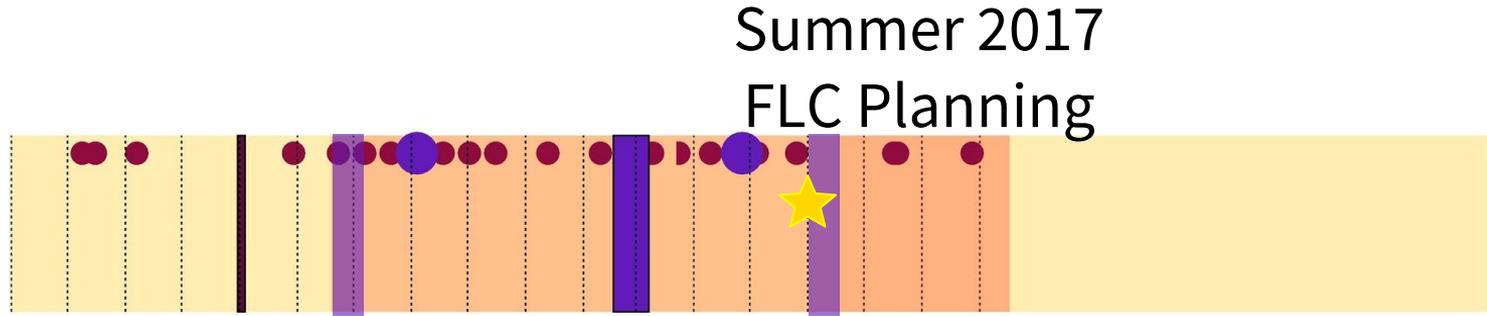
Summer 2017
FLC Planning

SWIRL Team Meetings

Frameworks informing the SWiRL FLC

New Information Literacy Framework

Authority is Constructed and Contextual

Information Creation as a Process

Information Has Value

Research as Inquiry

Scholarship as Conversation

Searching as Strategic Exploration

Writing Frameworks

Practicing habits of mind (curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, metacognition)

Developing rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking, writing processes, knowledge of conventions, abilities to compose in multiple environments

Learning drives scaffolding & assessment of writing

Engaging threshold concepts related to disciplinary writing improves student learning

Transparent Assignment Design

Mary-Ann Winkhelmes,
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Purpose: *Provide clear learning objectives; help students recognize how the assignment benefits their learning*

Task: *State the activities the student should do/perform; provide the steps, guidelines, or a recommended sequence for the students' efforts*

Criteria for Success: *Describe the characteristics of the finished product. How does excellent work differ from adequate work?*

SWiRL's Guiding Principles

Equitable curricular design must make explicit the intersections of critical thinking, writing, and information literacy.

Learners--actual, not just imagined learners--and learning matter most.

Scaffolding learning through evidence-based practices is prioritized.

Writing and information literacy are grounded in critical practice.

Curricular and pedagogical development should be iterative.

SWiRL Faculty Learning Community (2017-18)

SWiRL Initiative Timeline

2017 - 2018
FLC Pilot

● SWIRL Team Meetings   ▲ FLC Meetings

SWiRL Faculty Learning Community

Goals

➢ Support writing in the disciplines/genre-specific writing

➢ Enhance assessment, grading & feedback

➢ Address differentiated learning/instruction

➢ Improve assignment design, including sequencing/scaffolding

➢ Communicate clear expectations to students

➢ Build community

➢ Become resources for own departments

Participants

➢ 12 Lecturers and Tenure-stream Faculty from 11 disciplines

FLC Topics

Fall Sessions	Winter Sessions	Spring Sessions
1. Introduction and grounding frameworks for writing, info literacy, and critical thinking 2. Scholarship of teaching and learning 3. Designing, teaching, and assessing writing 4. Disciplinary discourse and critical information literacy 5. Writing and information literacy, within a critical thinking framework	1. Course-level inventory: How do our courses overall reflect writing, information literacy, and critical thinking? 2. Transparent assignment design and charrette process 3. Charretting assignments and rubric discussion 4. Threshold Concepts in writing 5. Rubrics	1. Giving more attention to writing and research skills in assignments and rubrics 2. Developing learning activities to support learning goals of assignments 3. Sharing and reflection: Evolution of pedagogy, assignments, and rubrics over the course of the FLC

Faculty Work

Readings & discussion

Analytic writing, assignment and course audits

Work on own assignments & courses

In-session small group work: feedback, application of principles

Feedback on FLC

ACTIVITY: You try!

Before/After analysis of assignments: Criteria

❏ Transparent assignment design:
  ❏ Purpose
  ❏ Task
  ❏ Evaluation Criteria
❏ Writing
❏ Critical Thinking
❏ Information Literacy

Hands-on assignment analysis activity

Imagine you are a student receiving this assignment. Which version would better help you complete this assignment successfully? Why?

Consider our criteria (below), or your own.

- ❏ Transparent design: Purpose, Task, Evaluation Criteria
- ❏ Writing
- ❏ Critical thinking
- ❏ Information Literacy

What are your observations?

1) Mini-proposal: affect guiding design of assignment
2) The task needs to be upfront; task is buried. Assignments get longer and longer--how to help students access the task?
   a) Media: Print vs digital delivery?
   b) Short first page (ala executive summary)
3) Detailed assignments help students to get better collaborative help (in writing centers, etc.)
4) Make the genre of an assignment explicit
5) Visual accessibility matters--font decisions and sizes. (Document design matters)
6) "Instructor use only" is the criteria.
7) A lot depends upon how the assignment is enmeshed in the course; context matters.
8) Suggestion: have students give revision feedback to assignments & resubmitted to faculty for revision.
9) Purpose energizes students (or maybe turns them off).
0) To what extent should communication be a goal of the writing assignments?
1) Lines up with "Quality Matters" tools used in online instruction.

Our preliminary findings on FLC impact

Transparency and Critical Thinking

Transparency

	Before	After
Purpose	33%	92%
Tasks	58%	100%
Success Criteria	17%	75%

Critical Thinking

	Before	After
Purpose involves CT	33%	75%
Criteria for evaluating quality of CT	25%	67%

Writing & Information Literacy

Writing

	Before	After
Specifies context/ rhetorical situation	25%	58%
Scaffolds writing process	50%	75%
Evaluation criteria reflect rhetorical situation	0%	33%

Information Literacy

	Before	After
Describes sources important for assignment purpose	25%	42%
Ethical use of info (accurate, in context, documentation)	25%	42%
Evaluation criteria reflect use of sources	17%	25%

Evaluating the SWiRL FLC Pilot

What have we learned so far?

Things to keep:

Value of cross-curricular community of faculty who learn from each other

Large leadership team allows for productive 1-on-small group face-to-face feedback & sustainable, distributed labor

Generate excitement via introducing conceptual frameworks about writing, info literacy, critical thinking

Things to change:

Less demanding time commitment

Close the gap between conceptual learning and application opportunities (especially to own teaching materials)

Provide more opportunities for application activities (frequency, reiteration, & infrastructure)

Draw more explicit focus on developing shared language/knowledge around writing & information literacy

Did we meet our goals?

➢ Support writing in the disciplines/genre-specific writing

➢ Improve assignment design, including sequencing/scaffolding

➢ Communicate clear expectations to students

➢ Enhance assessment, grading, & feedback

➢ Build community

SWiRL Initiative

Did we meet our goals?

➢ Support writing in the disciplines/genre-specific writing
➢ Improve assignment design, including sequencing/scaffolding
➢ Communicate clear expectations to students
➢ Enhance assessment, grading, & feedback
➢ Build community

➢ Become resources for own departments
➢ Address differentiated learning/instruction

SWiRL
Initiative

Looking ahead to next year

1. Create our own resources to assist faculty in making concrete changes to improve discipline-based writing and research

2. Run 2 quarter-long FLCs, not year-long FLC

3. Offer sessions on writing and info literacy as part of regular faculty development programs

4. Involve this year's FLC participants in next year's activities

5. Keep assessing

SWiRL Initiative

Questions, conversation, gratitude

Contact info:

Christine Bachen (cbachen@scu.edu)

Nicole Branch (nbranch@scu.edu)

Laura Doyle (ldoyle@scu.edu)

Trish Serviss (pcserviss@ucdavis.edu)

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