Overall, I would rate my FIQWS experience as (24 responses)

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How successful was your collaboration with your topic instructor on assignments? (24 responses)
What suggestions do you have to make collaboration more successful?
(19 responses)

This answer really goes for the next question as well. The problem is it's so contingent on whether the topic instructor feels it's important to communicate and collaborate with the writing instructor. I would imagine in most cases no "policing" is required, that professionals will simply act the part. In my case the other professor had a general lack of professionalism and was a lazy and ineffective teacher. Perhaps it would be wise to have a department wide mandatory meeting before the semester in which the instructors can meet, and it is made more clear that collaboration in a FIQWS course is not to be considered a burden but rather an essential part of the job.

Discuss the division of work, shared responsibilities, especially with formal assignments, communication, show a united front

Assignments must be created together. Can't recycle assignments from previous semesters without review by comp instructor.

Better clarification for topic instructors on what the goals/outcomes are for the writing component. How can the assignment sequence be more holistically integrated into the arc of the semester.

Knowing the schedule of assignments in both sections, i.e., where critical assignments overlap, and which assignments are better served by closer collaboration. In my experience, and I achieved greater success with our students because we never prioritized our individual assignments over our partner’s.

My most recent experience with FIQWS was very positive and that was largely due to sharing assignments, handouts, etc. via Google docs. Collaboration doesn't need to mean setting up a face-to-face meeting. Sending an e-mail, sharing documents helps lower the stress of collaborating immensely.

Hold the topic instructors far more accountable for shouldering their load of the work.

The assignments were given to me and the topic section teachers by the head of the program. There was no opportunity for me or topic instructor to weigh in on the required writing elements. I only actually created one graded assignment for my class and it was with no input from topic section. It wasn't a graded assignment for topic section.

Developing more integrated assignments across both classes

Have the topic instructor be a committed mentor for adjuncts to develop.

Content instructors should be required to submit syllabi including topic-driven writing assignments as part of the application process to teach a FIQWS course. They should be given some general guidelines in terms of designing writing assignments for the application. The guidelines would share some elements of the guidelines we were given at the orientation and a number of changes which I am happy to recommend in person (in a nutshell, less genres and less pages so that composition
instructors can give more detailed feedback and students have more opportunity for meaningful revision).

Only content instructors whose syllabi and writing assignments meet the guidelines should be selected to teach FIQWS courses. Those selected should then be paired with a composition instructor whose role is prepare students to successfully complete the content instructors writing assignments. This would improve collaboration by making the success of FIQWS far less dependent on it. In other words, let the content professor and composition instructors do what they do best within the confines of a syllabi and content writing assignment that have been vetted upfront to ensure that they actually make sense for a FIQWS course.

More time and incentive to work on lesson planning between semesters; making sure both topic and writing instructor use the same form of communication with students (cc'ing each other on emails with students); weekly "required" meetings (not necessarily in person); making sure that the topic is something the writing instructor is comfortable with/knows at least the basics about before teaching students how to write about it (taking the time to discuss the topic in-depth before the semester begins--this way, the instruction about the basics of academic writing fits more easily into topics that quickly/often get complex. If comprehension isn't there, the writing won't be at the level the student/instructor intends, makes crafting thesis statements and other crucial parts of essays much more difficult for the student to write and the instructor to edit)

Also providing writing instructors with some authority would be essential

I have taught both as a topic instructor and as a composition instructor, and I think the course would greatly benefit if the instructors could collaborate on designing the writing assignments. I think it would also be helpful if a professor with a great deal of experience designing assignments could teach a workshop prior to the beginning of the semester.

Standard essays. The readings should be more accurately tailored to allow for critical analysis across the board, regardless of the topic. It's difficult for say, American Musical Theatre, to design essays around musicals in which the writing instructor has unlikely ever read or seen. It leaves the writing instructor at a severe disadvantage, scurrying to keep up.

I think that this question is a little difficult to answer because we didn't collaborate on specific assignments but were very good at working on prioritizing skills that should be achieved for each assignments.

Continue to emphasize that composition comes with its own requirements and that students need time to revise and to learn the craft. This includes the content person realizing that each composition teacher approaches the teaching of composition somewhat differently, within the requirements of CCNY composition.

Multiple sessions over break to create essay assignments

It can be difficult to inspire collaboration because so many academics prefer to work in a research individualistic mode. However, there are many advantages to collaborating with other committed instructors. Collaboration often helps one discover different aspects of student issues and successes.

In general, I would rate the communication with my topic instructor as

(24 responses)
What suggestions do you have for improving communication between instructors?
(20 responses)

Pay us to meet with each other at mandatory meetings.

See above...

Make a time weekly to talk, whether it be via email, phone, or in person

Weekly or bi-weekly face to face time. Joint office hours?

Unfortunately I don't think there is one catch-all solution. Some pairs meet in person, some via email. Email seems to work fine, once the syllabus and assignments are laid out. (That said, it's also unfair to rest the burden of success for the class solely on the instructors, many of whom are adjuncts and have other responsibilities or employment. It's like, "here's this fragile, often unwieldy vessel you must both navigate. Good luck!") I wonder if it's worth using some sort of dedicated group messaging platform for communication and file-sharing.

Communicate regularly. Discuss topics and/or share readings/assignments. Know the students' issues/work and study habits in each other's classes. Know which assignments require closer collaboration and which provide a greater measure of autonomy.

Support from the administration in the sense that there is someone really holding the topic instructors accountable for doing their share of grading the writing assignments and developing topics.

Having a joint syllabus from the beginning

The topic instructor is key: if they are engaged and willing, all is good.

Remove the model of a two-instructor class

see above

making sure both topic and writing instructor use the same form of communication with students (cc'ing each other on emails with students); weekly "required" meetings (not necessarily in person); having someone in the department to reach out to to help if communication is especially difficult;
Allowing writing instructors to develop some assignments instead of only following topic instructors’ strategies.

make sure topic instructors are cc’ed on all emails regarding course expectations, particularly in the spring semester when there is no orientation that brings everyone together formally. make sure that the grading break down is established at the start of the semester (exactly who should grade what) so that awkwardness about how work should be divided doesn't impede communication.

The topic instructors should clearly communicate the kinds of results they wish to see in the papers. Other than that, just being honest and responding to emails in a timely basis is helpful.

Well, if there was more allocated in the budget, I would propose two separate one-hour mandatory meetings a month between topic and writing instructors. When I first taught FIQWS, my topic and I met every other Thursday to discuss and recalibrate a bit. It helps greatly. Without messing with the budget, as I mentioned earlier, simply making the curriculum more standard across the board would reduce a lot of early miscommunication on deciding what essays to use and how to plan for it. If there was a standard, yet still allowing flexibility for the instructors, then there would be less time spent early on plotting and planning the course, and would allow for more discussion on what readings to use and whatnot.

I have had very good experience with my co-instructor because we became very friendly and emailed frequently. I would also make sure to attend her class in the beginning of the year and when students had presentations in her class. This would ensure face to face contact. But this was easy because our classes were back to back.

Meet or e-mail once a week. Know what is happening in each other's classrooms. It is also important to discuss the work and behavior of students who may need additional help.

Paid office hour

While face-to-face meetings are ideal, I have found that instructors need to be flexible in their forms of communication. For example, for some instructors emails are the best form of communication, but for others emails just get lost in the shuffle and phone conversations can work well.

How likely are you to recommend FIQWS to a colleague?  (24 responses)
What were the most difficult aspects of the FIQWS learning community?
(24 responses)

The students get confused about who to listen to for what.

Just the extra legwork required to shuttle back and forth between the two instructors.

Making students understand that they need to succeed in both courses

When a topic instructor doesn't collaborate.

Working with a topic instructor who had taught the course several times and wouldn't adjust the assignments from earlier semesters. Working with an instructor who flipped out when I showed up at her office hours to chat. In general, some people just can't collaborate.

I think there is a reticence on the part of the upper levels of FIQWS administration to even want to address its systematic flaws. There seems to be a tendency to keep instructors and topics that aren't working well. And when those problems are flagged they are summarily dismissed. New FIQWS instructors are not adequately informed what the program even is, especially topic instructors from departments outside the Humanities.

Nothing in regard to working with my teaching partner; the most difficult aspect is the variable of student maturity and/or preparedness for the amount and/or level of college work; while some students are clearly prepared and willing, others suffer from lack of basic critical thinking and/or writing skills. In my two semesters, though, this issue of preparedness has varied greatly; fall 2015 students were largely less prepared; spring 2016 largely better prepared and more gratifying to teach.

Grading.

Communicating with the topic instructors and lack of engagement by the topic instructors. Since I wasn't an expert in any particular field this left me floundering and often trying to teach writing AND learn the topic I'm teaching.

Coordinating with topic section instructor in order to be aware of what was happening in that class. There was definitely a disconnect

Students really struggled with finding relevant journal articles for their research papers

How to cram in too much work in too little time.

Having two instructors unnecessarily increases the instructor work load without appropriate compensation.

It's more work than a regular comp course and less autonomy.
I was lucky enough to teach with the same topic instructor for two years, but I do think that it is/would be difficult for writing instructors to have to switch topics every semester. The presumption that a writing instructor is there to teach only the basics of academic writing (which can be applied to any course topic) is, in my opinion, false. Students should have better access to advisors and assessments before the class begins (ELL/ESL learners should have access to help in the summertime that they do not have to pay for--I think the lack of this type of tuition-free programming at City does a big disservice to many of our FIQWS students, and they quickly get overwhelmed, no matter how determined they might be at the beginning, or how much tutoring support they seek out on their own time); not enough time for the number of major essays required (editing and feedback timelines are very tight, and due date deadlines for major assignments get pushed back, which creates a crunch for both student and instructor)

Again, following most information taught in the topic section when adding creativity and flexibility to the writing section would be more beneficial.

making the boring job of teaching "essay structure" engaging and fun. Temptation is to focus on content/topic material, and avoid focus on form. rhetorical concepts, even though they are absolutely fascinating, are also intimidating to teach. perhaps getting more guidance on how to teach rhetoric.

I had an experience when a composition instructor did not approve of the writing assignments I composed and did not advise me until it was too late.

Having a confident grasp on the topic. I know the course is couched as though it shouldn't matter what the topic is since you'll just be teaching writing; however, the writing truly relies so heavily on the topic that it's difficult to separate the two. Difficult is an understandment.

I think some lack of autonomy in writing assignments can be tricky.

In the earlier days, the reputation of the content section was considered more important. My FIQWS partner also had his own agenda in terms of what should be contained in an essay and gave instructions which were not correct in terms of a thesis statement. This caused a lot of extra work. It is also important to schedule work loads. Content professors were used to having their own courses which contained writing, prior to teaching FIQWS.

Creating formal essays with scaffolding assignments. Minimizing overlap with topic instructor

Collaboration can be difficult because people's schedules are so busy. Also, my experience has varied greatly depending on the topic instructor. I have worked with wonderful, committed topic instructors. Also, a few years ago, I have worked with terrible, ambivalent, topic instructors that couldn't even be bothered to create a syllabus. However, I think the FIQWS program too often gets negative attention. I do think that the innovative, collaborative nature of the FIQWS program does offer particular challenges and unusual opportunities for teaching and learning. I think it is an interesting and innovative program. I believe that any program of this size and capacity will run into similar problems because it can be an unwieldy system to manage and many issues would not be exclusive to the FIQWS program.

What were the most successful aspects of the FIQWS learning community?
(22 responses)
That the students seemed to learn about both writing and a topic simultaneously. I think it actually is a great idea for a course. And my students and I ironically sort of bonded even more because of the other professor’s shenanigans. I think the students still ended up learning a lot regardless and it was a largely successful course.

Collaboration, when effective, is the best

When you have

I like the premise and I see the value for the students.

the learning community of students itself. There was a general respect and regard.

Collaborating with topic professor [redacted] to ensure not only a system of checks and balances between us, but also that our assignments and lectures coincide as much as possible to offer the best opportunity for our students’ success.

Coming up with assignments.

There's a great deal of support for the writing instructors from the administration as far as curriculum and resource development.

Loved the class itself; and, I liked both topic instructors. I found them to be willing, if not always able, to communicate.

The students formed strong friendships and were happy to support each other during peer-review activities. I saw a great amount of improvement throughout the semester from all students.

Excellent topic instructor with meticulous and careful guidance.

It is always rewarding to work with our students at City College, and my experiences with faculty, both full-time and adjunct have been very good.

The FIQWS format and student groups are great. Students benefit from the extra time together to bond with each other and their instructors.

see above

Great opportunity for comprehensive collaboration among instructors; opportunity to integrate technology and creativity into lectures and assignments; students often find that they learn much more about writing than they think they will, which prepares them for other writing-heavy classes in their second semester and beyond; students have access to a variety of interesting topics they may not get to learn about after their first year

Students’ sharing their immigration experiences and applying terminology in class discussions as well as writing.

collaboration has been informative and educational for me in all my fiqwses. i enjoy the challenges of learning how to relate to and work with each unique topic instructors. it pushes me to learn more about the different teaching styles, though i prefer instructors who tend to be more hands-off about essay assignments.

The topic instructors are able to teach something they are truly passionate about - the students tend to fall in love with the subject as a result. Also, working with another instructor who can help me solve
problems, keep the students on track, and split the responsibilities has been a great experience; it creates a secure, stable environment for the students during their first semester in college.

It's good for first time instructors because there is a support system from more experienced topic instructors. Also, I would imagine it helps to lower the drop rate as students are enrolled in two courses, making it less likely to drop two core courses.

I think the students really benefited from a connection that formed because of their shared class. The students were also helped by input from two instructors covering the same assignment, so long as instructors' input was not contradictory.

Students being able to learn to write while researching something that interests them. The rewards are seeing a student become thrilled to find new information on something which they can choose for their term paper, and to write about it. The library introduction is valuable, and takes them into the college experience very early in the semester. I also think FIQWS allows students to discuss and analyze class readings so that they can learn to introduce, quote and paraphrase material that is relevant to their work. I think the mid term evaluations with both instructors are very important as well in terms of targeting student work and needs.

Giving the students the opportunity to be engaged in very interesting topics and across programs. The double class experience also gives me the time and opportunity, as the writing instructor, to really give students the time to learn not only writing skills, but also general academic-study skills.

**In your opinion, what, if anything, would you change to improve the FIQWS learning community?**

(23 responses)

Let teachers work together for more than one semester.

Just to improve the collaborative element- though I would add that beyond the collaborative element itself, the extra time and legwork that requires should be fairly compensated, as well. It takes a long time to get the materials together and many of those hours are not covered by the pay rate. I don't think it's a controversial statement to say that professionals should be paid for their time.

More collaboration including more paid meetings to encourage this

More regular meetings, updates, etc. Get rid of instructors who don't work well with others.

A pared down essay assignment sequence (eliminate research paper, only teach annotated biblio and proposal), more vetting of topic instructors, a better channel of communication to the FIQWS politburo.

It could be better clarified to students that the writing and research strategies, techniques, etc. which they learn in FIQWS composition can be applied to many disciplines in the curriculum; students often enter the FIQWS composition class with the assumption that the class is only for them to succeed with its corresponding topic section--something which I endeavor to dispel in the first class as it is a limiting belief in many ways, not the least of which is how students set goals for and the enthusiasm with which students approach the class in general.

One experience I've had with FIQWS content instructors from outside the English department, is a tendency to view composition instructors as teaching assistants or somehow lower. I would like to see
a greater emphasis on parity between teachers.

I’m not sure that it can be improved. I enjoyed the old straight up composition classes and feel that FIQWS is in many ways a failure in comparison to those.

regular scheduled meeting with topic section instructor

More help in developing integrated assignments. Less assignments so that students have more time to work on developing a research essay.

Require more collaboration for ALL topic and writing instructors.

Replace the current FIQWS model with two required semesters of English composition, taught by single instructors with class sizes no larger than twenty students. First semester should focus on writing mechanics, the second on refining these and then introducing research skills.

Fund educational outings regardless of whether they relate directly to the topic.

More composition sections need to be taught by full time faculty, particularly faculty who know how to teach writing.

Incorporate the option of more technology with respect to course design and communication between topic/content instructors; find some way to have topic instructors work with content instructors for more than one semester/between semesters; smaller class sizes; ESL/ELL/ support for students who know before they enter college that English or writing isn't their strongest subject (summer prep program that DOES NOT require them to pay out of pocket or secure more student loans); help the Writing Center employ even more tutors to accommodate the number of students who seek help.

As I mentioned, writing instructors should also be acknowledged as important educators who should be a part of collaborative teaching journey (instead of being viewed as teaching assistants).

more guidance on teaching rhetoric. more formal expectations on how work is to be divided. emails that include everyone, during the spring especially.

If the relationship between the instructors is positive, this element will not be a problem. Otherwise, the instructors should always be ready to adjust their lesson plans based on their colleague's feedback.

Besides scrapping it altogether, I would seriously reconsider the topic courses. They are so out of touch with what students want to study. I can't stress that enough. So. Out. Of. Touch. Brazilian film in the 60s? Yes, it's great. But why? Why not focus on more topics that lend themselves to focused debate and critical thinking on the students part. I now teach Freshman Composition, and I focus my curriculum around Standard American English. Most students have never heard of this concept of a standard language (just like they've never heard of those obscure Brazilian films from the 60s); however, they use language every day and never stopped to think twice about it. To me, the whole concept of college is to reexamine not only ourselves, but the world we live in. By reexamining something like Standard English, students see their world in a whole new light. This moves beyond the classroom. I think more of this kind of curriculum is what FIQWS needs desperately before it falls to the wayside.

I was always helped by any workshop offered to help map out assignments between the two instructors.

We might meet for some support and discussion. I also preferred the combined grade, although I
understand the reason for separating them.

More paid time to plan and prepare

More training for all instructors, but I don't feel this need is exclusive to the FIQWS program.

How many times have you taught FIQWS in the role of a composition instructor?
(24 responses)

- 1 semester: 6 (25%)
- 2 semesters: 4 (16.7%)
- 3 semesters: 4 (16.7%)
- 4 semesters: 3 (12.5%)
- 5 or more semesters: 6 (25%)

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1HaconqZf0ylqcIlPh6UCbJp3RTNg4TZNc-FGNTyB6i0w/edit?usp=drive_web#responses