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To: Maureen O'Herin, SLO Chairperson

From: Mark Tarte, AJ Program Coordinator

Subject: Pilot Project: AJ54 – Investigative Report Writing

I submit the following information as my student learning outcome final report for AJ54, Investigative Report Writing (Fall, 2005).

Review of Project Proposal:

Briefly describe the assignment or course you plan to use for the project:

AJ54 – Investigative Report Writing. Investigative reports with emphasis upon accuracy and details necessary. Includes arrest reports, incident reports and miscellaneous field reports. Techniques and methods used to cover information; how to analyze and present information in a clear and concise report.

Describe the assessment techniques that you are considering for the project:

I plan to utilize various report review sergeants from Livermore Police Department, Pleasanton Police Department and the Dublin Police Services as well as the charging district attorney from the Livermore-Pleasanton Court. These law enforcement professionals will be used to gauge the progress of the individual students as well as the teaching techniques utilized in class.

After a period of introductory instruction, the students will be required to complete a series of police investigative reports that a working law enforcement officer may complete. After completion, selected reports will be sent to each participating agency or office for review as if it was submitted by a working officer. Upon completion of this process, the selected reports will be taken to the district attorney's office for review. This is part of the process for any arrests or charges to be filed. This will be used to highlight the strengths and weaknesses in the reports produced by the students.

Briefly explain the significance of the assignment or course, why this particular assignment or course was selected as a possible SLO pilot project, and how this project will be an effective model for other instructors:

The above process approximates the actual procedure that a police report goes through from the reporting of a crime to the final submission of an investigative report. I selected this course due to the difficult nature of police report writing and its impact on the justice system as well as the individual agencies that lose personnel in training due to a lack of

report writing ability. I believe that this can be an effective model for those instructors who are facing similar real world issues in their areas of specialty by utilizing persons in the community to assess their students' work in a real word setting.

The Original Concept:

The original concept of using criminal justice practioners was impractical on several levels. One was the time and effort of volunteer police sergeants to review selected reports and the lack of time the district attorney's office had to review student reports.

On average, a police sergeant will have between 15-25 reports a shift to read, all requiring his or her attention to detail to ensure an officer has completed the report properly and has covered the legal requirements for an arrest report or a report forwarded for complaint by the DA's office.

Due to this reality, adding to their workload was both impractical and frankly, impossible to accomplish. On average, a police sergeant may read as many as 100-150 reports a week, depending on the activity level and numbers of arrests generated by his or her watch.

The district attorney's office is different. Rather than reading seven or eight officer's reports daily, the DA's office has a responsibility to each law enforcement agency in the valley, which includes the Livermore, Pleasanton and Dublin Police Departments, the CHP Dublin Office, East Bay Parks Police, California Fish and Game and the Alameda County Sheriff's Department.

It is not unusual for the DA's office in Pleasanton to handle 25-50 in-custody or complaint reports a day from all agencies combined. Monday reports may number 50-75 or more in-custody or complaint reports from each agency due to weekend activity.

Comparison of the Academy to College instruction:

Therefore, because of this reality, my original concept of having police sergeants and then the DA's office review selected reports, I dropped that portion of the project for a more straightforward SLO.

I am currently on a statewide task force with the California POST Commission (Peace Officer Standards and Training) on report writing instruction in police academies. In talking with POST and our own academy in Dublin, I decided to teach the report writing class in a style closer to the academy style of instruction.

My instruction in AJ54 in the past had followed the academy to a degree, then for a final project, a weeks long "homicide investigation" would take place and the final report would be a result of this "investigation."

The academy uses the "crawl, walk, run" method of instruction, allowing students to learn how to properly format a police report and learn simple and easy to use techniques to become competent report writers.

Their method is to give students a 50-hour refresher in English usage and grammar, then a 40-hour block of instruction in the actual mechanics of police report writing. This would include understanding the legal elements of the offense; the taking of statements

from victims, witnesses and suspects; the gathering of evidence and information from other sources and the construction of a properly prepared police report. The final result would be a series of more complex reports that would result in a pass/fail grade.

Given the nature of the academy, blocks of instruction are quicker than in a college setting, but they have less hours over all (40 compared to 54) for instruction of actual police report writing. The English refresher that the academy uses is not able to be replicated for my course, but attention to correct English is always a part of report writing instruction.

The Project:

On the first day of class, a syllabus was handed out that reflected the class concept and the expected outcomes for each student.(attachment #1). This was reviewed in class and each student signed a receipt for a copy of the syllabus.

A written pre-test was then administered to gauge the writing ability of each student. (attachment #2).

After the syllabus and the pre-test was administered, a lecture on the history and importance of report writing was done and the semester's tentative schedule was reviewed.

Report writing forms were developed for Las Positas College along the lines of the report writing forms used by the academy. (attachments #3-6). These forms were used as part of the grading process and used to teach the necessary attention to detail. Each student received a package of these forms to use in class. A report writing abbreviation sheet was developed and also given to each student. (attachment #7)

After reviewing English usage and grammar for a week, the first assignments were started. These consisted of a written scenario with the pertinent information needed for the report. Each student was allowed to read the scenario and ask questions as needed to complete the first report. (Attachment #8)

After completion, the report was reviewed and a report review sheet was accomplished by the instructor and returned with each report. (Attachment #9)

The scenarios were reviewed each week in class and a correct sample was handed out to each student for their review after they had completed a report. (Attachment #10) Sample reports from actual police events were given as examples of good and poor report writing.

Video scenarios were incorporated into the report writing process about mid-semester. Again, after reviewing a video of an actual or simulated incident, a report had to be accomplished and upon review, a grade assigned with a comment sheet attached was given back to the students.

The reports started out simple, with little requirement for more than taking information from the scenario and reducing it to a simple written document. As the semester progressed, the scenarios became more complex and the corresponding reports as complex and lengthier.

Eventually, two moot trials were held in class, using students' reports as the basis for their "testimony" in the trial. The testimony was based off of their reports and after each round of "cross-examination of the "officer," instruction was given on the reason the testimony based on the report was good or not.

All of this instruction was geared toward preparing the students for the police academy, whether they were actually going to an academy or not. With upwards of a 50% failure rate for academy cadets in report writing across the state, it was important to stress to the students the need for good English skills and report writing ability.

Also, each student was required to maintain a notebook with handouts, sample reports, and their reports for review as well as complete the required notebook in the class.

A grade of a high "B" was needed (85% or better for a grade) to be considered able to complete the academy's report writing block.

Results:

- 47 Students were initially enrolled in AJ54 for Fall, 2005.
 - 10 students withdrew or were dropped

- 37 completed the course for a grade
 - 3 students completed the course with an "A"
 - 12 students completed the course with a "B"
 - Of these, 4 were in the high "B" category
 - 17 students completed the course with a "C"
 - 3 students completed the course with a "D"
 - 2 students failed

The results were not encouraging. Overall, of those students receiving a grade of "C" or higher, there was a success rate of 86.4% (32 of 37 students). However, only 7 students were considered ready for the police academy report writing course, a success rate of only 19%.

Those students who did not pass high enough to be considered ready for the police academy, were counseled on what they could do to help their chances once they got to a police academy.

Identified problems:

While I did not breakdown the percentage of each of the following problems, most student at some point during the semester were found to have one or more of the following problems:

- Grammar usage
- Spelling
- Sentence structure
- Report writing format
 - First Person
 - Past Tense
 - Active Voice

- Reading comprehension
- Incomplete or inaccurate data

Of the 19% of those students deemed ready for a police academy report writing class, the most common problem was with either an occasional spelling error or boxes on certain forms incorrectly completed. Universally, these students did not make the same errors once it was pointed out to them. In fact, after the fourth week, I rarely had to correct their reports for any errors.

Those students who passed with a “C” to a low “B” had difficulty at different phases of the class. Some of the legal concepts of reporting writing were difficult to grasp for these students and if they corrected this area, they would commit other errors such as inaccurate or incomplete information, tense or voice.

The most common error among this group was difficulty in differentiating between past tense, present tense and future tense. When corrected in one report, most would write their next report correctly, but once a more difficult report assignment was given, they would fall back to mixing tenses in the same sentence or paragraph. Toward the end, most in this category had grasp this concept, but then they would make other errors that lowered their grade.

Those students in this category were encouraged to enroll in those English courses that would enhance their chances of success in a police academy report writing class. Those students who received a “D” or “F” did so due to a lack of attendance and/or completion of assignments and did not do enough work for an evaluation of their abilities.

Findings:

I believe the SLO process did focus the course more toward a tangible goal and helped to focus both my instruction and delivery. While the results were not what I had hoped for, I believe the course was tighter, better focused and has the potential for a better result in the future.

For future classes, I believe that a two-tier instruction method will be best. Instead of a simple written pre-test, a comprehensive English abilities test, similar to one used for placement testing, will be developed and used to identify those students who will need additional help.

Students will be informed of this through the syllabus and in class the first day. Those students with little difficulty will be allowed to start the report-writing program immediately. Those students identified as needing help in certain areas will have time allotted to them during the semester for additional help or tutoring. They will not be required to complete the same number of reports and will be encouraged to enroll again in the course to better their chances in a police academy, if that is their goal.

Overall, I liked using the learning outcomes for the reasons given above. It was a learning process for me and I think those students who worked hard in this class received a better level of instruction than in previous report writing classes.