Recipients of the Year 4 Initiative for Teaching and Learning Excellence grants will be recognized at a public reception beginning at 3:30 p.m. March 11 in the Van Brunt Visitors Center. Congratulations to this year’s recipients, who are listed below.

This year’s initiative focused on projects aimed at helping students write better.

6 writing projects earn awards

Announced in 2004 and launched in 2005, the Initiative has awarded 53 competitive grants to projects designed by UNL faculty and staff, all aimed toward improving some facet of undergraduate teaching or learning on the UNL campus. More than $900,000 has been committed to the 53 funded projects.

First-, second-, and third-year projects addressed seven overarching themes: Advising; Learner-Centered Classroom; One Campus, Many Views; Program Innovation; Teaching and Learning with Technology; Outcomes-Based Assessment; and Teaching Fellows. Funding for the ITLE has been generously provided by the University of Nebraska Foundation.

Teaching Real-Life Writing Skills: A Food Science Blog

College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources $17,500

The PI’s plan to initiate an “issues in food science blog” to complement Food Science 280. The course explores a variety of current issues in food science (such as food bioterrorism), incorporates a variety of writing assignments and attracts majors and non-majors. Students learn to write for scientific “peers” (majors) and lay audiences (non-majors). The required blog will create a “safe” environment based on how they supported their arguments as well as their grammar, structure and clarity of argument. Approximately 60 percent of the course grade will be based on these weekly assignments.

Redesigning Business Communications Courses to Strengthen Writing Outcomes

College of Journalism and Mass Communications $25,000

Two converging needs drive this proposal. The College of Business Administration wants the College of Journalism and Mass Communication to add a sophomore-level business writing course to enhance an existing freshmen-level class. Journalism also seeks to create a course that will satisfy new ACE requirements and attract students from a variety of majors.

This project will help redesign business writing courses by surveying businesses to identify skills they wish students to master; by improving course instruction; by collaborating to create parallel instruction where teachers could create assignments relevant to writing and CBA content; by collaborating to differentiate CQMC courses from English composition courses; and by encouraging business communication instructors to attend discipline-specific professional development activities.

Teaching in the Design Disciplines

College of Architecture $19,000

Architecture faculty find that their students consistently fail to appreciate or understand the need to write well. The project surveys the writing requirements as stated by professionals in the various disciplines and identifies faculty and programs successful in improving student writing. The team will develop a Web site with writing guidelines, samples, exercises and teaching tips. The team will encourage use of technology to motivate student writing. A faculty workshop will disseminate these teaching tools, demonstrate how to use them and encourage their adoption in a variety of courses in the college.

Fostering Faculty and Teaching Assistant Development as Writing Instructors

College of Arts and Sciences $36,000

This proposal grows from a Faculty Leadership for Writing Initiative project in which a Writing Inquiry group in Statistics proposes to developing a writing pedagogy course for teaching assistants in Statistics. TAs teach 15 sections of a first-year course, Statistics 215. They wish to incorporate more writing into the course. This collaborative project with English will prepare Statistics TAs as writing instructors and create a TA teaching mentor position. The proposal reinforces a notion of the Blue Sky report to emphasize teaching as an essential component of graduate education.

Improving Writing in History Survey Courses

College of Arts and Sciences $36,000

This project will redesign an introductory survey history course (History 202) to include writing as a central component of learning. Technology will be used to offer students explicit instruction in disciplinary conventions and habits of mind, and then give them ample opportunities to practice writing in specific context. Nearly 2,000 students from all academic colleges take this course each spring semester. The aim is to help first-year students improve their college-level writing skills. The plan is to develop a model that would work across humanities and social sciences.

Comprehensive Plan for Improving Writing Skills

College of Education and Human Sciences $15,000

This project funds the work of creating a comprehensive plan to improve the writing skills of undergraduates in each of six major options in the Department of Nutrition and Health Sciences. The plan includes identifying the range of writing required for career success in the six options; identifying where in the curriculum students are or should be learning these skills; developing specific assignments for students to learn writing skills; and evaluating opportunities for students to progressively develop writing skills by building on learned skills. The project also funds work with faculty to develop effective feedback mechanisms to students.

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