Incorporating Low-Stakes Writing in Developmental Algebra

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During the 2015 – 2016 academic year, faculty from the Math, Chemistry, and Biology departments at Queensborough Community College (QCC) collaborated to devise low-stakes writing assignments appropriate for non-Writing-Intensive courses in their disciplines.

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Our goal was to create and class-test a portfolio of low-stakes writing assignments to enhance learning of subject matter and provide writing experience and practice for students in non-Writing-Intensive STEM courses.

Many STEM classes are traditionally taught with little or no writing component. By introducing low-stakes writing into the curricula, students can get practice with writing in courses that typically don’t require it.

Numerous STEM classes cannot be offered as Writing Intensive (WI) sections. Remedial classes, such as Elementary Algebra, cannot be designated WI because they are non-credit. Some STEM classes do not lend themselves to high-stakes writing assignments because departmental requirements do not allow for grades to be based on assignments other than exams. In departments with large numbers of adjuncts, not all faculty are WI certified.

Low-stakes writing assignments can be introduced into courses without extensive faculty training, and without significant changes to curriculum or grading.

Examples of both online and in-class writing assignments will be shared. Techniques such as writing-to-learn, free-writing, writing prompts, and prewriting will be discussed. Topics will be from Elementary Algebra and College Algebra.