

The Diana Hacker TYCA Outstanding Programs

The Faculty Initiative on Teaching Reading at Kingsborough Community College

*** 1. Submission Category (select one):**

Reaching Across Borders (Interdisciplinary initiatives)

Composition Programs and Writing Studies

Fostering Student Success

Excellence in Teaching

*** 2. Title of Program:**

Faculty Initiative on Teaching Reading at Kingsborough Community College

*** 3. College Name:** Kingsborough Community College, City University of New York

*** 4. College Address:** 2001 Oriental Blvd.

*** 5. City:** Brooklyn

*** 6. State:** NY

*** 7. Zip:** 11235

*** 8. Chief Instructional Officer:** Dr. Joanne Russell

*** 9. Chief Instructional Officer Job Title:** Provost

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Program Description

Now in its fifth year, the Faculty Initiative on Teaching Reading (FITR), a faculty developed interdisciplinary program, continues to enrich and enliven the teaching of reading at Kingsborough Community College (KCC) through inter-related professional development activities, a semester-long faculty seminar on the teaching of reading, and a series of college-wide events, like the annual FITR Symposium.

Program Statement

Faculty Initiative on Teaching Reading

Program Purpose

In our technologically complex society, in which students encounter an enormous variety of written texts in a range of forms and contexts, the ability to read thoughtfully and critically is essential to students' "... success in college as well as ... their success beyond college in their personal and professional lives, and as members of a democratic society" (Homing, 2017, p.8). Unfortunately, many studies demonstrate that college students' ability to read well is declining rather than improving (e.g. ACT, 2015; Burchfield & Sappington, 2000; Clump, Bauer & Bradley, 2004; Jamieson & Howard, 2012; PISA, 2015). Research conducted at Kingsborough confirms this trend, demonstrating that reading is not a significant part of most students' college experience and that faculty find the teaching of reading to be a challenge (Del Principe & Ihara, 2016; Del Principe & Ihara, 2017; Schnee, 2017). Furthermore, the teaching of reading is especially urgent to achieve equity for Black and Latino students who together made up 54% of Kingsborough's student body in 2020. According to the 2017 National Assessment of Educational Progress, less than one-quarter of Black and Latino eighth graders in the U.S. scored "proficient" in reading (NAEP, 2017).

Program Description

To address these and other reading-related challenges and work toward racial justice and educational equity on our campus, an interdisciplinary group of faculty at KCC launched the Faculty Initiative on Teaching Reading (FITR) in 2017. Grown out of a longstanding commitment among these faculty to enhance the teaching of reading, FITR invites faculty from all disciplines to participate in multiple professional development opportunities aimed at improving the teaching of reading: a semester-long seminar on teaching reading, an ongoing faculty interest group (FIG), and an annual symposium on college reading.

One notable characteristic of FITR, reflected in its name, is that it is an entirely faculty generated and led initiative that places collaborative learning at the center of its work. One example of this is FITR's commitment to a rotational leadership model whereby faculty participants have an opportunity to join the interdisciplinary cohort of seminar leaders, FIG facilitators, and symposium planners, and also make up the FITR advisory board. The faculty who have assumed leadership roles in FITR represent a variety of disciplines: Biology, English, Education, History, Political Science, and Sociology.

Collaborative Seminar Description

As the centerpiece of FITR's work, the semester-long collaborative seminar consists of: five two-hour professional development workshops; monthly readings on reading pedagogy; classroom inter-visitations; innovative teaching demonstrations by faculty; and the design and implementation of a pedagogical inquiry project.

During this semester-long experience, FITR participants:

- Read and discuss scholarship on teaching college reading
- Explore ways to teach challenging, college-level texts
- Collaborate on ways to integrate reading into coursework
- Share existing successful practices
- Experiment with developing new approaches to teaching reading in their own classrooms through an inquiry-driven project

Each session puts the faculty member in the role of the student to explore reading practices through demonstration and experience. Facilitators and guest "experts" have led workshops pairing seminar readings with reading strategies such as: social annotation, literature circles, interrogating texts, visual reading, and reading schemas.

Faculty Interest Group & Symposia

The faculty interest group and symposia are essential components of FITR as well. They provide educational opportunities for those faculty who want to learn more about teaching reading in their courses but can't commit to an immersive professional development experience. The FIG is a venue where former participants continue meeting to discuss aspects of teaching reading in their courses. The symposia have engaged 126 faculty and administrators, familiarizing them with the work of experts on college reading such as scholar Alice Horning, reading activist Stephen Haff, writer-educator James McBride, and the research of their Kingsborough faculty colleagues. Topics covered include culturally responsive reading instruction, innovative ways to inspire reading in and across the disciplines, and research on cognitive reading approaches.

Outcomes

- 40 faculty from 15 disciplines in both STEM and the humanities have participated in the seminars and developed their capacity to teach reading.
- 35 faculty from a range of disciplines have attended the FITR FIG and explored various approaches for improving the teaching of reading in their classes.

- Over 125 faculty, staff, and students attended the FITR symposia.

Although faculty report many positive changes to their approaches to teaching reading as a result of their participation in the various components of FITR, we recognize the importance of assessing the impact of our work on student learning. To this end, two former FITR seminar leaders received a Collaborative Pedagogical Research Grant from CUNY in 2019-2020 to deepen the assessment of student learning. They had begun collecting data when the pandemic forced classes online, making it impossible for them to proceed effectively with the program evaluation as designed. We will apply for future funding to carry out this important work.

Program Evaluation

Seminar facilitators document and assess the impact FITR has on faculty's pedagogical choices and instructional practices in a variety of ways:

- Pre-seminar survey
- Participants' written reflections
- Peer intervisitation report
- Review of participants' curriculum plans and projects
- Post-seminar survey
- Collection of course documents/artifacts (including student work)

We find particularly helpful some of the qualitative reflections we've collected from faculty participants:

"The most valuable aspects were genuinely understanding the importance of reading. This was a skill that I took for granted and assumed college students mastered."

"I'm thinking much more clearly about the relationship between collaboration and deep reading online. Thinking about annotating a text as a shared moment rather than an isolated one online is a really important change for me."

"The inquiry project gave me an idea to explore how student reading skills work; one of the things I noticed is that students read/understand things differently depending on if they are with others or by themselves. This allowed me to plan to conduct an inquiry project on students' ability to understand articles in a synchronous vs an asynchronous environment."

Conclusion

FITR has influenced over 100 Kingsborough faculty -- through theory, scholarship and interactive pedagogical experiences -- to think deeply about how to improve the teaching of reading in their courses. It has also, in the words of our provost, served as an excellent model for other professional development initiatives on our campus. We also hope that FITR, in some small way, has helped to prepare students for fuller participation in our democracy, as empowered critical and capable readers. We would be deeply honored to be the recipients of a Diana Hacker award.