Enhancing Undergraduate Students' Research and Writing

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Concern about the research and writing abilities of undergraduate students led to the development, implementation and enhancement of four sequential writing assignments in an introductory course. These writing assignments—which included a report on an interview of a professional in the field, a research paper on an aspirational career, a research paper on interim positions that would prepare a person for the chosen career, and a reflection paper—were designed to help students gain increased knowledge of, and understanding about, careers in sport management. Based on reflections and feedback from students, revisions in these assignments were made over three years to strengthen students' research and writing skills. A course portfolio containing examples of student learning enabled the professor to provide evidence of student learning and to make the teaching-learning process more visible.

Introduction

College teachers have often imparted knowledge as "sages on stages" even though student learning can be achieved more effectively when teachers serve as "guides on the side" (Weimer, 2002). Teachers can no longer rely solely on lecturing and expect to be perceived as experts imparting knowledge. Rather, they are increasingly held accountable for actively engaging students and documenting their learning. Effective teaching requires continuing reflection upon what was successful in helping students learn and implementation of changes enhancing the learning process (Bean, 2011; Brookfield, 2006; McKeachie, Svinicki, & Hofer, 2011).

Building on the premise that teaching is intellectual work focusing on actively engaging students, the purpose of this paper is to describe a course redesign process focused on strengthening the research and writing abilities of undergraduate students. The professor sought to improve and document student learning using a series of four writing assignments designed to enhance students' research and writing abilities and share the importance of continuous reflection so other faculty might benefit from lessons learned. Specifically, the nexus between career exploration, a personally relevant topic for undergraduate students considering careers in sport management, and writing about possible careers based on research as evidence of learning was documented through student examples in a course portfolio.

The professor implemented the initial course redesign in spring of 2010 in an introduction to sport management course with an enrollment of over 80 mostly first- and second-year students and developed an online course portfolio that described the process and provided examples of students' work. After reflection and conversations with colleagues, the professor made additional changes in the four writing assignments in each of two subsequent semesters when teaching the

course. Before detailing this three-year process, a brief review of literature is discussed to lay a theoretical framework for this instructional approach dedicated to increased student learning. This literature review is segmented into three topical areas: teaching as intellectual work, student engagement, and the enhancement of students' research and writing abilities.

Teaching as Intellectual Work

Since the publication of Boyer's (1990) *Scholarship Reconsidered*, the intellectual work of teaching has been experiencing greater acceptance and gaining status in higher education. In describing teaching as intellectual work, Bain (2004) concluded that exceptional teachers treated lectures, discussion sections, problem-based sessions, and other elements of teaching as serious intellectual endeavors and as cognitively demanding and important as research. Savory, Burnett, and Goodburn (2007) provided a practical guide and formal model for making the scholarly work of teaching visible. Specifically, they suggested methods for planning and conducting classroom research including structuring the exploration of in-class inquiry questions and emphasized the importance of the teaching-learning process through detailed examples, and they related faculty experiences.

Bernstein (2002) concurred, "Teaching university-level courses is a form of serious intellectual work that can be as challenging and demanding as discovery research" (p. 215). He described four specific steps in the intellectual work of teaching. First, teachers identified content to be discussed and intellectual goals for learners to achieve. Second, decisions about instructional design were made. Third, teachers selected activities that helped students understand ideas taught. Fourth, intellectual work was "the evaluation of the effectiveness of the course and how well learners achieved the understanding set forth in the goals" (p.

216). Bernstein suggested peer review of reflective writing and teaching, such as through a course portfolio, fulfilled formative as well as summative purposes. He described an expanded, collaborative process for peer review of teaching, including three reflective statements comprising a course portfolio, as the foundation of teaching as intellectual work. The first reflective statement framed course goals and content. The second described teaching methods and instructional practices used to promote learning; the third presented examples of student performance accompanied by teacher feedback. Teacher reflection over the course culminated the process. Other educators, such as Bernstein, Burnett, Goodburn, and Savory (2006), also supported use of a course portfolio. Connected with the intellectual work of teaching was the need to facilitate greater student engagement, as discussed in the next section.

Student Engagement

Active engagement of students is essential to learning (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Bean, 2011; Brookfield, 1987; Brookfield, 2006; Cross & Steadman, 1996; Diamond, 2008; Murray, 1985). Lowman (1995) reported exemplary teachers engaged students in discussions, used group work to promote learning, and integrated learning inside and outside the classroom. Barkley, Cross, and Major (2005) also advocated for collaborative learning stating,

> It involves students actively, thereby putting into practice the predominant conclusion from a half-century of research on cognitive development. It prepares students for careers by providing them with opportunities to learn the teamwork skills valued by employers. It helps students appreciate multiple perspectives and develop skills to collaboratively address the common problems facing a diverse society. And it engages all students by valuing the perspective each student can contribute from his or her personal academic and life experience (p. 10).

Brookfield and Preskill (2005) claimed that one specific example of student engagement, discussion, provides a rich learning experience to achieve these learning outcomes: provide opportunities for students to explore diverse perspectives, increase awareness of and tolerance for ambiguity or complexity, recognize and investigate assumptions, listen attentively and respectfully, develop appreciation for differences, increase intellectual agility, connect with a topic, respect others' voices and experiences, learn habits of democratic discourse, help create knowledge, build capacity for clear communication of ideas and meaning,

develop abilities for collaborative learning, become more empathic, develop skills of synthesis and integration, and transform themselves. These authors argued persuasively that discussion facilitated greater student engagement with content and increased learning. The best college teachers, according to Bain (2004), demonstrated their commitment to learning by engaging and motivating students, helping them gain understanding, guiding their actions and performances, challenging them to reflect upon and critique their learning, and helping them make judgments about their learning.

Peer review of writing and learning through the writing and revision process offered two effective strategies for student engagement. Yang (2011) suggested students learned new ideas and perspectives as well as improved their writing skills through peer review. Shaw (2002) found students seemed to care about how their classmates perceived their work, with peer pressure motivating students positively in their writing. However, peer review of writing was not without issues regarding its effectiveness. Yang stated, for example, too often students engaged in off-task chatting and only shared generic compliments instead of giving "revision-oriented feedback" (p. 688).

To address these concerns, Bean (2011) emphasized the importance of instructors providing guidance to students to optimize the effectiveness of peer review sessions. Fallahi, Wood, Austad, and Fallahi (2006) suggested using a framework of grammar, writing style, writing mechanics, and referencing in peer editing when teaching basic writing skills. McGroarty and Zhu (1997) stressed teaching students how to provide feedback on peers' writing to develop needed skills and build confidence in providing honest critiques. Peer review, they recommended, needed to focus on global concerns such as ideas, audience, purpose and organization. Bean (2011) listed peer review of drafts of student writing as one strategy to encourage revisions and suggested that peers were important resources for helping develop critical thinking skills. He concluded, "These studies support the value of peer review in encouraging revision, showing that students learn as much by doing the reviews as by receiving them" (p. 302).

College students who may fear writing because of lack of practice may procrastinate until they experienced the pressure of a submission deadline, resulting in less than their best work (Shaw, 2002). Completion of drafts of writing assignments so students could obtain feedback from instructors and classmates was encouraged by Bean (2011); Ellis, Taylor, and Drury (2005); Fallahi et al. (2006); Shaw (2002); and others. Revision of papers helped students realize writing was a process that could increase their confidence and abilities, not a one-time event (Yoder,

1993). Again, as Bean (2011) emphasized, formal writing assignments that included revision and multiple drafts were powerful tools for teaching critical thinking.

A strong connection existed between scholarly teaching and student engagement. The intellectual work of teaching required continuous reflection upon, and use of, instructional strategies that more actively engaged students in constructing new and meaningful knowledge. Building on the intellectual work of teaching and essentiality of active student engagement, the next section describes the important of enhancing students' research and writing abilities.

Research and Writing Abilities

Bean (2011) stated, "…the most intensive and demanding tool for eliciting sustained critical thought is a well-designed writing assignment on a subject matter problem" (p. xvi). He described ways for instructors to engage students more actively in disciplinary content while utilizing writing at the forefront of the teaching-learning process. Ellis, Taylor, and Drury (2005) supported the nexus between writing, disciplinary content, and learning when they reported,

> …research into student writing at university has shown that the experience of writing not only helps students to become familiar with the standards and style of written expression expected in their disciplines, but it also helps them to clarify their understanding of the subject matter about which they are writing. (p. 49-50)

Student writing and research skills often have been areas of concern among higher education faculty. For example, faculty in the department of history and philosophy at Eastern Michigan University developed a writing process model to combat frequent student procrastination in a research and writing methods course (Olwell & Delph, 2004). This semester-long model with incremental steps included identification of topics weeks before papers were due, compilation of bibliographies before beginning the writing process, and submission of drafts or detailed outlines so teachers could provide feedback about research weaknesses, thesis organization or writing style. Using this model, teachers purposefully guided students in developing strong thesis statements and providing supporting evidence based on research and critical analysis.

Effective teaching required intellectual commitment by faculty and students as well as instructional approaches to help students improve their research and writing abilities. The course redesign described in this paper was guided by principles of teaching as intellectual work, student engagement leading to greater learning, and the importance of enhancing research and writing skills. The

professor designed, and subsequently revised based on reflection and student feedback, four writing assignments in an introduction to sport management course. Guided by the work of Bernstein (2002), Bernstein, Burnett, Goodburn, and Savory (2006), and Savory, Burnett, and Goodburn (2007), the professor developed a course portfolio that presented course goals, a description of the course redesign, examples of instructional practices and activities, and evidence of student learning through examples of student work (see http://www.cte.ku.edu/portfolios/lumpkin).

Methods

Background on the Introduction to Sport Management Course

Introduction to Sport Management is a required prerequisite course taken by between 80-90 students per semester who are seeking admission as sport management majors. The initial learning outcomes for this course included the following: (1) Students through an exploration of the fundamental content areas within sport management will make a reasoned, knowledgeable choice about whether sport management is an appropriate career path; (2) Students will be able to explain the principles of leadership and management as applied in sport settings; and (3) Students will be able to describe, analyze, and apply the principles and issues in sport ethics, personnel management, financial management, sport law, facility and event management, strategic planning and sport marketing.

When planning the new writing assignments, the professor added a fourth course goal: Students will identify careers of interest to them, investigate the chosen careers, and demonstrate through written assignments their knowledge about, and understanding of, how to advance in chosen careers. Reasons for adding this learning outcome were to help each student explore a possible career interest by interviewing a person in the selected career and writing a synopsis of what was learned, investigate entry and sequential professional positions he or she might hold to gain experiences and develop expertise in preparing for chosen careers, and reflect upon and make personal application of what was learned.

To facilitate students' abilities to conduct research, to enhance their writing, and to serve as resources for them, assistance was solicited from professionals in the university's library and Writing Center. On the second day of class, a librarian described the website she had developed specifically for the class. This website included instructions for using databases to locate scholarly articles and books, evaluate and use online resources, and cite resources properly. Additionally, to help students with their research, on the course management system the professor provided a list of

scholarly journals and during class modeled how to identify key points in a scholarly article. The assistant director of the Writing Center described how its personnel could help students improve their writing from idea conceptualization through the revision process, culminating in a well-written assignment. Figure 1 depicts the process used in planning and implementing the research and writing assignments. Figure 2 shows the connection between the learning outcomes, instructional strategies used in this course, and the writing assignments.

Four Writing Assignments

Bean (2011) argued,

The relationship between the amount of writing for a course and students' level of engagement—whether engagement is measured by time spent on the course, or the intellectual challenge it presents, or students' level of interest in it—is stronger than the relationship between students' engagement and any other course characteristic (p. 1).

He added, "…[G]ood writing assignments (as well as other active learning tasks) evoke a high level of critical thinking, help students wrestle productively with a course's big questions, and teach disciplinary ways of seeing, knowing, and doing" (p. 1-2). Students learned through writing as they embraced authentic tasks challenging them to grapple with what they were reading, got actively engaged with important problems and issues, and thought more critically about what they were trying to state. Dean (2010) and Graham and Perin (2007) agreed that writing-to-learn was highly effective because students had to think critically and actively engage with the subject about which they were writing.

Despite these proven connections between writing and critical thinking and learning, often students resisted writing because it was hard work. Evidence of this resistance had been noted by the professor in the few writing assignments completed by many former students in this introductory course. Contributing factors to poorly written papers, according to Olwell and Delph (2004), were students' frequent procrastination in beginning work on their papers, often as late as the night before the due date resulting in the lack of thesis statements; reliance on easily accessible, rather than substantive, scholarly sources; unsubstantiated claims; lack of coherence and organization in describing key points; and unedited, poorly written papers.

The task description for writing assignment #1 required each student to identify a specific career of interest within sport management; conduct an in-p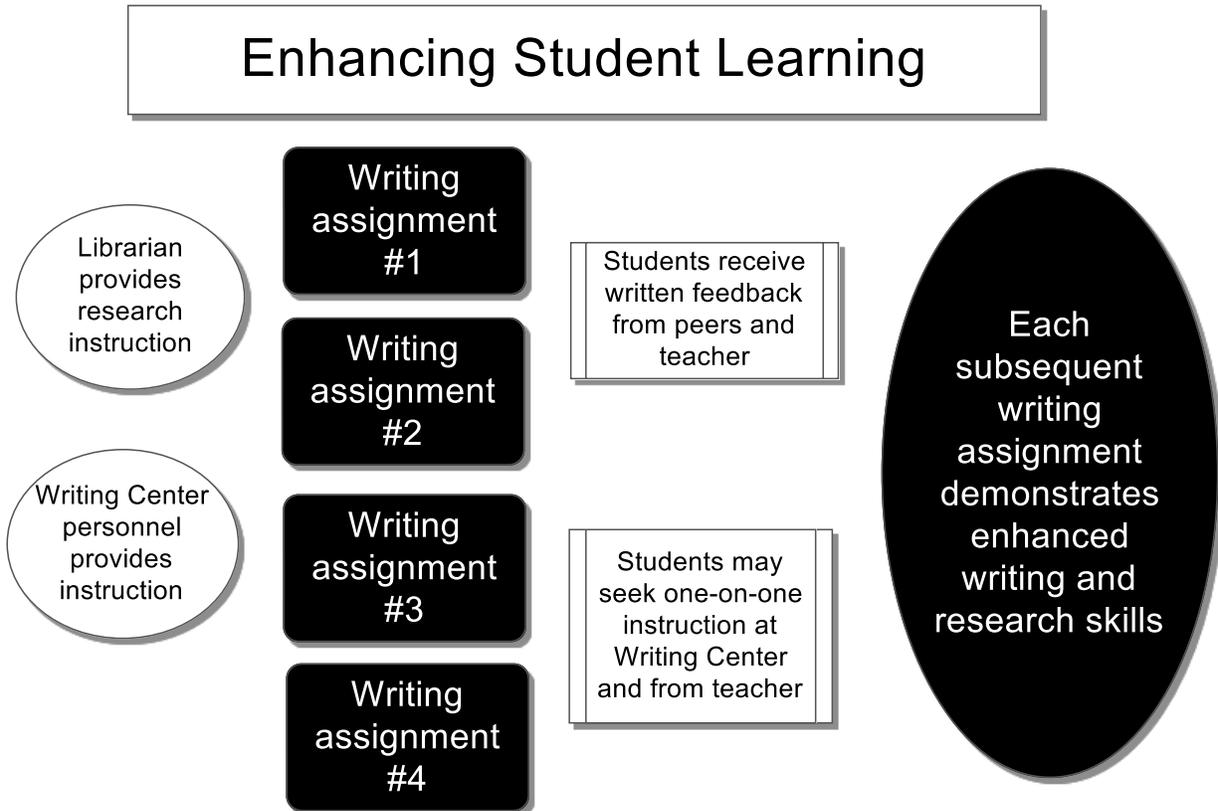erson, telephone, or electronic interview of a professional in the selected career; and write a 2-3 page report describing what was learned. Expectations for this and other writing assignments were provided through grading rubrics (see Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 for examples of the grading rubrics for the four writing assignments as revised over three years) with exemplary, proficient and marginal performance in four criteria: description of the career and responsibilities of the person interviewed; knowledge and understanding of career preparation and development; and organization and communication. Based on the assumption that students would increase their knowledge and reflect on their learning in each of the four sequential writing assignments, the possible points for each were 20, 40, 60 and 80. The points associated with each criterion increased proportionately with each subsequent writing assignment. The overall grading scale for the course included 100 points for online quizzes covering reading assignments, 300 points for 3 examinations and 200 points for the 4 writing assignments.

One week prior to the due date for writing assignment #1, students were asked to bring drafts of their papers to class. Requiring students to bring drafts of papers to class prevented waiting until the night before the due date to begin working on the writing assignment. During this class period, each student was grouped with classmates who had interviewed professionals in similar sport management careers (e.g., athletic directors; general managers; sport agents; and sport marketers) and read and provided peer feedback to at least two classmates about the information presented and clarity of the writing. A secondary outcome for students from reading classmates' interview draft papers was to glean additional information from what others had learned. Students were encouraged to get additional help at the Writing Center before finalizing writing assignment #1.

A copy of the grading rubric was attached to each student's paper on all writing assignments and evaluative checkmarks and comments placed in the section of the rubric matching the graded or summative assessments. In addition, hand-written comments were made by the professor on each paper with sequential emphasis on content, organization and grammar. This feedback also was formative because students were required to revise and resubmit subsequent writing assignments.

The quality of graded writing assignment #1 papers ranged widely. Some students did well because they met requirements for exemplary performance, diligently edited their writing, and took advantage of feedback received from classmates or someone in the Writing Center. The majority of students emphasized what they learned from the person interviewed but could have edited their writing more carefully for clarity and

Figure 1
Enhancing Student Learning

Enhancing Student Learning

Librarian provides research instruction

Writing assignment #1

Writing assignment #2

Students receive written feedback from peers and teacher

Writing Center personnel provides instruction

Writing assignment #3

Students may seek one-on-one instruction at Writing Center and from teacher

Writing assignment #4

Each subsequent writing assignment demonstrates enhanced writing and research skills

grammar. A few students procrastinated, leading to late submissions, poorly edited papers and cursory descriptions of what they learned from their interviews.

The criterion for the revised and resubmitted writing assignment #1 stated: Clear and informative revised report on the interview; each revised writing assignment was worth 10 points of the grade for the newly submitted writing assignment. For example, the performance criteria for revised paper (#2) stated: clearly communicates evidence of critical thinking, detailed analysis and an understanding of the sequential jobs and responsibilities of individuals seeking to advance in the chosen career. The revision and resubmission process facilitated students' learning as reflected in organization and clarity of writing.

The task description for writing assignment #2 required each student to write a 2- to 3-page research paper based on information from at least 5 sources of information (these could be obtained electronically or in print other than from newspapers) about the interim positions or sequential steps for advancing toward the selected career within a 20-year period of time. Students who wanted to change to different career choices for their writing assignments were permitted to

do so. Most students' revised writing assignments #1 showed greater clarity and more careful editing; however, a few students failed to use the feedback provided by the professor, resulting in their receiving fewer points.

For writing assignment #2, several students struggled in locating informative sources to help them learn about the types of entry-level and mid-level positions professionals in sport management careers would hold as well as the knowledge and experience needed for advancement in careers. The criterion asking students to describe the sequential jobs and responsibilities in the career path challenged students as many relied on minimally helpful, but easily accessible, electronic resources; other students read more broadly in scholarly articles and books that greatly enhanced their understanding of types of responsibilities associated with these jobs and skills and abilities needed to be successful.

At the mid-point of the semester, students were invited to provide anonymous feedback via the course management system on any aspect of the course. They were specifically asked to respond to three open-ended questions: what they liked about the course, what they

Figure 2
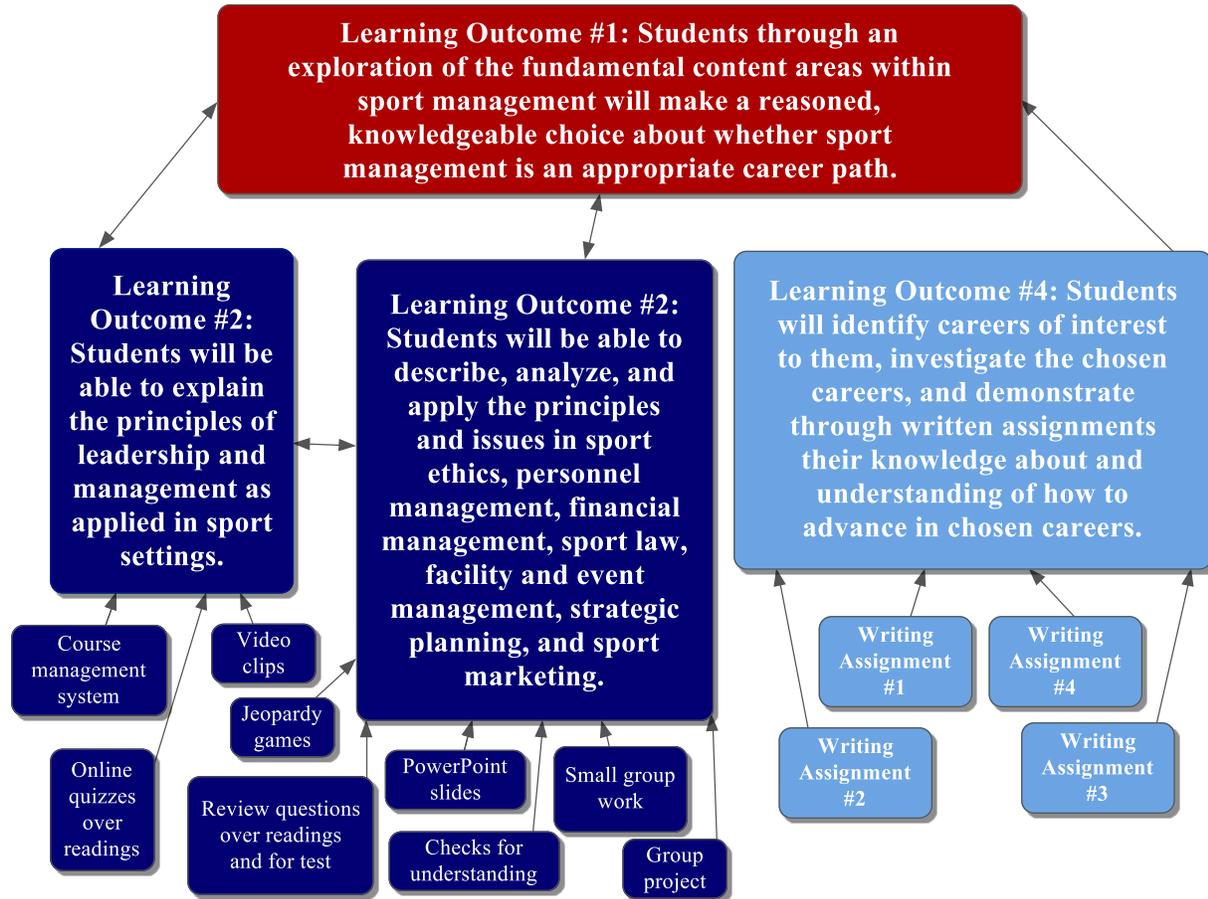*Alignment of Writing Assignments with Pedagogical Approaches and Learning Outcomes*

Learning Outcome #1: Students through an exploration of the fundamental content areas within sport management will make a reasoned, knowledgeable choice about whether sport management is an appropriate career path.

Learning Outcome #2: Students will be able to explain the principles of leadership and management as applied in sport settings.

Learning Outcome #2: Students will be able to describe, analyze, and apply the principles and issues in sport ethics, personnel management, financial management, sport law, facility and event management, strategic planning, and sport marketing.

Learning Outcome #4: Students will identify careers of interest to them, investigate the chosen careers, and demonstrate through written assignments their knowledge about and understanding of how to advance in chosen careers.

Course management system

Video clips

Jeopardy games

Online quizzes over readings

Review questions over readings and for test

PowerPoint slides

Checks for understanding

Small group work

Group project

Writing Assignment #1

Writing Assignment #4

Writing Assignment #2

Writing Assignment #3

Table 1
Grading Rubric for Writing Assignment #1

Categories	Meets few criteria	Meets some criteria	Meets most/all criteria
Career Background (20) Paper describes the current position and responsibilities of the person interviewed.	0-6	7-13	14-20
Career Information (20) Paper includes information about and examples of career preparation and advancement of the person interviewed.	0-6	7-13	14-20
Career Advice (10) Paper describes advice for career success from the person interviewed.	0-3	4-7	8-10
Organization and Communication (10) Paper is well-organized, communicates effectively, and uses proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling.	0-3	4-7	8-10

Table 2
Grading Rubric for Writing Assignment #2

Categories	Meets few criteria	Meets some criteria	Meets most/all criteria
Career Background (20) Paper provides a job title, a detailed description of the selected position, and a description of the types of organizations in which this sport management position exists.	0-6	7-13	14-20
Knowledge and Understanding (30) Paper shows evidence of knowledge and understanding about the selected position including a description of various job responsibilities and examples of competencies required for success in this sport management job.	0-15	16-22	23-30
Organization and Communication (10) Paper is well-organized, communicates effectively, and uses proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling.	0-3	3-7	8-10

Table 3
Grading Rubric for Writing Assignment #3

Categories	Meets few criteria	Meets some criteria	Meets most/all criteria
Career Background (20) Paper includes a detailed description of the sequential jobs and experiences needed to prepare for the selected career including education, internships, and various jobs held.	0-6	7-13	14-20
Knowledge and Understanding (30) Paper demonstrates knowledge about sequential jobs, experiences, and responsibilities that prepare an individual for the selected career including specific examples that could inform your career decisions.	0-15	16-22	23-30
Organization and Communication (10) Paper is well-organized, communicates effectively, and uses proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling.	0-3	3-7	8-10

did not like about the course, and what suggestions they had for improving the course. Responses specifically about the writing assignments stated students liked exploring different careers, but they did not like the provision of peer feedback on drafts of papers, the number of writing assignments, and the number of sources required for the writing assignments. Students suggested eliminating the peer feedback, having more extra-credit opportunities, and reducing the number of sources required for writing assignments. Since this was the first time these writing assignments had been required of

students and in response to this feedback, four changes were made with the goal of helping students be more successful: elimination of the peer feedback; the revision of writing assignment #2 made optional for bonus points as part of writing assignment #3; reduction of the required minimum number of sources for writing assignment #3 from 5 to 3; and revisions to writing assignment #3 made optional for bonus points as part of writing assignment #4.

The task description for writing assignment #3 required each student to write a 3-4 page research paper that described the roles and responsibilities of

Table 4
Grading Rubric for Writing Assignment #4

Categories	Meets few criteria	Meets some criteria	Meets most/all criteria
Career Background (30) Reflections in this paper demonstrate an understanding of information learned.	0-15	16-22	23-30
Knowledge and Understanding (20) Paper makes personal applications of the information learned including thoughts on the chosen career and discussion of how you will use the information to be successful.	0-6	7-13	14-20
Organization and Communication (10) Paper is well-organized, communicates effectively, and uses proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling.	0-3	3-7	8-10

an individual in the chosen career. Writing assignment #3 was challenging for students because it required more time and effort to locate a minimum of three scholarly articles or books to obtain in-depth information about chosen careers. Students who relied solely on easily accessible, minimally informative and commercially popular websites received lower grades because of the lack of sufficient depth and breadth of information. While a few students chose not to revise writing assignment #2 for extra credit, most did. For those who had done well on their second writing assignment, making revisions resulted in their receiving 10 extra credit points. Many students in their revisions, however, only responded to specific questions asked in the professor's written comments and/or corrected grammatical errors. Other students made major revisions to improve their quality of their writing and received all of the extra credit points.

The task description for writing assignment #4 required students to write a 4-5 page reflective paper that made personal application of what was learned and how this shaped his or her thinking about, and conceptualization of, what it took to be successful in the chosen career. Most students chose to revise writing assignment #3 by addressing the marked grammatical issues and revisions needed as identified by the professor, and they received scores of up to 20 extra credit points. A few students failed to make specific personal application of what they had learned, even though this criterion was worth 20 points as stated on the grading rubric. For most students, the quality of writing assignment #4 was stronger than for previous writing assignments, possibly because no new research was required.

In reflecting on these four writing assignments, several students wrote that they would not have chosen

to write four papers, but they enjoyed learning more about possible careers in sport management through their interviews, research, investigations and reflections. Students acknowledged they learned characteristics about possible careers they liked, disliked, or never knew of, and they were glad they discovered through researching and writing about careers. Their writing improved through preparing drafts and receiving feedback to use when making revisions in subsequent submissions.

Second Iteration of the Four Writing Assignments

After conclusion of the course, the professor reflected upon successes and challenges of the four writing assignments and talked with colleagues about the use of writing assignments in their courses. As a result, a few modifications were made in preparation for teaching this course in spring of 2011. These changes are briefly summarized below.

The order of the task descriptions for the second and third assignments were exchanged because the professor believed it would be easier and more beneficial for students to investigate the roles and responsibilities of persons in career choices before exploring interim types of experiences they would complete and positions they might have in progressing toward their chosen careers. As a part of the second and third assignments, more extensive research was required as was reading career sketches of professionals in a variety of sport management careers. The second iteration of writing assignment #2 required students to write a research paper about their own long-term career aspirations to gain a better understanding about the responsibilities of individuals in these roles and whether fulfilling these duties would be of interest to

them. Students had to utilize information obtained from a minimum of five articles published in scholarly or sport-related journals for this paper.

With an ultimate career goal more clearly in mind, writing assignment #3 required each student to write a research paper based on information from at least 10 sources of information (5 of these had to be articles published in scholarly or sport-related journals, while 5 could be obtained electronically from commercial websites) about interim positions or steps for advancing in or toward the selected career. While increasing the number of sources for writing assignment #3, the requirements were more flexible to allow students to find information online about lower-level jobs in chosen careers.

With the large class size, the professor decided to eliminate the requirement to revise and resubmit previously graded papers as portions of the grades on subsequent writing assignments. One reason was the huge time demands for grading seven papers; another reason was that some students failed to spend the time required to substantively revise their original writing assignments. This change influenced the decision to make each of the four writing assignments worth the same number of points, 60 points each. However, after students received their grades for writing assignments #2 and #3, they requested and were given the option to revise and resubmit one writing assignment of their choice to improve their grades.

Because of the importance of receiving feedback to enhance their writing, students were encouraged to meet individually with the professor to discuss and get comments on drafts. A few students took advantage of this opportunity with positive effects on their writing, research and grades. Peer feedback was reinstated with each student required to bring a draft of each writing assignment to the class immediately preceding the due date for submission to receive comments and edits from peers. To make these sessions more beneficial to students, written guidance for peer feedback was provided by the professor. The questions listed below are examples of this guidance:

1. What did you learn about this person's career journey? Give positive feedback about this.
2. What would you like to learn more about this person's career journey? Provide specific feedback.
3. Did this person describe and show an understanding of the sequential jobs and responsibilities needed to prepare for the selected career?
4. Did this person organize the paper and communicate clearly and effectively?

To emphasize the requirement of preparing a draft and bringing it to class, students who failed to do this were marked absent for that class (depending on students' overall attendance, this could negatively affect their grades). Finally, to encourage students to get help from the Writing Center, they were allowed to make up one unexcused absence from class by going to the Writing Center for assistance with at least one writing assignment.

Upon reflection, the second iteration modifications in the writing assignments were positive. The peer feedback sessions were more engaging and helpful for students due to increased guidance and clarity provided by the professor. Additionally, students liked not having to revise three writing assignments as parts of their grades, yet appreciated the optional opportunity to revise and resubmit one writing assignment for additional points. More students availed themselves of opportunities to get formative feedback from the professor prior to the submission of their writing assignments.

Third Iteration of the Four Writing Assignments

Changes in points associated with each writing assignment, peer feedback, and order of the writing assignments were continued the third time this course was taught in spring of 2012. The requirement to read career sketches for writing assignments #2 and #3 was eliminated, although students who incorporated information from the various positions that sport management professionals advanced through in writing assignments #2 and #3 benefited from what they learned and wrote. More extensive guidance was provided by the professor to help students give peer feedback to classmates, which continued to improve the quality and helpfulness of the feedback. Students who demonstrated problems with their writing (i.e., scores of 7 or below out of a possible 10 points on the organization and communication section of the grading rubric) were required to provide proof of receiving assistance on a subsequent writing assignment from an individual in the Writing Center. To assess how effectively course learning outcomes, and specifically the two associated with the writing assignments, were being met, on the day of the final exam the professor asked students to anonymously provide feedback.

Results

Analysis and Synthesis from Students' Perspectives

When initially presented on the first day of class, the four written assignments and the research requirements for two of these were daunting to first- and second-year students. While some students may not have been eager to embark on the required work, others may have questioned whether they possessed the skills necessary to be successful. Regarding writing

assignment #1, however, students appreciated the flexibility to interview any person working in sport management, ask any questions they wanted, review examples of excellent papers submitted by former students, and use the grading rubric to guide their writing. Combined, these led to most students earning over 50 out of 60 points on this assignment. However, despite repeated encouragement to seek assistance from the Writing Center, some students submitted papers with insufficient editing and numerous grammatical mistakes.

For writing assignments #2 and #3, most students preferred to rely on easily accessible online information rather than to seek help from the professor or a librarian when searching for scholarly resources. Consequently, many students struggled and were frustrated when trying to locate or identify required information about the sport management careers they chose as well as the entry- and mid-level positions that would prepare them for career advancement. Some students' reluctance to seek help resulted in their receiving lower grades and learning less than they would have from more scholarly resources. The professor collected helpful scholarly resources from students in this class and posted these on the course management system the next time this course was taught.

Overall, students enjoyed writing assignment #4 because it did not require conducting research or an interview. In their papers, on the end-of-course evaluation, and in talking with the professor, several students commented about how valuable they felt the learning associated with the sequenced writing assignments was. The connection between what they learned and their career aspirations had become meaningful and personally applicable.

In addition to learning information about the 12 topics in a survey course about sport management, students' responses about meeting course learning outcomes were extremely positive (see Table 5) (i.e., 100% , with 58 students stating the objective to "identify careers of interest to them, investigate the chosen careers, and demonstrate through written assignments their knowledge about and understanding of how to advance in the chosen careers" was fully met; 23 responded it was mostly met; and the other 2 added it was somewhat met) (see Table 5). The concept map shown in Figure 1 depicts the linkages between the course learning outcomes with the writing assignments and instructional strategies used by the professor.

Concluding Comments

The Nature of Teaching

Teaching is intellectual work. Continually examining and enhancing the teaching-learning process is a critical aspect of effective teaching and requires a heartfelt commitment to, and lifelong passion for, learning. Faculty members who believe teaching is intellectual work are more likely to inspire students to fully engage in the learning process, enhance their critical thinking skills, and actively seek to learn. As Bain (2004) reported, the best college teachers set high standards. Value-added education demands setting and meeting high standards for teaching and learning. With the goal of enhancing and documenting student learning, the professor added four sequential writing assignments, engaged in continuing reflection about how to improve the writing and learning process, and made mid-semester and reflective adjustments.

Overall reflections on the effectiveness of the four writing assignments yielded these insights:

- Many students were reluctant to use the Writing Center even though they were strongly encouraged to take advantage of this helpful resource. For example, in the second iteration of the revised course, 14 out of 85 students went to the Writing Center to get help with their writing assignments; in the third iteration, the 10-12 students who scored 7 or less on the criterion of organization and communication on any of the first 3 writing assignment were required to receive help at the Writing Center. This small percentage suggested that students felt they already had the needed writing skills to get whatever grades were their goals; maybe students did not wish to spend the extra time to get help; or maybe they procrastinated in writing their assignments, so they did not have time.

- Many students struggled in finding scholarly sources of information about careers in sport management. While additional guidance was provided to students to help them find resources for writing assignments #2 and #3 in the second and third iteration of this course, some students still relied too heavily on easily accessible and mostly commercial websites, many of which were limited in content and direct relevancy to requirements of the writing assignments. In the third iteration, the professor provided additional guidance in how to use databases to find resources. Students were encouraged to meet with the professor for individualized help, which some did.

- Based on positive feedback received through the reflection paper and anonymous end-of-course evaluations, most students thought they improved their writing abilities. For example, in response to the open-ended question about what things the instructor did well as a part of the end-of-course evaluation, one student in the second iteration of

Table 5
Student Feedback about the Extent to which Course Objectives Were Met

Course learning outcomes	Fully met	Mostly met	Somewhat met	Minimally met	Not met
Students through an exploration of the fundamental content areas within sport management will make a reasoned, knowledgeable choice about whether sport management is an appropriate career path.	66	17	0	0	0
Students will identify careers of interest to them, investigate the chosen careers, and demonstrate through written assignments their knowledge about and understanding of how to advance in the chosen careers.	58	23	2	0	0
Students will be able to explain the principles of leadership and management as applied in sport settings.	59	23	1	0	0
Students will be able to describe, analyze, and apply the principles and issues in sport ethics, personnel management, financial management, sport law, facility and event management, strategic planning, and sport marketing.	95	22	3	0	0

the course wrote, "helped me with my writing." Another student in the third iteration wrote, "I enjoyed the paper assignments." As students focused on making revisions, the quality of their resubmitted writing assignments showed improvement. Evidence of student learning as demonstrated through their writing assignments is provided in the course portfolio available at http://www.cte.ku.edu/gallery/portfolios/lumpkin.

- Most students realized the value of these writing assignments because by connecting these with career exploration they learned more about options and opportunities in sport management careers. For example, a student in 2012 stated in writing assignment #4: "As I look back on my experience, I see how this class has impacted my future decisions and career path in sport marketing tremendously. Learning about all the different fields people want to go into and learning about each one, benefited me in one way or another. I felt like I could take something I learned from each lesson and apply it to marketing. Although having to write so many papers was not what I was expecting, it got me on track and motivated me to start getting serious about my own career path."

Like this student, others in their writing assignments #4 (reflections) commented on the helpfulness of learning more about one or more careers and how beneficial it was to confirm or contradict their preconceived notions about these careers. Some students stated what they learned reaffirmed their desires to pursue certain careers. Other students learned the job expectations for the careers they investigated were quite different than they thought and changed their minds or were rethinking what their career choices might be. Having conducted research and written about their aspirational careers as well as possible interim experiences and jobs they might hold to prepare for these careers, reflecting on what they had learned was considered by most students to be highly beneficial.

Implications of this Course Redesign

The incorporation of research and writing assignments into an introductory course is broadly applicable in higher education. Designing writing assignments to make them directly relevant to students' lives enhances how engaged they will be. Since many students struggle with writing in general and writing research papers in particular, it is incumbent on faculty members to structure writing assignments in clear, understandable and meaningful ways. This includes specific task assignments, guidance in how to identify and use scholarly sources and frameworks for conceptualizing and writing research papers. Encouraging students both to avail themselves of personnel working in a Writing Center and to take advantage of peer and teacher feedback also is beneficial in improving writing skills. Clearly stated, high expectations described in grading rubrics help students understand expectations and strive to achieve them (Bean, 2011).

From the professor's perspective, three implications of this course redesign are most poignant. First, given that the focus of teaching should remain on

students and their learning rather than on the discipline (Bain, 2004), teachers should seek feedback from students about how to make their learning more relevant and meaningful. Second, reflecting on teaching should be never-ending. After each class throughout the semester and in the planning process for teaching a course again, the reflective teacher will examine every aspect of course content, the instructional process and assessments including writing assignments, and he or she will make adjustments that will lead to greater student learning. Third, documentation of student learning is increasingly imperative in higher education. While development of a course portfolio may not work for everyone (although it is recommended), collecting examples of students' writing is a powerful reminder of the difference teachers are making in student learning.

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