WIP FALL NEWSLETTER

From the Writing Intensive Program

One way to support student engagement in public writing

How to Host a Mini-Conference for your WIP Class

An Interview with Laura Fackrell, WIP TA in Geology

What: a mini-conference

Course: GEOL 4020, taught by Mattia Pistone

Who: 12 students participated, some with group presentations so a total of seven presentations

When: 10:30am–3pm

Where: Flinchum's Phoenix

Schedule: Breakfast. Oral presentations. Break for lunch. Poster presentations using projectors.

How did this event fit into your writing-intensive curriculum? Why did you decide to host it?

There was a plan to have presentations related to their projects in the syllabus; however, a grant allowed us to host a bigger event, and conferences are a likely part of the students' future careers in geology so a useful experience to have as undergraduate students.

What did you hope for students to get out of the event?

An experience presenting their work to a public audience, similar to what they would likely experience in the future. The focus of the presentations was not on how well a student spoke or similar measurements but focused on if the student had a clear purpose and were able to support that in the presentation and state specific conclusions and then interact with the audience with questions.

What was the planning process like?

It took a few weeks to plan and some communication back and forth to see how we would adjust the assignment to work with a conference. Some things that really helped were getting an idea of any dietary restrictions ahead of time and having students sign up for specific times to present, which helped the conference run smoothly.

❝ Definitely exceeded my expectations."
—student response

How did students experience/respond to the event?

The presentations the students gave were highly successful and very interactive, and the students did a great job of presenting their work.

If other faculty are interested in hosting a mini-conference for their classes, what recommendations might you make to them?

Aside from logistics, encourage instructiveness and let the students really enjoy their time. I think that goes into setting expectations for the presentations and focusing on the instructiveness of the experience. The students were nervous but also prepared to be interactive and that made the conference a success. Also, have students upload the presentations beforehand, like how a normal conference would, that way if there are WIFI or connectivity issues, the presentations can be downloaded ahead of time.

What did you learn/gain from the experience?

I did not realize how differently students would respond to this style of set up as opposed to a "normal" class presentation. They really put in a lot of effort and proactively participated, and that made it a great event. A general class presentation tends to be treated more like something they have to get done, but the students really got into the conference set-up and that made it so much better.

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