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APPLICANT INFORMATION

A. Application Grant Year (e.g. 2019-20): 2019-2020
B. Project Title: Improved Paper Writing Through Oral Reading of Papers to Peers
C. Applicant Name(s): Michael Barnwell
D. Department(s): Philosophy
E. List any / all CCTL grants received in the past 5 years. Include grant year, project title and list highlights of the outcomes (presentations including brown-bag sessions, publications, main results).

   Presented at Niagara University’s 12th Annual CCTL Conference (January, 2014).

   Presented at Niagara University’s 14th Annual CCTL Conference (January, 2016).

2015-2016: “Visual Argument Maps To Aid Learning Both Philosophical Method And Content.”
   Presented at Niagara University’s 15th Annual CCTL Conference (January, 2017).

2016-2017: “Transferring Critical Thinking Outside the Classroom (And Civic Engagement Too!)”
   Presented at Niagara University’s 15th Annual CCTL Conference (January, 2017).
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1. Describe the goals of the project and the impact the project will have on active and/or integrative learning in higher education. Discuss both your courses/discipline and transferability to the Niagara University community and higher education more broadly.

In my Introductory to Philosophy Honors class (PHI105HON) I employ a unique first-draft and peer-editing system in order to encourage my students to become better writers. Each student must write six papers and be a peer reviewer for three different paper assignments. When writing a paper, the student must turn in a draft that is given anonymously to a peer reviewer (who is not writing a paper for that assignment; the assignments are staggered among the students). The peer reviewer then provides anonymous feedback on the draft that is returned to the author. The author then revises her first paper before turning in a final version to be graded.

There were several intended benefits of making the students write drafts to be reviewed. First, it made students write their papers early so they had time to set them aside and ‘clear their minds,’ so to speak. This way, when the authors returned to their papers, they could hopefully see their mistakes more clearly. In addition, the peer comments should help them identify inadequacies in their writing styles and arguments. Moreover, the peers themselves benefitted by seeing the kinds of mistakes others made. Finally (and this point is key to the current proposal), writing a draft for an anonymous peer was supposed to make the students ‘take their draft more seriously.’ To explain: I have been convinced for a long time that turning in “rough drafts” is useless. When students know that they are writing ‘only a draft,’ it is easy for them not to put their best effort into it; it doesn’t really ‘count’ anyway. The problem with this typical rough draft approach is that many of the problems a peer or instructor would comment on in that draft are mistakes or issues that the student would not have committed in the first place if she were treating the paper as if it were ‘for real.’ More than likely, students do not take drafts seriously and make mistakes they would otherwise not make. This situation has several drawbacks. Since the majority of the comments a reviewer of the draft would offer are regarding issues the authors would fix anyway on the final draft, the comments are largely useless. Not only that, but now everybody’s time has been wasted. The student wasted her time by writing the draft, and the instructor or reviewer wasted her time by making comments on issues that would not have shown up anyway. There is furthermore no pedagogical value to the exercise. The only way drafts can be useful is if students put forth their best effort on them and then have pointed out to them what they are still doing wrong. It is only when students receive feedback on their best efforts that they are able to be truly aware of their own writing flaws.

When I first instituted this system, my goal in making students serve as peer reviewers for the drafts was to make the students take their drafts more seriously. I presumed that knowing fellow students would read and comment on their papers would make authors write better drafts. In other words, I was hoping this procedure would cause the first drafts to not be ‘rough drafts.’ In this way, the problem of the pointlessness of rough drafts that I pointed out above could be avoided. Their drafts would be better; therefore, any comments they received on such drafts would be helpful and would not simply be aimed at problems they would have fixed anyway. What I have noticed over the years, though, is that students still treat the draft as a rough draft. I presume this is due to the anonymous nature of the process. Since they know the reviewers will not know who they are, authors are free to write less-than-adequate drafts without fear of embarrassment. The peer reviewer then has no option but to comment on many mistakes that the author would certainly have fixed in the final draft anyway. As a result, the process is less pedagogically helpful than it could have been, and the peer-reviewers and author’s time has been wasted to a degree.

It is also commonplace in education that reading one’s paper out loud is one of the best ways for an author to proofread her own paper. When the sentences are spoken out loud, structural, grammatical and argumentative problems that may not have been apparent while simply reading the paper in one’s mind become apparent.

My goal in this project, therefore, is to make authors read their own papers out loud to their peer-reviewers. This process will eliminate the anonymity involved in the current process; the author will be standing up in front of her peers. Since authors will be aware that the peer reviewers will be listening to them read their own papers, authors should take more care to write better drafts lest they suffer unneeded embarrassment.
Moreover, reading the paper out loud is helpful for the authors themselves. They will be able to ‘hear’ how their paper sounds. It is very likely that this process alone will cause them to self-correct many of their errors independently of feedback from their peers. As a result, this process retains the benefits of writing an early draft and getting peer feedback, adds a new benefit (i.e., ensuring that the authors do indeed read their papers out loud), and incentivizes authors to avoid the pointless task of treating the first draft as a ‘rough’ draft. In addition, public speaking is increasingly becoming an important emphasis of general education and is highly desired in the business world. This exercise will thus give the students a low-stakes experience in speaking in front of others so as to help them build their poise and confidence.

This project is highly transferable to other courses at Niagara and higher education more broadly. Since writing papers is a key component to almost every aspect of education, students must learn how to write serious (not rough) drafts, revise them, and clearly and cogently communicate their thoughts throughout all disciplines. Getting into the habit of reading paper drafts out loud and adequately preparing to do that in front of peers while writing one’s draft is a skill that can be used in nearly every university course (and even in one’s future business life).

2. **Provide a brief literature review and describe how your project would further develop the discipline.**

The role of peer review on writing has been recently explored in the literature, and there is evidence to think the peer review process is positive for both the author and the reviewer (Harland, Wald, and Randhawa 2017). Trautmann reports that the peer review process leads to more revisions being made and that authors regard peer review as having been helpful for revising scientific reports (Trautmann 2009). Others have agreed that peer review is positively perceived by the authors and advise that care be taken to take certain precautions, such as limiting group size of the groups and to separate the peer and instructor reviews (van den Berg, Admiraal, and Pilot 2006). As an interesting sidenote (and in perhaps some tension with some of the other findings), Lundstrom and Baker found peer review helpful but more so for the reviewers themselves (Lundstrom and Baker 2009). It had even been found that peer review is helpful in an ESL context (Paulus 1999), a result in tension with earlier findings (Nelson and Carson 1998). Interestingly, one study claims that the greatest benefits of the peer review process is for lower-level students (Mulder et al. 2014). My project will extend this literature since I am focused specifically on honors students. My project will take place in my PHI105HON class, so I will be able to explain the benefits (both for the author and the reviewer) from the aspect of how it benefits higher-level students specifically.

The benefits of reading aloud to revise are such a commonplace that they almost need no support. Nevertheless, Peter Elbow has explicitly explored these benefits in his important book *Vernacular Eloquence* (Elbow 2012). Interestingly, the importance of reading the actual words one has written aloud is so important that one study has probed into how text-to-speech software can help this process (Garrison 2009). Apparently, students sometimes do not read the actual words when reading aloud and using text-to-speech software helps correct this and leads to some proofreading improvements.

My project combines both of these strategies: reading aloud and peer-review. It thus seems to have the potential to fill an important gap in the literature while extending some portions of it, such as exploring specifically how these methods can be helpful for higher-level students.

3. **Detail how active and/or integrative learning will be studied to accomplish the goals described in (1). Identify potential problems you may encounter and alternative tactics or strategies you would implement if these occur.**

I will continue to split up the class into three staggered groups. Each group will write six papers and serve as peer reviewers for three of those papers. And as before, the authors will turn in a draft of their paper to be peer reviewed and the comments of the peer reviewers must be taken into account by the authors while writing the final drafts. The large alteration I will make to accomplish my goal will be with regard to the authors’ third and fifth papers. After two papers, they should have a general idea of how to write the papers
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for my class and they should have already received feedback from myself and peers on two previous papers. This allows them to ‘take it to the next level’. It also provides a good baseline for comparison to the ‘read aloud’ portion. For their third and fifth papers, they will meet in small groups. There will be authors and reviewers together of approximately four to five students with a minimum of two of those students being reviewers. The authors will read their papers out loud (any other authors in the same group will have to step outside the room so they do not ‘steal’ ideas from another author). One of the reviewers will be assigned to each paper. (Both reviewers will not be assigned to each paper. In this way, some anonymity will remain so as to allow the reviewers to be somewhat anonymous and therefore more honest.) After each paper is read, the author will quickly leave the room to allow whichever reviewer is reviewing to write up his or her review. This process will continue until all the authors have read their papers. The reviews will then be delivered to me independently and I will give them to the authors at the next class.

I will be able to administer surveys to both the authors and reviewers regarding the benefits of this method. They will be able to compare the typical peer-review method with the ‘read aloud’ peer review method. Anecdotally, I will be able to comment on the perceived improved (or not) quality of the drafts. I will also be able to survey the authors as to how much more seriously they took writing the draft knowing they would have to read it aloud in front of a peer reviewer. Finally, I will be able to look at the quality of the peer review comments and, as a direct measure, compare the final paper and their grades to previous iterations of this same paper in previous classes.

Since this may take up too much class time, I plan to do this outside of class (and possibly in office hours). The potential problem I foresee are schedules not coinciding. In order to accommodate for this problem, I will survey their schedules before dividing them into initial writing groups and will purposely organize them so that their schedules for this project can coincide.

4. Clearly describe the assessment techniques you will use to evaluate the effectiveness of the active and/or integrative teaching strategy (e.g. pre-post testing, surveys, anecdotal evaluations, etc.). Optionally provide attachments as an appendix if assessment instruments are already developed.

I will take administer a survey (attached) that covers both the author and peer-review experiences with regard to the read-aloud portions and how they compare to the non-read-aloud portions of the class. I will also be able to anecdotally compare draft quality for the papers students do and do not read aloud (I see all the drafts). I will also be able, as a direct measure, to compare the final ‘read aloud’ papers and the grades on those papers to similar papers in previous iterations of the same paper in previous classes. I will also be able to compare the quality and grades of papers that did and did not go through the ‘read aloud’ process.

5. Provide a detailed implementation plan (timeline) of activities you will undertake for this project. When will the project be enacted in the classroom? When do you anticipate completion of the project? Dissemination of the results?

Since I am on sabbatical in Fall 2019, I will do this in my Spring 2020 PHI105HON class. Students will read aloud their 3rd and 5th papers to a group of peer reviewers. I plan to complete the project by the end of this course. I may attempt to replicate it in Fall 2020 PHI105HON in order to obtain a larger sample. I anticipate sharing my results at a brown bag in Fall 2020 and hopefully a journal article submitted in Spring 2021.

6. How do you plan to disseminate the results of the project through channels emphasizing the scholarship of teaching and learning? Please specify conferences, journals or other venues that you have in mind.

As mentioned above, I plan to share the results with the campus during a brown bag in the absence of our the annual CCTL conference during Fall 2020. I hope to draft an article during Spring 2021 and submit it to Teaching Philosophy. If it is not accepted there, I will hope to submit it to either Studies in Higher Education or Journal of Excellence in College Teaching.
Appendix 1: Reference List


Appendix 2 (optional): Assessment Instruments

Oral Reading of Papers to Peer Questionnaire

Please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements by circling the corresponding number.
Answer these questions with regard to papers 1, 2, 4, and 6 (when you did not ‘read aloud’ your paper).

1. Knowing that a peer was going to review my paper along the writing rubric made me write the first draft more carefully and better than I otherwise would have.

   Not at all  Somewhat  Very

2. At the beginning of the semester, I made significant changes to my final versions based upon peer-evaluations.

   Not at all  Somewhat  Very

3. In the middle of the semester, I made significant changes to my final versions based upon peer-evaluations.

   Not at all  Somewhat  Very

4. At the end of the semester, I made significant changes to my final versions based upon peer-evaluations.

   Not at all  Somewhat  Very

5. I learned how to write better myself as a result of receiving peer-evaluations.

   Not at all  Somewhat  Very

6. I learned how to write better myself as a result of giving peer-evaluations.

   Not at all  Somewhat  Very
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Answer these questions based upon your experience READING ALOUD your paper

7. Knowing that I had to read my paper aloud to reviewers made me write the first draft more carefully and better than I otherwise would have during the other parts of the course.

   1  2  3  4  5
   Not at all  Somewhat  Very

8. The peer reviews I got from the ‘read aloud’ portion were better than those I received during the other parts of the course.

   1  2  3  4  5
   Not at all  Somewhat  Very

9. I realized mistakes myself I otherwise would not have realized by reading my paper aloud.

   1  2  3  4  5
   Not at all  Somewhat  Very

10. Were there any differences between the first and second time (papers 3 and 5) of the ‘read aloud’ peer review portion worth commenting on?

   Answer these questions based upon being a peer reviewer for the read aloud portion of the course.

11. Listening to others read their papers aloud was more effective than regular peer-reviewing at making me realize how to write better papers.

   1  2  3  4  5
   Not at all  Somewhat  Very

12. I was able to offer better advice on papers if they were read aloud by the author.

   1  2  3  4  5
   Not at all  Somewhat  Very

13. Please comment, as an author, on whether ‘reading aloud’ made a difference in your preparation and overall writing process for those particular papers. Be sure to compare it to your process for writing drafts during the non-read-aloud portions of the course.
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14. Please comment, as a peer reviewer, on whether hearing papers ‘read aloud’ helped, hurt, or had no effect on your writing ability for your own papers. For example, did hearing papers read aloud make you realize how much more work you had to put into writing your own drafts?

15. Please offer any other open-ended comments regarding the process of papers 3 and 5 being ‘read aloud’ to peer reviewers.