Faculty collaborate on strategies for reading

Terri Bidle, left, and Cindy Dove

At a September 25 meeting, members of the Reading Across the Curriculum group shared their experiences with reading strategies for student learning and engagement. The group is working with a Reading Apprenticeship framework that locates reading development in the academic disciplines, with faculty members in a role combining content expertise with reading mentorship. The need is clear: a 2006 study by the American Institutes for Research found that more than 75 percent of students at two-year colleges lacked the skills to perform complex literacy tasks.

Reading research shows that reading skills cannot be separated from content knowledge. People with higher content knowledge and lower reading skills perform better at reading tasks than people with the reverse set of skills. Thus, reading development is most effective when it works with existing content knowledge. In many subjects, however, students lack the background knowledge that would allow them to understand the course reading. Three approaches to addressing this challenge follow.

For anatomy and physiology, a course with typically high fail rates, Professor of Anatomy and Physiology Terri Bidle developed a method to build content knowledge first, before asking students to read textbook material. Students begin a topic with both a lecture outline that includes embedded learning objectives, and a document with answers to the learning objectives. Students are required to complete their lecture notes before class using the answers to the learning objectives. Each class meeting begins with a quiz, for which students can use their completed lecture notes. Answers to the quiz are given immediately, so students understand what they know and what they need to study. The quiz and its review take about 15 minutes at the beginning of class. Because students have complete lecture notes, concepts can be effectively covered in the remaining hour of class time. Preparing their lecture notes outside of class deepens students' understanding of lecture points and students are able to integrate concepts more effectively during lecture. In addition, students feel more confident after lecture in reading the material in the textbook. Students in the full range of grades, from A to F, say that the approach "really helps," and preliminary analysis for the fall 2015 semester indicates that the approach decreases the failure/withdrawal rates.

Eric Schwartz, instructor of political science, incorporates an approach that requires students to engage in diverse tasks continually. Students take quizzes, participate in discussions of current political events, and write essays and research papers. Recently, students have participated in a special "question time." Every class period, the students are divided into small groups. Each group is given three or four questions about the text. At the beginning of the class, each group comes before the class to present their answers to the class. Group cooperation between the students is fostered and in-depth reading of the text is required for successful answering of the questions.

English 102, an introductory literature course, is inescapably reading-intensive. To support students who have a variety of skills and learning preferences, Adjunct Instructor of English Liz Hadley enhanced her Moodle course site with a multimedia feature for most assigned texts. These features are optional. Discussion questions are based on the readings; multimedia resources help students approach and understand the readings. Hadley began adding these resources to the spring 2015 version of the course. When asked for anonymous feedback, students requested more audio and video materials.

Join the Teaching Course, on Moodle, for more stories and additional reading resources. *Reading for Understanding,* a guide to the Reading Apprenticeship framework, is available for loan from the Fletcher Center library. New members of the Reading Across the Curriculum group are welcome.

Is your online course accessible?

Educational accessibility "is the college's goal to provide students with an equal playing field, without the impact of disability standing in the way," Jaime Bachtell, coordinator of Disabilities Support Services, told workshop attendees on October 16. "We want to make sure that all of our online materials are accessible to all students," she said, "including students with disabilities." The HCC Disabilities Support Services Handbook, available on the office's webpage, offers detailed guidance for faculty members about working with students with disabilities online and in traditional classes.

Compliance is an ethical responsibility, Bachtell explained, but it is also a legal obligation under federal law. Instructors are responsible for creating accessible courses and learning resources – ideally, accessible in general rather than in response to an individual need. For most faculty members, accessibility involves learning new skills. For instance, Word documents become meaningful or gibberish when converted from text to speech. The difference is formatting.

To learn how to meet the most common accessibility course requirements, Learning Technology System Specialist Brenda Huffman recommended the Portland Community College resource site at: *www.pcc.edu/resources/instructional-support/access/* . The site, developed by a national leader in online instructional accessibility, provides step-by-step how-to guides, instructional videos, and a full-length free course. Topics include:

- Creating clear and consistent course design
- Using properly formatted headings and lists
- Writing meaningful text for images and links
- Creating documents in accessible formats

- Using captioned media
- Developing LMS webpages
- Formatting Word documents
- Designing PowerPoint presentations
- Maintaining accessibility when converting a document to a PDF
- A plugin that creates accessible math and science equations, formulae, and notations
- Dealing with tables, graphs, and complex images
- Working with video and audio

Learning Technology staff assistance is available for "over-the-shoulder assistance" for implementing accessibility features, Huffman said.

Accessibility resources are located at the Disabilities Support Services webpage, the Fletcher Center webpage, and on the Teaching Course (on Moodle).

Beyond the classroom

In the photo below, Mark Barlet, president and CEO of the AbleGamers Foundation, demonstrates assistive videogame technologies to HCC students from the Anime and Game Development Clubs. The prop in the foreground is a life-sized replica of the Songbird from the video game BioShock.

Alicia Drumgoole, assistant professor of English, said, "It's important to show students real-world opportunities for their degrees. The AbleGamers Foundation views these demonstrations as an opportunity to help students advance in the field of gaming and digital entertainment. We hope that we can continue our work with the

Trudy Gift, center, with colleagues Doug Horton and Karen Weil-Yates

Foundation to bring awareness to this worthwhile and fun charity. Thank you so much to all of the faculty members who brought their students out to this event!"

Teaching with long-term impact

Trudy Gift, professor of Information Systems Technology, caught up with a group of HCC alumnae who began their computer programming careers in her courses thirty years ago.

Stefanie Hart, Angie Kendall, Crystal Kline, Jane Rhodes, and Tina Younker were students in Gift's classes in the mid-1980s. Today, all are programmers for Brethren Mutual Insurance Company. The get-together was prompted by a card from Jane (Fenner) Rhodes '84, now a senior programmer analyst, thanking the professor for her early influence.

 "When I turned 50, I made a list of things I wanted to do, and one of those was to thank the special people who influenced my life, especially the women," Rhodes said. "Trudy taught us that you may have to start at data entry, but those jobs will be there if you make yourself available. I was a secretary when my first employer took a chance on me. He realized I had abilities and mentored me. Trudy helped me see that I could do this. She was very encouraging – a road sign pointing us in the right direction."

As one of 150 developers working at in her division at Citibank in the 1990s, Rhodes participated in a panel made up of the top 20 most productive developers. When the members introduced themselves, "Most of them had master's degrees from places like M.I.T.," Rhodes said. "When I said, 'I have an A.A. degree from my local community college,' their heads whipped around, 'You what?!'" Rhodes attributes her career progress to "the quality of education we got" at HCC.

To women considering careers in computing, Gift said, "You really have no barriers today." Gift considers career advising to be part of the job of professor. "I stay in contact with businesses to connect students with jobs," she said, and she gives students advice about professionalism on the job. Treating people well will help "open doors that you never knew were there," she tell them, and "Education
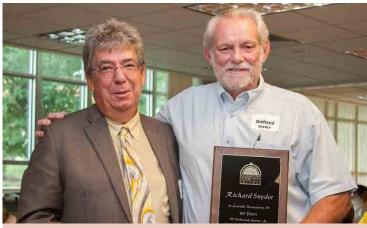
doesn't stop when you get the degree. You have to keep learning."

"Sometimes we wonder, are we making an impact?" Gift said, until an exchange like this one. "Those are the days you know that you are making a difference. Hang in there," she encourages. "There are rewards, even if it may take a while to feel them."

HCC Annual Faculty Dinner and Conference 2015

From left: Brian Eichelberger, Sarah Burge (back to camera), Shannon Cameron, and Vicky Bullett

Adjunct Instructor of Sociology Dick Snyder, right, with Vice President Dave Warner. Snyder was presented with a plaque recognizing 40 years of service to HCC.

From left: Tim Jenness, Dick Snyder, Ed Gift, Don Stevenson, and John League

Alyssa Little, left, and Audra Haddock-Martenot