

SUMMARY

Based on knowledge of the product, please summarize your review of the product below in 2-3 paragraphs.

Following is a review of the City University of New York CareerPATH/Start Psychology Curriculum, piloted in spring 2014 at two campuses of the City University, Queensborough Community College and Borough of Manhattan Community College. This curriculum consists of a general overview, unit-by-unit lesson overviews, individual detailed lesson plans, readings, target disciplinary vocabulary, strategy explanations, activity and discussion protocols, writing templates, and writing assignments. It is my judgment that this curriculum merits an outstanding rating because it:

- Achieves the City University of New York CareerPATH goal of promoting a career pathway to the health care industry by providing students with a cohesive and rigorous introductory course in psychology;
- Achieves the City University of New York Start program goal of helping students to successfully transition to college-level study by supporting the development of their academic reading and writing skills via a well-scaffolded, cohesive disciplinary curriculum.

In this nine-week curriculum, students are immersed in college-level coursework in introductory psychology as they develop key academic reading and writing skills. The curriculum is divided into three curricular units, consistent with the content of a first-level college course in the discipline: Introduction to Psychology: Topics, Careers, and Methods; Behavioral Psychology: Learning, Conditioning and Habit Formation; and Cognitive Psychology: Learned Helplessness and Mindsets. In the first unit, students gain an overview of the field by exploring general principles and concepts, researching mental health careers, gaining fluency with basic disciplinary terminology, and learning experiment design. In the second unit, students are introduced to Behavioral Psychology, the sub-discipline focused on the theory that behavior is learned and can be measured, trained, and changed through conditioning. Students investigate the principles of both operant and classical conditioning and apply them to accessible life situations. In the third unit, students explore Cognitive Psychology, the other major sub-discipline, centered on the way in which people perceive, remember, think, speak, and solve problems. Special focus is placed on learned helplessness and mindsets. The course culminates with six writing-intensive lessons leading to a final paper, writing portfolio, and self-reflection.

Woven into each lesson are specific pedagogical objectives designed to support deep reading and analysis of texts, analytic and argumentative writing, and oral communication, all of which are critical for college success. These objectives are carefully spiraled throughout the curriculum, so that students have the opportunity to continually practice and refine their skills. Of particular note is a strong, consistent focus on skills essential for reading complex informational text, such as skimming, questioning, predicting, inferring, categorizing, summarization of concepts, synthesis of central ideas, and citation of textual evidence. Writing skills are taught and reinforced through Discussion Journals, textual annotation, various essay assignments, portfolios, and CATW practice sessions. Oral communication skills are developed through small group and whole class text-based peer discussions, and oral presentations.

On April 28, 2014, together with Gayle Cooper-Shpirt, Director of College Transition Curriculum and Instruction for Language and Literacy Programs at the City University of New York, I visited a classroom on the Queensborough Community College campus to observe the implementation of this curriculum. The students appeared highly engaged in the lesson, making connections between their prior knowledge and the disciplinary content of the course. The "sense of learning" was palpable. In a post-lesson discussion with the instructor, we discussed the academic gains that the students were making, among which were:

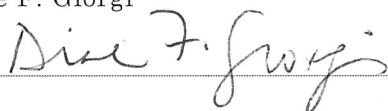
- Building reading stamina and gaining proficiency in comprehending disciplinary reading material. The Discussion Journals are an effective tool for engaging students in grappling with complex texts and helping them to internalize the discipline-based strategies needed for prioritizing and committing information to long term memory. The instructor noted that students are less resistant to struggling with lengthy, dense expository texts than they were at the beginning of the semester;
- Gaining confidence and skill in oral academic discussion. The Discussion Journal prompts are an effective springboard for sharing ideas with peers. The procedures for small group sharing provide clear expectations for these discussions;
- Transferring reading and discussion skills learned in the course to other contexts.

Now that the pilot semester has ended, this curriculum can and ought to be expanded to additional Start reading/writing courses across the City University campuses. One challenge to keep in mind for future implementation will be to hire instructors who not only have the requisite training and skill in literacy instruction, but also possess a strong background in the discipline of psychology.

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Date: June 23, 2014

Signature



This workforce solution was funded by a grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration. The solution was created by the grantee and does not necessarily reflect the official position of the U.S. Department of Labor. The Department of Labor makes no guarantees, warranties, or assurances of any kind, express or implied, with respect to such information, including any information on linked sites and including, but not limited to, accuracy of the information or its completeness, timeliness, usefulness, adequacy, continued availability, or ownership. The CUNY CareerPATH Program is an equal opportunity employer/program and auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.