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## How Cornerstone Changed My Teaching, Story 2

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## How Cornerstone Changed My Teaching: Story 2

Part of the journal section “Forum: Cornerstone” [Contribution to Cornerstone: An Experiment in Interdisciplinarity and Community]

Susan Roberts-Dobie, “How Cornerstone Changed My Teaching”

For two years (2012-13 and 2013-14), I took a break from one of my major classes to teach a section of Cornerstone. It was a pretty big leap for me, given I had no formal academic preparation in teaching speaking or writing, but I was intrigued by the opportunity to work with freshmen, and after ten years of teaching the same preps, I needed to stretch a little. The learning curve was steep, but well supported by the leadership team. Now that I have returned to my home department full time, I can see three ways Cornerstone has changed my teaching.

1. I assign more writing. I learned that writing doesn't have to be long papers. For example, for a budgeting assignment, I now require a cover letter explaining the budget, so they can practice professional writing. Sometimes, I incorporate three minutes of ungraded free writing at the beginning of class to get their brains started on a new topic. I now see writing as a habit that needs to be practiced regularly, as opposed to once a semester in one big paper.
2. I collaborate more. I had never taught a class with multiple sections, so I had never thought to ask a colleague how to teach something. But when you are teaching a class with 20+ sections, why not collaborate? Why not share my assignments and get feedback on what others liked and how they might tweak it? Now that I am back to teaching in my little silo, I regularly ask colleagues how they might teach a new concept or what they think of an assignment idea or video clip. It turns out, my colleagues are happy to talk about my classes and theirs.
3. I connect more. There is a serious expectation of connection in Cornerstone. The faculty are serious about students having a great introduction to UNI. I'd always liked my students and made small talk before class, but I hadn't deeply invested in a number of years. I had quit asking about hometowns and hopes and dreams. Along the way in Cornerstone, I remembered the importance of connection, both for my students and for me.

I am a better teacher after teaching Cornerstone, and I highly recommend teaching Cornerstone to anyone looking for an opportunity to grow.

[Go to the narrative [Cornerstone: An Experiment in Interdisciplinarity and Community](#) article.]



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