

# Improving the Teaching and Assessment of Student Writing in GE Courses

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# Introduction

The AANAPISI Grant has funded a project to improve the teaching and assessment of student writing in GE Courses at San Jose State University. The culminating product of that project was a manual titled "Providing Feedback on Student Writing" that details the best practices for assessing student writing. The information in that manual was broadcast in a series of professional development workshops for GE faculty, through the Center for Faculty Development.

# Goals of the Project

**Objective 1:** Overall, the goal of this project was to give the instructors the information they need in order to provide effective, transformative feedback on student writing. Specifically, these workshops aimed to

- Supply instructors with the best practices for providing feedback on student writing, including marking strategies and development criteria.
  - Coach instructors on creating a model for students to take responsibility for developing their writing skills, using instructor feedback and the campus handbook (*The Everyday Writer*).

**Objective 2:** Provide follow-up support for previous participants of the workshop. Instructors need this support as they implement the practices they learned in the workshop.

**Objective 3:** Expand the reach of this support through department-based and individual-based training.

## **Handbook**

**Find the “Providing Feedback on Student Writing” handbook online at  
<http://www.sjsu.edu/aanapisi>**

## Results

**Objective 1:** The workshops were well-received and at room capacity. An important outcome of the project was the small learning communities that developed between instructors belonging to the same department. Once he/she realized a colleague was attending or had attended a workshop, collaboration began. During the workshops, instructors were fully engaged in the learning community in the room - swapping ideas and stories, asking questions, laughing.

Objective 2: All instructors were contacted and offered follow-up support. Only a few wanted further guidance and their questions were often about issues tangential to providing feedback on student writing, yet still related to writing - SJSU's plagiarism policies, scaffolding exercises, etc. Many of the questions during and after the workshops lead me to believe that faculty who assign writing - regardless of discipline or department - are given no basic information about SJSU's policies related to writing, or any basic principles of best practices for teaching writing. In other words, I have not seen consistency with the way we treat writing on this campus.

## Results (continued)

Objective 3: Multiple department-based workshops were conducted, with such departments as LLD (Linguistics and Language Development) and Psychology. They were successful and well-received. That said, scheduling the department-based workshops proved very difficult. Many departments do not have regular meeting times for faculty, and therefore it is difficult to solidify a time for the majority of faculty to be able to attend a workshop.

Multiple individual-based workshops were conducted and these were also successful. Scheduling was much easier, and the session was more tailored to that instructor's need, which made the session more effective for that individual. Yet, there was, of course, no interaction with other faculty which disabled any kind of learning community and/or shared ideas.

## Feedback

"An excellent workshop! Thanks!"

## "Useful examples."

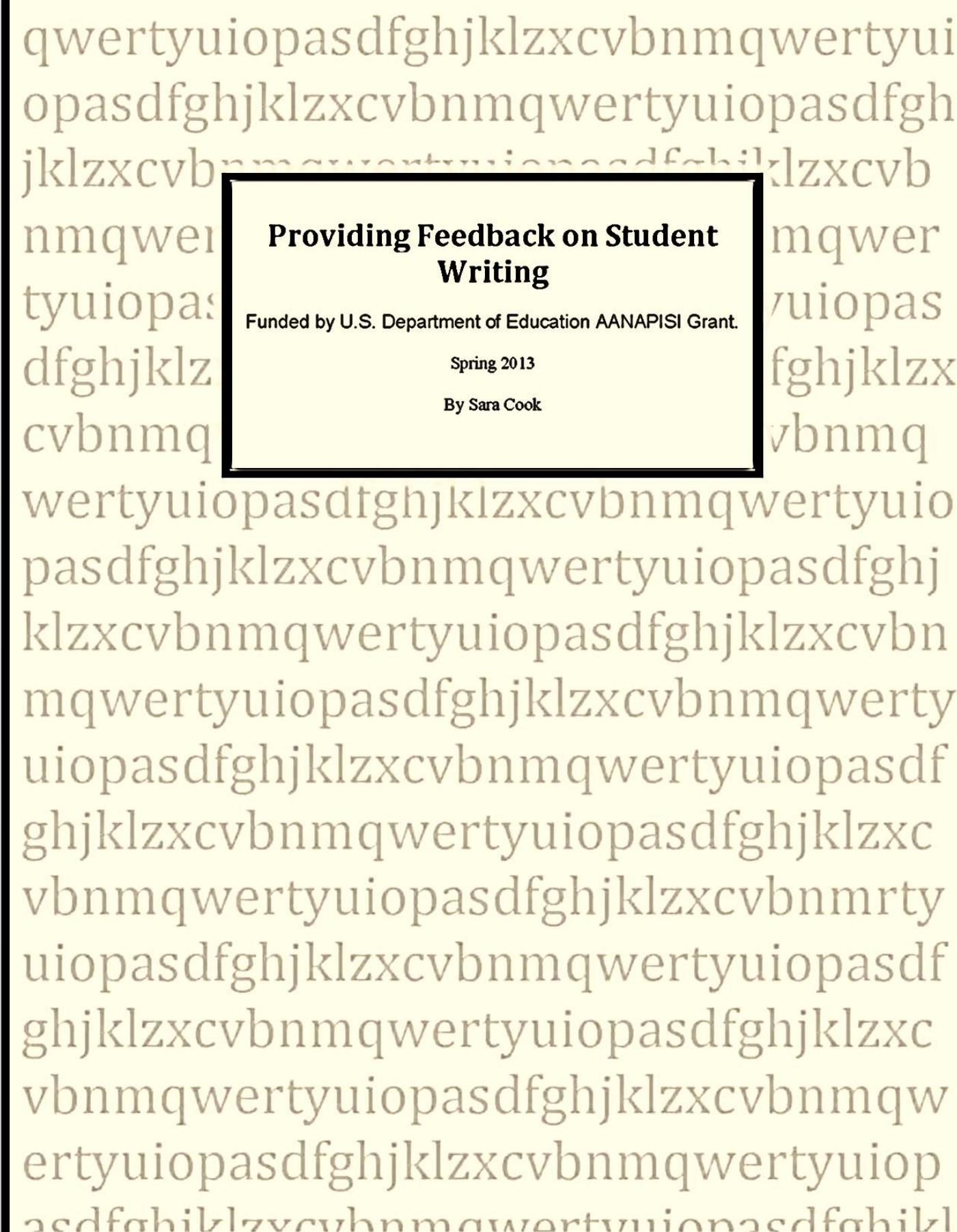
"I'm glad I came. Thank you!"

"Loved the workshop. Well worth the time."

"This workshop was extremely helpful.  
Excellent job."

"An excellent, practical workshop."

"Very engaging. Excellent resources."



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