Inside Independent Learning

Meet Sarah

I grew up in northern Minnesota, outside of Duluth. Access to education as a means of personal-development and increased opportunities is a passion of mine that stems from my learning and undergraduate teaching experiences at the University of Minnesota in Duluth, where I majored in American Indian Studies and German Studies. I moved to Madison in 2002, where I completed my M.A. in German Literature with a concentration in Medieval texts. I am currently a dissertator at UW-Madison, where I have focused on Post-1600 German Literature, Second Language Acquisition, and Germanic Linguistics. I have been teaching Independent Learning German courses for three years and am excited to move into this new role as Independent Learning Academic Program Coordinator. I look forward to getting to know you and your courses in the next few months. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns; my door is always open, and I look forward to working with you.

Introduce Yourself

I have met many of my IL colleagues over the past three years, but I do not yet know you all. I would like to invite you to email me at skorpi@dcs.wisc.edu and share a few things about yourself. I appreciate the opportunity to get to know my colleagues as individuals rather than names attached to courses.

Inside Independent Learning

While working as an ad hoc Independent Learning Instructor for the past three years, I noticed that it was easy to feel disconnected from my colleagues and department. The majority of my communication was student focused, either directly with students, or dealing with an issue or concern a student had about the course. In my new position, I would like to foster a professional community for IL instructors so we feel more unified in our work for the Division of Continuing Studies. One aspect of this professional community will be monthly e-mails. These e-mails are intended to be useful, to provide support, and to explore topics of interest to IL instructors. These monthly emails should be useful and meaningful to you, so if you have a topic idea, please submit it by emailing me at skorpi@dcs.wisc.edu.

Good Practice Reminder: 3 Day Turnaround

"Check the online dropboxes and email daily (M-F). Return online assignments and enter student grades within three business days. Return emails within 24 hours (excluding weekends)."

***Excerpt taken from** UW Independent Learning Program Instructor Handbook*

With the approach of summer comes warm weather, vacations, and (for many students) more time to focus on independent learning courses. For IL instructors, this often means an influx of students and a higher volume of assignment submissions. Please keep in mind our policy of a 3-day turnaround time for feedback and check your courses on a regular schedule. If you will not be able to adhere to the three day turnaround time schedule, please let me and your students know, as well as an estimated date when feedback will be available. As an IL instructor, I had times (particularly after a holiday weekend) where I was not able to keep up with the submissions and maintain high quality feedback for students. Students are often very understanding of the need to wait an extra day or two for high quality feedback due to a sudden increase in volume, but it is important to communicate the circumstances surrounding the delay with students waiting for feedback. Please be sure to copy me on any such emails to students so I can adequately answer any questions that come my way.
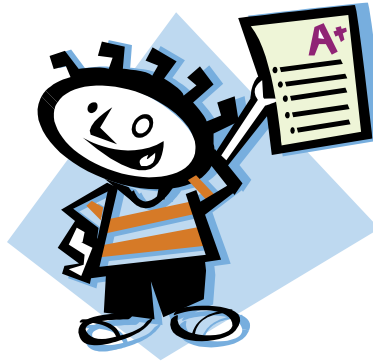
Ideas & Suggestions

Remember, if you have any questions or concerns that you think would be of interest to your IL colleagues, please submit them for future IL e-mails.

Coming Next Month: Student Email Communication

"I don't understand what question 3 is asking me to do."

With more technology available, IL instructors and their students are dealing with email as a primary communication tool. Many people can receive and send emails on their cell phones or other personal computing devises. Email as a medium has inherent challenges, including: conveying tone, appropriate register, and responding to emails that seem more like text messages or tweets. Next month, look for an article that explores the challenges of email communication, some suggestions for best practices, and some helpful "translations" to use when communicating with students via email. If you have any stories or tips surrounding this theme that you would like to have considered for next month's email, please send them to Sarah at skorpi@dcs.wisc.edu by June 16th.