We had a great discussion about Division III at Wednesday’s Talking about Teaching session. Here are some ideas organized around issues rather than presenters.

Resources

Writing Center – Center faculty meet with individual students. In addition, Ellie Siegel does a writing workshop that is largely Div III’s. They meet weekly and Ellie circulates around the room giving assistance. Supportive environment makes a difference.

OARS – Office of Accessibility Resources and Supports. Div III is so free form that almost no accommodation is generally necessary. The important piece is about strategies. Aaron works with students before Div III on technical strategies or tool development. An important focus in Div I and II should be on self-knowledge about one’s own strategies and work practices. There is opportunity early in Div III to work in OARS on adaptive strategies and tools.

CASA – Get CASA involved early. If mutually agreed upon, firm deadlines are not met, have full committee meetings regularly and have CASA involved right away. Not as a punitive measure but as a support. Students might see CASA as somehow scary. Perhaps by getting them involved early – say “let’s meet at CASA and see how they can help us – we keep having the same conversation and it doesn’t seem to be helping.” Have the whole committee meeting there. Anne will ask “why do you think your committee is concerned?” Better to ask for the meeting in CASA before it is clearly too late to make the deadlines.

Faculty Practices

General

Div III is so different from anything they have ever done. We have to normalize that with them. Let them know right from the start what the challenges will be and help them make plans for their work.

Ask for a schedule (including steps for fleshing out the project) including 2 deadlines for every item on the schedule (one for a first draft and the second for a revision based on feedback). Agrees on the schedule with the student. As soon as a student is not hitting the deadlines you might bring in another perspective – folks in CASA have a lot of experience helping students move forward. Having the committee and the student together in CASA (with Anne) keeps everyone on the same page. De-escalate the emotions by making it clear when things are not working as we hoped and what do we agree is necessary to move forward.
Set up expectations for the quality of work as clearly as you can in the contract. Make it clear what you will evaluate them on. At crucial moments you can say what the evaluation would look like at this moment and what the student would have to do to get a different kind of evaluation.

**When writing isn’t happening**

- Assume that students want to do the work. The paralysis is really a survival mechanism. By putting it off, they change the drudgery of doing it to the excitement of “can I do it?” Works well with 2-5 page papers, but not with longer ones like a Div III. For students with perfectionism (these are almost always smart people), the problem is often about decision-making. If you procrastinate you actually don’t have to or even get to make decisions – you just have to do it. Underlying perfectionism is almost always connected to depression (intertwined, not cause and effect), so referrals to Health Services are important. The perfectionism can be really hard when students know, respect, and have worked with a faculty member for a long time – they worry that their work is not reflective of what they should give you. Anonymity is helpful, this is another reason that having CASA in the room can help.

- Lit reviews are the hardest for students to do – it is all about decision-making – saying what is most important. When we as faculty do lit reviews, we have the perspective of the frame of the whole piece and of the field. Students are starting from inside – or really from separate little pieces trying to build the frame. It is helpful for them to have faculty give them an overarching piece that will help them frame – even reading Wikipedia or some other encyclopedic view for the broad brushstrokes (not to cite) is really useful. They need perspective on the shape of the larger issues and arguments.

- Go over the outline of the piece with the students. Make sure they understand the shape of the work

- Get them to do a writer’s introduction

- For some, talking out their ideas and then getting them to write it right away helps. They actually rehearse what they will be doing in a given section. You might see them start by writing a perfect paragraph. This is for students who revise in their head. Others have to write to get to their ideas – for these students, when they write their way to a good paragraph, have them put that paragraph first and then back it up – convince us that this is so.

- When a student has the ideas in their head, but can’t get it on paper: a) have them talk about a section and then go write it b) they might be tyrannized by the audience, so have them turn off the computer screen so they can’t see what they are writing (not editing as they go) or c) get them to think about writing as an email or facebook post, or some other low stakes writing, d) have them talk into dragon speak so their words get onto the page as they would speak them

**What to do if students are not meeting – students not replying to emails.**
This is an important time to: a) be in touch with CASA – they might help in reaching out to the student b) be clear about expectations c) let them know what supports exist on campus depending on what is up for them d) let them know we are on their side, or e) perhaps have one long meeting with the student where you hear them out so you can refer them to service/next meeting a short check-in about whether they followed up with those services but much longer on the work. That is, make it clear that you care about them and can refer them places, but your job is to talk to them about the work.

**Institutional Considerations**

We really have to examine what we are asking students to do before they get to Div III. In Div I and II students are learning about their own strategies and ought to leave Div II with strategies in place to select from as they face the challenges of Div II. OARS is a great resource for helping us think about how to do this in our courses and in our requirements. How do we build more independent project work into Div I and II?