Debrief Conversation with TRAIL Learning Community #1
22 January 2016

Benefits
Students were
• building arguments out of the evidence
• more nuanced in arguments
• better at pulling in counter-arguments instead of saying “this doesn’t help me”
• working with evidence differently, think about it more heterogeneously (harkens back to researcher bias)
• often passionate about what they picked
• seemed more informed by the end of the semester
• felt more ownership over their process, can translate into other contexts
• being prepared for academic writing (use of evidence), other classes are looking for content/evidence; values may be different in other types of writing
• grabbing onto the idea that working to a larger stakes papers was what they were meant to do (some students)
• feeling prepared for their research paper (many students).

Faculty found value in
• parts of the research paper
• readings
• annotated bibliography e.g. synthesis statements

Challenges
• Students need help making connections
• Stakes felt high on the last essay (however, some students were not stressed)
• May not have been as much revision of papers due to fall 2015 events
• You can really be impacted if you have a Monday/Wednesday class.
• Think about how to grade the journals. Will they be exploratory? Or do they need to be graded to ensure that students are referring to the readings etc.? Could they be graded more like CORE weekly responses?
• Providing context for students so they realize that the reading, writing, research, & critical thinking are all tied together and that they are not just improving writing but are to achieve all course learning outcomes
• Students (and faculty) may have different definitions of what constitutes writing or a writing assignment. Do student think of the annotated bibliography as a piece of writing?
• Some found that many students want the “traditional essay” or four self-contained essays (e.g. narrative essay, cause & effect, comparison and analysis) during the semester.
• One class felt that the Rhetorical Analysis was too easy. This may have been the result of page length of writing, readings selected ... ? There may be opportunities are there to “beef up” the analysis.

Additional Thoughts:
• Felt as though there was enough writing, depends on the course outcomes
• Where should the research proposal fall? There was a suggestion to do it after the annotated bibliography. Others suggested doing an early draft and coming back to it. It can start as speculative and isn’t necessarily a final proposal.
• Though students may want four contained essays, none of the TRAIL faculty thought this was desirable.
• Would be nice to integrate the diagnostics into the theme of the course.

Ideas:
• Identify a source from a database (after one or more database tutorials) to use for the Rhetorical Analysis, related to research question and could then be used in the Annotated Bibliography; students may benefit from more conversation about type of source e.g. informational vs. argumentative, feeds into choice of article for analysis
• Using the “Is Google Making us Stupid?” article for in-class rhetorical analysis; could think it through in class and then have each on write on their own, allows for additional focus on the quality of writing
• Journals can be expanded to ask students to try out integration, incorporation of quotes etc.
• Students could complete an outline (a bit like the research proposal) before doing the research paper. This had students outline how they were going to use their sources and what their argument was (making connections).
• Get students into groups early to become more confident about their subject.
• Can be extended conversations about the Jake Andraka video – To what extent was his research original? Is he giving credit?
• Make connections of activities, assignments, readings to course learning outcomes; talk about them since this CLO language also appears on the course evaluation