

Tips for Integrating a GRC into your Course

Below, you'll find some "lessons learned" from previous instructors' experiences incorporating a Graduate Research Consultant (GRC) into their classes. Hopefully this will alert you to some common issues GRCs have run into and get your research/creative project off on the right foot.

1. **Be focused:** Many instructors have commented that doing a bigger research/creative project and scaffolding all of the needed skills took more class time than anticipated. One strategy for handling this is to build some extra time for the project into the syllabus. Another is to focus on only certain parts of the research process (see the Research Cycle & Creative Cycle images at the end of this document to think this through). While you can do the whole research/creative cycle in your GRC class, you can also just focus on certain parts of it. The students' level of preparation and the amount of time you want to devote to the project can shape how much you want to take on.
 - **What's worked:**
 - i. **Decide which parts of the research/ creative cycle you want to focus on (and, just as importantly, what you don't):** Being strategic about which parts of the research process are most important will help you demand a high level of work in a targeted area without having the project become completely unmanageable.
 - ii. **Providing more support/structure** in some areas to keep students focused on the skills you identify as the most important. For parts of the research/creative cycle that are not your focus, find ways to skip over those parts. Examples:
 1. Give them the research topic/ question (or a short list to choose from) (skipping Step #1).
 2. Provide a list of pre-approved journal articles/ readings they can pick from (making Step #2 more manageable).
 3. Run statistical data for students, and have them interpret results (skipping some parts of Step #4 so students can focus on analysis).
 - **What hasn't worked as well:**
 - i. **Not assessing where the students are starting at:** Take the time to assess where your students are starting at in terms of their research skills, either by talking with other faculty who have taught the course or by doing a pre-test or class exercise to gauge their skill level. Instructors who haven't done this have sometimes realized too late that they should have worked on a particular skill earlier on. Those who have done this well have been able to adjust their plans for the project so that it is challenging, but doable.

2. **Make it fun!** What is the most engaging part of the research process in your field? Do students normally get to experience this part of the process?
 - **What's worked:**
 - i. **Having students work on primary data collection** (working in the archives, collecting field samples, collecting and analyzing statistical results). Find opportunities for students to have those "aha!" moments.
 - ii. **Having students do projects that are connected to the research/creative work of the GRC or faculty member:** Where this has been feasible, the students have been more invested when they know they are working on something that has the potential to contribute to real scholarship, rather than just a classroom exercise. It also shows students the enthusiasm of the GRC and faculty member for the research process.

3. **Incorporate it into class time (when possible, give points if not):**
 - **What's worked:**
 - i. **In-class workshops** where the GRC can work with entire classes at once.
 - ii. **Required one-on-one or small group consultations** with GRC that are scheduled far in advance or during regular class time. Consultations have been most effective when students have to prepare something for the meeting (i.e. email a draft of a paper ahead of time or prepare some questions) and the meeting has a clear goal.
 - iii. **Extra credit:** Some classes have had success with giving extra credit for out-of-class GRC workshops, but the point value needs to be significant and the students need to be motivated to get extra credit.
 - **What hasn't worked as well:**
 - i. **GRC office hours:** most GRCs haven't seen very many students show up when the office hours were optional.
 - ii. **Scheduling issues:** even if students are motivated, scheduling out-of-class meetings with GRCs has been time consuming and challenging. Some strategies include using class time to pass around a sign-up sheet for meetings, holding consultations instead of class time during a specific "project" week, and scheduling consultations far in advance.

4. **Manage group work effectively:** Many past GRC classes have used group work as a way to make the workload more manageable and to help students develop teamwork skills. However, they've found that working in groups can pose challenges.
 - **What's worked:**
 - i. **Teach group-work skills explicitly:** working in groups requires a set of skills that are separate from the research skills you are trying to achieve (communication, delegation, etc.).

- ii. **Assign roles:** many instructors have assigned specific roles in the group to clarify expectations and keep students accountable for their contribution to the group. See Blackboard for examples.
- iii. **Class time:** Scheduling work time during class for groups can prevent issues for students with busy schedules, and provides the instructor and/or GRC the opportunity to problem-solve with students as issues come up.
- iv. **Make students accountable for role in group:** Several people have had success with structuring grades in such a way that give value to the student's participation in the group. You can mix individual and group grades, let students rank other people in their group, etc.

5. **Communication between GRC & instructor:** The 30 hours that are expected of the GRC during the semester go quickly, so good communication is important to get the most out of the time and ensure a good working relationship.

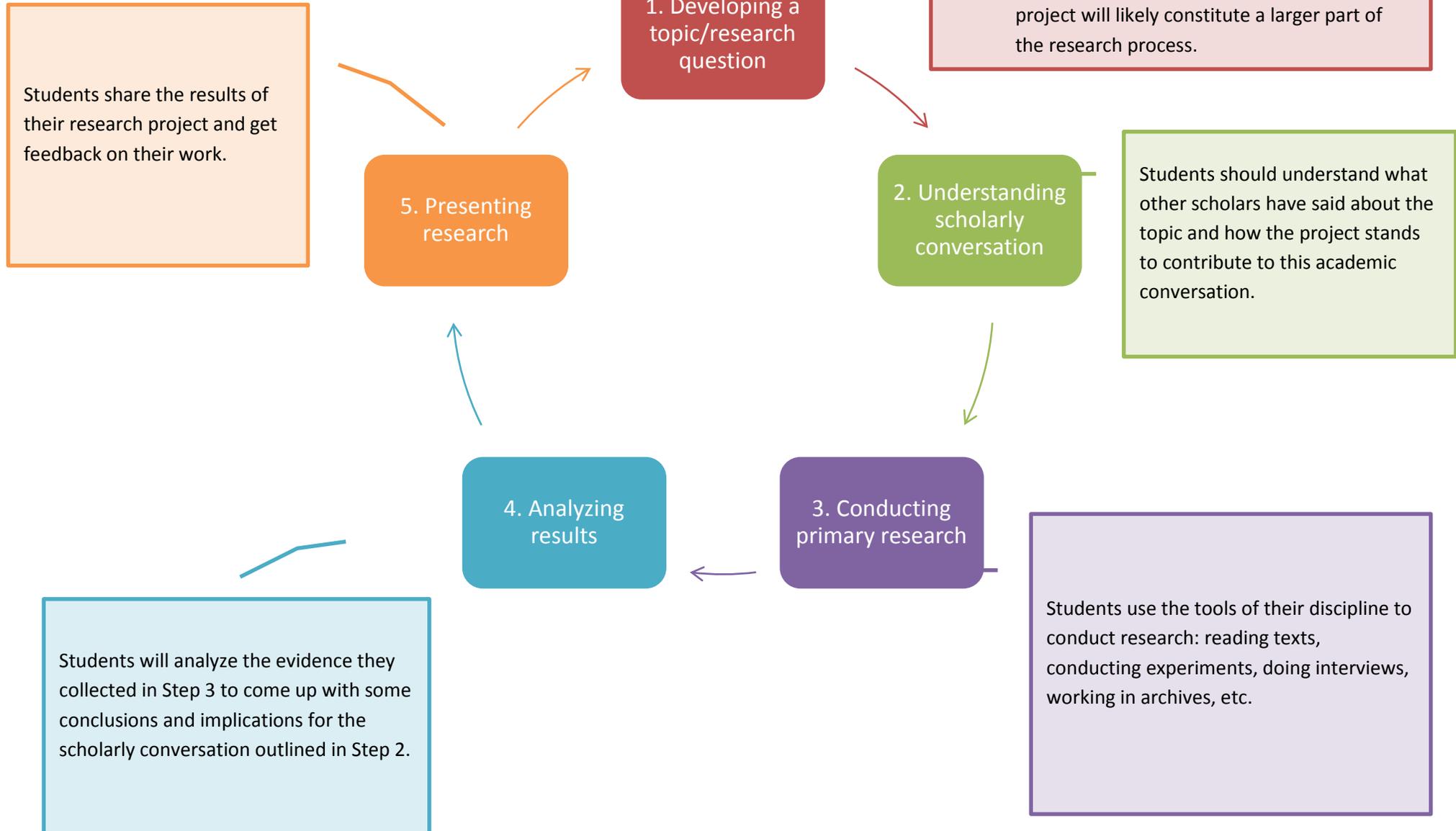
- **What's worked:**

- i. **Going over a 30-hour plan at the beginning:** At the GRC training, the GRCs will draft a tentative plan for their 30 GRC hours they have for the semester. GRC/Instructor pairs that have worked to revise this together at the beginning of the semester have had clearer expectations and more defined roles, even if the plan changed a lot during the semester.
- ii. **Having the GRC's role focused on a particular set of skills (or other clearly defined role):** GRCs that have had a clear and achievable set of skills they are working on (i.e. teaching students to visually represent data, to read a journal article, or how to frame a good research question) have had an easier time figuring out how to scaffold those skills and evaluate student learning at the end. They've also shown a little more ownership over the GRC project.

- **What hasn't worked as well:**

- i. **Having the GRC as a "general helper" on a project:** Some GRC/Instructor pairs have found it hard to stay within the 30 GRC hours when the GRC was just supposed to help more generally with the project. If the role wasn't very clearly defined, it was harder for the undergraduate students, the GRC, and the instructor to see what everyone's duties were. It was also hard for the GRC to write the End-of Semester report, because they couldn't evaluate their impact on student learning very clearly.

The Research Cycle



The Creative Cycle

