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. 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.
   - **What’s worked:**
     i. **Providing more support/structure** in some areas to keep students focused on the skills you identify as the most important. Examples:
        1. Give them the research topic/question (or a short list to choose from).
        2. Provide a list of pre-approved journal articles/readings they can pick from.
        3. Run statistical data for students, and have them interpret results.
     ii. **Having the GRC’s role focused on a particular set of skills.** 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. **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. 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:**
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 “ahah!” moments.

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. Outsource where you can: Use your GRC for their discipline-specific research knowledge, and outsource more general skills (writing, etc.) to other campus units.
   - What’s worked:
     i. Having KU Libraries or the Writing Center come in to give more general workshops (i.e. how to find a journal article), and have the GRC facilitate class activities for a more discipline-specific topic (i.e. what are the major journals in this field).
   - What hasn’t worked as well:
     i. GRCs giving workshops that are already offered by Campus units; this doesn’t make the best use of their discipline-specific research knowledge.