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# Technology Enhanced Learning: Reconsidering Writing Assessment Practices in the Humanities

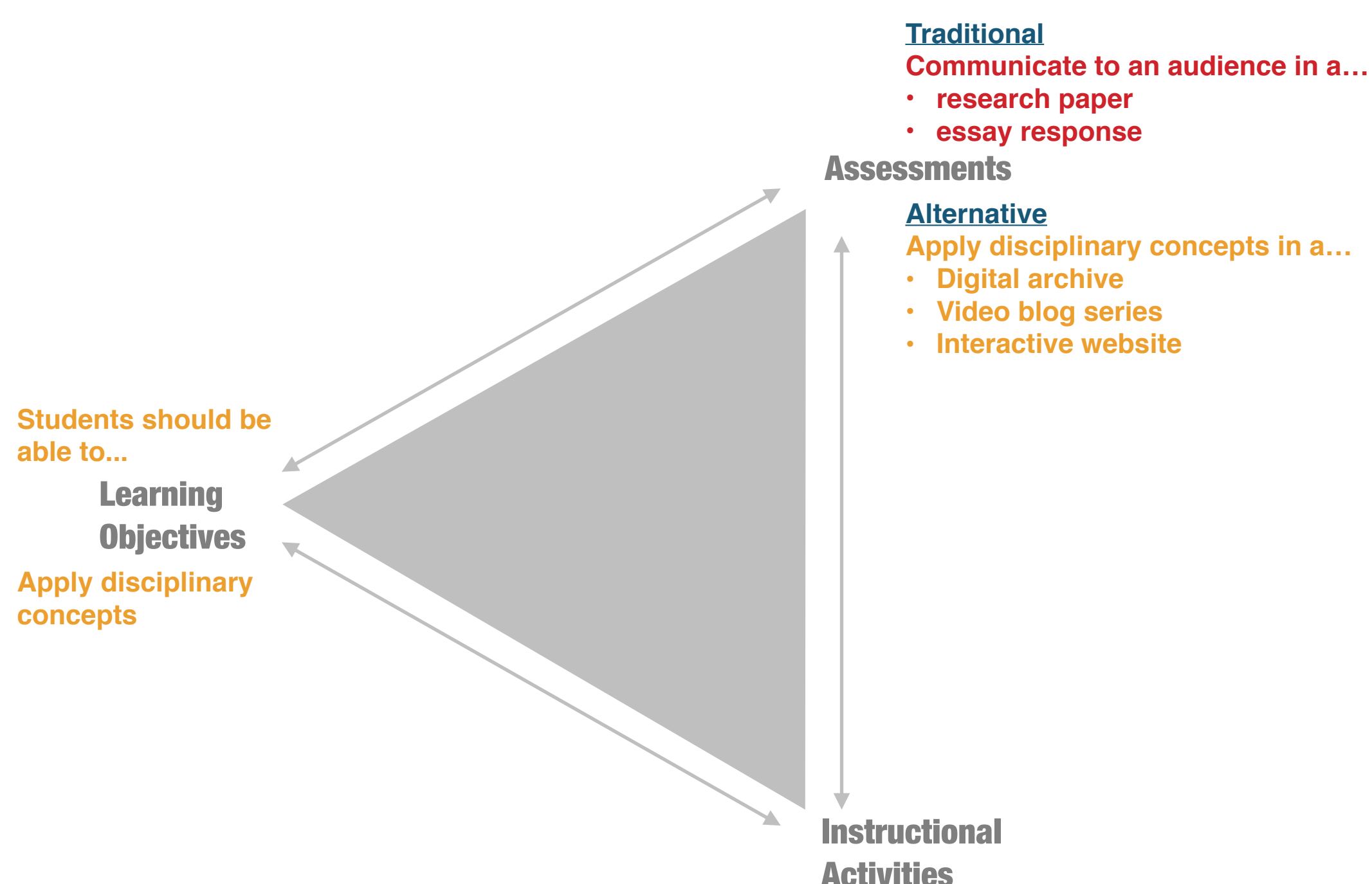
This project asks about writing assignments in the humanities and explores how and when technology could offer useful alternatives.

## Research Questions

### What do writing assignments typically look like in the humanities?

I surveyed instructors in the humanities (faculty and graduate students) who use writing in their disciplinary—Modern Language, English, History, and Philosophy—courses. Courses I was most interested in were those that did not exclusively teach writing but where writing was a key way instructors assessed what students had learned.

Respondents taught classes that incorporated writing but focused on disciplinary objectives.



## Research Design

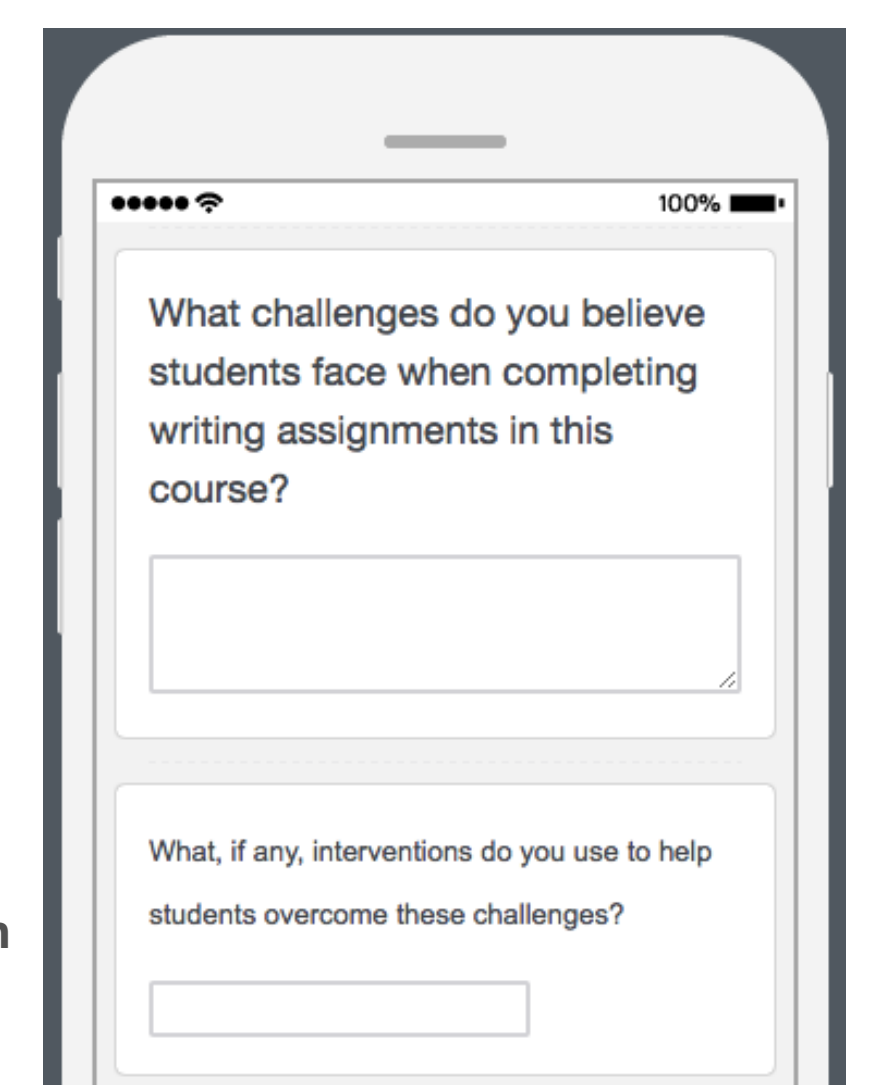
1. Survey was conducted with humanities instructors which asked them about existing practices and perceptions about technology.

2. Survey results, example syllabi, and sample writing assignment prompts were analyzed and coded to identify:

- Patterns in writing assigned
- Alignment between course/disciplinary objectives and writing assigned

3. Survey also asked instructors about their perceptions regarding the challenges students face with current writing assignments and the interventions implemented as a result.

4. Digital tools and technological resources are being assessed, with an eye toward reasonable solutions or alternatives to traditional assessment practices.



## Takeaways:

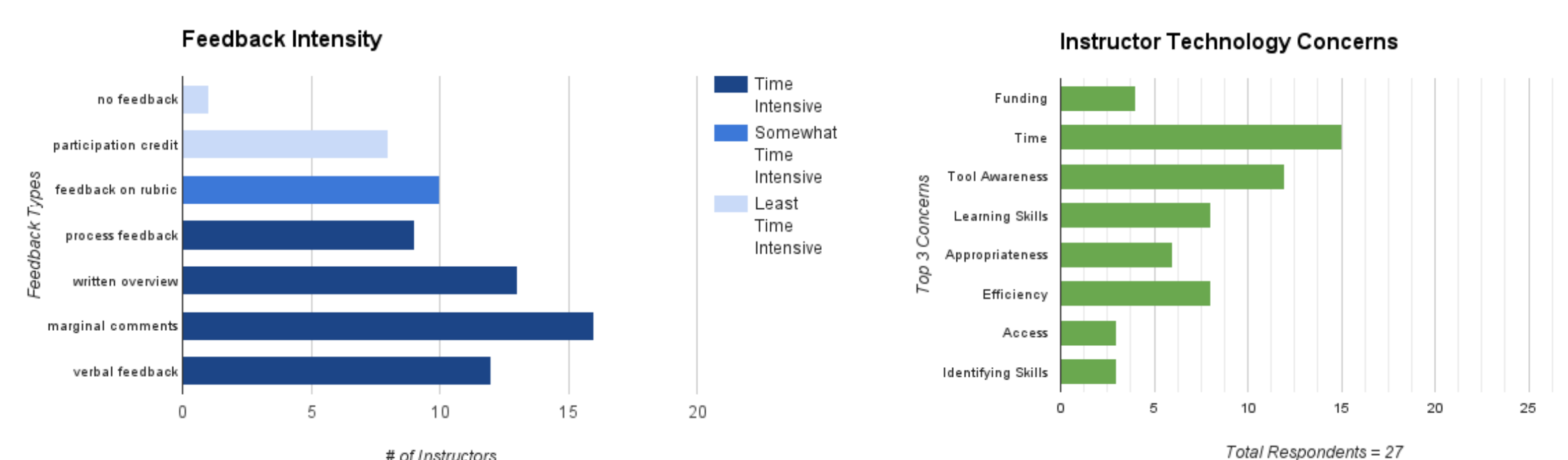
- Traditional writing assignments in humanities courses continue to support learning goals in a variety of contexts.
- However, students and instructors face challenges with writing assignments in these contexts.
  - Most common interventions are labor intensive.
- Technology may offer an alternative when course objectives are not linked to written communication skills.
- However, technology is similarly perceived as a time-intensive task.
  - Some instructors are already experimenting with technology in their classrooms.
  - Instructors interested in adopting digital tools may need more education and strategies for efficiency.
  - Making resources available to instructors interested in adopting tech is a likely next step.

### How do these assignments align with disciplinary course objectives?

### How is technology perceived by humanities instructors?

### In what ways have these instructors already adopted digital tools in their classrooms?

### How might technology offer alternatives to the traditional written essay and in what contexts are these alternatives most appropriate?



## Project Analysis

### Assignment Criteria and Challenges Facing Students

Time management was identified by instructors as a challenge students face when completing writing assignments. Assignment criteria among those who identified time management as a challenge included argument, synthesis, accuracy, and completeness. Similarly, 3 surveys identified process as a key challenge. It's possible that as a challenge, process (drafting, e.g.) is a similar challenge to time management if it refers to whether students choose to draft and how they manage their time for procedural steps that often lead to better writing. None of those in either of these categories (5 total) saw craft as an important criteria. Of those that did identify craft as an assessment criteria, none identified a common challenge for students.

Of those who identified craft as a challenge only one included craft as an assessment criteria. Similarly 3 identified content knowledge as a challenge students face but only 1 of these assessed for accuracy. The other two assessed for thoughtfulness or craft.

### Assignment Criteria and Course Objectives

For courses with an objective to develop disciplinary knowledge, assessment criteria related to synthesizing new ideas or accurately representing them would be expected. While some responses identified these criteria (2 - synthesis and 4 - accuracy), 4 other responses did not identify either of these criteria. Instead 3 of these are concerned with argument and 1 with the thoughtfulness of the response.

Of the 4 courses that identify craft as an objective only 1 noted craft as an assessment criteria while the other 3 are concerned primarily with argument. Furthermore, 2 of those that identify reading comprehension as an objective only note argument in their assessment criteria. This is perhaps the most glaring misalignment between an objective and the criteria by which students are being assessed.

Finally, there were 3 responses that noted students' ability to critique or analyze was significant but who assess for accuracy. Each of these also assess for comprehension.

### Writing Assigned and Assessment Criteria

In many cases writing assigned and criteria by which these assignments were assessed did align. Of those responses that identified craft as an important criterion, no course assigned writing that explicitly referenced craft. This criterion was implied in other aspects of the assignment, suggesting that courses that identify craft as an objective may not provide instruction relative to that objective.

Of those courses that assessed for argument, 5 of 6 total assigned some kind of argument-structured paper. The one outlier assigned a response that asked students to answer a question. Of those that assessed for accuracy, 6/7 were responses with the 1 outsider being a topic-based argument paper.