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Instructor Spotlight: Kimberly Rehak

Active Learning and Collaboration in Public Health Writing

University of Pittsburgh®

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As a full-time instructional designer, doctoral student, and writing instructor, Kimberly Rehak wears many hats. In the Writing for Public Health Genetics course- which is required for certain master degree students in the department of Human Genetics- Professor Rehak prepares students to communicate complex scientific concepts to broader audiences. By leveraging Peerceptiv, she fosters meaningful peer interactions and helps students master a “conventional register” in their writing—clear, accessible communication that bridges the gap between niche scientific expertise and a broader audience. Peerceptiv also streamlines the logistics of peer review, freeing her from time-consuming administrative tasks so she can focus on guiding students toward more effective writing and critical engagement with feedback.

Kimberly Rehak

Instructional Designer

College of General Studies

University of Pittsburgh

Ed.D. Candidate in Curriculum and Instruction

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Prof. Rehak's course focuses on three key goals: teaching students how to conduct effective peer reviews, helping them master clear and concise writing in line with the plain language movement, and guiding them in crafting unplagiarized, well-structured literature reviews. Achieving these objectives is essential for preparing students to communicate complex scientific ideas to a broader audience, a critical skill in public health fields.

“I just really like the accountability [Peerceptiv provides]. I also like how it helps students learn how to be better peer reviewers by giving them those prompts with specific questions to answer- which makes them look out for those things when they're reviewing.”

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Fostering Growth Through Peer Feedback

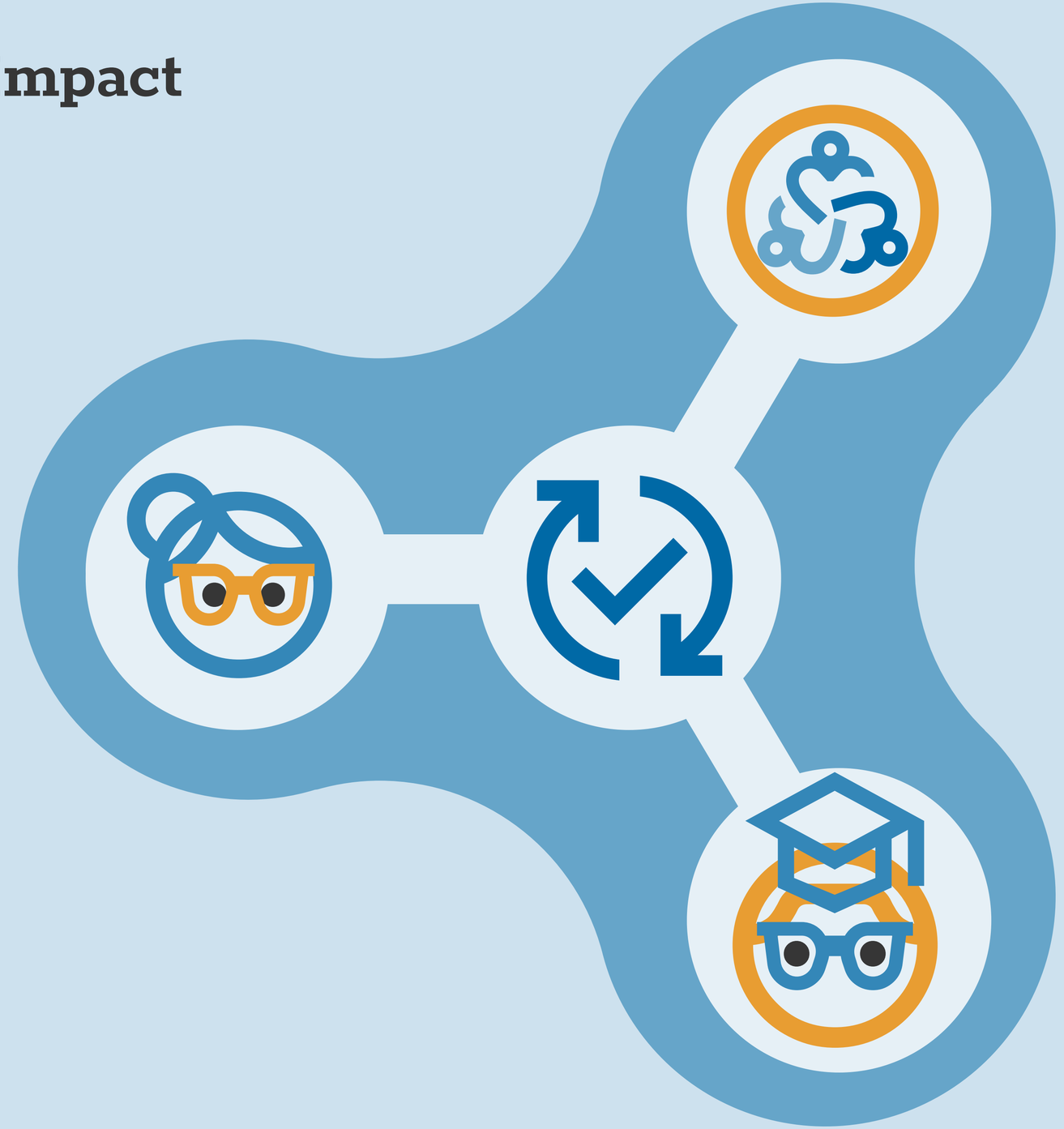
Peerceptiv's structured review process encourages students to engage deeply with their peers' work, providing specific, constructive feedback that fosters improvement. Instructor-created prompts direct student reviewers to address targeted aspects of the writing, ensuring that feedback is focused, actionable, and aligned with the course's learning outcomes. At the end of the semester, Rehak's student's were instructed to reflect on their thought processes for improving and iterating on their essays. Many students credited peer feedback for identifying key areas to refine, with changes clearly visible in their final drafts. The targeted, constructive feedback shared through Peerceptiv helped students engage more critically with their work, leading to more polished and effective writing.

"I also like that students don't get a hundred percent on the assignments because it shows that there is [always] room for improvement and we're not 100% accurate... And I like [Peerceptiv] because, yes, you don't get a perfect score, but you almost do- it's like 50 shades of 90%. It does kind of tease apart which [students] I might need to give more support to in future iterations, for instance, and things like that."

Iterative Writing for a Lasting Impact

Throughout the semester, students work on a single, scaffolded assignment designed to prepare them for the rigorous demands of thesis or dissertation writing. Focused on developing a literature review, the assignment emphasizes research, academic writing, and critical analysis. By breaking the process into manageable steps, students build their ideas iteratively, receiving targeted feedback at every stage.

Peer review is conducted using Peerceptiv's **Review Circles** feature, where students review and receive feedback from the same group of peers throughout the term. Then, most steps are graded by program mentors, who are experts in the students' fields of study. After the mentor evaluates the accuracy of the content, Professor Rehak provides feedback focused on writing style, clarity, and structure. By the end of the course, students produce a polished literature review that serves as a foundation for their thesis or dissertation.



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1. Choose a topic

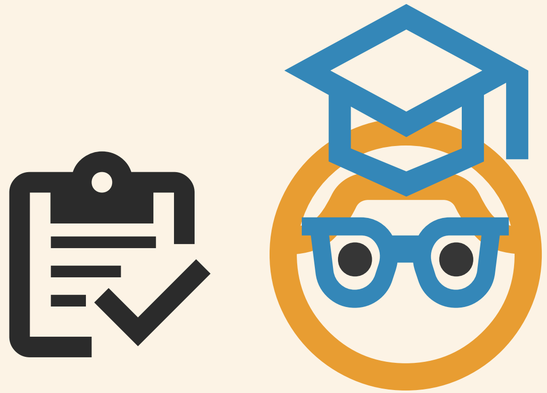
Graded by Prof. Rehak

2. Thesis

Reviewed in groups as practice for future peer assessment

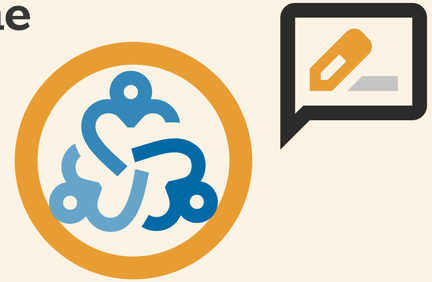
Graded by Prof. Rehak

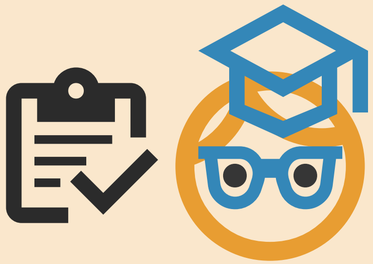
3. Annotated Bibliography



Reviewed by program mentor

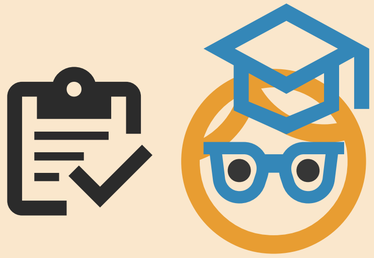
4. Outline





Reviewed by program mentor

5. Rough Draft



Reviewed by program mentor

6. Final Draft

Final Review

Reviewed by program mentor

Review Circles: Improving Together

Peerceptiv's **Review Circles** option assigns students to small, consistent groups for peer review throughout the term, mirroring real-world collaborative practices. Allowing students to engage with the same peers repeatedly fosters familiarity with each other's work and creates a collaborative environment for in-depth feedback. By reviewing and revising within these circles, Professor Rehak's students build a deeper understanding of their peers' unique topics, offer more thoughtful critiques, and see the progression of their own and their peers' writing over time.

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Career Readiness: Hitting the Right Register

In Professor Rehak's course, students develop essential skills for public health careers, including critical thinking, effective communication, and providing constructive feedback—key for academic publishing, grant writing, and collaboration in the field. By rating the helpfulness and accuracy of peer reviews and responding to feedback, students enhance their reviewing skills over time. This iterative process of writing and reviewing also strengthens their ability to adopt a clear, accessible tone, a vital skill in public health for communicating research findings, influencing policy, and educating the public.

"Another goal of the course is to teach writing for the plain language movement- so, clear, correct, concise, the three C's- teaching how to do that. "

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More Teaching, Less Tracking

For Professor Rehak, Peerceptiv significantly reduces the administrative burden of managing peer review by automating time-intensive tasks like tracking submissions and feedback, which she previously handled manually with spreadsheets. The platform's streamlined logistics free her to focus on higher-order priorities, such as assessing the quality of feedback and providing targeted guidance to students. Additionally, Peerceptiv's visibility into the review process allows her to easily monitor progress, identify missing submissions, and send reminder emails, ensuring deadlines are met and creating a smoother experience for both instructors and students.

...Again, one of those things I said I liked about Peerceptiv is that it just kind of does that really great first pass at the assessments or assignments for the instructor. So then you can spend less time counting the number of comments [and such.] [Instead] looking at the actual quality of the feedback they're giving or the answers or responses [to the assignment].

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From Spreadsheets to Seamless Review

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Upload

Students anonymously upload their essay to Peerceptiv

Review

Students review submissions from peers within their Review Circle

Feedback

Students hold each other accountable by evaluating the reviews received on their own work

Grades

Peerceptiv generates valid and reliable peer scores based on the quality of the submission, as well as the accuracy and helpfulness of reviews given

That's one thing I like about Peerceptiv as well- I love that progress tracker so you can see how many people are still missing assignments. That's something that it's really hard to see if you're just using the LMS.

Professor Rehak appreciates that Peerceptiv allows instructors to create custom rubrics that guide students through the peer review process. Professor Rehak’s rubric encourages students to provide balanced feedback, highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement in their peers' work. By embedding these expectations into the rubric, she sees students develop the critical ability to deliver constructive and specific feedback—a skill essential for public health professionals who must communicate effectively in collaborative and academic settings.

"If you're going to enter academia, you're gonna need to know how to do peer reviews. You're gonna need to know how to incorporate feedback from peer reviews and so on and so forth. So I'm really trying to teach that as part of the academic publishing process..."

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Fostering Active Participation in Course Design

As an instructional designer at the University of Pittsburgh, Professor Rehak frequently recommends Peerceptiv to instructors across departments for its ability to enhance student engagement, streamline peer review processes, and support scalable, high-quality online learning. Peerceptiv addresses the learner-learner interaction requirement integral to Pitt's standards for online courses, going beyond traditional discussion boards to foster active participation and deeper learning.

"[Peer review] is a great concept because you can't be passive- and with online learning too, you can't be passive. For students who want to improve- want to learn- I think it's a nice active exercise in reviewing, holding yourself and your peers accountable, and taking criticism."

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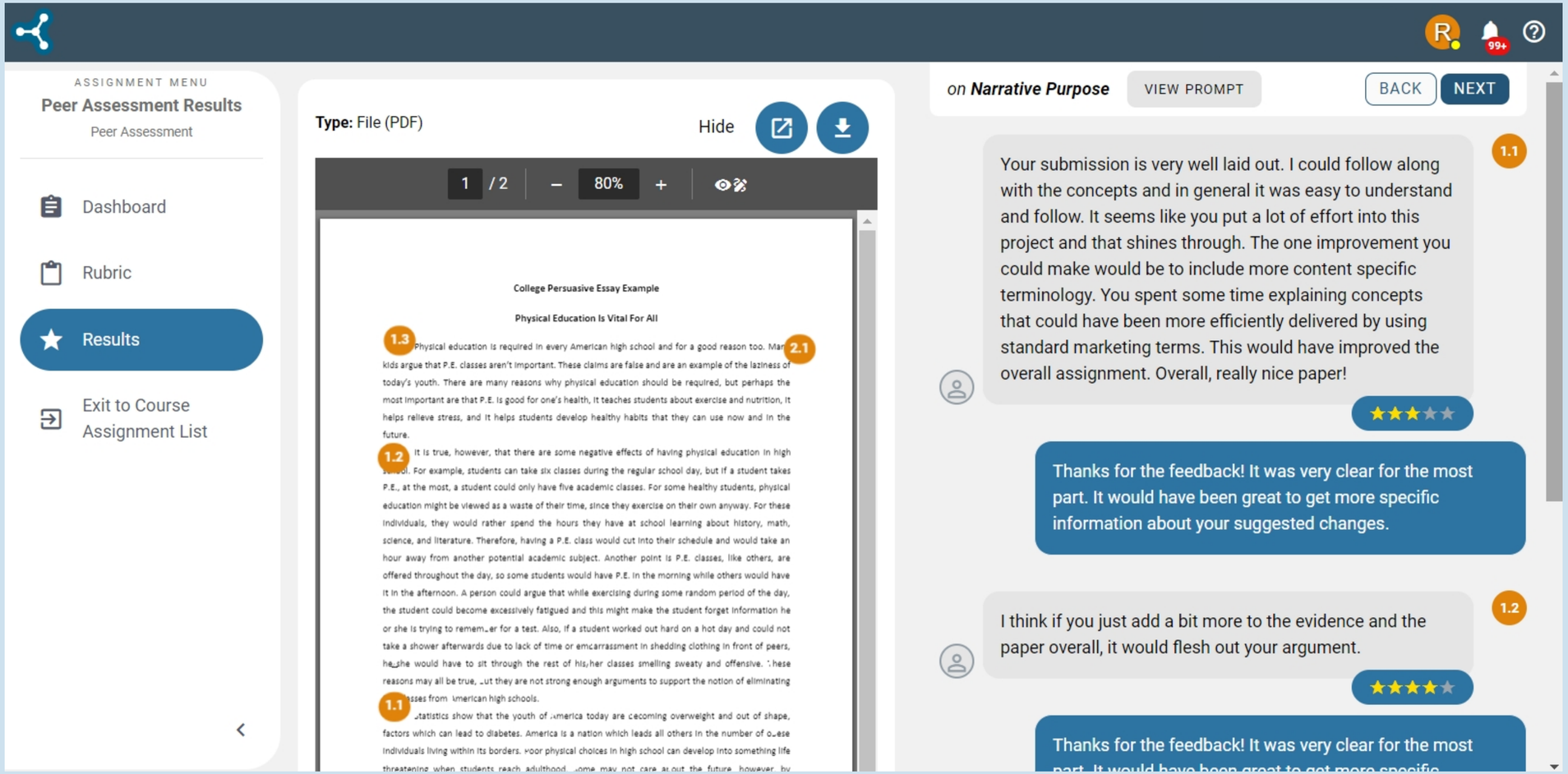
Professor Rehak views peer review as an essential active learning strategy. With Peerceptiv, students engage deeply with course material, reflect on their own work, and learn from their peers' perspectives in a transparent process. This fosters accountability and growth while encouraging self-reflection. Professor Rehak has witnessed students take peer feedback seriously, weaving it into revisions and documenting their learning journey within the platform—offering a unique glimpse of learning in action.



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Flexible, Scalable, and Effective Learning through Peer Review

In her dual roles as an instructional designer and adjunct instructor, Professor Rehak exemplifies how Peerceptiv can empower educators and students to achieve meaningful learning outcomes. For instructors, Peerceptiv offers the flexibility and support needed to create assignments that align with specific course goals while remaining scalable and manageable. Students don't just receive feedback—they engage critically with it, refine their work iteratively, and build essential skills for their future careers. Professor Rehak's experience highlights Peerceptiv's ability to bridge the gap between technical expertise and accessible, effective communication, equipping students to excel both academically and professionally.

"Overall, I definitely see improvements in student writing [and] really good feedback from students. When I was reading their drafts, some people left their comments from their peer reviewers in the margin and I could see the mentors saying, 'Oh, take that advice. That's really good!' It's really cool when you see that learning in action basically being documented."

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Embrace the research-driven benefits of Peerceptiv. Easily add a peer review step to any existing assignment.

- **Encourage Critical Reflection and Iterative Revisions** with active, collaborative peer review
- **Empower Students for Career Success** by building essential writing and feedback skills
- **Streamline Your Course Design** with scalable assignments aligned to course goals
- **Seamlessly Integrated with Your LMS** for a smooth setup and workflow

Contact **info@peerceptiv.com** to add an assignment today.

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