Course Design

Reimagining “English 1311: Expository English Composition” as “Introduction to Rhetoric and Writing Studies”

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Course Description

English 1311: Expository English Composition is the first semester course in a two-semester first-year composition (FYC) sequence. Both ENG 1311 and its second-semester counterpart, ENG 1312, are required for all students unless they have transfer credit covering this requirement or place out of one or both of the courses via the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) exam. ENG 1311 is described in the course catalogue as a course that provides “Instruction in addressing academic writing tasks through the composing process, with emphasis on strategic use of language, of rhetorical form, and of authorial voice and point of view to inform and persuade effectively; development of critical thought through writing and reading complex discourse” (436). When I taught the course discussed here, most 1311 courses were still being taught in a very traditional FYC manner, based around a textbook with readings, and four essays based on the EDNA model: expository, descriptive, narrative, and analytical.

The course I describe here was an experimental redesign of the traditional course that was taught to two sections in spring 2009. It took a very different approach, eschewing a textbook in favor of readings from Rhetoric and Writing Studies (RWS) journals along with Internet media such as editorials and news articles. Instead of the four traditional FYC essays mentioned above, students’ major assignments consisted of a summary of a Rhetoric and Writing Studies article, a contrastive rhetorical analysis, a collaborative wiki project illustrating students’ understanding of the theory of epistemic rhetoric, and an end of semester reflective paper that required students to discuss how the discourses they were exposed to during the course changed their understanding of writing.

Institutional Context

The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) is a 20,000 student minority-majority institution located on the U.S.-Mexico border. Over 70% of the university is Latino, and Spanish is commonly heard in public spaces on
campus (Center for Institutional Evaluation). An additional 9% of the students are classified as international students from Mexico, many of them crossing the border from Juárez every day to attend classes. UTEP draws the vast majority of its students from the El Paso/Juárez region, with a small percentage from other states and other countries. Due to this unique location, multilingualism is the norm and the majority of students in FYC classes have oral fluency but not necessarily full literacy in multiple languages. A minority of students are English monolinguals, others speak English as a second language, while others have grown up speaking both English and Spanish.

There has been a lot of change in UTEP’s FYC courses over the past several years due to the innovative work of the current FYC Director. One of the Director’s prerogatives has been to design the courses more in line with RWS as opposed to that of English literature studies, which has traditionally been a dominant influence in the design of FYC courses. When the course described here was taught, the second semester ENG 1312 had been redesigned and was just moving beyond the piloting stage. ENG 1311 was up for redesign but still based on a model that had prevailed for decades at UTEP, which loosely focused on teaching the four modes via traditional paper-based essays: expository, descriptive, narrative, and analytical. In contrast, ENG 1312 was focused on teaching for transfer, having students learn APA, rather than MLA style, compose multimedia projects such as documentary videos, and use RWS disciplinary concepts (such as discourse communities) to analyze their communication networks and prepare them to enter disciplinary discourse communities. ENG 1312 was a huge step away from high school writing, which often focuses heavily on personal narrative and English literature due to a variety of reasons: state-mandated testing, mandated curriculum, and teachers’ educational backgrounds in English literature and creative writing. Thus, I knew a redesigned 1311 would have to serve as a bridge between these two environments. Students’ college writing would not focus on analyzing literature or writing personal narratives but would instead introduce them to disciplinary concepts and the technologies that they would need to succeed in 1312.

Some of those who teach FYC classes at UTEP are students in either the master’s or doctoral programs in RWS, and they, like myself, are encouraged to incorporate RWS disciplinary knowledge in the courses they teach. However, like many universities, the majority of FYC instructors at UTEP have minimal or no background in RWS, thus limiting the amount of RWS disciplinary material that can be incorporated in any redesign. While there is a pedagogy and theory course for all new TAs that introduces them to RWS discourses, this work is not reinforced by the graduate work of most TAs in the program, who are students of literature or creative writing. As a result, the FYC Director felt that any redesign would have to adopt a spe-
cific textbook and encouraged me to try to use one within my course. My search for a textbook proved futile for a few reasons. First, there have not been any textbooks released that are suitable for a writing about writing (WAW) class. Elizabeth Sargent and Cornelia Paraskevas’s *Conversations about Writing—Eavesdropping, Inkshedding, and Joining In* is one possible example; however, it is a Canadian textbook that is difficult to find in the U.S. Wendy Bishop’s *On Writing: A Process Reader* includes a number of essays about writing and literacy; however, they are generally popular as opposed to academic discourses about writing, which is problematic in a course designed to expose students to disciplinary discourses. Textbooks often include too many readings and force an instructor down a narrow path since she feels compelled to use a book that students paid for. Choosing a textbook leaves little room to include texts related to the lives of my students, which are certainly unique given UTEP’s location on the U.S.-Mexico border. For these reasons, I eschewed a traditional textbook in favor of a handbook along with articles from disciplinary journals and English and Spanish Web media sources. While this limited the possibility of such a course being adapted on a program-wide level at UTEP in the near future, I was confident that it would give a better insight regarding student ability to handle challenging disciplinary material and the value of this work, thus giving me data to argue for a more radical program-wide redesign down the line.

**Theoretical Rationale**

Over the past several years, interest in teaching first-year composition classes with a WAW curriculum has increased significantly. In “Language Matters: Rhetoric and Writing I as Content Course,” Debra Dew explains why FYC courses at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs moved away from the content-less FYC model to a model that used RWS disciplinary material as its content. In particular, Dew argues that the new model “restored the theoretical link between language and disciplinary content” and aligned FYC courses with other introductory courses across the disciplines, making writing instruction “more fully a scholarly enterprise with disciplinary integrity” (88). While Dew’s article was published in 2003, interest in teaching FYC with a WAW focus greatly increased after the publication of Downs and Wardle’s 2007 *CCC’s* article “Teaching About Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)envisioning ‘First-Year Composition’ as ‘Introduction to Writing Studies.’” In this article, the authors discuss what they envision as a “radically reimagined FYC” which proposes to draw on disciplinary material from writing studies to shift the focus of FYC from “teaching ‘how to write in college’ to teaching *about writing*—from acting as if writing is a basic, universal skill to acting as if writing studies is a discipline with content knowledge to which students should be introduced” (553).
Because Downs and Wardle’s proposal is a radical departure from ways FYC has traditionally been taught, it is not surprising that their article sparked a lot of response. Libby Miles and others at the University of Rhode Island wrote a critical response to Downs and Wardle, accusing them of regressive thinking by focusing on a semester or two of FYC as opposed to pushing the development of a broader, multi-year undergraduate writing curriculum. They also suggested that FYC courses are already offering knowledge from our discipline without “miring all students in the specialized discourse of an advanced discipline” (Miles et al. 504). However, Barbara Bird has responded in support, challenging criticisms that first-year students cannot handle the difficulty of reading disciplinary discourses by explaining how she designed successful WAW classes for basic writers (“Writing”).

A more recent College Composition and Communication article by Wardle, “‘Mutt Genres’ and the Goal of FYC: Can We Help Students Write the Genres of the University?,” further explores the problems with traditional FYC courses and argues for the WAW approach. Here, Wardle examines a number of traditional FYC assignments, arguing that they wind up “mutt genres,” “genres that do not respond to rhetorical situations requiring communication in order to accomplish a purpose that is meaningful to the author” (777). These genres, like the observation essay or the generic argument essay, do not exist in the same form outside of the FYC course. While an alternative to this would be to teach specific disciplinary genres, Wardle’s discussion of an English TA attempting this approach reveals the challenges one faces in doing so. The instructor she references worked closely with a biology professor and researched the genres of the biology discourse community; however, despite this work, the TA remained a discourse community outsider and realized that she could not teach such discourses as an insider could.

I avoided “mutt genres” by having students draw on disciplinary knowledge to achieve common academic tasks. The first essay assignment asked students to compose a summary of a RWS journal article and the last asked them to reflect on their growth during the course. For the journal article summary, students performed a task that they would likely be asked to do as they progressed in their academic disciplines when they had to write an essay or a reading response. While a summary assignment may be included in a traditional FYC class, it would likely be focused on summarizing a popular text as opposed to an academic one. By having students report on an academic discourse that I am familiar with, I am in a better position to evaluate their summaries, ensuring that they captured the major points of the articles accurately in their essays.

The final essay was a reflective essay, which I used as a replacement for the traditional personal narrative essay that is included at the beginning of an FYC sequence. Whereas the typical personal narrative essay may be considered a “mutt genre” that has no real place in university-level writing,
I have found that students are often asked to reflect on their learning experiences at the end of a semester. Because this assignment required students to combine personal experience with references to academic articles, it helped prepare them for a more academic style of reflective writing than they might have engaged in previously.

My decisions in designing this course were also influenced by WAW approaches besides Downs and Wardle’s. An unpublished chapter manuscript by Wardle and Downs, “Reimagining the Nature of FYC: Trends in Writing-about-Writing Pedagogies,” reveals the diversity of WAW curricula that currently exists. For this chapter, they surveyed teachers utilizing WAW approaches at their universities and found three major trends:

The first focuses on literacy and discourse, how writing and language demonstrate community membership. The second focuses on Writing Studies itself—the existence of the discipline qua discipline, with its knowledge and expertise on writing, emphasizing rhetorical theory and its resultant strategies for writing. The third focuses on the nature of writing and writers’ practices. (15)

In Shannon Carter’s Texas A&M course, students read work by scholars such as Brandt and Moss and conduct ethnographic inquiry into literacy practices in and out of school (Wardle and Downs, “Reimagining” 18-19). Debra Dew’s Rhetoric and Writing I: Academic Reading and Analytical Writing is a university-wide course at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs that focuses on acknowledging Rhetoric and Writing Studies as a discipline. In this course, students read rhetorical theory and use it to analyze rhetorical performances (Wardle and Downs, “Reimagining” 19-20). At Marywood University, Laurie McMillan’s course uses Wendy Bishop’s On Writing: A Process Reader and “is specifically focused on promoting transfer of knowledge gained in the class through metacognition, reflection, and explicit discussion of writing processes and practices” (Wardle and Downs, “Reimagining” 20). In a recent Basic Writing e-Journal article (“Meaning-Making”), Barbara Bird describes her experiences teaching WAW to basic writing students at Taylor University. She focuses largely on articles that introduce students to the meaning-making power of language and includes rhetorical theorists such as Kenneth Bruffee on her reading list.

Of these approaches to WAW, my design would be most closely aligned to Dew’s and Bird’s models since my model takes a strong rhetorical approach, namely one that focuses on the epistemic power of rhetoric. A number of theorists like James Berlin and Kenneth Bruffee have argued for the value of a writing classroom focused on epistemic rhetoric, which postulates that “Discourse does not merely discover truth or make it effective. Discourse creates realities rather than truths about realities” (Brummett par. 20). Berlin has made the argument that rhetoric is at “the center of a culture’s
activities” and, as such, the teaching of rhetoric and writing is intertwined (Writing Instruction 2). He writes, “When freshmen [sic] learn to write or speak, they learn more than how to perform an instrumental task...They are learning assumptions about what is real and what is illusory, how to know one from the other, how to communicate the real…and how language works” (2). While Writing Studies provides information about the practice of writing, such as the processes of revision, rhetorical theory provides a more complex understanding of issues such as audience consideration, exigence, kairos, and theories of language use. Writing Studies provides knowledge about the skills required for effective writing while Rhetoric expands on this practical knowledge by helping students understand how to make effective rhetorical choices to achieve their writing purpose.

In my course, I introduced epistemic rhetoric through the use of a video I created that focused on the way societal discourses shaped our understandings of the U.S.-Mexico border wall, a very relevant issue for the class since the border and the new wall, which some of my students crossed every day, can be seen from UTEP. The video was followed by Barry Brummett’s 1977 SCA speech, “The Three Meanings of Epistemic Rhetoric.” With plenty of scaffolding, my students read this speech at the beginning and end of the course. Although I knew students would struggle with the theory at first and not reach a full understanding of it in one semester, I felt that grounding the course in a theory of epistemic rhetoric gave students a better understanding of the power of rhetoric, the influence discourses had in creating their realities, and their ability to rhetorically intervene in their social and political realities. While we took different approaches in doing so, I felt I shared similar goals with Teresa Grettano who sought to “prepare [her] students to participate both as active receivers and critical senders of messages in the media circuses in which they are immersed daily” (73). Similarly, I align my goals with Barbara Bird, who says reading articles about the epistemic power of rhetoric leads students to “have a much richer, fuller understanding of the power that reader-writers exercise as they read and write” (“Meaning-Making” 3). I believed that by understanding how situatedness within certain discourses leads to a different understanding of a situation, my students would more effectively analyze the discourses surrounding them. In doing so, they might, like Grettano’s and Bird’s students, become more critical consumers and producers, gaining larger control over the construction of their own realities.

The influence of rhetorical theory was most evident in the second and third essay assignments in my course. The second assignment had students write an analysis of a societal issue using a theoretical framework of epistemic rhetoric while the third assignment had students compose a multimedia essay that used evidence to argue for a theory of epistemic rhetoric. With the second assignment, I worked on situating the traditional FYC rhetorical
analysis more fully within RWS. Instead of limiting students to a simplistic rhetorical framework commonly found in textbooks (e.g. ethos, pathos, and logos), I had students use a more advanced theoretical framework which drew from Brummett’s theory of epistemic rhetoric as well as Flower and Hass’s “Reading Strategies and the Construction of Meaning.” As a result, writing this analysis required students to be familiar with academic theories so that they could use them to analyze the world around them.

Heeding calls by Cynthia Selfe and Kathleeen Yancey for writing teachers to teach more than the traditional text-based essay, I made the third essay a multimedia assignment collaboratively written on a wiki. For this assignment, students built on their knowledge of epistemic rhetoric established in the first part of the semester to make an argument for this theory. Whereas a traditional FYC “mutt genre” might have students write on a generic topic such as immigration or abortion without this knowledge being situated in a particular discipline, the essay assignment in this class had students find real-world evidence to support an academic theory. This mirrors what academics do when collecting data through empirical research or discourse analysis in order to develop or support a theory.

**Critical Reflection**

As one who is aware of student ability to perform to the expectations of the teacher, I entered my WAW classroom with the attitude that my students, with proper scaffolding, could understand disciplinary discourses. Nonetheless, aware that I was teaching at a university with a number of students still acquiring English in addition to learning U.S. academic discourse, I wanted to design a curriculum that would be challenging but not overwhelming for my students. Thus, with the exception of the Brummett article, I began the course with older works by an accessible scholar, Donald Murray, who would help dispel student beliefs that a writing class was all about grammar while giving them knowledge about the writing process and collaboration within the writing classroom.

Compared to previous semesters of teaching FYC, teaching the course I am presenting here was a very different experience for both me and the students. This difference was evident in the student responses on the end-of-semester anonymous survey I gave, the final class evaluations, and student reflection essays. In the class evaluations for the more traditional FYC course I taught the previous semester, one student stated that it felt like a high school class. In these evaluations, students mentioned nothing about the writing assignments, indicating they were a forgettable part of the course. In the evaluations of the new model, students clearly saw the course to be more rigorous, and a number of responses said the readings and the knowledge gained about RWS were the most valuable parts of the
course. For instance, a student who reported liking the articles wrote, “Even though some of them were hard to understand, it really helped me overall and I know it will benefit my future education.” Some survey responses for my WAW course confirmed this sentiment for traditional FYC courses and noted the difference of my new approach. One student who had previously taken 1311 wrote, “This is the second time I take ENGL 1311, and I can say that my other class was more like a high school class. We were doing very elementary things like writing about a memory, writing about our favorite things...” Another student had a similar positive experience, hinting that her interest in studying writing had been strengthened through the experience: “At first I felt very discouraged to take it because it was my second time taking it and I believed that if I had no interest the first time, nothing would change the second time around. It was an extremely interesting, challenging and fun class.”

As revealed by these responses and others, students found this course different from previous writing courses they had taken at both high school and college. An important difference was certainly the readings, with several students mentioning them explicitly on the end-of-semester evaluations as being one of the best parts of the course. Others mentioned how they liked the fact that RWS material was being taught in class since they had never been exposed to it before. These sentiments appeared to be reflected by a survey response in which over 35% of students said they would now be more likely to consider majoring in RWS if it was offered as a major at UTEP. The student quoted above ended his comment with, “I am not an English major, and it made me think twice about what I really wanted to major in,” indicating the value of creating RWS major options. Due to our close alignment with English literature studies, this student conflated RWS with traditional English studies; however, his interest in studying English was clearly sparked by RWS disciplinary discourses.

On the survey, over 80% of the students responded that the reading assignments for this course were either “More helpful” or “A lot more helpful” in improving their writing ability than those they read in previous classes, with 90% feeling the same regarding the writing assignments. Along with my students, I would argue that sustained engagement with discussions on writing helped them become better writers. This may be seen by looking at some student responses. In the end of semester reflection, Cesar wrote about his transformed understanding of the writing process:

After reading Nancy Sommer’s [sic] (1980) article, I also realized that revision by itself can be a complex process in writing. Unlike in Murray’s (1972) description of revision as being part of a linear writing process, Sommer’s [sic] proposes a non linear model for it. This model changed my perception of revision. I became aware that revision doesn’t necessarily have to play the paper7 of the cherry on top of the cake.

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As evidenced by Cesar’s and other responses, students found the articles concerning revision particularly helpful. Also, as this response shows, they were able to connect ideas among various readings to analyze their own processes. Here is an example of another student, Julio, connecting readings and using them to analyze and develop his own writing processes:

According to Murray “prewriting usually takes 85% of the writer’s time” (1972, p.90). Upon reading this I realized that I needed to begin doing some form of prewriting but I still felt that I needed to do more to my paper and I wasn’t sure what it was. It wasn’t until we began reading the article by Faigley & Witte did I realize that I needed to add a revision stage to my writing process and not just a editing revision process but a restructuring revision process.

It is hard to imagine that engagement with these disciplinary discourses regarding process cannot help but develop writers more effectively than the traditional content-less FYC model. As evidenced by student responses in writing and on the surveys, my students certainly saw a difference between this writing course and previous ones they had taken, understanding that the discourses on writing they read in this course helped them reflect on and develop their writing abilities in ways that anthologized popular essays could not.

The above comments reveal that students generally found readings concerned with the writing process and revision helpful and accessible; however, they were not always enthusiastic about other readings during the semester. During the class and on final evaluations, complaints about the length of the articles were fairly common even though they were never asked to read more than about ten pages of an article for a class. Overall, student reading responses revealed a fairly good understanding of the articles; however, there was consistent evidence in responses and class discussions that some students were not reading as deeply as they could. One article that students clearly did not understand well on the first reading was Brummett’s, which talked about three meanings of epistemic rhetoric. Virtually all of the reading responses for the initial reading were way off from understanding these distinctions; however, when we came back to it later in the semester, students’ comprehension clearly improved. Julieta wrote of her transformed understanding: “The first time we read the article I was so confused by it I had no idea what he was trying to say. Now that I have a better understanding, I can imply that what he means is that, it is through the use of verbal language and communication that we create reality.”

The difficulty associated with some of the more challenging readings (e.g. Brummett; Kantz; Brodkey) led at least one student to drop early in the semester. Overall, about seven out of twenty-five students (28%) from each of the two classes dropped or failed by the end of the semester, which was
above the program-wide drop rate of approximately 15% (Brunk-Chavez). This higher drop rate reflects Downs and Wardle’s finding that the difficulty of a WAW curriculum in which the “readings and assignments are lengthy and complex” can lead more students failing or dropping a WAW course than a traditional FYC course (“Teaching” 574). Nonetheless, my drop rate was significantly lower than that of a colleague who experimented with the WAW approach, indicating that limiting the amount of reading and choosing more accessible articles helps moderate the difficulty of the course. On the survey, more than 60% of students reported that the reading assignments were more difficult than other classes they were taking during the semester. As I struggled through discussions during some classes, it was clear that students were not always doing the readings or did not understand them well enough to discuss them confidently. When I teach a WAW class again, I will pay more attention to struggling students, pointing them to other student responses and meeting them individually or in small groups to reduce the attrition rate.

For the final course reflections, I asked students to consider “how the discourses [they] have read and discussed this semester have recreated [their] reality in regard to writing” (emphasis in original). While the Murray articles and the readings concerning revision were certainly popular, I was surprised at the number of students who referenced the Brummett readings as one of their favorite despite the difficulty they faced in understanding it. Cynthia titled her reflection “My metamorphosis” and explained not only the transformation she underwent in regard to writing and her view of herself as a writer, but also her view of the world around her:

…our world to us is created by the knowledge we gain through discourse. With the ability to detect biases in readings or media we are no longer limited to just believing what we see or hear we have an option. I can now see the media that I had once thought was just informative is rather persuasive, and with this knowledge I do not have to fall victim to it.

Some might be apt, as Maxine Hairston or Richard Fulkerson have, to criticize a FYC course focused even partially on epistemic rhetoric, one that helps individuals become critical readers like my student Jose: “Now I understand that when I read anything it’s someone else’s writing and it’s a tool being used to change my reality.” These critics might wonder why rhetorical theory should play such a strong role in a writing classroom, worrying that teachers might become more preoccupied with indoctrinating their students than teaching writing. To challenge this, I return to the words of Cynthia, who wrote, “I as a writer can contribute to the construction of reality through participating in societal discourses. I can share and shape another person’s reality.” As this statement indicates, knowledge about rhetorical theory helps students understand the power of language in constructing the world.
around them, thus helping them realize the full potential of communicative acts like writing. With this realization, students like Cynthia and Jose may better understand the importance of being a rhetorically effective writer, something that a WAW FYC course can help them become.

While I was satisfied with how the semester went, there are multiple things that I would do differently upon teaching a WAW FYC course again. First, I would reduce the number of Murray readings since using too many of these biased students towards the expressivist paradigm early in the course. In their place, I would find other accessible articles with the help of others using the WAW approach. For instance, Barbara Bird’s students have responded well to pieces such as Toby Fulwiler’s “Looking and Listening for My Voice” and Mike Rose’s “Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans, and the Stifling of Language: A Cognitive Analysis of Writer’s Block” (Bird, “Meaning Making”). Since most writers struggle with writer’s block at some point, it is understandable that Rose’s article would be interesting for students. Given the linguistically diverse student population at UTEP, I would consider including the new “CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers” and articles like Suresh Canagarajah’s “Toward a Pedagogy of Shutting Between Languages: Learning from Multilingual Writers.” I would also like to focus more on the concept of “discourse communities” with David Bartholomae’s often anthologized “Inventing the University.” Finally, I would consider having reflective letters that draw from the course readings with each essay, instead of one reflective essay at the end. This would help students continually reflect on the knowledge gained from the readings, encouraging them to analyze and reformulate their writing processes throughout the semester.

Despite the struggles I faced while teaching this course, reading the course evaluations, survey results, and final reflections vindicated my belief that this was a more effective and more engaging way to teach writing than I had done previously. As discussed in the beginning of this section, students who found their previous English or FYC classes unhelpful or uninteresting found this curriculum engaging and helpful for their development as writers. While the director of our FYC program was clearly interested in the course I designed and enthusiastically supported my efforts, she pointed to the fact that many of the people teaching the course were not overly familiar with RWS discourses and that any upcoming 1311 redesign would need to depend on a textbook and could not expect to go as deeply into rhetorical theory and writing studies as I had done. However, as seen by the work of Elizabeth Wardle, this approach has been and can be implemented program-wide, even at large universities such as the University of Central Florida, which has 45,000 students (UCF Staff). Wardle and Downs have recently published a textbook, Writing about Writing: A College Reader, which can help universities implement the WAW approach. While I have come to un-
nderstand that rhetorical theory, an important part of the course discussed here, is not playing an important role in all WAW courses, everyone pursuing the WAW approach is making a contribution in moving beyond FYC’s perpetually “intellectually thin curriculum” (Crowley 228-9) to a course that truly challenges students with intellectually demanding disciplinary content, material that better prepares students to write across a variety of academic and social contexts.

Notes
1 I am using Rhetoric and Writing Studies instead of Rhetoric and Composition because that is the name we use within our program and the one I used within my class. While many of the authors of the articles I used for my course would be more specifically situated within Composition Studies, a subset of the more encompassing Writing Studies field, I will consistently use Writing Studies to avoid any confusion that might stem from alternating between Composition Studies and Writing Studies.
2 Similarly, I required my students to use APA style. In Composing Research, Cindy Johanek makes a strong argument why RWS should embrace APA style over MLA style, which has traditionally dominated the RWS discipline due to its affiliation with English studies. According to Johanek, MLA treats texts as a “living object of study,” which is useful for literature studies but not as useful for RWS, where texts play a different role, “constructing theory, presenting research and discussing pedagogy” (191). APA helps us focus on “not the product of the text that resulted from such inquiry, but on the process of thinking that was used to arrive at that text in the first place and the later application of those ideas to our work” (191). Similarly, as Johanek writes, the majority of students passing through FYC will be entering disciplines where they need to learn APA style. Given that they were likely exposed to MLA style through their high school English classes, FYC is a good venue to expose them to a new citation style that will likely be useful as they continue their studies.
3 While finding the label “writing about writing” problematic in that it is overly broad and also ignores rhetoric, I will use it here since it is the most commonly used term referring to FYC courses that focus on writing as a subject. As will be discussed later, WAW courses take a variety of approaches, but the approach that I focus on is one that focuses on introducing students to disciplinary discourses by treating RWS as a disciplinary community and having students read and write about the discourses in this particular community.
4 See Libby Miles’s “Constructing Composition: Reproduction and WPA Agency in Textbook Publishing” for more on the limitations that rhetoric and composition scholars face in trying to introduce innovative ideas in textbooks.
5 This study was approved by the University of Texas at El Paso’s IRB, listed under protocol #107704-2. All student names used here are pseudonyms.
6 Unfortunately, because of the lack of RWS majors within English or as a separate major, this student has the potential for disappointment if he does choose an English major, as he would be studying very different things than he did in my course. To avoid this problem, I share the hope with Downs and Wardle that “Over time, as these groups move on to other disciplines, professions, and
administrative positions, their knowledge about our field may be of assistance in creating more writing studies majors” (“Teaching” 578). This desire is not merely the selfish desire of increasing our disciplinary visibility, but stems primarily from the belief that RWS has a wealth of knowledge to teach students about writing, knowledge that they can take with them as they write in other disciplines and professions.

7 Cesar probably intended the word “role” as the Spanish equivalent is papel. Cesar, like many of the students in the class, was a native Spanish speaker.

8 The three meanings are: methodological, which says language is used merely to report an external truth; sociological, which argues language creates a social reality but that material reality exists outside of language; ontological, which argues that rhetoric has a role in creating all we know.

Works Cited
Brunk-Chavez, Beth. “Re: fyc drop rate.” Message to the author. 1 Sept. 2010. E-mail.


Wardle, Elizabeth. “‘Mutt Genres’ and the Goal of FYC: Can We Help Students Write the Genres of the University?” *CCC* 60.4 (2009): 765-89. Print.


Syllabus

ENG 1311: Expository English Composition
or Intro to Rhetoric and Writing Studies (RWS)

Course description and goals:
A writing class should be about writing. Unfortunately, most textbook publishers do not share this belief and choose to design books with short and superficial discussions about writing accompanied by a number of popular nonfiction essays on a wide variety of societal topics. This course will offer something different by focusing on material from rhetoric and writing studies (RWS) journals, with the belief that your engagement with discussions on writing will help you become a better writer. With that in mind, this course intends to help you do the following:

- see how writing is a process and develop this process
- explore the concept of “discourse community” and gain a basic understanding of the RWS discourse community
- learn to read more critically and effectively question texts and the ideologies behind them
- learn how to read and effectively give feedback on another’s writing through peer review
- examine and improve your own revision process
- understand what “rhetoric” is and why it is important for you
- develop technological literacy through the use of multiple online technologies
- reflect on your growth as a writer

Required texts:

Printed copies of the following articles, which may be found on Blackboard and in the library databases:


**Assignments:**

1) Readings: These include the articles listed at the beginning of this syllabus as well as from the required *Brief Penguin Handbook* and various web articles assigned throughout the course.

2) Online postings, Journals, and Peer Review: You will complete online responses to the readings at least once a week, with details about these assignments given in the daily calendar. Additionally, you will be asked to read and respond to your peers’ work in various peer review assignments throughout the course.

3) In-class Writing: On days where there is no response assignment, you may be asked to write about the reading in class. We will also use class time for researching and drafting essay assignments.

4) Essay 1 (Summary): Throughout college, you may often be asked to summarize sources in informal class responses or in writing more formal essays. While it is impossible to be completely unbiased, Faigley’s (2009) Handbook describes how the writer of a summary should give the appearance of neutrality in its description of the difference between a summary and an analysis. For this essay, you need to choose one of four RWS articles that I have posted on Blackboard:

   Janet Emig’s “Writing as a Mode of Learning”
   Donald M. Murray’s “All Writing Is Autobiography”
   Walter J. Ong’s “The Writer’s Audience Is Always a Fiction”
   Gordon Rohman’s “Pre-writing the Stage of Discovery in the Writing Process”

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and write a summary for a student in another composition class that
did not have the chance to read the article you did. You should use the
questions I provide to help guide you in planning your summary.

5) Essay 2 (Rhetorical Analysis): In the last essay, you wrote a
summary of one of the articles we read earlier in the semester. In that
summary, your goal was, as described by Flower and Hass (1988), mainly
“creating a gist and paraphrasing content”; however, while your writing in
this essay may include some summary, your task in this assignment goes
beyond that. The difference between the two tasks may be connected to
the difference between the work of student and experienced writers in the
Hass and Flower study: “While the student reader is mainly creating a gist
and paraphrasing content, the experienced reader does this and more—he
then tries to infer the author’s purpose and even creates a sort of strident
persona for the writer” (p. 177). Once you select your texts, you will write
a comparative rhetorical analysis, comparing and contrasting the authors’
and/or newspaper’s ideological leanings and how they affect the delivery
of their message.

6) Essay 3 (Wiki): For this essay, you are going to illustrate the notion
that rhetoric is epistemic, that discourse creates our realities. In order to
do this, you have three options: (1) select multiple texts on a single public
issue such as the U.S.-Mexico border wall. Using text, video, pictures,
and audio, you will illustrate how the issue is represented differently
by different people and how their views are a reflection of ideological
bias; (2) show how the Internet allows us to construct our own realities
by giving us more power to choose the discourses we consume and
contribute to public discourses through sharing on sites like Facebook;
and (3) create an iMovie like the one we watched on the U.S.-Mexico
border wall. The movie can focus on one of the two assignments listed
above

7) Essay #3 Oral Presentation: For our final exam period, you will
work with your partner to prepare a short presentation (approx. 5-10
minutes) in which you discuss your wiki essay. You should plan to show
us your essay, provide some details about your writing process, discuss
what your essay is about, and explain why the visual elements are
important to it.

8) End of Semester Reflection: Most likely, this class was different
from other writing-oriented classes that you have taken. Over the
course of the semester, we will read a number of articles from rhetoric
and writing studies journals discussing issues such as writers’ processes,
revising effectively, reading rhetorically, and even the construction of
knowledge. As cited in the prompt for Essay #3, Brummett (1977) said,
“Discourse does not merely discover truth or make it effective. Discourse
creates realities rather than truths about realities.” For this reflective
essay, I would like you to consider the above quote and think about how the discourses you have read and discussed this semester have recreated your reality in regard to writing. The most successful reflections will demonstrate thoughtful consideration of the work we have done this semester. Reflections of this nature will (1) contain specific references to and quotes from multiple texts that we have read, (2) mention specific writing tasks that were particularly helpful in your growth as a writer, and (3) speculate on how this growth will be helpful in your future writing endeavors both inside and outside the classroom.

Grading:

You will have three major types of graded assignments for this course: essays, daily homework assignments, and reading quizzes. The essays will be evaluated on a traditional 100 pt. scale. All other assignments (homework responses, in-class quizzes, peer review responses, online skill-building, and others) will be evaluated on a 5 pt. scale. For reading responses, a typical 5 pt. response will include a well-thought-out response that responds to the question asked and proper APA citation with at least one quote from the reading.

Final grades will be calculated as follows:

Essay #1: 15%
Essay #2: 15%
Essay #3: 15%
End of semester reflection: 15%
Online postings, homework assignments, quizzes, and peer review: 25%
Classroom community building (class participation, motivation, and general enthusiasm): 10%
Oral presentation during exam period: 5%

Bullet key for calendar

 Class Activity/Note
 Writing Assignment
 Reading Assignment

Day 1
 Introductions and class policies
 In-class writing and group discussions on expectations

Day 2
 Read syllabus
 Type, print, and bring to class a 150-word response to this question: Upon reading the syllabus, how does this writing class look different from previous ones you’ve taken?
Introduction to rhetoric as epistemic
Day 3

Download from Blackboard, print, and read Barry Brummett’s “Three Meanings of Epistemic Rhetoric.”
On WebCT, post a 150-word response describing the difference in your own words between the three notions of rhetoric as epistemic that Brummett describes.

Introduction of the rhetorical triangle.
Day 4

Download from WebCT, print, and read Donald Murray’s 1970 article “The interior view: One writer’s philosophy of composition.”
On Blackboard, post a 150-word response explaining how this reading helped expand your understanding of the rhetorical triangle introduced on Monday and described on p. 1 of the Handbook.

Day 5

Download from Blackboard, print, and read Murray’s “Teaching writing as a process not product.”
On Blackboard, post a 150-word response to one of these two questions: (1) How does Murray’s advice for teaching differ from previous writing instruction you’ve had? OR (2) Murray explains that each part of the process takes different amounts of time. According to Murray, what part takes the most time? Why do you think this is?

Day 6

Type, print, and bring to class a single-spaced 400-600 word reflection on how your process compares to that described by Murray (note: this counts as two homework assignment grades). Use the following questions to guide your reflection:

- What process do you use when writing? How does this change if you’re writing an academic essay as opposed to an email?
- What is the most time consuming part of your process? The least?
- What is the most difficult part of your process?
- Which of Murray’s implications did you find most important?

Day 7

Read Handbook pp. 297-299 and pp. 321-330. On pp. 321-330, pay more attention to the use of APA style as opposed to the content of the paper. How does the writer integrate quotes and cite them? How is the paper formatted? How are the references listed?
Revise one of your Murray postings by adding at least one properly integrated and cited quote and including a reference list that lists Murray’s article properly. Print and bring to class. **Note: from this point on, you should always use proper APA style in your online postings and any source-based writing you do for this class.**

Day 8

Complete “APA Citations” exercise online using the Handbook to help you.

Read Handbook pp. 6-19, “Planning and drafting,” and consider the following question when reading: How did this reading help you better understand Murray’s assertion that pre-writing should be the most time consuming part of the writing process?

Day 9

Download from Blackboard, print, and read Donald Murray’s 1978 article “Write before writing.”

On Blackboard, post a 150-word response to one of the following: (1) Using a personal experience with a previous writing task, help clarify the connection between increasing information and increasing concern OR (2) Think of an important piece of writing you’ve done. Describe how two of Murray’s signals (like genre) were particularly important for your writing.

Day 10

Read the assignment prompt for Essay #1, Handbook pp. 75-79, and the sample essay posted on Blackboard (a summary of Gordon Rohman’s 1965 article “Pre-writing the stage of discovery in the writing process”).

Write a 200-300 word response answering the questions that are posted on Blackboard about the sample summary essay you read.

Introduce Essay #1

Day 11

Read through your previous responses and glance at the articles we’ve read to decide which one interested you the most.

Reread the article you chose and take notes based on the Essay #1 assignment prompt. Bring both the article and notes to class.

In-class pre-writing exercises.

Sign up for group conferences – you need to post a draft of your essay on Blackboard under your group number under “Peer Review Conferences” **24 hours before your conference** so your peers and I have time to read your essay.

Day 12

Read Handbook pp. 218-224, “Avoiding plagiarism.”

Complete “Planning Essay #1” exercise online.
In-class activities on summarizing and paraphrasing.
Day 13

Small group conferences on drafts in the Writing Center
– follow the directions on Blackboard to post your essay at least 24 hours before the conference, read your partners’ essays, and post your comments before the session.
Day 14

Essay #1 due—submit online by class time
Read Handbook pp. 47-55, “Read and view with a critical eye” and consider the following questions while reading: When reading, do you follow the suggestions given? If not, what did you learn while reading that could help you read more actively?
Day 15

Download from Blackboard, print, and read Christina Haas and Linda Flower’s 1988 article “Reading strategies and the construction of meaning” to p. 174. Consider the following questions when reading: (1) How is viewing meaning as “a rich network of disparate kinds of information” (p. 170) different from other types of reading for meaning that students may be asked to do? AND (2) According to Hass and Flower, why might different readers understand a text in different ways?
Day 16

Read the rest of Hass and Flower’s article and consider the following questions when reading: (1) What does it mean to view texts as discourse acts? and (2) How do writers who write rhetorically differ from those who don’t?
Day 17

Return Essay #1, summarize feedback, and have a revision workshop in which the class works together on revising one essay.
Day 18

Read Handbook pp. 404-413 and read your essay, looking for these errors.
Complete the “Editing” assignment online using Essay #1.
In-class work on comma errors.
Day 19

Complete the comma exercise assigned online.
On Blackboard, post a 150-word response to the following question: How can reading rhetorically make you a better writer? Use at least one quote from the Hass and Flower article in your response.
Day 20

Evaluate the Handbook’s sample essay (on pp. 60-66) by posting a response to the questions on Blackboard.

Introduce Essay #2

Day 21 – at a conference – no F2F class

Read an editorial in a newspaper at a site like nytimes.com, guardian.co.uk, or elpasotimes.com.

Post a 200-word response in which you analyze the author of the editorial. Use the following questions to guide you: (1) What purpose does the writer have for writing?, (2) What assumptions does the writer make?, and (3) Where would you situate the writer on the political spectrum? Liberal, centrist, conservative or somewhere in between?

Day 22– at a conference – no F2F class

Choose and read one of the pairs of news articles I will post on Blackboard.

Post a 300-word response in which you analyze how the articles present different views on the news issue being discussed. Use the following questions to guide you: (1) How do the articles report the issue differently?, (2) How might this difference be affected by the location of the author of the article or the newspaper in which it’s published?, and (3) Many assume that news articles are “objective” representations of reality. How does your reading of the pair of articles you selected challenge this view?

Day 23

Find, print, and read two articles, editorials, or speeches on the same topic (expect to use these for Essay #2). Bring them to class.

On Blackboard, post a 300-word response in which you analyze the articles using the questions in the Day 21 assignment.

Day 24

Complete the “Essay #2 Outline” exercise online by posting an outline that details the main points of your essay. Look at the samples in the Handbook on pp. 17-18 and the assignment online and decide how you want to format your outline.

Day 25

By 5 p.m. Friday, post a draft of your essay under Essay #2 Peer Review and your group number on Blackboard. Follow the instructions online to post your essay and your comments before Monday’s class.

Day 26

Follow the instructions online to complete peer reviews by this class period. In class, you will meet F2F to discuss online
comments.

Day 27

Download from Blackboard, print, and read Nancy Sommers’s 1980 article “Revision strategies of student writers and experienced adult writers.”

Post a 200-word response on Blackboard responding to the following questions: What are the differences that Sommers finds between the revisions made by student and experienced writers? Where would you place yourself in relation to the writers Sommers describes?

Day 28

Submit Essay #2 on Blackboard by class time.

Download from Blackboard, print, and read Lester Faigley and Stephen Witte’s 1981 article “Analyzing revision” to p. 405. Consider the following two questions while reading: (1) What is the difference between meaning changes and surface changes? and (2) What is the difference between macrostructure and microstructure changes?

Day 29

Finish reading the Faigley and Witte article and consider the following two questions while reading: (1) Which group made the highest percentage of meaning changes? The least? Why do you think this is? and (2) According to the authors, why did the more advanced writers possibly make fewer overall revisions?

Day 30

In-class revision workshop on Essay #2.

Day 31

Join PBWiki and view the video on the class wiki’s homepage. As you view the video, consider the argument that the video makes and whether or not you agree with it.

Day 32

Reread Brummett’s “Three meanings of epistemic rhetoric,” found on Blackboard.

On Blackboard, post a 200-word response explaining how your understanding of Brummett’s article has changed since you read it earlier in the semester.

Day 33

Read “Rhetoric as epistemic: What’s the big deal?” on the class wiki. Consider the following questions when reading: (1) Why do the authors of this text object to Hairston’s argument that instructors should not let ideology influence writing classroom design? and (2) How has technology enabled students to create knowledge through participation in societal discourse?
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**Revision of Essay #2 due by class time**

Day 34
Download from Blackboard, print, and read Margaret Kantz’s 1990 article “Using textual sources persuasively” to p. 79. Consider the following question while reading: How was Shirley’s original treatment of the topic different from what her friend suggested?

Day 35
Finish the Kantz article

On Blackboard, post a 150-word response to the following question: How is the paragraph that starts at the bottom of p. 81 that begins “Alice, who thinks rhetorically…” indicate that Kantz believes in the notion of rhetoric as epistemic?

Day 36
Log onto the wiki and read the assignment prompt for Essay #3.

Complete the Freewriting assignment online as a way to brainstorm for Essay #3. Submit online, print your freewrite, and bring it to class.

Introduce Essay #3.

In-class: (1) Pick a partner, (2) share your freewriting/brainstorm topics and discuss ways you could develop them, and (3) decide on a topic.

Day 37
Read back over the Brummett article and the wiki pages we read and pick quotes that can be helpful for your essay. Post these on your wiki page.

In computer classroom with partner: Find at least two discourse sources on your topic, discuss how they offer different perspectives on your issue, and post a 150-word summary of your discussion on your wiki page.

Day 38
Download from Blackboard, print, and read Linda Brodkey’s 1989 article “Transvaluing Difference.” Consider the following questions when reading: (1) Where would you situate Brodkey on the political spectrum? What ideologies does she espouse? (2) On p. 598, what false assumption does Brodkey say students and colleagues often make? and (3) Based on her discussion on the bottom of p. 599, what does Brodkey think about objectivity?

On your essay page, post at least one quote from this article that can be helpful for your paper, explaining how you might use it.

Day 39
Post at least two more discourse sources/examples that you can use for your essay.

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In-class partner work: Develop an outline for your essay using the quotes and discourse sources you have collected on your wiki page.

Day 40

In-class descriptions of work in progress—briefly explain the outlines you developed, focusing on the point of your essay and what specific examples you are going to do to develop that point.

Day 41

Have essay drafted by this class period. Will meet in computer classroom for peer review.

Day 42

Introduce end of semester reflection assignment: As cited in the prompt for Essay #3, Brummett (1977) said, “Discourse does not merely discover truth or make it effective. Discourse creates realities rather than truths about realities.” For this reflective essay, I would like you to consider the above quote and think about how the discourses you have read and discussed this semester have recreated your reality in regard to writing.

Class evaluations.

Submit Essay #3 and the end of semester reflection on Blackboard by the exam period.