

## Language Matters: Rhetoric and Writing I as Content Course

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At the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs (UCCS), writing faculty recently reconceptualized English 131 (ENGL 131: Composition I) by claiming an instructional agenda beyond the instrumental function of general skills writing instruction. Our shift from a Writing-WNCP, “writing-with-no-content-in-particular,” curriculum (77) to a Writing-WSC “writing-with-specific-content” curriculum, (82) follows David Kaufer and Richard Young’s conceptual parameters as articulated in their theoretical inquiry into the relationship between writing and content. Kaufer and Young define the Writing-WNCP course as an instructional tradition that has long “dominated the thinking of most English departments,” a tradition that encouraged “the splitting off of writing from the rest of what is taught and learned in the academy” via the establishment of the separate course in first-year composition (77). Such a course focuses on “mechanics, usage, style, and the paragraph” while other disciplines focus on “content, for which language is only a vehicle” (78). The “*fundamental premise*” that scaffolds the W-WNCP tradition is “the separability of language and content” (77) where content serves “an instrumental rather than an intrinsic” function (78). In said tradition, one assumes that “the *same* [writing] skills will develop no matter what content is chosen” as the “language skills taught and learned are generic” (78). W-WNCP courses choose content “presumed to be of interest to students” as students “write best” about such things (78), but such content must not require “so much time and effort to learn—lest instruction in writing be compromised” (79). The emphasis, then, is often on “personal expression” (79).

In contrast, Kaufer and Young then define W-WSC courses wherein “language serves more than” an “instrumental function” (82) as “language practices are inextricably linked to [one’s] discipline” (86). To teach dis-

disciplinary content is “to teach languaging about the discipline” (83). As students write within disciplines, “writing assignments are dictated by the specific rhetorical practices of the community” (81) and students negotiate both language skills and content. Whereas Writing-WNCP courses artificially separate instruction in rhetorical skills from disciplinary contexts, (first-year composition from content courses across the curriculum), Writing-WSC courses ask students to direct their inventional attention to both skills and content in process.

At UCCS, our theoretical revision of ENGL 131 may be understood as a shift from such a general skills W-WNCP course to the alternative W-WSC model. Our curricular revision includes deep conceptual moves in four related areas. First, ENGL 131 is now a content course with rhetoric and writing studies (RWS) as the subject matter. Second, the integration of content restored the theoretical link between language and disciplinary content. The relinking of language and content led us to conceptually reanimate form. Rather than teaching fixed patterns of arrangement, we now address form as rhetorically contingent. Third, the language-content link further motivated us to recover instructional liability for sentence-level competencies from our supplemental skills course taught in the writing center. Finally, the integration of rhetoric and writing studies as disciplinary content in the first-semester course reconstituted our instructional labor by aligning ENGL 131 with other content courses across the disciplines. By definition, our writing instruction is now more fully a scholarly enterprise with disciplinary integrity.

### **ENGL 131: COMPOSITION I AS GENERAL SKILLS WRITING INSTRUCTION, W-WNCP**

When I assumed administrative oversight of the UCCS Writing Program in the fall of 2000, ENGL 131 was a general skills writing course with an accompanying exit portfolio. Archived program reviews from 1982 (“Academic”) and 1990 (“Composition”) indicate that the ENGL 131 curriculum, as first developed in 1980, remained the same through 1990. Accrediting reports from 1997 and 1998 then indicate that the ENGL 131 curriculum remained essentially the same up through the late 1990’s (Odell, “1996”; “1997”). Overall, writing program policies and practices were internally coherent and yet aligned with the curricular vision of 1980 when I arrived in the fall of 2000. UCCS archival documents offer rich insight into the logic that informed the development of ENGL 131: Composition I in 1980 and then the practices and policies that sustained its identity through the fall of 2000. During my first year as WPA, I came to more deeply appreciate ENGL 131: Composition I in all of its principles and practices.

ENGL 131 was a general writing skills course “designed to give all incoming students experience at writing analytically in a number of different formats and genres directed to different purposes” (“UCCS English 131”). Students wrote one diagnostic essay, three in-class essays, and three out-of-class essays. All essays drew their content from the writer’s own experience, the experience of others, and hypothetical examples. As such, they were to “stand up in terms of analysis and argument without the inclusion of outside information” (“Suggested Guidelines”). Students needed to analyze and reason with “their own thoughts, ideas, perceptions, and understandings before they [reasoned] with others” (Odell, “Composition Faculty” 1). Further, writers who “start[ed] first with others’ essays, tend[ed] not to learn how to take their own position; rather they parrot[ed] someone else’s” (Odell, “Composition Faculty” 1). This principle complemented the early-process claim that “students [needed to] find their own voices, their own sense of authority over their prose”(Napierkowski 1). To develop personal authority, as evidenced through voice and independent reasoning, ENGL 131 cordoned off academic content.

Writing program documents justified the general writing skills curriculum for first-semester students. These writers all had to formulate a thesis, generate topic sentences, develop paragraphs, and reason analytically. The Composition Program Review (1990) cited such developmental needs: “[M]any entering freshmen ha[d] so little idea how to write a competent academic paper that they need[ed] a structure—even a formula—for doing so if they [were] going to survive in college” (6). In “reality,” “many entering students [could not] handle the fundamental writing tasks that college require[d] of them” (7). ENGL 131’s curricular aim worked from the skills-first, content-later principle, which sustains most W-WNCP courses.

Syllabi explicitly described the W-WNCP curriculum. ENGL 131 focused on “the fundamentals of academic argumentation,” as developed “within the confines of the five-paragraph, thesis-driven essay” (Timm). Formal competencies—“how to write sentences and paragraphs that read well and flow”—were taught as structural building blocks to be crafted (Hester). Writers built diverse analytical structures, e.g., a casual analysis, an evaluation, a problem-solution, a compare-contrast, or definition, which would capably hold diverse content across the curriculum. Writers “‘finger practiced’ with differing structures to master the techniques and conventions” of analytical discourse, and “to promote cognitive development” (“Composition Program” 5). Syllabi timelines were organized topically by the specific analytic structure under construction.

Students wrote in-class essays (ICEs) to prepare for exams across the curriculum. ICE prompts were self-contained writing problems, each with context, aim, audience, and issue clearly defined. ICEs were experience-

based, analytical essays written on common topics, such as the effects of television violence on children and the causes of addictive behavior. Writers received topics on the test day to assess authentically their ability to generate experiential content on demand. They wrote three ICEs in order to generate one successful essay for their final ENGL 131 portfolio.

Students chose one ICE and one out-of-class essay (OCE) for their final ENGL 131 portfolios. Portfolios were scored twice; split decisions received a third read. Portfolios received a pass, pass/lab, or fail. Students with passing portfolios received letter grades for ENGL 131; those with pass/lab portfolios received an incomplete, and had one year to complete ENGL 135, a laboratory course focusing on sentence-level issues. Students with failing portfolios repeated ENGL 131. An appeal process enabled instructors to resubmit failed portfolios. If the portfolio failed the appeal process, the student repeated ENGL 131.

The instructional emphasis on the construction of formal elements as general writing competencies was coherently linked to portfolio criteria and clearly addressed in course syllabi. The “liberating confines of the basic five-paragraph essay” was the “form that most appeal[ed] to those unknown readers who at semester’s end decid[ed] [the student’s] fate: the portfolio readers” (Hester). Portfolio essays needed a thesis, and micro-theses, “accompanied by the clear, logical movement,” of ideas as “demonstrated by appropriate transitional and cohesive devices” (“Composition Program” 4). Paragraphs “proceed[ed] in either parallel or subordinate patterns (4). The essays “manifest[ed] reasonable correctness of sentence structure,” a “felicity of syntax,” and were also “free of serious usage errors” (4). Portfolio criteria emphasized structural competencies and the development of experiential detail. Writers who built these formal features into their essays and adequately developed their ideas passed the assessment.

## THE WRITING PROGRAM’S REVIEW OF ENGL 131: COMPOSITION I

ENGL 131 and its companion portfolio came under review when English faculty hired a new WPA, who was specifically charged with the task. Writing programs are complex, dynamic systems, which—to remain healthy and effective—must necessarily respond to shifts in local context and external relations. The immediate past WPA was a classified employee who enjoyed no license to revise the curriculum or program policies and practices in response to the shifting constraints of the program’s administrative (rhetorical) situation. In the fall of 2000, a new tenure-track WPA was hired to review and revise all of the above.

As the new WPA, I worked with administrators, letters, arts and sciences (LAS) faculty, writing faculty, the writing center coordinator, and tutors to review ENGL 131. Because writing faculty already met for monthly portfo-

lio norming, we appropriated some time for curriculum review. After a few months of discussion, writing faculty individually completed the Composition Faculty Survey Fall 2000 (Appendix A). At the same time, I visited with colleagues in English, LAS faculty, the writing center coordinator, and her tutors. Many sent follow-up memos and emails detailing their observations and concerns. Guiding documents that heavily informed our review included the “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition” and the newly formulated “UCCS Core Goals for General Education.”

### UCCS FACULTY AND STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON FIRST-YEAR WRITING COMPETENCIES

Faculty in LAS assessed their first-year students’ writing competencies across the curriculum. Our English chair, for example, explained that first-year students “[had] major trouble with a writing topic that [required] them to go into a text, extract evidence to support a thesis and sustain an argument, and embed quotations in their own writing, so that this evidence [worked] fluently with their argument” (Ray). Furthermore, “they [were] unable to evaluate evidence, and frequently [overlooked] salient points in the texts that would buttress their analysis.” She felt “students [were] afraid of text” as they struggled to set up their arguments. They “reach[ed] into the air for evidence instead of the text” (Ray). Essays were mostly “about themselves” rather than their literary texts. Joan Ray’s rich description of her text-based, analytical assignments and her analysis of her students’ struggle with task formation enabled us to assess ENGL 131’s external relevance to ENGL 150 as a general education literature survey.

Philosophy professors assigned analytical arguments based on academic readings. Students who entered “Introduction to Philosophy who [had] taken English composition [did] not have analytic skills in thinking and writing, and it [took] half a semester to even begin to teach them” (Olkowski). Students “[needed] not just to know how to construct a grammatical sentence,” they had to “construct arguments based on evidence and to distinguish these from beliefs and opinions” (Olkowski). Philosophy students, very much like Ray’s literature students, struggled to generate text-based, analytical arguments sustained with evidence from course readings.

History professors regularly assigned thesis-driven essays in their general education courses. As in philosophy, first-year history students “[passed] their opinions as analysis,” and reiterated a text’s arguments rather than formulating a “viable thesis” and shaping an argument of their own (Sheidley). Faculty across general education identified academic reading and textual analysis as the necessary “place” for writerly invention to begin. Students negotiated academic texts during their first semester on campus (in His-

tory 151, English 150 and Philosophy 100), but such content-based inventional strategies were not integral to ENGL 131 as a general skills writing course.

In their formal survey of the ENGL 131 curriculum (Appendix A), writing faculty echoed other faculty's concerns and shared their observations as ENGL 131 instructors. Faculty consistently questioned the transfer value of ENGL 131 ICEs generated from stand-alone prompts. Faculty suggested that we integrate readings so essays would "more closely represent the kind of writing students will do in other classes" (Napierkowski). Because ICE prompts were standard, faculty "read the 'same' essays over and over, and expected certain perspectives" on the issues (Loterbauer). ICE prompts "often [encouraged] formulaic, empty essays" (Flint). Faculty also registered student concerns that the in-class topic and time constraints actually impeded their ability to demonstrate writing competency.

Writing faculty noted that first-year students pushed for increased responsibility in ENGL 131. "[Students] regularly [asked] to do more research" (Timm). Faculty had "to rein in [first-year-writers] to keep them from doing so, and [didn't] enjoy doing that because many of them [had] written research papers in high school" (Timm). Students felt like they were "backpedaling" (Timm). Faculty shared student-to-student, hallway comments overheard in passing. A recurrent theme was captured by the following comment: "All they want is a five-paragraph essay, and I already know how to do that." Writing faculty identified developmental needs and writerly desires as articulated by the students themselves.

Finally, faculty claimed that portfolio criteria and assessment procedures constrained their practice. The exit portfolio prevented risk taking in assignment design. The "quest for safety in the portfolio" led faculty "to leave behind genres such as definitions and narratives" (Johnson). Instruction was "driven by [faculty] desire to submit successful exit portfolios" (Napierkowski). Exit portfolio pressure, and high-stakes production bore down on faculty and students alike. One instructor described her students' experiences: "Let's face it, [ENGL 131] is about as much fun as a trip to the dentist—without Novocaine. [Students] feel this way because the stakes are so high with that winner-takes-all portfolio. Most of my English 131 students are scared, pissed, and wary" (Fallon). Faculty agreed that the portfolio standards and procedures focused "much too much on writing the minimally accepted form to pass the exit portfolio" (Odell, "Composition Faculty" 1).

UCCS writing center tutors met with me to share their insights from writing conferences across the curriculum. They "noticed a lack of engagement in [first-year students'] writing," perhaps because the "131 curriculum [did] not adequately challenge students to engage in their work" (Macna-

mara, Hill, and Williams). They felt students could be asked to write “more than the ‘cookbook’ 5-paragraph essay structure” (Macnamara). One tutor, Adrienne, mentioned “other 100-level courses” in which students were already asked “to analyze texts and include research in their own writing—History 151, for example.” Another identified a common need: “an ability to critically analyze or critique a piece of writing, whether it [was] an outside source or the student’s own work” (Burkey). Most students could “construct a thesis and organize an essay,” but they could not “really critique a piece of writing” (Burkey). Tutors observed a gap “between basic skills and sophisticated analysis techniques” (Macnamara, Hill, and Williams). As students advocating for students, they proposed that first-year writers “read a text and then write an analytical paper including their original thoughts” (Macnamara, Hill, and Williams). Peer tutor observations and suggestions generally complemented those expressed by LAS faculty.

#### GUIDING STANDARDS: UCCS CORE GOALS AND THE WPA OUTCOMES STATEMENT

As part of our curricular review, we considered the “UCCS Core Goals for General Education” as adopted by faculty in the spring of 2000. ENGL 131, as a universal requirement, naturally addresses core goals in written communication. As a common course, ENGL 131 further functions as a vital venue for delivering core experiences, including the principles and values of a liberal education on a grand scale. Two specific core goals informed our revision of the first-semester course:

**Goal One:** Students will be able to read, write, listen and speak in a manner that demonstrates critical, analytical and creative thought.

**Goal Four:** Students will be prepared to participate as responsible members of a pluralist society—locally, nationally, and globally.

Goal One’s reading, writing, listening and speaking competencies called for the integration of academic readings, along with the critical and analytical discussion of the same. Goal Four promoted curricular diversity and made rhetorical competencies integral to general education curricula. We discovered that integrating critical and analytical reading and discussion in ENGL 131 and diversifying our readings would better serve our undergraduate mission. ENGL 131, reconfigured as a W-WSC course, would more richly serve the UCCS core goals and thereby enhance the external relevance of our writing curriculum.

The Council of Writing Program Administrators adopted its “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition” in April of 2000. The Outcomes Statement’s aims are “curricular” as it focuses “on what we want students to know, to do, to understand”(Yancey 323). UCCS writing faculty assessed course competencies against the Outcomes Statement’s common expectations to generate a broader context for curricular revision. The Outcomes Statement both guided and authorized our local revision of ENGL 131. As the Outcomes Statement thoroughly integrates rhetorical competencies, it admits a civic function for first-year writing, a function that complements democratic discussion as a venue for enhancing students’ abilities “to participate as responsible members of society” (UCCS Core Goal Four). It also integrates critical reading and analysis and calls for diversity in course content. As an external document generated by WPA professionals, the Outcomes Statement provided the necessary theoretical and professional leverage we needed to advance our deep revision of ENGL 131.

Administrators, faculty and students all variously confirmed that ENGL 131 as a general writing skills, Writing-WNCP course no longer served our collective needs. Program constituents had identified needs and set new goals, which cohered into our agenda for curricular change. Our proposed revision incorporated UCCS core goals and standards from the WPA Outcomes Statement and immediately responded to gaps identified by the UCCS collective.

### **LANGUAGE MATTERS: FROM GENERAL SKILLS TO CONTENT COURSE**

ENGL 131’s emphasis on general writing skills and experience-based essays did not enable first-year writers to negotiate assignments across the disciplines. Students struggled to transfer writing skills into context-specific, content-rich writing situations. The appearance of “opinion” (Sheidley; Olkowski; Ray) and the experience of writers “themselves”(Ray) in documented essays across the curriculum may have been content transfer from ENGL 131, where experience was legitimate content. Writers may have transferred ENGL 131 writing tasks to other disciplinary contexts, especially since most of these students were concurrently enrolled in ENGL 131.

ENGL 131 assignments needed to enable students to negotiate assignments across the curriculum more effectively. Writing faculty chose to replace experience-based essays with documented analytical essays based on course readings. Both the WPA Outcomes Statement and UCCS core goals supported the integration of content. ENGL 131 students now write three documented analytical essays and one ICE based on readings. We selected rhetoric and writing studies (RWS) as our disciplinary content, broadly cast

as language matters. RWS content, locally understood as the study of *language matters*, encompasses the following subtopics: multicultural rhetoric and language practices; language and technology; language and literacy; pop culture and language practices; or writing in the disciplines (WID), as a survey of discourse conventions (skills and content) across the curriculum. Faculty choose their specific subtopic, but no matter the subtopic, students analyze diverse essays that address language issues. The essays then provide a discipline-specific, discursively rich context to facilitate invention. The documented essay now closely replicates the writing assignments students negotiate across the disciplines. RWS content, under the umbrella of language matters, gives disciplinary presence to our subject matter, so students learn that “language practices are inextricably linked to disciplines” (Kaufer 86). Our ENGL 131 writers are already “linguaging about [a] discipline,” (83) about *our* discipline within their very first writing course. Finally, the study of language theory and practice should enhance skills transfer since our subject matter further enhances students’ awareness of writing principles and practices as always linked to disciplinary content.

#### RELINKING LANGUAGE AND CONTENT: MATTERS OF FORM

As a W-WNCP course, ENGL 131 asked writers to work with language and to build local and global analytical structures in the absence of substantive content and without the generative constraints of a disciplinary situation. Prescribed analytical forms constrained our first-year writers’ delivery of their ideas. Faculty interpreted this struggle as a sign of writers’ developmental immaturity, proof that they needed even more formal constraints (“Composition Program” 6). Alternately, the struggle perhaps ensued as writers forced their content into prefabricated language structures, such as the three-point, closed thesis. Such form-fixing enforced an ineffectual split between language and content, where form did not rhetorically respond to content. ENGL 131’s reliance upon fixed forms inadvertently delayed the writer’s rhetorical maturation. As writers were denied rhetorical control over matters of form, they did not learn to strategically negotiate language-content relations, the one “inextricably linked” to the other (Kaufer and Young 86). Writing faculty chose to reanimate form, to teach form as rhetorically contingent and to give writers control of formal matters throughout the writing process. We released students from the protective custody of a three-point thesis, and a five-paragraph essay, and thus admitted the complexity of rhetorically situated invention and arrangement.

Our theoretical re-linking of language and content and subsequent reanimation of form affected the portfolio assessment. Our local implementation of the portfolio assessment had created a culture of fear and instructional intimidation for both faculty and students. The high-stakes

assessment constrained instruction to formulaic directives for producing the generically “good” text. As ENGL 131 students’ mastery of essay forms was likewise evidence of instructional competency, faculty pretty much taught to the test (“Composition Program” 6). For faculty and students to negotiate the theoretical and practical demands of relinking language and content, they needed a supportive instructional environment that rewarded risk-taking and developmental messiness. We relocated the ENGL 131 portfolio by converting it into a general education assessment. Students now submit a portfolio after completing their six credit hours of required writing course work.

Our reconceptualization of form deeply reconstituted writing instruction as faculty knew it. Writing instruction depended conceptually upon the material presence of form as “content.” Since ENGL 131 emphasized language skills, assignments existed as forms to be made: compare/contrast and problem/solution, for example. Instructors lectured on thesis statements, topic sentences, and paragraph patterns. Their critical attention to form largely constituted their instructional labor. Understandably, the removal of fixed forms from our curriculum (the material loss of their labor) traumatized writing faculty. The following comment captures the loss felt by many: “Our revision of 131 took away form, but gave us *nothing* in exchange” (Odell, Email, emphasis added). The removal of fixed forms (their reanimation and representation as rhetorically contingent) signaled the removal of the instructor’s practice. The addition of RWS content and the pedagogical shift to rhetoric as *techne* were conceptually invisible substitutes. Our theoretical relinking of language and content compelled writing faculty to materially reconstruct their practice. Writing faculty yet mourn the conceptual loss of fixed forms as substantively equivalent to the loss of their comfortable and familiar practice, a practice which had sustained their professional identities for years.

### RELINKING LANGUAGE AND CONTENT: SENTENCE-LEVEL COMPETENCIES

Restoring the language-content link further motivated us to recover instructional liability for sentence-level competencies from our supplemental course taught in the writing center. Even as ENGL 131 emphasized general writing skills, the curriculum held that sentence-level issues were outside the course’s instructional domain. Faculty assumed that students mastered sentence-level skills before enrolling in ENGL 131. If not, faculty advised students to concurrently enroll in ENGL 135 for supplemental instruction. Most students did not enroll in the lab as advised; instead, they waited until their portfolios received a pass/lab rating, and then completed

the lab the following semester. Alternately, some students managed these issues on their own or visited the writing center for support.

Faculty assessed portfolio essays for sentence-level competencies but did not teach them. On average, 20% of ENGL 131 students received pass/lab ratings for insufficient language control (Odell, “1996-1997” 5; “1997-1998” 4). To redress the high pass/lab rate and quite fully secure the language-content link, faculty recovered sentence-level competencies from the laboratory course. The laboratory curriculum was freestanding—students worked on general editing skills in the absence of disciplinary content. Recovering the competencies enabled us to offer sentence-level instruction within the discursively rich, discipline-specific context of our revised W-WSC curriculum.

### **W-WSC, DISCIPLINARY IDENTITY AND THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF WRITING FACULTY**

Writing faculty gained much from our curricular revision even as the subsequent rebuilding of their practice was (yet remains) professionally exacting. In “Depoliticizing and Politicizing Composition Studies,” James Slevin reminds us that our writing “curriculum [. . .] communicates some important messages to students; it teaches students how to read the courses they enroll in” (5). They learn “what forms a coherent order and what doesn’t, and to that extent, what counts and what doesn’t” (5). Our shift to a content course tells students that our disciplinary content “counts,” that RWS, locally defined as *language matters*, merits their intellectual engagement. Ours is a critical claim for disciplinary appreciation and respect.

ENGL 131 as a W-WNCP course constrained writing faculty’s labor relations to the department of English and the college of LAS as one of service and thus perpetuated an unfortunate academic labor trend. When the first-year course defines itself by the absence of intellectual content (the W-WNCP course) it enables academic institutions to “endorse and institutionalize” an “impoverished notion of first-year composition and what it means to teach it” (Slevin 6). Furthermore, such a “reductive notion of composition” enables university administrators to justify shameful employment policies (Slevin 6). Slevin appropriately implicates writing professionals as well because we “let institutions get away with it by endorsing and institutionalizing impoverished notions” of our labor—we perform our work in ways that reinforce our own impoverished state (6). Locally, UCCS writing faculty work inside this labor trend as they are all instructors who work extremely hard for very little pay. By reconstituting their labor as scholarly teaching, faculty resist the academic labor trend and add professional integrity to their work. As a W-WSC course, ENGL 131 need not attach itself parasitically to other fields and feed off their content. Such content-depen-

gency perpetuates an impoverished definition of our work as remedial writing skills. The integration of our own content gives faculty more intellectual control over their labor.

Some might argue that the integration of content in ENGL 131, even if it's *ours*, sustains service relations with other disciplines because we aligned writing assignments with those across the disciplines. Actually, the integration significantly alters our institutional location and curricular relations. We have moved from a skills and service curriculum *below* other disciplines to a W-WSC curriculum that enjoys parallel relations to other disciplines. Our coursework is externally relevant as we share responsibility for teaching core competencies. Our work is supportive but no longer *subservient* in its disciplinary location and *lesser* in its curricular function. ENGL 131 as content course deliberately disrupts our local labor hierarchy, a hierarchy that has not rewarded writing faculty, professionally or materially, for their institutional loyalty and hard work. By performing our work *otherwise* by giving presence to *the intellectual* in our work, we undermine the institution's continued justification of shameful policies (the heavy workload, the low salary), instead of perpetuating the same. Writing instruction performed as scholarly labor gains professional legitimacy across the institutional terrain.

## RHETORIC AND WRITING I: ACADEMIC READING AND ANALYTICAL WRITING

In the spring of 2002, the LAS curriculum and review committee approved a title change, the new course description, and our common outcomes for ENGL 131 (Appendices B, C). Composition I is now: *Rhetoric and Writing I: Academic Reading and Analytical Writing*. LAS committee members respectfully entertained our claim that composition has its own disciplinary content. They appreciated the integration of academic reading and discussion—no matter the disciplinary subject. Our colleagues across the disciplines embraced our curricular revision, and thereby sanctioned the refiguring of our academic labor relations. Now, writing faculty and program administrators need to perform these relations anew by advancing curricular claims that relentlessly enhance the professional integrity of our work.

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## APPENDIX A

### COMPOSITION FACULTY SURVEY FALL 2000

**Purpose:** The purpose of this survey is to gather input from all writing faculty concerning our current approach to English 131. We will use the survey data for critical discussion and then curricular decision-making. These decisions will have an immediate impact upon your practice, so

please take the time to thoroughly express your ideas, concerns and needs relative to 131. Feel free to move beyond these questions as well. Thanks.

**Course Goals:**

- What is your current understanding of the purpose of English 131?
- Do you think the current purpose of the course needs clarification, expansion? If so, what should we consider?

**Course Description:** Currently, our 131 description asks for one diagnostic essay, 3 OCEs, and 3 ICEs.

- What is a reasonable workload for English 131?
- What types of papers should we teach in English 131? What values/interests/goals inform your choice of papers for this course?

**Content or Materials for English 131 papers (OCE):** Currently, students are invited to draw from personal experience, experiences of people they know, and sometimes they ask us to let them draw from outside sources (minimally).

- Which of the above sources do your students regularly use?
- How do you facilitate the gathering of materials for 131 papers? For example, personal experience may be accessed or recovered through invention activities. If you invite students to draw from observations/interviews/outside sources, how do you facilitate their research process in 131? What kinds of support are we offering for this process?
- Should we include other resources for their papers? If so, which sources?

**Content or Materials for English 131 (ICE):** Currently, many students write their ICEs from our departmental pool of prompts, and a few are drawing content from readings.

- What are the limits/benefits of the departmental prompts?
- How do you feel about shifting to reading-based ICEs?
- How many ICEs should students write? Why?

**Conferences:** Currently, many of us are using conferences for purposes of revision and portfolio preparation.

- How often do you schedule conferences, and for what purposes?
- What factors impact the number and kinds of conferences you schedule?
- How might we alter our instructional context to better support conferencing?

**English 131 Textbooks:** We have some instructors working from packets and some using Axelrod and Cooper's *The Concise Guide to Writing*.

- What are the strengths/weaknesses of your current "text"?
- What should we look for in our 131 texts?
- What type of text would meet our students' needs and address their interests?
- Do you require students to buy a handbook? Should we all require a handbook, the same handbook?

**Diagnostics and Supplemental Instruction, English 135:** Currently, students write a diagnostic essay, and we can then recommend that they enroll in 135 to address sentence-level issues.

- What are the benefits/limits of our current placement process for English 135?
- What suggestions do you have relative to our placement process?
- What do think about our current approach to English 135 as a supplemental course for our English 131?
- How do students respond to the placement process and to 135 as our supplemental course?

**Portfolio Process:** Currently, we read portfolios at the end of English 131, and we include one ICE and one OCE in the portfolio. Students receive a fail, pass/lab or pass as a result of the assessment. We have an appeal process.

- What texts should be in our portfolio? Do you like the current make-up?
- What outcomes should be possible for this portfolio? Are there other outcomes we should consider?
- What are the benefits/limits of our current criteria for the 131 portfolio assessment? What should we keep? What should we change, if anything?
- Do you have ideas or concerns about our appeal process?
- How would you feel about using an exit portfolio to assess competency after students complete *both* of their writing courses? In this process, students would complete our courses and receive their grades. Then, they would put together a writing portfolio that would be assessed to determine writing competency. If students didn't pass this portfolio, they would be required to take English 301, or another 300-level writing course. Students would have one year to demonstrate competency after completing their writing requirements. The portfolio assessment would be detached from our first-year courses.

Anything else you would like us to address:

## APPENDIX B

### RHETORIC AND WRITING I: ACADEMIC READING AND ANALYTICAL WRITING

*Rhetoric and Writing I* is the first course of a two-semester sequence, required of all UCCS students. Students develop critical reading, writing, and thinking skills through class discussion, the rhetorical analysis of academic texts, and the writing of documented analytical essays. Emphasis is given to reading and writing processes as multiple and rhetorically diverse. Course content focuses on *language matters*, the discipline-specific content of the field of Rhetoric and Writing Studies. Students study language theory and practice in one of the following areas: multicultural rhetoric and language practices; language and technology; language and literacy, pop culture and language practices, or WID, as a survey of language practices across the curriculum. Requirements include academic journal writing, an in-class essay exam, and three documented analytical essays. *Rhetoric and Writing I* is taught in a computer-mediated environment.

**English 131 includes the following writing, reading and speaking activities:**

**Writing Assignments:** English 131 includes four formal writing assignments: an in-class essay based upon academic readings, and three documented analytical essays. Essays ask students to integrate evidence from course readings. Students use writing-to-learn activities including: journals, peer reviews, and other in-class writing assignments throughout the course. Writing-to-communicate activities include computer-mediated exchanges, synchronous online chats, and threaded discussions.

**Reading Activities:** English 131 incorporates critical reading as integral to academic learning and inquiry. Students read essays that articulate diverse perspectives on language issues. They analyze academic essays for purposes of invention and inquiry, to develop strategies for responding to diverse rhetorical situations, and also to increase their awareness of the relationships among language, knowledge, and power within their fields.

**Oral Communication:** English 131 incorporates discussion as both a supportive counterpart of academic reading and writing processes, and to enable students to participate as responsible members of a pluralistic society—locally, nationally and globally. Students develop oral communication skills through the following activities: group discussion of academic readings, writing conferences, and brief in-class presentations.

## APPENDIX C

### ENGL 131 FIRST-YEAR OUTCOMES

*English 131, Rhetoric and Writing I*, at UCCS is aligned with the Council of Writing Program Administrators' "WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition" (*College English*, Volume 63, Number 3, January 2001).

#### Rhetorical Knowledge

*Students should . . .*

- Focus on a purpose
- Respond to the needs of different audiences and rhetorical situations
- Use conventions of format and structure, and adopt a voice and tone appropriate to the rhetorical situation
- Understand how genres shape reading and writing
- Write in various genres, including critical, analytical, reflective discourse

#### Critical Thinking, Reading and Writing

*Students should . . .*

- Use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating
- Understand writing assignments as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing appropriate content and sources
- Integrate their own ideas with those of others
- Understand the relationships among language, knowledge, and power through the reading and analysis of academic essays

#### Writing Processes

*Students should . . .*

- Generate multiple drafts to complete a successful text
- Develop strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proof-reading texts
- Use later invention strategies to rethink and revise their texts
- Understand writing as a social process and use collaborative strategies throughout the process
- Effectively critique their writing and that of their peers
- Use computer technology throughout the writing process

## Knowledge of Conventions

*Students should . . .*

- Format analytical academic texts
- Employ genre conventions relative to structure, paragraphing, tone, and mechanics
- Integrate ideas, cite course readings, and document the readings as warranted
- Demonstrate control over their written language, including syntax, punctuation, grammar, and spelling

