

Job-Search Portfolio
Peggy O'Neill

English 102 Intermediate Composition: Narrative

Goals

English 102 is the second semester of required first-year writing at the University of Louisville. The goals of the course, as explained in the composition program handbook, include a continued development of writing as a process with an emphasis on rhetorical issues; practice producing readable and interesting finished products that reflect academic conventions; practice incorporating primary and secondary research into writing processes and products; and development of critical thinking processes. This course tends to focus on essays and more formal kinds of inquiry (primary and secondary research) as students produce texts appropriate for an educated audience.

In designing this course, I was guided primarily by two principles: first, the goals and requirements of the composition program, and second, my beliefs about teaching writing. The program goals are most evident in the course description, the research components of the writing, and the reading selections. Program policies and guidelines are also reflected in other aspects of the course such as the emphasis on participation, the number of assignments, peer response, revision, and multiple drafting. One of my main goals was to help students learn and practice writing processes that would help them to successfully produce texts beyond my classroom, so I focused on developing self-assessment and reflection as part of the student's writing process by using a portfolio grading system.

Activities

The course activities were structured to address the course goals and contributed to the students' final, graded portfolio. The first assignment aims at introducing a variety of research tools, such as interviewing, government documents, computer databases, and trade journals. Students researched their college major, a major they were considering, or a particular career path, and wrote a documented essay for other first-year students. I had used this assignment previously and had always had positive results. It works well with the population at U of L because many are first-generation college students and don't have parents who can help them negotiate the demands of college or career preparation. While students worked on the writing, we read and discussed critically several essays related to education and students' relationship to it. Most students learned a lot about the concrete demands they will face in realizing their goals as well as strategies for achieving them. For example, one student realized that his part-time job as a grocery clerk could be developed into an internship in management, computer programming, or human relations, and that he could qualify for tuition reimbursement as well. Another student explored his declared major, criminal justice, and discovered what he would need to do to fulfill his requirements for his degree as well as what he should do to make himself a more attractive candidate for the FBI, his ultimate goal. Besides relying on printed material, his research included interviewing an FBI agent, an FBI recruiter, and one of his criminal justice professors. All in all, students responded positively, learning not only about

conducting research and writing texts that incorporated that research but also about something they were invested in. This assignment was also informative for the class as a whole because students learned from each other about a wide array of opportunities, requirements, and careers.

The second and third assignments, an annotated bibliography and documented essay, considered more traditional academic topics although I encouraged students to choose topics that they were interested in. Requirements for the assignments included finding and assessing traditional scholarly sources, using the research to construct an argument, and using appropriate documentation. One woman investigated minority parenting, compiling her bibliography with texts from education, psychology, African American studies, and sociology. She even included documents about community programs and local resources. The paper that grew out of this research was addressed to parents of African-American males persuading them to get involved while their sons were young. She then proceeded to provide options for parents that were specific to her neighborhood. As a single mother of an African American boy, she was invested in this topic and worked to include accurate, meaningful information that spoke to her audience.

The fourth assignment was an open topic and I had originally conceived of it as a problem/solution essay. I encouraged students to focus on a local problem, research it, and offer a solution but required students to define the necessary audience for their paper and an appropriate structure for it. For example, one student, an army veteran and father of two small children, investigated the childcare facilities on campus and tried to find a viable solution. Although his paper wasn't successful in terms of changing the dismal situation, he discovered how complex the topic was, encompassing issues such as finance, need, space, liability, and personnel. Students also had the option of corresponding with local high school seniors and writing a paper aimed at helping first-year students adapt to the university. (See the Transitional Years document in the last section.) Several students opted for this, but due to logistical problems and lack of consensus, it was often frustrating.

Since the first assignment through the end of the fourth one, we had continued reading essays, writing responses to them, and discussing them. Our focus centered on what we as writers could learn from these essays. Classroom activities throughout the semester included peer workshops at all stages of writing from invention and drafting to revision. Students also wrote reflective memos for all drafts that were reviewed, and we did reflective writing throughout the process. My goal with these activities was to help students learn to self-assess their texts and processes in their development as independent writers. This goal was also important for their end of semester portfolios. We spent the last two weeks of class working on revisions, drafting cover-letters, and editing as they compiled their course portfolios.

Evaluation

I dropped the fifth assignment, not required by the program, because students needed more time for research and revision. Overall, I was pleased with the progress of the course and the students' performances. As the student evaluations indicate, most students found the class productive and responded positively to the assignments and the course structure. I felt like the class was successful at fostering the students' development as

writers while fulfilling the program goal of learning to write appropriate academic texts.

English 102: Student Evaluations

I consider student evaluations, especially the discursive comments, critical components of my development as a teacher. I use the results to reflect on the overall success of a course and in planning future courses. I have enclosed both discursive comments and the multiple-choice evaluations that are required by U of L both of which are completed anonymously at the end of the semester. Below are typed versions of all the discursive comments that I received for this class (not all students responded to this portion of the evaluation). Students wrote in response to the following prompts: 1) Comment on the course materials, amount of material covered, and so forth. Do you have any suggestions for improvement? 2) Comment on the style, enthusiasm, etc. of the instructor. Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

“I thought the course materials were helpful and informative.”

“I liked that she gave the student control over their work, but she provided positive and corrective criticism.”

“I really liked *The Presence of Others*. It was very interesting. I would read it outside of class.”

“Nope, very capable teacher.”

“Mrs. O'Neill has motivated me into becoming a more complete writer. Job well done!!”

“The course covered a great deal of material. I hurt myself by not learning to type.”

“The class was excellent!”

“Peggy was a great instructor. I learned valuable information!”

“The text chosen for this class was very interesting. I really enjoyed our outside readings.”

“Mrs. O'Neill was a great teacher. I liked her style. My only complaint is that the portfolio was such a large percent of our grade.”

“The course and materials are very strong, no suggestions.”