My Purpose & Objectives

I offer my classroom as a place of listening, guiding, and nurturing. My students shall grow in reading & writing skills, in thinking skills, and in life skills. I know all of these skills are intertwined, interrelated, and necessary for success in the university, in the workforce, and in everyday life because "students and professors [must regard] one another as ‘whole’ human beings, striving not just for knowledge in books, but knowledge about how to live in the world" (Hooks 68). I teach the way I do because I know what conditions are most favorable to my own learning, my own growth. I teach the way I do because some of my past classroom experiences as a student included professors who tried to heave their knowledge into students, and we students were barely able to regurgitate the necessary information on their exams—retaining next to nothing. I teach the way I do because from those professors I learned how not to teach.

As a recent undergrad, I learned best when I had a teacher who was foremost a person. By that, I mean they let their personality be a part of my learning experience. When this happened, I felt safe and I felt like learning. I hope to attain that same space in my own classrooms with my own students. I want them to know they are safe, and I want them to feel like learning. This safe space, this nurturing environment will engage students’ “genetic predisposition to write as well as to speak; and, [when they] meet [this] enabling environment … [they] will learn” (Emig 136). It’s my job to be a “provider of possible content, experiences, and feedback” (Emig 139); it’s my job to be the guide for their learning experience. Some of the many directions I intend to steer their semester will include:

- Thinking Beyond the Text
  Thinking Critically
  about what we read
  about what we write
  about why we read & write

- Thinking Visually
  What do words do?
  What do colors do?
  What do fonts do?
  What do shapes do?

- Thinking Orally
How well can we articulate our needs, our desires, our knowledge?
How well can we present ourselves orally?
How does our ethos contribute to our authority when communicating?

- Thinking Ethically

  How can we respect one another and the world around us?
  How can we grow as ethical decision makers in our communities?

When “the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it” (Freire 75), we lose that plethora of knowledge already within our students. These students are “containers”—containers brimming with knowledge. My job is to get them to believe in themselves and to share their precious know-how. In order to continue my growth as a teacher, I am learning to listen better because my students offer their world of knowledge to me. I realize that when we “create participatory spaces for the sharing of knowledge” (hooks 69), we all learn. It is through this participation, “[t]hrough dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teachers cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teaches … a process in which all grow” (Freire 80). The students’ experiences and their very energies are contagious; I grow from each of them. I care about them not only in the classroom, but also about their interests, and their activities.

I try to establish an air of acceptance and approachability immediately as each semester begins, and I offer myself and what I know to my students; but more, I will offer them what I don’t know but am willing to learn with them. I have never been afraid to say to students “I don’t know, but let’s look it up.” And, although Erica Lindemann says “even teachers need to be learners from time to time” (285), I say teachers need to be learners all of the time. I know these things are working because of the growth I see in students over the course of a mere 15 weeks, not only in their reading skills, their technical skills, but also in their ability to look through texts of different modes and see the underlying agendas within these texts. I see their growth as they begin to network with one another through group activities.

I plan to continue to devour pedagogical theory because these actions I take in the classroom are mostly innate, and I need to find out what theorists say and use their theories to enhance what I already feel (know) is right. It is through this curiosity of mine, my need for knowledge, which I will continue to grow as a teacher. While I have many strengths in the classroom, I feel I need to hone my assignment writing and scaffolding abilities and perhaps offer a little less outright to the students so that they must reach farther for their knowledge; these are the immediate goals I set for myself as a teacher. This plan emulates Emig’s “Non-Magical Thinking” as I firmly believe it is my job to “provide circumstances in which [students] discover what they must know” (135).
Through these convictions and beliefs, my students and I will grow over the course of our time together. As “[e]ffective teachers continually seek to improve both what they know and what they do” (Lindemann 253) so shall I continually seek to improve both what I know and what I do. This is what teaching’s all about.

“To prepare [students] for the future life means to give [them] command of [themselves]; it means so to [guide] [them] that [they] will have the full and ready use of all [their] capacities, that [their] eyes and ears and hands may be tools ... that [their] judgment may be capable of grasping the conditions under which they have to work.”

--“My Pedagogic Creed” by John Dewey

**Course Rationale**

We teachers must inform our students thoroughly for our rapidly changing world, and while teaching specific software will not help them as these softwares do change too frequently, introducing students to the concepts behind the technologies will give students a comprehensive set of tools for writing in this rapid-fire world. Once equipped with the tools to adapt to the world, then the students have the agency to begin to shape their world(s). Given all of this, we as writing teachers tackle a long string of topics in a short span of time. In a mere 15 weeks, we should take on composition and rhetoric from multiple directions: classical argumentation, visual illustration, oral presentation, and wrap it all in ethical representation. It is my belief that students and educators both need to hone their textual, visual, oral, and ethical presences.

My course, designed to enrich students’ academic writing through a multi-modal, multi-genre, multi-media 15-week process, begins with small, in-class research. We will scrutinize online sources, introduce working collaboratively with one another—and with another class. Students will learn to differentiate between reliable and unreliable sources, will learn to work in groups, will discover how to write for different audiences, and will write in different genres as we explore writing on a textual level.

Using students’ own expertise as places of learning—their personal histories, assumptions, biases; and their software knowledge and other computer-oriented experiences—and expanding upon those areas—students will leave WRA115 with a firm grasp on reading critically, analyzing, and then producing multi-modal multi-media. We will not only use pen and paper, we will also learn to work with expertise in powerpoint and with widened abilities in Word, as students create multimedia productions supporting their research and
enhancing their visual literacies. My approach to computer usage will “stress three areas: understanding what computers are generally good at, using advanced software features that are often ignored, and customizing interfaces” (Selber 476).

As the semester comes to a close, students will give oral presentations of their semester’s research, thus working on the canon of delivery. The ability to communicate well orally – to be able to articulate oneself – first in the classroom, and then on job interviews, and in job performance – is intrinsic to all forms of employment; students need multiple chances to work on the canon of delivery in the classroom, so that they may speak well to whomever they find themselves with throughout their lives. Their entire semester will be interlaced with “the rules of etiquette that have been developed for interaction on computer networks … [and will] focus on manners in cyberspace” (Selber 482), encouraging a widened ethical approach in both their online and offline worlds. In this multi-modal, multi-genre, multi-media world, students must equip themselves with many types of communication skills. My “rhetorically whole” strategies should give them a firm foundation to stand on. And, while some would say this is too much to take on in a writing class, I say it’s really the bare minimum. Besides, all of these concepts and tasks piggy-back one another and make a “whole” semester and a “whole” experience for the student. Traditional literacy skills won’t mean much in a linked-and-clicking tech-filled world unless those traditional skills are accompanied by these other critical literacies.

Thematically, drug and alcohol laws affect each of us in unique ways. Some find the legal age to consume alcohol law unfair. Some never thought deeply about the consequences of having a DUI, let alone a second DUI. Throughout the semester, we will look at these laws from a personal and local stance, and from a cultural and national stance as we will read deeply and widely and analyze America’s continuing “war” on drugs – spare no expense; damn the torpedoes; full steam ahead. The question begs to be asked: should the US consider alternate ways of combating our escalating dilemma regarding the drug “war?” To attempt to answer to this question, the students will wrestle with these ever-so-pressing issues. Students in WRA115 will read one judge’s view on the “war” on drugs as he brings forth a long overdue conversation about other alternatives our nation really does have. Listening to his argument, and to other authors and their agendas, we will ask: What can we as writers do to advocate change in these current laws? Should we as writers do something to advocate change in these current laws? And, while we will look at these key points and many others, these key points and many others will affect students not only over the course of this semester—but over the course of their entire lives.

Course Description, Purpose, & Objectives
WRA115 is a course designed to help students develop knowledge of writing through examining the complex relationship of reading, writing, and speaking intertwined with the overarching topic of the American Drug & Alcohol laws. The main goal of a Tier-1 course is to introduce students to and increase their awareness of general strategies for interpreting, assessing, and composing within particular rhetorical situations. Through the process of writing and the process of researching, students will learn successful strategies in composition. Through group activities students will learn to network and to negotiate. Through ongoing interface with technology, students will grapple with and learn various computer softwares, file formats, graphic design concepts, and search techniques. Through all of these interactions, students will learn that writing is both a process and a social activity. Then, both students and myself will reflect on these processes because “teachers [and students] of writing … must themselves write, frequently and widely. And they must introspect upon their writing, since without reflection there has been no experience, as philosophers from Socrates to Dewey point out” (Emig 141).

**MSU Tier I Requirements**

Institutional missions and requirements of the Tier I writing courses are designed to improve students’ ability to read carefully and critically; to collect, analyze, and share information; and to develop arguments and present ideas to others in clear, effective, and persuasive prose in a variety of genres. Analysis of verbal and visual texts helps students develop their knowledge of the cultural heritages of the United States, of public issues, and of principles of writing.

This semester includes drafting, revising, and editing compositions derived from readings on American law and justice to develop skills in narration, persuasion, analysis and documentation.

**Textbook Choices**


We begin with Barnet and Bedau, and Barnet & Bedau start with critical reading. They then step through critical thinking, and finally move through critical writing. These bases will ground our semester in a look-see-do format and give students the basics for a foundation of questioning and addressing issues. *From Critical Thinking to Argument* also provides both the Toulmin and the Rogerian formats for writing formal persuasive argumentation giving students more than one way to construct compelling, convincing well-crafted arguments.

“Imagine a world where every document uses the same font, line spacing, and margins, and you can’t judge a book by its cover because all the covers look alike. It would be a world without document design. And, frankly, it wouldn’t be pretty” (Palmquist 1).

Palmquist introduces readers to the intersection of design, composition, and theory; and he does so in a brief 133 pages. Beginning in his preface, moving through his introduction, and sprinkled throughout the entire booklet, Palmquist reinforces the fact that visual rhetoric is rhetoric. I will strive to underline his concepts throughout the entire semester.


“This supplement offers guidelines and strategies for adapting … written research … for oral presentations” (1). This 86-page booklet is perfect for the oral component in my classroom. Students must learn to present themselves. Orally, students need to be able to recognize a variety of audiences (apathetic, sympathetic, hostile, etc), be able to evaluate their audience, and be able to talk comfortably in front of (and often with) that audience. Through their college careers, they need to present to fellow students, to common interest groups, and eventually to graduate committees and potential employers. Then, as grad student or as employees, our students must be able to articulate the messages pertinent to their chosen fields. Oral presentation skills are necessary as students will need the words to articulate their positions – not only on paper – but in front of classmates, co-workers, and customers as they enter into the business world.


Lunsford makes “writing easy” – or at least lays it out in an easy-to-follow format with topics on writing, sentence grammar, sentence style, punctuation and mechanics, language, multilingual writers, conducting research, and documentation formats. This handy reference book should guide students through the formalities of writing at the college level. Lunsford has callouts specifically for ESL students, which should actually aid all students. Often we
don’t pay enough attention to the technical errors which occur in student writing (and in our own), and Lunsford gives this guide to all of us who don’t always know where not to put commas and when to use a semi-colon. Plus, using a handbook can empower students to teach themselves grammar lessons as they look up the rules rather than being told what to do. With the competitive nature of the job market and graduate programs, students need reinforcement of grammar and punctuation; whether we like teaching it or not—it is our job. Besides, we may just learn something new too!

Assignment Sequence

The assignments for the coming semester are scaffolded to build directly on the heels of one another. During the first several weeks of the course, we will enter into a conversation that digs deeply into the concept of audience (current and future audience). This dialogue will also cover authority and experience as students read about writing narrative and memoir, and based on their own expertise, their own experience, they write narratives. As students discover audience and their own authority, and they reflect, it will be their “reflection … upon their world [which allows them] to transform it” (Freire 79). The second writing assignment ties in thematically as students watch the movie “The History of Marijuana,” and then perform a critical analysis of that movie, writing a paper on their observations, focusing on a particular thread or element in the movie. As we progress through project 2, we will also begin to discuss “good” visual design.

Also beginning the first week and continuing throughout the semester, students will do online research, looking for textbooks. This opens to the students new places to purchase texts, as well as hones online research skills, “making sure that students are comfortable with keyword searches [and]…showing [them] how to use sources from the World Wide Web critically” (Lindemann 283). Each student will purchase a different drug- and/or alcohol-oriented text, learn to skim it, and write an annotated bibliography entry—which they will then post to our class wiki. This living resource will grow throughout the semester and be there for them when they produce their own annotated bibliographies (with a limit of 4 coming from the bib on the wiki). These resources will serve students through their argument papers towards the end of the semester.

Once their research is complete, students will embark on some visual persuasion activities by making a powerpoint (or other electronic) visual argument as well as a print brochure (or flyer or poster) as a handout for classmates which overviews their research because “even the most basic of computer technologies can be an incredibly powerful teaching tool” (Lindemann 285). For their “final exam,” students will present their research orally and show
their visual argument, as well as give one another a print version of their work. This not only enhances their abilities to design and use visual rhetoric but it also reinforces the multiple modes of communication they will need as they continue in their schooling and in their lives.

**Assessment**

Grading will be based on the following categories. A 4.0 paper will demonstrate a firm grasp of these concepts.

- **Assignment/Audience:** completed all requirements of the writing assignment; essay is sensitive to audience.
- **Thought:** Essay shows deep thought about topic; points out things that many people may not have noticed before.
- **Organization/Unity:** Essay is organized around a thesis; body paragraphs are unified and related to the thesis; transitions connect ideas between sentences and between paragraphs.
- **Support/Development:** Support ideas with specific reasons, details, and examples, which add “spice” to the essay; in developing ideas, students integrate paraphrase and quotation from reading material.
- **Language/Grammar:** Essay demonstrates control of sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, and other grammatical elements. Sentences vary in structure and style. Wide range of vocabulary.
- **Revision Effort:** Essay reflects effort in revision in the areas listed above.
- **Other:** Paraphrase and quote from the class readings? Use new vocabulary from the readings correctly? Works Cited page that follows MLA (or the citation format of your discipline).

**Of Risks and Worries**

Unpacking any subject of controversy bears risks; discussing the drug laws in our country is no exception. Nevertheless, we begin this conversation as a means to consider other people’s viewpoints, to grow, and to promote change. Encouraging students to express their beliefs, and challenging students to think beyond their personal worlds are some of these risks, but it is when we take these risks that we grow, so I refuse to worry ahead of time about these risks; they are necessary. And, while I will not worry, I can plan. I plan to achieve an air in our classroom where we all feel comfortable, and we all respect one another—even though our viewpoints may (can and will) differ, we will still respect each others’ rights to our own beliefs. This type of environment promotes learning about each other, about our different cultures, and about our
different lives all while we learn the thematic and technical threads of this course.

I do worry about my pedagogical and theoretical backgrounding as I enter into each of my classrooms. I teach from a place inside me that works well, but I must continue to study, finding theorists I agree with—finding theorists who agree with me. I know I must have a solid theoretical foundation in which to ground my pedagogical stance. But, I also have experience on my side. I walk into my classrooms content with “the experiences of my life … [and] the insight to transform these experiences into evidence.” (Sommers 29); that’s a pretty solid foundation in itself!
Works Cited


