"WEALTH, POWER, AND JUSTICE IN THE EUROPEAN UNION:" REFLECTION ON THE WRITING COMPONENT FOR CORE 2414

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My core course explores the progression of regional integration that formally began with six states in the European Coal and Steel Community in the 1950s and continues today among the twenty-seven member states of the European Union (EU). Peaceful, voluntary integration constitutes a dramatic contrast with preceding centuries of European warfare and unification through military conquest. A central question for the class is why states that recently fought two world wars chose to merge their destinies with a common market, a single currency, and a binding "supranational" legal system. We focus on the evolution of economic and political interests in integration and the legal pressures that erode state sovereignty today. As a "24" series core course that examines the relationship of "communities and their environments," we pay particular attention to the extent to which economic and political developments within the domestic and international environments motivated national communities to form a regional community that transcends the nation-state (supranationalism).

I have been teaching the course in a writing-intensive format for a few years since I participated in the original "Marsico pilot" of writing-intensive courses and preferred to continue teaching with writing as a major mechanism through which students engage the course material. As a result, I have experimented with a variety of writing assignments and am currently fairly satisfied with the mix of assignments for this course. My current approach involves two types of writing assignments, both of which are formal.

First, students in cooperative learning groups of three students each write a series of 2-3 page typed essays during class about once a week. I assign students to the cooperative learning groups on the basis of diversity in major, GPA, and gender, and students remain in the same groups all quarter. For these "written analyses," one group of three students essentially writes one essay together. They must take turns at being the "scribe" who does most of the typing on the laptop, although they tend to pass the laptop around a bit as they work through the material and revise their writing. Each group submits their analysis to me as an email attachment that I print out, comment on, and return as a hard copy.

The questions that their essays must address ask the students to analyze an issue from the assigned readings. One example would be "Explain how the EU exercises influence and leadership in the world, drawing on the texts by Mark Leonard and John McCormick. Discuss specific examples of successful EU approaches in international economics and politics." I intend the written analysis assignments as "writing-to-learn" exercises that encourage students to read carefully and reflect on ideas in the text. In this particular example, most students think of the EU as anything but a leader in world politics given its lack of an "EU" military and its difficulty coordinating a single EU position on issues such as the war in Iraq. Yet, the EU has come to exert a powerful influence in international economics and a more subtle influence in international politics that I would like them to be aware of and critically evaluate.

My priorities in grading these assignments are (in descending importance) the extent to which the essay (1) reflects an understanding of central ideas from the reading, (2) justifies its claims with specific and relevant evidence from the readings, and (3) reads coherently in paragraphs and complete sentences. I also expect that students practice acknowledging their sources in the format required for the individual papers that constitute the other primary type of writing assignment in the course. Each written analysis is worth ten points, and a bonus extra credit point can be earned if all group members correctly answer a quiz question based on the analysis.

Groups earning 90 percent of the possible points (not including the bonus points) on all written analyses will earn an A for 20 to 25 percent of the course grade. I provide the extra credit bonus points to motivate all members to participate actively and take a stake in each other's learning, and students evaluate each others' contributions as well. I use the student evaluations of fellow group members and my own observations of individual performance within the groups to improve or demote the "group grade" by a +/- that an individual receives.

Students typically take about 50-80 minutes to complete one analysis, so this approach requires a substantial amount of class time. While students discuss the question and write, I circulate around the room answering questions, posing questions to those who have a simplistic answer that needs much more exploration and substantiation, and reading segments of their writing. I have found that the investment of class time is worthwhile because I see evidence of improved mastery of basic course content in quizzes and improved argumentation in individual papers. Compared to a more conventional approach with only lectures and class-wide discussion, where it often seems that only a select group of students really does the reading, I observe everyone grappling with ideas from the reading. They are also discussing writing issues on a weekly basis as they quibble about how to articulate ideas and construct paragraphs.

The second primary writing assignment involves two papers of approximately seven pages each, written individually by each student. One is submitted around the mid-quarter and one at the time of the final exam session. These papers are substitutes for midterm and final "exams." I provide specific questions and expect only assigned readings as source material, but the questions are much broader than the weekly written analyses, requiring students to reflect on and synthesize ideas from five weeks of readings and lectures for the first paper, and from the entire quarter for the second paper. The two papers address issues related to major learning objectives for the course, where they critically assess issues such as (1) the extent to which the contemporary institutions of the EU transcend the system of sovereign states that originated in Europe and characterized world politics for the past five hundred years, (2) the future potential for a single currency and cross-national mobility to forge a common European identity among "EU citizens" in the communities that pioneered nationalism two hundred years ago, and (3) the relative importance and interaction of economic, legal, and political pressures for European integration at different points in the postwar era. There is not a "right" answer to the questions assigned for these papers, and students are exposed to a range of theoretical perspectives on the particular question that they consider. I evaluate the papers foremost in terms of the quality of the argumentation and the extent to which it reflects a comprehensive understanding of the history of European integration as it has been presented to them as well as the competing theoretical interpretations of that history.

These papers have a "dual deadline," which includes an initial deadline for a complete draft for the purposes of an in-class peer review session, and then a second deadline to submit a polished draft to me that I grade. The deadlines are two to five days apart (usually two for the first paper and four or five for the second paper). The students review the two papers of the other two students in their cooperative learning group, and receive feedback from those two students on their own paper. After inviting writing instructors from the Writing Center to lead one of these sessions this past fall, I have changed my approach to guiding students through peer review. In the past, I distributed a sheet that included a series of questions to consider as they read papers that involved issues of argumentation, organization, and basic mechanics. This was overwhelming, and most students simply edited what others wrote, focusing on correcting spelling and grammatical errors. The writing instructors guided the students to focus on what is most important in my grading criteria: issues of argumentation and supporting claims with evidence. I have adopted this approach, and student evaluations of how helpful peer review is have gone up, and I also see improved argumentation in the second drafts that are submitted to me. During peer review, I circulate among students and look at components of their draft that they have concerns about and answer questions that arise as they read each other's work. I deduct a full letter grade on the final paper grade for anyone who does not (1)

bring a reasonably complete draft that is written in sentences and paragraphs and (2) make a serious effort to provide feedback to others on their drafts.

I expect these papers to conform to political science norms, which includes a "thesis" that essentially answers the paper question in the first paragraph, along with an organizational "road map" that indicates how subsequent discussions will proceed to substantiate the thesis. We discuss this basic format in class, and how it usually emerges after a significant degree of drafting and revision. Students who have taken a number of political science courses before may takes notes and outlines and refrain from formal drafting until they can formulate a first paragraph with a tentative roadmap, but many will produce an entire draft before they are prepared to identify their thesis and go back and restructure and revise their discussions into a more coherent argument that they can then present in a formal introduction. Students at the University of Denver have improved tremendously at this task in recent years. Changes in the writing curriculum have largely coincided with a substantial improvement in the class ranks and test scores of incoming students (and increasing numbers with AP and IB credits), so this improvement in basic structure that I observe may be over determined, but I welcome it in any case. In my experience, if students have a "good" introduction by the standards of political science, they usually have an analytical paper that develops and supports an argument. The quality of the argumentation still varies in terms of ambition, creativity, and plausibility, but the paper has typically moved beyond unqualified assertions of opinion and lengthy description. By contrast, most of the descriptive narratives that include an accurate reporting of facts, but little to no argumentation, do not have a "good" introduction.

More generally, I evaluate papers on the extent to which they (1) demonstrate an understanding of course material, (2) develop a consistent argument based on relevant reasoning and evidence, (3) organize discussions in a coherent manner, (4) articulate ideas clearly, using the English language correctly and (5) provide adequate acknowledgment of sources with appropriate citation. I determine the letter grade on the basis of the first three criteria, and +/- on the basis of the last two criteria, with the exception of plagiarized papers, which result in F's. I have used a rubric for many years that I have been tweaking periodically, and after the writing workshop that I attended in June 2008, I now plan to make a significant change to the existing rubric. In the past, the rubric has helped me to communicate expectations to students (who receive the rubric before submitting the paper) and helped me to grade more efficiently and fairly. Observing the range of rubrics presented in the workshop, and experiencing such a dramatic improvement in student writing I graded this year, I now seek to develop a simpler, but also more demanding rubric, to differentiate between papers that meet essential criteria and those that genuinely display creativity, nuance, and sophistication.

I worry that integrating what others called an "x factor" into the rubric will make the grading look more subjective and may result in a lot more student complaints, but I want to try to differentiate among papers given that 1-2 students in a class of 25 write papers that are truly extraordinary while 10-12 write what I would have considered to be a solid A in the past. Even two years ago, fewer than five students in 25 would have written an "A" according to my existing rubric. I want to challenge our top students and do not want these talented students to look at the current rubric and "coast" to an easy A. I typically offer the opportunity to revise papers after students receive a grade from me, but I do not require revisions. In my experience, requiring revisions only results in many submissions of papers with minor changes, usually the fixing of any errors that were noted. The first paper is usually worth 20 to 25 percent of the course grade, and the second paper is usually worth 30 percent of the course grade.

Constituting 70 to 80 percent of the course grade, the writing components of the course are central to my evaluation of the students' engagement with course material. Through the writing assignments, I hope that students learn about the major postwar developments in European integration and critically reflect on the implications that these developments have for the prospects for (1) peace in regions characterized by endemic conflicts, (2) greater democratic accountability in international

arenas, and (3) norms to guide relations between communities of variable prosperity and power. As students encounter the central questions that integration scholars pose and research, students cannot "guess" what the "answers" are, but must actively engage in thinking about the issues in order to write out short in-class essays and their longer individual papers. They must enter into a dialogue at least with two other students and myself as they prepare their short written analyses and their longer individual papers. By practicing how to construct arguments supported by logical reasoning and empirical evidence, I hope that they will also learn a skill that I think is useful in a variety of settings beyond academia. I particularly hope that they might begin to recognize the difference between the assertion of opinions unsupported by any compelling logic or systematically gathered facts and the articulation of arguments that are supported by plausible reasoning and valid evidence.