

Writing in FSEM and ASEM

Analyses of Student Work
by DU Professors

Edited by
Brad Benz
&
Doug Hesse

University of Denver Writing Program

*Student Writing in First-Year and Advanced Seminars:
Analyses by University of Denver Professors*

Edited by Brad Benz and Doug Hesse

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Introduction: How Professors Read Student Writing

Doug Hesse
Executive Director of Writing

In June 2016, some 25 University of Denver professors from departments across campus analyzed selected student writings from either a First-Year Seminar (FSEM) or an Advanced Seminar (ASEM) that they'd taught in the previous year. We met for half a day to discuss how and why to analyze student writing, and how to use what we might learn in the process. My Writing Program colleague Brad Benz helped plan and lead this workshop. Participants then had three days to complete a brief written analysis. A schedule for the workshop and process appears as Appendix A of this document. The original call for participation, which outlines the scope of the project, appears as Appendix B.

DU began requiring FSEM for all incoming students in the fall of 2006. While the course was originally conceived as “writing intensive,” that feature was soon broadened to be “student engagement intensive.” Most FSEM sections, then and now, require significant amounts of student writing, as writing is well established as both a profound means of engagement and a tool for learning. Also in 2006, DU began requiring a writing-intensive core class for all students, a requirement that by 2010 had been revised into an Advanced Seminar. In terms of writing, these classes had four specific characteristics: 1) students were to complete at least 20 pages of writing, in 2) at least three different projects, 3) with some of that writing revised after professor feedback, in 4) sections that devoted at least some class time to writing activities and instruction. All faculty teaching ASEM participate in a three-day workshop on writing, for which they receive an honorarium of \$1000. A more thorough overview of writing at DU, excerpted from another publication, appears as Appendix C.

The June 2016 enterprise had two main goals and a secondary one. First, the project provided a pretext for conversations among a wide swath of faculty about writing, assignment-making, and student performances. Since 2006, there has been a rich tradition of faculty attention to writing at the University of Denver, in seminars and workshops, both formal and informal. This has been especially true for professors teaching in the FSEM and ASEM programs, who have gathered each June to reflect back with one another on their previous year's experiences. These efforts have yielded two published collections of faculty essays, a one-day symposium, and numerous incidental projects. One significant collaborative research project resulted in a peer reviewed journal article about ASEM writing, [“Assessing a Writing Intensive General Education Capstone: Research as Faculty Development.”](#) We found that campus conversations are enhanced by concrete examples of local practices: assignments, grading processes, sample materials, classroom practices, and the like. Considering what DU students actually do in response to writing assignments created a new focus for conversation. People got to peer into one another's syllabi, assignments, and thought processes.

Second, and more importantly, the project afforded individuals a chance to reflect on their expectations for student writing. All of us draft writing assignments with certain goals in mind, including the learning objectives the writing will further and how we expect the student writers to meet them. We strike a balance between existing abilities and the kinds of

challenges that push learning, between creating tasks that provide enough specificity to encourage success, but not so much constraint as to inhibit exploration. In any given assignment, we fiddle with whether to stipulate audience, genre, purpose, format, source materials, drafts, conventions, grading criteria, and so on—and if so, to what degree. We create the best assignments under those constraints, and then we send them off, often to be surprised with the writing that students produce in response. Often they do better, often worse, and often something completely different than we expected. Seeing what students actually produce provides insight about how we might shape future assignments or design pedagogies that bring student performance closer to our expectations, and vice versa.

Third, and as a secondary consequence of the first two goals, the writings gathered here provide a snapshot of the state of writing in FSEM and ASEM. The assignments show an exciting range of practices across disciplines, faculty, and course topics. The student writings, as characterized, demonstrate how our students actually engage those practices.

What follows are, for the most part, first drafts, produced by faculty in a limited time under some constraints, subjected to minimal editing, as Brad explains below. There were some 25 participants in the workshop, and from them Brad selected some fewer pieces to represent the range of work.

Our formatting has been minimal, aided by Lauren Salvador, the Writing Program's Office Manager. One thing we did was to put in Courier typeface extended chunks of student writing. We did this to remind ourselves where we might need permission from student authors before any possible wider publication of their work. (We wouldn't be fine publishing certain essays to wider audiences without student permission.) As it stands, we're confident that we've been fair (and legal) to quote student work in this fashion for professional teaching development purposes with DU faculty.

I hope you'll enjoy peering into your colleagues' classrooms and minds as much as Brad and I have.

Editor's Note

Brad Benz

Teaching Associate Professor of Writing

The draft version of this collection possessed many strengths, but with 25 contributors and totaling 120+ pages, it proved to be redundant in places and ultimately too cumbersome for future writing across the curriculum (WAC) faculty professional development. To trim the collection and to eliminate overlap between the assignment types, I chose writing assignments that met one of two criteria:

- 1) the writing assignment showed innovation in research method (e.g. primary, archival research) and/or intended audience (e.g. a non-expert, non-academic audience); or
- 2) the writing assignment was a less formal, writing to learn exercise, with lower stakes for the students and faculty.

This collection gathers some of the more innovative WAC assignments and excerpts from the resulting student writing (in Courier typeface), offering a pedagogical glimpse of WAC courses at DU.

Participants in the Workshop

M. Dores Cruz, Anthropology

Lawrence Berliner, Chemistry

Charlotte Quinney, Women's College

Paula Cole, Economics

Yavuz Yasar, Economics

Rachel Feder, English

Liz Collier, English Language Center

Erika Trigoso, Geography

Hilary Smith, History

Chad Leahy, Languages and Literatures

Susan Walter, Languages and Literatures

Lydia Gil Keff, Languages and Literatures

Mei Yin, Mathematics

Diane Waldman, Media, Film, and Journalism Studies

Michael Brent, Philosophy

Davor Balzar, Physics and Astronomy

Jing Sun, Political Science

Alison Schofield, Religious Studies

Ben Nourse, Religious Studies

Gregory Robbins, Religious Studies

Amie Levesque, Sociology and Criminology

Jared Del Rosso, Sociology and Criminology

Angela Sowa, Writing Program

April Chapman-Ludwig, Writing Program

Brad Benz, Writing Program

David Daniels, Writing Program

Geoff Stacks, Writing Program

Heather Martin, Writing Program

LP Picard, Writing Program



Philosophy, Psychology, Neuroscience, and Free Will (ASEM)

Michael Brent
Department of Philosophy

Assignment Context

This assignment is from my ASEM entitled “Philosophy, Psychology, Neuroscience, and Free Will”. The seminar introduces students to the topic of human freedom from the perspectives of philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience. Prior to completing this assignment, through the assigned readings and the conversations in the classroom, students have begun to consider the following line of thought: if everything that you do and have ever done is the inevitable byproduct of political, social, economic, cultural, psychological, and neurological forces at work within and around you, in what sense could you be free and morally accountable for your actions? When our actions are situated within this broader context, it seems unlikely that our desires, preferences, choices, decisions, intentions, plans, values, and commitments can make any difference to what happens, can push back against the world, affecting real and genuine change. By asking students to engage with a provocative text by the neuroscientist Benjamin Libet and at least two other works that we read during the term, the assignment requires students to write an argumentative essay in which they present and defend their own opinion on the question of whether recent neuroscientific data does, in fact, undermine the existence of free will.

Assignment Prompt

Among the educated public, it is a widespread assumption that human beings have free will and that when we act with free will, we are morally accountable for what we do. In his recent work, the neuroscientist Benjamin Libet has challenged this assumption, claiming that our actions are ultimately the result of neurological factors that are beyond our control, likely rendering us unworthy of praise or blame. Based on your reading of at least two other texts that we have encountered this quarter, would you agree with Libet’s view about free will and moral accountability? If so, why? If not, how should we think about these issues?

Using the texts by Libet and at least two other authors, write an eight-page argumentative essay answering this question. Assume that you are writing an academic paper for an audience of undergraduate students at a national philosophy conference. Assume further that your audience has not read any of the material, but they were drawn to your talk because of its intriguing title. The introduction of your essay should explain the problem and outline your thesis statement and supporting argument as a response. The rough draft of your essay is due May 11.

My Hopes and Dreams

Through writing this assignment, my hope was that students would achieve and demonstrate a number of things. First, that they would achieve an understanding of their own beliefs about this challenging topic and the reasons that support these beliefs, and demonstrate this by clearly asserting a claim and supporting this claim with reasons and evidence. Second, that they would achieve an understanding of the claims, evidence, and reasoning presented by Libet, and demonstrate this understanding by clearly describing, in their own words, what Libet claimed and why. Third, that they would select appropriate texts to support or counter Libet's argument, and demonstrate this by clearly describing the arguments articulated within these texts and by describing, as precisely as possible, exactly how the claims, evidence, and arguments presented in those texts either support or counter Libet. Fourth, that they would achieve an understanding of the way(s) in which their chosen texts support their own opinion, and demonstrate this by articulating the evidential relations that exist between their thesis statement and the claims, evidence, and arguments presented by the texts they've selected. Last, but not least, that they would present an argument that was at least intelligible and coherent, if not insightful and original, and demonstrate this through prose that clearly displays the depth of their knowledge of the subject matter and the relevant texts, through indicators like editing, formatting, proper use of source materials and evidence, argumentative structure, voice, and style.

Student Strategies

Although to varying degrees of success, a significant majority of students used similar strategies and approaches when writing their essays. I believe this similarity was due in large measure to the assignment prompt and the scaffolding exercises I assigned prior to their writing of the final draft. The assignment prompt asked students to assume that they are writing an academic essay for an audience of fellow undergraduates at a national philosophy conference, where the audience has not read any of the material but were drawn to their talk because of its captivating title. The prompt requested that the introduction of their essay clearly articulate the problem addressed and outline their thesis statement and supporting argument. In addition to the guidance provided by the prompt, prior to their writing of the final draft, students completed three scaffolding exercises. The first took place early on during the term, when I gave students an in-class workshop on the basic mechanics of philosophical argumentation, including a lengthy discussion of my hopes for the assignment. The second exercise was an outline, which included a brief summary of their thesis statement, argument, and their chosen textual evidence in support of their argument, as well

as a short bibliography. I held individual conferences with students to review and discuss their outlines. After completing their rough draft and receiving detailed written feedback from me, students completed the third exercise, which was an in-class peer-review workshop, guided by instructions that we discussed beforehand.

The two examples included here are the introductory paragraphs from the final drafts of two student essays. Since the assignment prompt explicitly asked students to articulate the problem addressed by their essays and outline their thesis statement and supporting argument in the introduction, and because, in both cases, the introductions demonstrate the quality of editing, formatting, proper use of source materials and evidence, argumentative structure, voice, and style found in the remainder of the essay, they serve as useful tools for learning from student writing.

Student Writing #1

The Illusion of Free Will: An Evolutionary Perspective

The debate over the concept and existence of free will can be found among the earliest philosophical literature and universally within theology. It has large implications not only for the nature of humanity and consciousness, but also for the universe itself. Our society is, to a large extent, built on the assumption that we do have free will; within the legal and criminal systems individuals are punished under the assumption that they had control over their actions, within the school system students are educated and taught under the assumption that intelligence or knowledge is flexible, and, more broadly, society is built on a system in which people hold others accountable and responsible both for their merits and their failures. Discovery of a lack of free will would have large scale implications for the foundations on which society is built, while proof of the presence of free will would require large changes in the fields of anthropology, evolutionary biology, physics, and many other fields of inquiry which are based on the idea that the world is solely physical and no greater than the sum of its parts. Within the realm of the free will debate, one of the most noted and referenced explanations for the argument against free will is the 'Consequence Argument', originally published by Peter van Inwagen. According to van Inwagen, if determinism were to be true, there would be only one possible outcome at every

instant (191), indicating that humans have no power to change the course of events. The consequence argument relies on the laws of nature being defined and unchangeable, though van Inwagen makes no claims as to what these laws are. This paper will further specify that laws of nature include the theories of evolutionary biology. The consequence argument denies the existence of free will even though many individuals report the experience of free will as a counterargument. This, too, can be explained by evolutionary biology, as an evolutionarily adaptive illusion to help explain the world. Given that all of the moments in history and the path of evolution have created the world as such at the present moment, given that the future is shaped by the past, and given that the laws of nature cannot change, applying the laws of nature to the state of the world in the present moment can result in only one possible outcome: the state of the world at the next moment as it occurs. It is evolutionarily advantageous nonetheless to believe that we have power to some degree over the world in which we live but this is simply an illusion, an adaptive mechanism to help us understand the world around us. Adjusting the consequence argument to include evolutionary biology, there is no free will but it is adaptive for man to believe that there is.

Analysis of Student Writing #1

Student #1 includes much by way of analytical detail but her writing is not very concise, precise, or well organized, as evinced by the sheer length of her introductory paragraph, and the fact that it opens with a sweeping and unfounded generalization about the debate, including unspecified implications that are neither very useful nor very informative. Although the three examples of the ways in which society is built on the assumption that we have free will are compelling, Student #1 mentions further potential implications without providing examples to assist the reader in understanding her point. During the opening four sentences, Student #1 brings up a number of interesting but not clearly related notions – evolutionary biology, physics, history, theology, and philosophy – and doesn't introduce and define these concepts. Moreover, the transition to the work of Peter van Inwagen is abrupt. Her reason for doing so only becomes apparent about five sentences later, when she attempts to introduce her thesis. When doing so, she struggles to clarify the fact that she is going to assume the truth of Peter van Inwagen's argument, while not explicitly mentioning the work of Libet or the additional text(s) with which she will engage. This suggests a failure to carefully engage with the assignment prompt.

Student Writing #2

Free Will: A Middle-Ground Approach

For centuries the topic of free will has been at the center of intense debate among academics. Recently, top scholars in the fields of psychology, philosophy, and neuroscience have questioned its existence and come to many different conclusions. Roderick Chisholm, a prominent American philosopher from Brown University, has argued that we, as agents, can indeed be the cause of our actions. In contrast, psychologist Daniel Wegner of the University of Virginia (and later Harvard University) argues that our freedom to choose is only an illusion. Clearly, the philosophical community is divided on the issue, and psychologists and neuroscientists are no closer to a consensus. Benjamin Libet claimed to show that our decisions are preceded by unconscious impulses; this assertion spurred a long line of research centered on lightning-quick brain impulses occurring before an action takes place. The results of this research remain inconclusive, as one could use them to support or deny the existence of free will. In this paper, I will attempt to show why research to date on the topic of free will is not strong enough to support a conclusion either in favor of or against its existence. If anything, the most defensible claim that can be made from philosophical and scientific research is that free will exists to a degree, but only to a degree. Until the body of research can show definitely that free will does or does not exist, this is the only appropriate position to be taken. Furthermore, I will show that a significant amount of previous research actually does offer support for the possession of what I will call *incomplete free will*.

Analysis of Student Writing #2

Student #2 carefully introduces the philosophers and psychologists with whom he is working, but seems to have trouble providing similar context for Libet and the conversation happening within the field of neuroscience as a result of Libet's work. After introducing his interlocutors, Student #2 provides a clear and concise thesis statement, one that reflects a balanced assessment of the relevant literature. In the final sentence, he coins a key term – “incomplete free will” – that makes clear the purpose and structure of the remainder of the essay. Although by the end of the essay the student succeeds in tracing “incomplete free will” through the disciplines of neuroscience and philosophy, he does not make this clear to

the reader of the introduction, which is unfortunate. Otherwise, this is a strong introductory paragraph, demonstrating the quality of editing, formatting, proper use of source materials and evidence, argumentative structure, voice, and style found in the remainder of the essay.

Going Forward

In their own ways and to differing degrees of achievement, the essays produced in response to this assignment met the five desiderata noted above. Thus, in general, I was satisfied with the responses that I received and the extent to which I made clear my expectations for the assignment. The next time I offer this assignment, though, I shall change the instruction and scaffolding that I provide, in two ways. First, during the in-class workshop on the basic mechanics of philosophical argumentation, I will include model student essays as a teaching tool, particularly to help students understand how to shape an introduction, how to put texts in conversation with each other, and how to make clear the distinction between a student's presentation of other writers' ideas and their analysis of these other writers' ideas. Second, during our individual conferences I will ask that students bring a complete draft of their introduction, in addition to outlining their thesis statement, argument, and textual evidence. Together, we shall read their introduction and assess the extent to which it succeeds in meeting the standard set by the model essay. Doing so should, with any luck, help students to better understand the kind of writing that they are aiming to produce in the remainder of their essay.



Poetry and the Public (FSEM)

David Daniels
Writing Program

Reflection on Two Sample FSEM Papers

The papers I've chosen to discuss are samples from my FSEM's Assignment #2, an evaluative review of two books of poetry. Imagine something different in content, but not that different in substance or scope, from a smartly written film review for *The New Yorker*: an appraisal of each book's merits and shortcomings, with reference to each poet's past works, pertinent biographical detail, comparisons and contrasts to other poets and poetry movements, along with quoted lines and stanzas to illustrate my students' claims. My hopes in assigning this project were: (a) to gauge my students' engagement with the books; (b) to introduce them to the genre of an 'evaluative review' in contrast to a 'traditional academic essay'; and (c) to observe, however passingly, their ability to locate connections between past course content and the books under consideration. I also wanted (d) to assess their ability to substantiate their claims with evidence from the texts.

In preparation for this assignment, we did several things as a class. We read and discussed both books in detail, which required students to email me responses to a single poem from each collection (which they then shared in class). We also read and analyzed 'typical' book reviews online, discussing their common genre features, asking why such features might appear in relation to intended audience, discussing tone and organization, and scrutinizing the nature and scope of argument within such reviews. We drew parallels between the two books with past course content. Finally, students brought drafts to class for peer review and revision, without direct written feedback from me. Students were invited to share drafts with me during conferences; no students took me up on that offer.

I've isolated here an *A*- paper and a *B*- paper, neither perfect, neither terribly awful, or off base, for reflection.

Both papers did well in (a) demonstrating their engagement with the books under review. The stronger paper immediately conveyed the student's admiration for the book by writing, within the first paragraph, that Vandana Khanna
strikingly illustrates the vibrant culture of India while
subtly incorporating the poet's thoughts, hopes, and

feelings. Khanna's poetry allows the reader to feel her emotions, whether she is jubilant, dismayed, hysterical, or fatigued. Throughout the collection, it's easy to understand and feel these emotions with her.

This indicated to me that the student had read the book steadily and grasped its global appeal upon readers. In contrast, the weaker paper began by claiming that both books contain many great aspects. They differ completely, and are both masterpieces. You genuinely see that both poets put so much thought into each individual word that they used to tell their tales. Each book is special in its own way.

Upon reflection, I see now that I was drawn more to the specificity and vibrancy of language within the stronger paper ('strikingly illustrates,' 'jubilant, dismayed, hysterical, or fatigued') than the weaker paper, which relies upon more general claims of affection ('many great aspects,' 'so much thought,' 'special in its own way'). The weaker paper might have been bullshitting me entirely in its enthusiasm, I realize now, but later in the review, the student writes with greater clarity and discernment: "If I am going to be candid though, I would firstly suggest *Smith Blue*. The writing that Dungy shares within its pages is simply much more relatable to a larger audience." While not entirely specific, such sentences convinced me that the student had done the reading, reflected on it, and arrived at a deliberated judgment of it.

The stronger paper did far better in (b) mimicking the genre conventions of an 'evaluative review' of poetry. Its opening sentence presumes a discrete, knowledgeable audience, and tackles the matters at heart: "*Afternoon Masala*, the intriguing new collection of poetry by prize-winning Vandana Khanna, continues to explore the author's struggles of discovering her US identity in relation to cultural change, coming of age, and family values." Such an opener presumes that readers would be familiar with Khanna's past work (which is true), that she's an award-winning poet (true), and that her thematic concerns would take precedent over other poetic matters to her readers (true). The sentence also captures the tonal qualities of stellar reviews, at once personable but smart. By contrast, the weaker paper (while okay) opens with an overly long paragraph of biographical information about Dungy, as if stolen directly from Wikipedia. (In fact, and I won't check right now, it might have been.) This paragraph also ends with a fairly familiar three-pronged *thesis statement*, promising to evaluate Dungy's book on the basis of "its themes, its images, and how it relates to readers." There's nothing essentially wrong with this student's approach to the book, in scope and depth of analysis, but it was apparent to me that the strangle-hold of "the 5-paragraph theme" was governing her organization and delivery. Later, this paper (the weaker one) ends with a final paragraph that begins "In conclusion..." The stronger paper's final paragraph, more clearly attuned to the genre and its intended audience, reads:

With a hefty price tag of \$18.95 in paperback, *Smith Blue* might not be for everyone, but I recommend it, for it offers a glance into the poet's life by detailing her private life and thoughts, which makes the poetry honest

and raw, including elements that many people can relate to, such as humor and popular references. All of this together makes Dungy's poems not just interesting, but peculiar, at times confusing, but also enjoyable for the reader.

The stronger paper was able to (c) locate sophisticated parallels between the current books and past course content. This student drew meaningful connections between Dungy's book and the Black Arts Movement and the Harlem Renaissance, even while noting how Dungy's book deviates from its African-American history. This student writes, impressively,

Although much of the poetry in this collection is melancholy and "blue," Dungy likes to also incorporate humor into her poems. She's 'blue' in the way Langston Hughes is 'blue,' which makes them more relatable to the typical reader. Yet, she incorporates some of the language play of the high Modernists, too, which expands the reach of her writing to a wider audience. For example, in the poem "It Is," Dungy responds to the final words spoken by Gertrude Stein, by writing...

Such writing and awareness is nuanced, thoughtful, and complex, something we'd prize from a graduate student, let alone an FSEM student who had just recently learned of Stein and Hughes. The weaker paper – and typing this tonight, on my porch with a glass of wine in hand, makes me wince that I'm not just joyful but actually critical – attempts to make similar connections, but often in rudimentary fashion. For example, the weaker paper writes: "Personally I felt as though Khanna's book was a learning experience, much like reading Ezra Pound was for me."

Finally, both papers did very well in (d) substantiating their claims with specific evidence from the texts. There are embedded quotes from illustrative poems within both papers, as well as occasional indented block quotes of entire poems – but not merely as filler, but rather for smart rhetorical effect, either to demonstrate each writer's adoration for the books or to underscore a claim. For example, from the weaker paper, the student writes:

Khanna allows the readers to step into her life completely. She creates all of the five senses in her writing, allowing the readers to entirely get a sense of the memories that she is recalling, the 'shake of gold bangles...lie according / to the alignment / of some distant star.' In these memories, the readers can virtually feel that they were there with her.

This isn't the most profound claim to illustrate perhaps, yet the student writer's point is well taken. The stronger paper perhaps writes with greater subtlety,

Khanna sets the tone of her book by strategically placing "Insignificant Beginnings" as her first poem, where the play on vowels and consonants delivers most of the meaning: 'Before I was born, in a country / that loves vowels,...' The way that she uses words to describe things, and embodies these through assonance, rather than coming

right out and saying what they mean, makes her writing so rich.

In sum, both papers are strong, and I'm tempted to go back and give the *B*- paper a higher grade. What kept the *A*- paper from receiving a perfect *A*+ were occasional sloppy errors in punctuation and grammar, ample enough to indicate to me a less-than-perfect attention to proofreading and editing. What gave the *B*- paper its score, despite its clear and various pleasures now, was a lack of specificity within claims and an infidelity to the genre conventions. I really should go back and raise its grade.

Torture in the Modern World (FSEM)

Jared Del Rosso

Department of Sociology and Criminology

Purpose of the Museum Project

Most years, I teach an FSEM on torture. Usually, I assign two writing assignments. While the particulars of these assignments have changed over the past four years, the general purpose of each has held steady. The first assignment asks students to take a position on the US debate about torture; a secondary purpose is for students to demonstrate that they understand the basic facts of this debate. The second assignment asks students to interpret contemporary torture, identifying and reflecting on the prevailing meanings the practice has today.

For the workshop, I chose to review the 2015-16 version of the second assignment, what I called a “Museum Project.” This year, I asked students to imagine that they are in charge of transforming the detention center at Guantanamo Bay (after its closing) into a museum about US interrogation practices during the war on terror. The assignment asked students to do the following three things:

- Name the museum,
- Provide an overview (approximately 800 words) that succinctly communicates what they hope visitors will learn from or experience at the museum,
- And select and descriptively caption at least four artifacts – images, documents, etc. – that they would display at the museum. I asked that captions be about 200 words in length and relate the artifact back to the overall purpose of the museum.

With this assignment, I want students to go beyond some of the familiar arguments and positions about torture, many of which we address in the first half of the quarter and in the first writing assignment. (Some of these familiar arguments include: Torture works / doesn’t work; Torture is justified / is not justified; Enhanced interrogation is / is not torture.) Rather, I want students to use the museum to construct an argument about what torture means to those who suffer it, those who use it, those nations that allow it, and the citizenry who accept it. Unfortunately, I did not articulate this in my prompt for the assignment! (The things you learn when reviewing a new assignment!)

In anticipation of the assignment, we do several things:

1. Students visit The Counter-terror Education Learning Lab (The CELL) in Denver during orientation, which is a museum / educational center on terrorism.
2. Students read and discuss scholarship on the ways that countries deny their use of torture, how historical uses of torture are reference points for understanding contemporary torture, and how Cambodia has attempted to reckon with Khmer Rouge torture at The Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum.
3. Students engage in a group exercise that is something like a “trial run” of the project, selecting documents from some that I’ve provided and captioning them for display during a class period.

Student Strategies for the Assignment

Though I did not require this of students, the majority imagined their museum as a space with rooms. Each room had its own “message,” which expressed a portion of the overall theme or argument of the museum, as articulated in the overview that students wrote. One student, who I will refer to as Maura, designed her museum around the argument that torture betrays US values. She proposed four rooms, each expressing a different national value: “freedom,” “democracy,” “exceptionalism” (my phrase) or America as the “good guy” (hers), and “patriotism.

Grace, whose museum was, in my view, the most sophisticated in the class, proposed that her guests would travel into the subjective realms of torture. But she linked this journey to that of art – showing how photography and artwork could dehumanize or dignify victims, as the case may be. She titled room one “The Guilt of the Torturer,” room two “Dehumanization of the Victim,” room three “The Return of Dignity to Both,” and the final room “Insanity of the Public.”

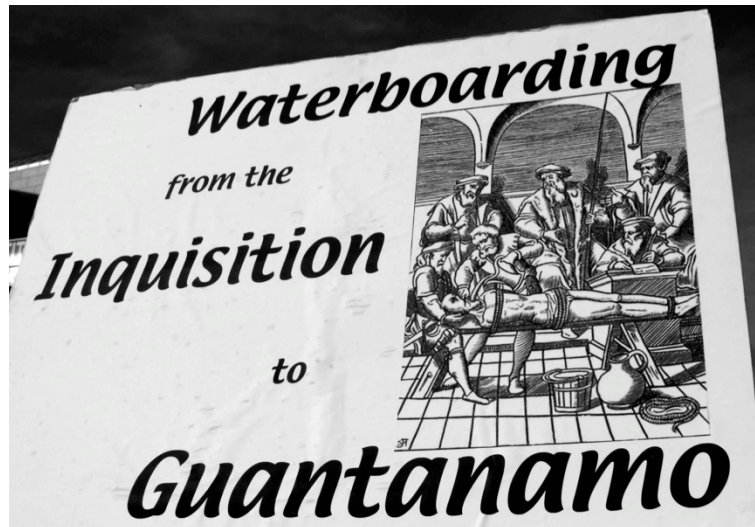
Most students came to use rooms organically, without my prompting. (I believe, however, that I suggested the idea to Maura, who struggled with the assignment, after seeing how it benefitted students.) I believe that this strategy helped students structure their museum, connecting its elements to their overarching themes. If I were to assign this project again, I would likely include “rooms” in the prompt. Because I asked students to present and caption four artifacts, most settled on four rooms as well. I might require that – or simply suggest it – in future iterations of the assignments.

A second, notable strategy related to students’ use of “artifacts.” I required students to present and caption four, giving some slight extra credit on the assignment for exceeding that requirement. Most students presented four or five artifacts, most artifacts came from documents I presented or displayed myself in class, and most students presented individual artifacts individually, rather than combining disparate ones into a richer display. Some students identified which room these artifacts would appear in. Some didn’t.

Maura presented four artifacts, all of which I’d displayed or discussed in class:

1. A photo from Abu Ghraib, which she linked to the theme of “freedom,”
2. A signature of Donald Rumsfeld on a memo authorizing torture, which she linked to the value of democracy and transparency,

3. President Bush's 2003 statement in support of UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, which she linked to American exceptionalism. Here, Maura combined the statement with an image that cuts across its grain, a protest poster:



4. A provocative mural in Iraq linking Abu Ghraib to the Ku Klux Klan. Maura linked the image in the caption to American exceptionalism and patriotism.



Grace's use of artifacts differed from Maura's. She presented 3-9 per room. Some of the documents came directly from class. All *types* of documents also came directly from class. However, Grace presented documents within those types (e.g. "the Abu Ghraib photographs") that I had not shown the class. She provided overarching captions, rather than individual captions, to these artifacts; the captions linked the set of images to the purpose of the rooms.

Successes – and Challenges

It is easy for me to see the success of Grace's project. Grace designed a museum that built on, but did not replicate, the positions and arguments from course readings and lectures across the quarter. It was thematically coherent, addressing the subjective dimensions of torture and the ways that art (or quasi-art, such as perpetrator photographs) could assault the subjectivity of victims or affirm their basic human dignity.

Grace also went beyond the requirements of the assignment in several ways. She experimented with the layout and typeface of her writing to emphasize certain points. For instance...

Do not proceed into the museum if you care about humanity.

Hopefully, the above phrase alarmed you, as our society fortunately assumes that everyone has at least one bone of compassion among their anatomy.

She incorporated extra artifacts, some of which she found through her own research. These artifacts were thematically coherent. Room 1, for instance, contained photos of Abu Ghraib torturers – posing with each other, posing with their own victims, and posing with a corpse. Room 3, on the other hand, contained Chris Bartlett's black-and-white portraits of former-detainees, which Bartlett intended to counter the dehumanizing Abu Ghraib photographs.

The message of Maura's museum – that torture betrays US values – also built on, but did not straightforwardly reproduce, material from class. It is, however, a less rich theme than Grace's, as it primarily deals with the politics of torture (from topics 1 & 2 of our class) and doesn't meaningfully address some of the social and cultural aspects of the practice (from topic 3 of our class). Moreover, Maura's attempt at presenting the components of this message is not always successful. Some of her "rooms" seem to communicate very similar, if not identical messages. For instance, her room on freedom is a "very patriotic room." Room 4's theme, however, is patriotism. Room 3 (which I call "American Exceptionalism") lacks a clear theme beyond the idea that the US thinks of itself as the good guy, but doesn't always live up to that standard. Maura begins her description of the room with, "America has always been portrayed as the hero and the good guy. In this next room I display that that isn't the truth."

This also seems to be theme of room 4:

The room will be set up like a classroom with American textbooks on the desks. The textbooks will have negative key history points though instead of positive.

Lacking distinct sub-themes, Maura presents artifacts that seem to me to be interchangeable. The poster in room 3 could just as well appear in room 4, while the mural in 4 could appear in 3 (both are reproduced above). Rumsfeld's signature, in room 2, is meant to illustrate the lack of transparency around torture and, so, illustrate how torture violates democratic values.

SECDEF DECISION

Approved D.R. Disapproved _____ Other _____

Attachments
As stated

cc: CJCS, USD(P) *However, I stand for 8-10 hours
A day. Why is standing limited to 4 hours?*

D.R. DEC 02 2002

ified Under Authority of Executive Order 12958

It is fine, but it could have just as easily been any document on torture – since there is nothing that is unique about this document’s message about transparency. A document with a redaction might have been more appropriate. And this signing statement of Rumsfeld’s, which compares forced standing to his own standing at a desk, might better illustrate a room about “clean” or “markless” torture techniques and the perception that such techniques are not torture. (The line is: “However, I stand for 8-10 hours a day. Why is standing limited to 4 hours? D.R.”)

Finally, Maura’s selection of captions did not, in any way, suggest that she had done independent work or investigation of potential artifacts. All come directly from class.

Implications

For a number of reasons, I am scaling back the museum project. The main reason doesn’t concern the challenges of the assignment: I am having students work on revising a single, position paper over the course of the quarter. Rather than assign the museum project as a second, major writing assignment, I’m making it one that should take about a week and a half to complete. It will be weighted less than this assignment has been in the past. But we will have a class dedicated to allowing students share their exhibit with each other.

There are many things that I think I can do to help students be more successful on this project, even if it takes an abbreviated form.

1. Many students proposed a theme or message for the museum that straightforwardly or, in Maura’s case, indirectly replicated issues we dealt with at the start of the quarter; these early topics are addressed in the first writing assignment. My hope is this second writing assignment allows students to explore arguments different than those that they explored in the first writing assignment. I can facilitate this by:
 - a. Emphasizing this in the prompt, rather than in tiny font in the rubric.
 - b. Discussing, more explicitly, how museums make messages. I can do this before the quarter even begins with our visit to The CELL and then return to it when we discuss the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum.
2. Nearly all students used artifacts that I had provided. Even Grace, who used documents that I hadn’t shown, largely replicated the sources of documents that I had shown. This is not surprising, for several reasons. First, the assignment did not ask or require them to find a document from outside of class. Requiring that students find at least one unique artifact may help address this. Second, many students do not know how to locate such documents effectively. Having a class on information literacy or

- showing students where the vast repositories of these documents are stored could help.
3. Few students combined individual artifacts to convey a rich, complex message. This, combined with the use of artifacts I'd shown in class, meant that most of the museums lacked originality. While I hoped to model the use of multiple, diverse, and contradictory artifacts through an in-class, group exercise, I found that most groups used individual, straightforward artifacts rather than using multiple ones to build complex displays. It didn't occur to me, after that exercise, to then model the use of artifacts in different ways. I should do this. And I should suggest in the prompt (or perhaps require) that students combine multiple artifacts into a single exhibit.
 4. As students worked through this assignment last fall, I began to suspect that I had taken for granted a set of cultural competencies, interpretive skills, and familiarity with the genre (see Appendix C, point 3, "So Why Does a Given Piece of Writing Turn Out the Way it Does?") of museums that nearly all students lacked. While I expected that our readings on culture and torture would help students with this assignment, they didn't help enough. Most students never really moved beyond the politics of torture to the *interpretation of torture*. I need to be more attentive to this transition next year, guiding students into it and helping them understand what it means to engage with the rhetoric of torture as a cultural sociologist would, rather than how someone trying to win a political debate might.



Poetic Minds (ASEM)

Rachel Feder
Department of English

Original Assignment

For this assignment, you will select a contemporary work of literature or philosophy, and will write a 5-7 page (1250-1750 word) essay exploring your selected text in the context of the course. In so doing, you will explore some of the ways in which Enlightenment philosophy and Romantic poetry are still relevant to contemporary culture. You may interpret the categories of “literature” and “philosophy” as broadly as you wish; just be sure to justify your choices.

Your essay should display mastery of the course materials, both by citing extensively from course texts and by applying course texts to your topic in nuanced, complex ways. The application of course materials will help you develop a strong, analytical argument about the text that you have chosen. For help designing your argument, I recommend visiting the writing center and/or setting up an office hours appointment with me.

Justification

In my ASEM, “Poetic Minds,” I concluded the quarter with a final assignment that asked students to analyze a work of contemporary literature or philosophy within the context of Enlightenment- and Romantic-era thought and in the context of class discussions about the ways in which literature responds to philosophical problems. My goals in crafting this assignment were threefold: 1) to ask students to invert their perspectives, i.e. to read the contemporary as intellectual historians; 2) to demonstrate knowledge of course texts via application of that knowledge to a thesis-driven close-reading; and 3) to generate new knowledge by analyzing a text of their choosing on which they would be the expert in our class. Student presentations of these final projects also provided an efficient way in which to expand a closing unit on contemporary literature.

Paper One

Cole had a compelling interpretation of the assignment, choosing to analyze key texts from Scientology in order to develop a nuanced, dynamic argument about the ways in which

Scientology employs, complicates, and rejects strains of classic philosophical thought. While Cole did a good job demonstrating that Scientology “is a modern philosophy that builds from the foundations of Enlightenment philosophy while ultimately rejecting it,” I wonder if the constraints of the argument-driven analysis might have limited his engagement with the topic. Cole stuck closely to two texts by the movement’s founder and used Descartes, Locke, Spinoza, and Wordsworth to historicize treatments of progression, understanding, and the evolution of knowledge in these texts. While both application and argument were strong, there was no room in the paper for a discussion of other aspects of Scientology that might have been interesting to consider in relation to course texts—the role of Scientology in Hollywood, for example.

Paper Two

Angelica, a senior environmental science major, brought detailed concepts from Blake, Kant, Spinoza, and William and Dorothy Wordsworth to bear on an in-depth investigation of one of her favorite books, Cheryl Strayed’s *Wild*. I was amazed by the nuanced analysis of *Wild* that Angelica was able to craft by walking through the text with Enlightenment- and Romantic-era texts in mind. Her response to the assignment not only demonstrated mastery of course texts but also led her to take her understanding of course texts deeper. For example, an analysis of why one of Strayed’s encounters with nature was Blakean gave Angelica the opportunity to produce a new close reading of one of William Blake’s poems.

Again, argument seemed to be the sticking point here. Because she was drawing such detailed, nuanced connections between course texts and her chosen text, Angelica lost sight of an overarching intervention. While Angelica did manage to develop a complex argument about the connections among nature, spirituality, and education, as she went deeper into each text, she seemed to lose sight of the broader argument, and there is no good thesis statement.

Paper Three

A third student, Beck, had a daring and creative interpretation of the assignment. Rather than marshal her analysis of a contemporary text into the structure of a standard academic paper, as the assignment asked her to do, Beck worked in the genre of the literary essay. She chose a rock song as her text of choice and wove analytical allusions to course texts in with the close reading of song lyrics. These connections are forged within a narrative about her own experience of hearing the song after reading course texts. The resulting paper is actually very beautiful (“Relief and Wordsworth wash over me”). In addition to freeing herself up for elegant, associative writing, Beck has shown me the intense degree to which she has internalized the course texts—she’s not only able to apply these texts to the contemporary, but is also thinking about them as she moves through her everyday life.

Plans for Revision

Assessment of three sample papers has shown me that the main strengths of the assignment are 1) that it gives students an effective way to demonstrate their understanding of course texts, and 2) that it gives students the opportunity to write about a contemporary text that interests them. The main sticking point of the assignment seems to be argument, which either limited analysis or was limited by analysis. Beck’s creative take on the assignment, although a risk in this context, suggests another way forward, which is to ask students for a

literary essay. This revised assignment would meet the same goals while helping students think about what it might mean to write for a broader audience (via civic, literary, or other public writing) after graduation.

Updated Assignment:

Literary Essay: Investigation of the Contemporary

Task

For this assignment, you will write a literary essay that brings your knowledge of Enlightenment- and Romantic-era debates about the mind to bear on a contemporary text, topic, or phenomenon.

First, you will identify a particular question related to the theme of mind that has been central to several course readings. Example questions might include the following: how does a person come to trust in the truth of their knowledge? how does a person come to believe in the divine? under what conditions does a person become aware of their own patterns of constructing knowledge or meaning?

Drawing extensively from (a) course text(s), you will then write a 3-5 page essay that uses the intellectual-historical context developed through class readings to generate a detailed analysis of an artifact of contemporary culture.

Purpose

The purpose of this assignment is three-fold: 1) to demonstrate mastery of course texts and of some aspect of the course's guiding theme; 2) to generate a fresh, surprising, or provocative analysis of some aspect of contemporary culture, supported by close reading; and 3) to create a piece of writing that will be interesting to our particular learning community but also relevant beyond our class.

Audience

By "literary essay," I mean an essay that you might enjoy reading in a journal, magazine, or online venue. It may help to have a specific publication in mind.

Sharing component

We will share drafts in groups of three one week before the final deadline in preparation for an in-class workshop. We will also read excerpts from our essays aloud on the final day of class.

Assessment

I will assess your essay based on the following criteria~

Your essay should display mastery of the course materials, both by citing extensively from (a) course text(s) and by applying course texts to your topic in nuanced, complex ways. In so doing, it is necessary to demonstrate a precise, detailed, capacious understanding of the course text(s) you have chosen.

The application of course materials will help you develop a strong, analytical argument about your topic. Remember that strength, in this case, refers to precision, nuance, and support. Given the genre for this assignment, you may choose to craft an analytical argument that unfolds inductively, rather than foregrounding a thesis statement. In any case, successful essays will leverage the application of course materials in order to say something new and interesting about their topic.

Clarity is key. Read your sentences and paragraphs out loud to make sure they flow. Try a reverse outline to make sure your organization and argument unfold in intentional, effective ways. You achieve form by discarding, so you might want to write a longer “discovery draft” that you then whittle down into a concise essay.



Deviant Bodies (ASEM)

Amie Levesque

Department of Sociology and Criminology

In the Advanced Seminar, *Deviant Bodies*, I assigned a final project in which students conducted a content analysis of data they collected from social media websites. I tasked students with collecting 50 pieces of data in the form of comment posts, short videos, or photos that illustrated body shaming related to a topic of their choice. Once they collected their data, students organized and coded it, and then wrote a 10-12 page analysis of the ways in which body shaming manifested on these social media websites. I required students to put their coded data into an appendix of their paper. Students utilized at least four scholarly sources they found in addition to assigned course readings to ground their thinking about the patterns they found and the conclusions they drew. In this assignment, I really wanted students to look for obvious and subtle examples of body shaming while thinking about them sociologically. I had four goals for my students:

1. Collect, code, and organize data collected on the internet.
2. Identify examples of body shaming, under a well-defined topic of their choice, and demonstrate how the examples illustrated body shaming.
3. Utilize scholarly research to both ground and shape student analysis of body shaming on social media sites.
4. Analyze data in a well-organized and concise essay.

Students presented a variety of types of body shaming, including colorism (shaming of dark-skinned Black women), bottom shaming (shaming of gay men who are penetrated in anal sex with men), tattoo shaming, muscle shaming of athletic women, fat shaming, breastfeeding shaming, and the shaming of transgendered bodies. In this paper, I analyze two student papers: one on tattoo shaming, and one about shaming the Black female body. Both students demonstrated an ability to meet my goals for their papers, but one student offered a paper that achieved these goals less well.

My student who wrote their paper on tattoo shaming organized their essay in a very concise way, defining body shaming, generally, and then linking that definition to tattoo shaming. According to this student,

While shaming constitutes any action that creates guilt, regret, or embarrassment within an individual who has done something wrong, the results are expected to be corrective behaviors taken upon the shamed to re-modify themselves to equate with the socially constructed standard of 'normal.'

For this student, shaming is a process associated with power in which people who do not fit within the norms of society are subjected to practices of shaming. This student then drew a sophisticated argument:

Tattoos have become statements to visually express stories, experiences, interests, and the trials and tributes someone has gone through. These tattooed bodies have become pieces of art visible by the public, but they have also become the target for public shaming. I argue that even though the act of tattooing has become more acceptable than it once was, the presence of the associated deviant stigma still exists. Tattoo shaming is not fading; it is changing to shame the tattooed individuals from a different social perspective, as well as shaming them in the career field by greatly hindering them from job access. There is a line of acceptability in terms of the tattoo(s) and it is dependent on the meaning behind it, its visual aesthetic, and where it is located on the body, in addition to the collective number of tattoos on the body.

This student clearly took the reader through the context of tattooing and then made a strong argument about the shifting meanings of tattoos within our society. The student then argued that the transforming stigma of tattooing, while accepted in some arenas, was largely present in the career world. This student went on to write a paper in which they drew on examples from websites like LinkedIn to illustrate body shaming of people with tattoos. The student also grounded their work within scholarly work, to show that researchers have documented employers in the healthcare, teaching, and legal professions who stigmatize people with tattoos on their bodies. Finally, this student did not just provide examples of body shaming, but provided deep discussion about *why* the examples they presented were indeed stories of body shaming. In providing data in which a commenter shared, "Never understood the appeal [of tattoos]. It's like me taking my new Merc [Mercedes] and me carving my initials into it," my student went on to analyze how this was shaming. They stated, "There was consistent repetition of how idiotic the tattooed person was for permanently marking their body and not thinking about the long-term consequences of their decision." In this part of the analysis, my student not only provided the example of tattoo shaming, but discussed why this example showed this type of shaming, a skill that many students are still developing.

Another student wrote their paper about the shaming of Black women's bodies. While this student's paper was good, it lacked the sophisticated analysis of the first paper I discussed. This student utilized some scholarly work to demonstrate the empowerment that Black

women find in their bodies—through their hair, their body shape, and the color of their skin. Where this student fell short was in the lack of analysis in the examples of shaming they presented. In other words, it was unclear how the student determined these were examples of shaming. In discussing skin shades, for example, the student argued, “Being a light skinned woman or man is seen as more beautiful, attractive and more approachable than dark skinned woman or man.” The student then neglects to show evidence from the data they collected. Later in this section of the paper, the student does add a comment, “Whites still seem to prefer and to find less threatening persons who look more like themselves. These preferred individuals tend to be lighter-skinned and economically better-off.” While this quote, taken from an online comment, does show the shaming of darker skinned Black people, this example came much later in the paper rather than being tied to the original argument made in this section about the shaming of darker skinned Black women.

Another way in which this student fell short in their paper was in presenting the data itself. The student wrote a compelling paper about body shaming of Black women, particularly by presenting articles that discussed the struggles Black women face with altering their bodies to fit within dominant and White standards of beauty in our society. The student added examples of data pulled from comments on websites, but only sprinkled them lightly throughout their paper without analyzing them more fully. This student had a really ambitious focus, in setting out to show how Black women’s bodies are shamed in society, but they were unable to deliver a concise presentation of the data. Rather, the student incorporated many types of shaming of Black women’s bodies, from hair, to skin color, to body size. This paper would have been better delivered if it focused on one of these themes, like hair or skin color. In fact, another student did focus on dark-skinned Black women’s bodies, and was very successful in their analysis through this approach.

Generally, the final assignment in deviant bodies was an exciting one for me to read. I found that students wrote on topics about which they were passionate. Many shared personal narratives of experiences with body shaming. I found students to be deeply engaged with their projects, but in examining one paper that exceeded my expectations and another that was less successful, I found areas of improvement in my delivery of this project. First, in student proposals of this project, I need to work more closely with those that fail to clearly define and focus their topic of body shaming. I anticipated that student discovery of scholarly sources would help to inform their understanding of their topic, but this was not always the case. As students uncovered more and more data, they struggled to narrow and focus their organization of that data. Some were more successful than others. Another area in which I can provide better guidance is in working more closely with students as they complete their data collection. Students would have benefited from discussing the data they collected in a workshop *before* they started to write their papers. This would allow students the time and space to manage their data into a more concise analysis.

Designing a project in which students gathered their own original data, organized and coded it, and then analyzed and grounded it within scholarly literature in a concise essay was a challenging task for each of these upper level students. However, the progress they made through their drafts and presentations really showed that many of them desired this type of deeper understanding of their social world. They examined interactions that they take for granted around topics with which they felt personally connected. Although I plan to tweak

some of the process before they submit their final papers in future courses, the above examples show that we can challenge students with these multi-faceted projects and many will be successful in a variety of ways.



Buddhist Meditation: Traditional and Modern Contexts (FSEM)

Ben Nourse

Department of Religious Studies

In my FSEM, Buddhist Meditation: Traditional and Modern Contexts, I have students complete a series of "contemplative journal" assignments. For each of these assignments, the students have to do a particular meditation practice for 15-20 minutes a day for five days. After each meditation session, they record some thoughts about the experience. Then, at the end of the five days, they write a final, one-page reflection on the experience as a whole. The meditations that the students practice are drawn from Jon Kabat-Zinn's *Full Catastrophe Living* and are methods taught at hospitals and medical centers around the United States as part of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program.

My main purpose for including this assignment in the course was that I thought it would be beneficial if the students had some firsthand experience of meditation practices. This experience would give them a deeper appreciation and understanding of the readings on both traditional Buddhist meditations as well as meditation practices used today in a variety of secular settings. I felt it would also contribute to class discussions, as students would be able to draw from some of their own experiences in talking about and analyzing class topics and readings. On another level, I thought this assignment would also be useful as a means of having students simply take some time out of their busy first quarter at DU and engage in practices that often help people to relax and feel less stressed. These practices also have a tendency to open up space for students to step back from their day-to-day affairs and take a broader view of their lives, including their relationship with their own thoughts and emotions. This kind of reflection is at the core of a liberal arts education, but something that often gets lost in the everyday grind of assignments, exams, extracurricular activities, and social life. That being said, I do not expect that all students will experience benefits such as relaxation and a sense of calm. Such experiences are certainly not necessary to complete the assignment successfully and as such are not an element of the grading rubric.

As I state in the rubric for the assignment, two of the main things that I am looking for in these assignments are (1) the clarity and thoroughness of your descriptions, and (2) the degree of self-reflection and insight. Since this is a journal exercise, I make it clear that I am

more concerned with their thoughts than with the mechanics of their writing, though mechanics do count for a small portion (10%) of their grade on the assignment. With these criteria in mind, I will now look at two examples for this assignment, one from Cora (the stronger piece) and one from Betsy (the weaker piece).

Cora's assignment did well in both of the areas mentioned above: thoroughness of descriptions and degree of self-reflection. In her daily entries she gave detailed descriptions of her experience. During one session she writes:

Today I went outside to meditate. Surprisingly I found it easier to tune out outside distractions rather than the voices and door sounds I heard yesterday while inside... Like yesterday I was slightly distracted by trying to evaluate what I was doing in order to write it down later.

In her final reflection, too, she used specific examples from her meditation experience to reflect on the experience and the impact it had. For example, she notes that

my mindset going into the practice each day definitely influenced my ability to concentrate throughout. The days when I started off less distracted I found I was capable of relaxing much quicker and going deeper into a state of calm breathing. However, if I started the exercise feeling stressed with scattered thoughts, I discovered it was hard to stop thinking about classes, homework, and all the other things I was worrying about.

Betsy also gave detailed reports in her daily entries. Her first entry even has some narrative flourishes:

After a long day of classes and time spent on homework it was nice to take some time just to breathe. I had been slumped over my laptop for a few hours so the adjustment in posture was very nice. I could almost feel my cells getting happier as they received the oxygen from each in breath and were able to fully function with my spine in alignment.

However, her final reflection expresses more general laudations of meditation than specific reflections based on her experiences throughout the week. She offers statements like

I never foresaw the incredibly major impact taking time to meditate has had on me," and "I found this meditation challenge to be highly beneficial and I feel that I really have been truly benefited by it.

These kinds of remarks are found throughout the reflection, and I felt they were not adequately balanced with specific insights or with a critical analysis of the experience that looked at its successes as well as its difficulties. When I read this type of writing, I begin to wonder if the student thinks that I will respond better (especially in terms of a positive grade) if they give an overwhelmingly positive account of their experience. I do not doubt that there are some students who do have very positive experiences through this assignment (and many do), but I think it would be quite rare to have an unambiguously positive

experience without any difficulties or challenges. More to the point, reflections such as this do not demonstrate much depth of reflection.

Cora's piece is also generally positive, but she gives a more nuanced and self-reflexive perspective on her experience. She begins her reflection by writing,

Meditating this past week was an interesting experience and much different than I initially expected. As someone who is generally self-critical, I had troubles letting go and not judging my meditation experience, which is something I expected would be easier to overcome. My mind was constantly trying to make sure I was not thinking, which in turn led to more thinking and evaluating.

Later she writes, "I did not see an improvement throughout the week; my experience was linked more importantly to my feelings that day." To me, Cora's writing demonstrates a more thoughtful appraisal of her experience, tied to the particular benefits and challenges that she describes.

In light of these two students' writing and my evaluation of them, I think I could revise the instructions to emphasize the fact that I am looking for a critical evaluation of their experience which includes both challenges as well as successes in their practice. I am not looking for basic statements of how great meditation is. In fact, they are free to not enjoy the practice or to feel as though they have not gotten much benefit from it, they just have to support these conclusions with thoughtful reflections on their experience of the practice.

In student evaluations of the course, the contemplative practices and journal assignments receive overwhelmingly positive comments. Students often express that they wish the course included more such activities. I have also found that the assignments do in fact contribute to class discussions, with students comparing written accounts of meditation to their own experiences and appreciating some of the subtle distinctions between different meditation practices and their various goals.



Science and Religion in Dialogue - The Case of Darwin (ASEM)

Gregory Robbins
Department of Religious Studies

Background

ASEM 2410 takes students on a round-trip journey from the present to the past and back again. This writing- and performance-intensive course examines the relationship between science and religion by attending to the life and scientific discoveries, the religious commitments and struggles of Charles Darwin. Darwin's career is the perfect entry point for considering much broader issues in the relationship between science and religion that vex us today. Darwin's evolutionary theory fundamentally shaped modern science. In so doing, it raised significant challenges to traditional religious belief, particularly in Christian communities of faith. We see how that played out in Victorian England by playing a sophisticated academic "game" from the highly-acclaimed *Reacting to the Past* series produced at Barnard College. As we play the game, we present scientific papers, perform laboratory demonstrations, debate scientific methodology and social issues of the day to re-enact (in costume!) Royal Society meetings of mid-19th century London. These sessions provide an imaginative vehicle for understanding conflicts that continue to shape our perceptions of modern science and our construals of religion's relationship to its methods and goals. Darwin is as controversial today as he was 159 years ago, especially in America.

Is this course aptly titled? Shouldn't it be, "Science and Religion in Conflict—The Battle over Darwin"? Clearly, science and religion are two important forces in American life. The relationship between science and religion in our country has been, at times, a contentious one. Misunderstanding about both is rife; misinformation abounds. Many Americans have little comprehension about the nature of the scientific method in general, and Darwin's theory in particular. Darwin, the man, is widely demonized, his scientific contributions, in some quarters, discredited. Over 34% of Americans continue to tell pollsters that they believe God created human beings in their present form. Parent-teacher associations are roiled by demands to give equal treatment to "intelligent design" creationism in public school science classes, to "teach the controversy." On more than one occasion, local, pedagogical wrangles have wound up in the courts, drawing national attention, because the claims made about science and religion in these cases almost always raise interpretive challenges to the non-establishment and/or the free-exercise clauses of the First Amendment. Because Darwinian theory is inextricably linked in the minds of some with

“social Darwinism,” it is not uncommon to find the morality of certain advances in the biological and medical sciences—not just funding priorities—occupying Congressional debate. One consequence worth noting is the rise of the so-called “new atheism” during the last decade, partly as a response to what some consider a religious assault on free, scientific inquiry and Enlightenment ideals. Such trends are deeply consequential for American life. Our ability to arbitrate disputes, to forge acceptable public policy, and, ultimately, to exercise our responsibilities as citizens depends on how we understand, and engage science and religion. I promise my students that their participation in this course will be a transformative experience.

The Assignment

Am I able to deliver on that promise? The goal of the final project, linked directly to the student learning outcomes I set out on the first day of the course, is to give me some leverage for gauging my success. They are asked to craft a well-integrated essay (6-8 pages) in which they stake out a position. I provide a very clear structure (four sets of interrelated questions) for how they are to do that, with quite specific instructions:

1. How has your understanding of the relationship between science and religion and Charles Darwin, his theory, and the impact of his scientific contributions, changed as a result of the work you have done in this course? Or, has it remained the same?
2. Review and summarize briefly the key points of Malloy Nye’s discussion of religion, and the main categories Mikael Stenmark offers for construing the relationship between science and religion. As you think back on the ways they attempt to relate science and religion, the spectrum of possibilities they lay out, where do you now locate yourself?
3. If your mind has changed, which TWO of the readings, films, assignments, or some aspects of the Reacting to the Past (Darwin) game have been most important/influential/persuasive for the evolution of your thought and why?

/OR/

If your mind hasn’t changed, which TWO of the readings, films, assignments, or some aspects of the Reacting to the Past (Darwin) game have been most important and /or influential in confirming your already-held assumptions/presuppositions/opinions/convictions and why?

4. By way of conclusion, offer some reflections, in light of your stance, that take into account the following considerations:

4.1 Our playing of the Reacting to the Past game has given us insight about how Darwin’s nomination for the Copley Medal caused a number of issues that swirled in 1862-1864 to coalesce.

4.2 A little over a century later, the topics of our course converged again in a courtroom in Pennsylvania with the *Kitzmiller v. Dover* trial of 2005.

4.3 On your own, watch the NOVA video that re-creates that chapter in American history, *Judgment Day: Intelligent Design on Trial*. You can access the full-length film here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7HZzGXnYL5I>

4.4 Then, address these seven questions:

4.4.1 What debates in that very recent American court battle seem to have spilled over from 19th-century reactions to Darwin in England?

4.4.2 Why do you think the objections are still with us?

4.4.3 What is at stake?

4.4.4 Do you think a resolution is possible?

4.4.5 Is the case closed?

4.4.6 Can you imagine what the next chapter in this story might be?

4.4.7 What questions remain for you?

Student Strategies & Approaches – What Worked, What Didn't?

Sixteen students were enrolled in ASEM 2410 in spring 2016 quarter. I have chosen to look at two final project submissions that were produced by graduating seniors, both of whom had pursued double majors at DU. PAPER A was written by a graduating senior with majors in English and Political Science and a minor in Spanish. PAPER B was produced by a graduating senior with majors in International Studies and Religious Studies. The first paper I considered the best of the lot (clearly an “A” paper). The second was above satisfactory, but disappointing (78% or C+). Both took the tack that her or his mind had changed, yet both also chose to qualify that stance by adding: “only slightly.” How they chose to flesh out what they meant by “only slightly” made all the difference.

One of the most stimulating parts of the “Learning from your Students’ Writing” workshop was the group discussion that asked us to identify those elements of student writing that draw us in, which lead us to make evaluative and comparative judgments. From that rather lengthy list, I have culled FIVE (some of which are hybrids) to structure my reflections about the two papers I have selected.

The Opening Line

Having lifted the cover sheet of PAPER B, I was greeted by a salvo that did not bode well for what was to follow. “The debate about the compatibility between science and religion has been going on for centuries,” the student wrote, “through which evolution is quite an important topic.” No bombs bursting in air here, rather the sophomoric fizzle with which we are all too familiar. PAPER A sparkled by comparison, addressing Question #1 of my outline head on.

As I wrote in the first assignment for this class, my religious upbringing and secular education led me to

believe that there is no great discrepancy between religion and science, he wrote. On the heels of that straightforward, no-nonsense declaration came a charming sentence laced with self-deprecating, dead-pan humor:

Even in high school, quite independently, I had come to the conclusion that the six days in the Genesis' creation story could refer to non-24-hour days, briefly believing that I was the first one ever to come to that conclusion.

I was hooked.

Independent Engagement/Initiative/Enthusiasm

I was hooked by PAPER A even when its author admitted that "My views on the relationship between science and religion have not changed much during this course." While I wanted him to reveal that something like scales had fallen from his eyes, he stuck with a position he had long embraced.

I viewed religion, particularly Christianity, as a good way to explain spiritual and moral aspects of life," he declared, "and science as a good way to explain the natural world. I still hold that belief.

What followed, however, illustrated a profound engagement with the material of the course and the sort of transformation that had occurred during the term.

This course helped me to understand better the relationship between religion and science in our culture. I did not know the history of Darwinism in the United States and the extent of the classroom fights, the textbook battles and legal showdowns that evolution had precipitated in the past century. I had not read *On the Origin of Species*, but when I did I discovered a contemplative and reverent scientist earnestly searching for real answers. I cannot speak for *The Descent of Man*, as I have not read that yet, but rest assured, I will read it this summer.

Here is expressed an openness to the possibility of further growth and change that brought me to the edge of my chair. Thankfully, PAPER B was not devoid of curiosity. Its author, not far into the body of the work, admitted,

I had no idea that Darwin had any relationship with a specific religion, nor that he was christened in the Church and had attended Cambridge University to train as a clergyman in the Church of England. I had naïvely believed that his work on evolution was in no way meant to offend or disrupt the legitimacy of the Church of England, but I had no solid reasoning for this.

This kept me reading.

Care of Delivery – structure, organization, following instructions – tho' not in formulaic, artificial or wooden ways

PAPER A kept me reading because the author used the structure I provided to great advantage. Not only did the author identify explicitly the questions as he moved through the guidelines I set out, he did so seamlessly. He clearly saw the need to link the queries with transitional sentences. For example, as he negotiated the passage from section two to section three and the analysis of the readings, films, assignments and the game play, he kept with the overall thrust of his paper ("my mind has changed - only slightly") by telling the reader that "Two of the most influential concepts that facilitated the slight change in my views were clarifications of the specific realms in which science and religion operate, and the recasting of Darwin as a pious figure." That sentence looked backward to what the author had said about the theoretical discussions of Nye and Stenmark in section two, and served to introduce what would follow: an appreciation of the insights of James Moore in an assigned article (from a collection of essays entitled, *Galileo Goes to Jail and Other Myths about Science and Religion*), insights that were confirmed while playing the Reacting to the Past game. PAPER B was neither so carefully structured nor organized, though its author commented on more than the specified two readings, films, assignments, and the game play. For a couple of pages those comments caromed from the truly insightful to the merely impressionistic. Then, in the middle of page four, the ball nearly bounced off the billiard table (three paragraphs that attempted to link this course with another course in Religious Studies she was taking). Overall, the middle of Paper B could be characterized as desultory.

Summary vs. Analysis

In the guidelines I provided for the final project, #2 clearly expected a bit of careful summarizing. Both PAPERS A and B reminded the reader that Nye had claimed religion could not be studied apart from culture, and that a better way of approaching religion is to analyze what people actually do alongside what they say they believe. Both could delineate for the reader the four models Stenmark offered for construing the relationship between science and religion (irreconcilability, independence, liberal or conservative reconciliation, replacement). For PAPER B, the upshot of that was rather vague. "My views on the relationship between science and religion have not changed, but I have been able to understand the relationship or lack thereof better, and have been able to solidify both my own and other people's beliefs and reasoning more thoroughly." What the author meant by this statement, I surmise, is that she now considers herself equipped with a taxonomy for understanding why other people might arrive at conclusions that differ from hers. She took it no further. In PAPER A, we see the author, having summarized the readings, wrestling with the categories, allowing that he may have moved further from his original stance than he had expected.

At the beginning of this class, I identified with the independence model. I thought for the most part religion provided great guidelines for morality and spirituality, and that science was best for understanding the natural world. Now I see the value of the liberal reconciliation model as well. Science can complement religion and vice versa. Science and religion can give greater meaning to each other. For instance, religion can cause scientific breakthroughs to be used for the greater good or push

scientific discovery in certain directions. Scientific discoveries can make religion all the more profound and awe-inspiring.

The concrete illustrations and examples that follow this statement demonstrated that summary had been a springboard for careful analysis.

Balancing Ambition and Articulation

It was obvious to me that both of these papers were ambitious. Each author took the assignment seriously and sought to demonstrate their mastery of the course materials.

The set of seven questions in section 4.4 were intended to be diagnostic. I did not have specific answers in mind. I wanted to see where the students could go with the ideas to which they had been introduced, to see what connections they could make, to see what lessons they might draw. I was attempting to provide a lead sheet; it was an invitation to improvise. I was hoping for jazz. With PAPER A, because he was able to play so creatively within the structures, I sensed a bit of Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, and John Coltrane. It was as easy for him to riff on a textbook powerhouse like McGraw Hill as it was the Jefferson County (Colorado) School District. His closing line, in reflecting on personal issues: "This class has left me well-prepared to grapple with those tough questions and make well-educated decisions." PAPER B, which played fast and loose with the structures, was less successful. The author was content to observe that Darwin ultimately received the highest recognition from his peers in the 19th century (the Copley Medal), and predicted that, when transferred to a 21st-century context, "science can and does conquer!"

Implications and Changes to My Strategy

Looking back on my assignment for the final project, I must say that its intentions were ambitious. Too ambitious. I wanted the students to realize – by the review elements I tried to fold into the exercise and by testing their ability to extend and apply what they had learned in the Reacting to the Past game set in Victorian England to a new set of circumstances in American public education – that we had indeed accomplished our learning goals and outcomes. I wanted to tie a red big bow around the whole thing and send them on their ways with this gift of a course!

Section #4 definitely needs to be scaled back. I think I'd ask them to tackle only one of the seven questions, maybe two. Alternatively, I could spin off part four of the project and assign it as a separate writing exercise for the end of the third major unit of the course, leaving the final project to address the single question of how my mind has changed or remained the same. Having considered the papers again through the lens of this workshop, my mind has most certainly changed.



Disease in World History (ASEM)

Hilary A. Smith
Department of History

Producing Responsibly Imaginative Historical Writing: Analysis of an ASEM Assignment

I have chosen to examine two pieces of student writing that respond to a major assignment from my Honors ASEM, Disease in World History. The assignment asked students to write a narrative recreating the experience of one patient at the Jewish Consumptives' Relief Society (JCRS) in the 1900s or 1910s. The JCRS was a charitable tuberculosis sanatorium in Denver; its records, including boxes and boxes of patient files, are housed in the archives in DU's main library. We made several visits to the archives together as a class, and students were to select a patient file and use the documents in it as the foundation for a 1200 to 2000-word narrative about that person's experience. I asked them to put the patient's story in a broader context by applying the things they were learning from class readings about TB and TB treatment, sanatoria, Colorado as a TB destination, and the JCRS.

I hoped that this assignment would help students achieve several things. First, I hoped their work would demonstrate empathy with people living in a very different time, under very different circumstances, from their own; I thought reading personal letters and seeing the photographs and personal effects of the JCRS patients would help foster that sense of empathy. Second, I wanted them to demonstrate knowledge of the historical context, gained through our secondary-source readings for class, and show that they could apply what they'd learned in those readings to a particular case. I also wanted them to smoothly integrate primary and secondary material into a lively narrative, producing something that was at once enjoyable to read and scholarly. This would give them a more intimate understanding of the historian's craft, how we construct a compelling interpretation from fragmentary evidence. It was a tall order. Most of the students rose to the challenge, however (it helped that it was an Honors class).

I have selected a paper that earned an *A* (Paper A) and one that earned a *B* (Paper B) as the focus of my analysis here. Both pieces of writing are satisfactory. Both do an excellent job of being faithful to the primary sources, carefully documenting in footnotes the letters and

telegrams and other archival documents that inform the major events in their stories. Both are virtually free of technical errors. They were produced by two competent writers.

Still, Paper A is much stronger. What most sets Paper A apart from Paper B is imagination and empathy. The contrast shows up in the opening line of each piece. Paper A begins, "The tragic story of Sam Fisher's illness with tuberculosis is a winding one, full of blackmail, intrigue, selfless actions, and familial love," while Paper B begins "24 year old Bennie Pitchonoc immigrated to the United States from Russia with his wife Sarah in 1901." This verve gap is consistent throughout the two pieces right up to their closing sentences. Paper A:

The Fishers felt the sting of tuberculosis ... and though they managed to survive and prevail throughout these difficult circumstances ... tuberculosis left an unforgettable mark on their lives.

Paper B:

In Bennie's case, his daughter, relatives, and friends dealt with many consequences after his death, as did many other people who had tubercular friends and family.

Paper A's author writes with gusto – occasionally verging on the melodramatic, in fact. But the overall effect is an exciting, moving and memorable piece of writing. Paper B's author, on the other hand, seems wary of appearing to take liberties with the evidence, and consequently takes very few risks at all. The patient that Paper B's author is writing about died at the JCRS, orphaning a three-year-old daughter and igniting a custody battle between two local women. But Paper B delivers this tragic, knotty story in such a detached way that it becomes boring. "It is understood," Paper B tells us in the passive voice (understood by whom?) that one of the women vying for custody "grew fond of the child."

Another relative weakness of Paper B is that it takes little account of secondary literature and neglects to set the individual's story in a broader context. Although the writer cites archival (i.e. primary) sources frequently, he includes only one citation to a secondary source. And this lonely secondary source he uses to support a *medical* claim about the nature of tuberculosis ("TB is known to lie dormant for years without openly revealing symptoms"), rather than to help the reader understand the social, economic, or cultural features unique to the time in which his subject lived. He seems not to have understood what sort of evidence historical scholarship is best suited to provide, in other words. Paper A's writer again does better in this regard. She cites multiple books to support claims about why her subject might have emigrated from Russia when he did, why Denver was "a hotspot for tuberculosis treatment" at this time, and how institutions like the JCRS were funded.

Finally, Paper A demonstrates more awareness of audience than does Paper B. The lackluster writing in Paper B as compared with the vivid style of Paper A, which I have mentioned above, is one example of this. More problematic, however, is that Paper B's writer inserts new actors into the narrative without explaining who they are. He writes, "Shortly after [the patient's] death, Rose" – a figure not mentioned up to this point – "wrote to [the director of the

JCRS] , ” but the reader never learns who Rose is, despite the fact that she is at the center of the second half of the narrative. He also puts a paragraph about his patient’s first physical examination after a paragraph about his death, an order that may have made sense in the writer’s head but that confuses a reader expecting a chronological narrative. I attribute this, too, to a failure to see his own piece as a reader would see it. Paper A has none of this awkwardness: new figures are consistently introduced the first time they appear and each paragraph follows the previous one naturally.

Upon reflection, I think Paper A’s writer felt more comfortable with the creative aspect of the assignment than did Paper B’s writer. This course attracted mostly science majors, and my impression is that some of them had little experience with or fondness for imaginative writing. As we discussed and peer-reviewed the assignment, many of the students expressed anxiety about the part of the grading rubric that emphasized imagination (interestingly, the history majors expressed just as much anxiety about this as did the biology and psychology majors). There are a couple of ways I might alleviate this anxiety in the future and encourage more “responsibly imaginative” papers. One is to provide examples of successful work by previous students as a model. Another is to plan a conversation in class on just this topic, the place of imagination in historical writing. This conversation would stress that empathetic historical writing does not mean hyperbole or overly dramatic language – and here we might look at the places in Paper A where the student goes a bit overboard, and talk about why those don’t enhance the reader’s understanding or empathy. Good, imaginative historical writing derives as much from the writer’s grasp of the larger picture as it does from her diction. How did people understand tuberculosis and TB sufferers at this time? What sorts of laws applied to them, and what sorts of stigma attached to them? What did the medical treatments prevalent at this time entail? What was it like to be a poor, Jewish immigrant from Eastern Europe? What was Denver like? The more one is able to answer questions like these, the better equipped one is to imagine what a JCRS patient might have felt and experienced, and to craft a compelling historical narrative around that.

I might also change the length parameters for the assignment. Many students originally complained that they felt hampered by the upper word limit, so I increased it from something like 1600 to 2000 words. Next time, I might also raise the lower threshold, to something like 1500 words, to encourage students like the writer of Paper B to make more use of secondary sources, explain things more thoroughly, and just generally let loose a little more.

On the whole, however, I think this assignment was successful. I genuinely enjoyed reading most of the narratives, and the work really seemed to engage most of the students. Some of them spent extra time in the archives outside of class and contacted both the archivist and our resident JCRS expert (Jeanne Abrams) with questions. Several of the students said something to the effect that “this was the most exciting paper I’ve done in college.” I look forward to using it again in a future ASEM and I would like to develop other research-based assignments along similar lines.



Language Politics (FSEM)

Angela Sowa
Writing Program

The Assignment Situation

This assignment is from my Language Politics FSEM. The prompt asks students to write a low-stakes reading response, which is then posted to our FSEM's shared blog page. Students completed six of these blog responses throughout the quarter, beginning in Week 1 and ending in Week 7. Some of the responses had a particular theme I asked students to address, and others were more open-ended. The student examples I've listed below were written in week two, and students weren't given a theme to address.

We used these blog responses in a number of ways throughout the quarter. Sometimes I would select a response that I found particularly insightful, and read it aloud to the class. Sometimes I had students spend five minutes at the start of class finding their favorite passages from among their classmates' posts, which they'd then read aloud and we'd discuss what made the writing compelling. Sometimes I had them work in small groups and find connections or complications among their posts. Sometimes I asked students to come back to their responses after class discussion and add something to them informed by what we've just talked about. Sometimes we just began our whole-class discussion by having a volunteer pose the question they posted in their response. Really, there are an endless supply of interactive, student-centered activities that can spring from this response assignment.

Ultimately, many students use their responses as the seeds for a larger research project at the end of the quarter. One blog response asks students to find a peer-reviewed article to read and respond to, based on their research interests, and I'd estimate that 75% of students ended up researching the same topic that they responded to. For example, a student interested in the way politicians talk about Islam read an article that rhetorically analyzed post-9/11 speeches. She then ended up creating a magazine for her final project that was a "special issue" of *Time* magazine about Muslim Americans and language. Another student read about gender bias in video gaming, and used his response to form the basis for an interview he conducted with a gaming friend.

As I state on the assignment sheet, I see these blog posts as having multiple purposes:

- They spur class discussion and give us good ideas before we come to class so that we can use our time most efficiently.
- They provide a way for me to see students are both doing the reading and understanding it.
- They are building blocks on which students can create other assignments for our class.
- They allow engaging ideas to be rewarded publicly.

I like the blog medium, specifically, for this assignment because it lets students come to class already having read and responded to their peers' ideas on a particular reading. I've found this really spurs class discussion and allows us to jump right into the meaty issues. I also have found that the accessibility of the blog medium is helpful for students when they're brainstorming for longer, formal projects near the end of the quarter. Students can easily go back and look at what they and others have posted.

I also like the blog medium for its social element. Though I require students to make a certain number of comments on their classmates' writing, they often make more comments than required, and respond to responses – continuing a conversation chain outside of the parameters of the assignment. These conversations will spill into small-group or whole-class discussions the next day, as well. The blog allows student writing to be written to the whole class, rather than just to me, further encouraging discussion and connection.

This assignment is LONG, especially for a blog prompt, but I'm happy with the way it seemed to really help students figure out how to write about readings effectively. I didn't want a book report, and I didn't want a personal narrative. By providing such specific guidelines, even though the assignment was meant to be generative for class discussion and future project brainstorming, students were able to more quickly and efficiently figure out how to respond to the readings, developing the particular skills of summary, analysis, and synthesis. Did the assignment write-up feel a little prescriptive for me? Yes. But I don't think it felt that way to the students. At the end of the quarter, when we discuss how the class went and what we liked/didn't like, many students stated that the blog response assignment was both enjoyable and helpful for them.

Students struggle with close reading and analysis. In their experience, they equate analysis with "literary analysis" and have a hard time figuring out how to apply that prior knowledge to an academic text. I provide comments on their blog posts for the first response, and after that I only give feedback to students when their work is falling below the accepted standards of the class. (There'd be no human way to keep up with the workload of responding to 100 blog posts on top of responding to other written assignments). The assignment is low stakes in that each individual response isn't worth a whole lot of the course grade, and I am looking almost entirely for high-order concerns such as the quality and complexity of their ideas, rather than low-order concerns like sentence structure or punctuation.

I respond orally in class to their blogs ("David and Amanda both had questions about the ways in which we equate language use with nationalism..." or "Anna, can you talk more about the study you mentioned in your post?") so they know I'm reading their entries, and I tell students I'm always available to meet with them individually if they'd like to talk about

their response grades. I only mention this because I don't want any instructor to feel like they'd need to respond to hundreds of additional pages in order to effectively use this blogging assignment.

I've used blogs in my classrooms for years, and I do think it's important to give students pretty specific guidelines, even for a low-stakes blogging assignment like this one. Otherwise, I've found that the quality and nature of responses will be wildly different from one student to the next. I do think this response assignment would work on a platform like Canvas, perhaps more like a discussion thread, but the benefit of the blog is the ease, accessibility, and central nature of these blog entries (our whole class is centered on the blog, where students can find their syllabus, schedule, assignment sheets, readings, and class updates). Every time a student goes to look at the schedule, they also see the latest blog responses from their peers, and I think such a presence is important for giving these responses weight and significance in the course.

The two student examples I've chosen are in response to two short articles and an NPR segment on uptalk and vocal fry. Students were very taken with the idea that voice itself can be politicized, and they really caught hold of the concept of policing language (who polices, who is policed). The first example is strong in its personal connection – the student makes compelling connections to his own life. But the second, while perhaps no more compelling, is strong because the student is attempting, albeit in a clumsy and unpracticed way, to interrogate something larger with the readings rather than just react to them. I want students, even if they aren't terribly successful, to move towards this second work, as a way of beginning to engage with the academic community, rather than just as a personal response. This is not to say that a personal response is in any way less desirable, but I've found that students are pretty comfortable with personal responses already, and need much more work on finding larger themes, patterns, critiques, or connections. In class, I would ask the second student to talk through some of his ideas in class, and then I may have the class, in small groups, investigate just what kind of other research does exist about this topic, and decide, as a class, whether the interviewee had enough basis for her statements or not.

The Assignment: Response Pages

You'll complete a response page for about half of the readings we do in this course (for the other half, you'll post discussion questions). These pages are meant to work in a few ways:

- They spur class discussion and give us good ideas before we come to class so that we can use our time most efficiently.
- They provide a way for me to see you're both doing the reading and understanding it.
- They are building blocks on which you'll create other assignments for our class.
- They allow engaging ideas to be rewarded publicly.

Each response will be posted to our shared blog at least 24 hours before class. For example, if we're reading an article for Thursday's class, you'll need to post your response for that reading by Wednesday at 8am. This means you'll need to plan ahead a bit, and won't be able to cram the reading for the night before class – but it's better that way, I promise!

In the 24 hours between when you post your blog and when we meet for class, you should comment on at least two of your classmate's posts. Please make your comments substantive – only comments that further the conversation in some way will count (so saying “nice job!” won't cut it). Of course, it's nice to say, “Hey, friend! Great job! Loved this!” but that kind of comment really just ends a conversation rather than continuing it. The author will be responding to your comments, so doing things like asking questions, expanding points, posing scenarios, synthesizing with your own ideas, addressing a question the author asks, etc. will make the conversation more useful.

You should write your response in Microsoft Word so you can accurately measure its length and it doesn't get lost in the ether if Pioneer Net goes down (you'll all know this fear not long after you arrive on campus :)). Your post should be about one, single-spaced page in length – that's about 600 words. More is not better in this case (I'm looking at all you overachievers out there) and if your post is overly long, that will be as bad as being overly short. You don't need to have exactly 600 words, but you should be close-ish.

You should be sure to have a creative, catchy **title** for your response, and to select or create **tags** before you publish your post.

If there is more than one reading covered, you may choose to talk about just one, or to discuss both/all. However, if you choose to talk about only one, it will be clear to me you didn't do the *rest* of the reading if you neglect to bring in an obvious point from the other reading(s) in your synthesis. Be sure to do *all* the readings before you write your response, even if you're only responding to one.

Your response should have the following sections, with **one line of space** between each:

1. The first line of your post should be information that helps us identify which reading this response is for. (Example: Okrent pgs. 14-57). That way it will be easy to tell which response goes with which reading.
2. On the next line, list the most interesting or important question you had while doing this reading.
3. Your next section will be a summary of the pages read: this section should be NO MORE than 5 sentences. Summarize the main thrust of the author's arguments/points in the covered reading – do NOT insert your opinion or analysis in this section. This section should demonstrate to me that you've not only done the reading, but you are able to identify key elements of the reading (in other words, you understand what is MOST important, and that you're able to distill this into 5 or fewer sentences). A summary isn't just a re-telling of every little thing that happens – it's a repackaging of the important points so that someone who hasn't read the section will understand what it's about. You've all probably had experience summarizing fiction, and you know how to hit the main plot points while leaving out small details that don't need to be included. This is the same thing you do for non-fiction, though it might be more difficult to discern what those main points are at first. Don't worry – you'll get better at this the more you practice it.
4. Your next section will be a close reading of a very small section of

- the text – a sentence or two. Provide a quotation of the sentence(s) in question, and then do some analysis. What does your chosen passage mean? What work is it doing for the author’s argument? The sentence(s) drew you to it for a reason – why? What’s powerful, profound, confusing, infuriating, etc. about this small section of text, and why is it worth discussing? You don’t need to answer all these questions (and you probably don’t have the space, anyway), but think of them as springboards for your own thoughts.
5. Your final section will be a synthesis. This is where you can build connections. Are there other texts, current events, media, discussions, experiences, etc. that you can connect to what you’ve just read? Provide something specific here – don’t just say “a lot of movies have characters with accents.” Instead, provide a specific example of a movie, and perhaps provide a video clip, to illustrate the connection you’re building. You can also synthesize with other things we’ve read for class, or with discussions we’ve previously had in class.

Again, because you only have one single-spaced page for all of the above, you’ll need to be judicious in your choices – make sure your writing is tight and to the point. Response Pages will be evaluated in the following way:

- 3: strong, unique ideas and solid execution
- 2: average ideas and average execution
- 1: weak or obvious ideas and poor execution, OR may be missing elements of assignment

Student Response #1

Damaging or Destroying the Voice?

Reading from Uptalk and Vocal Fry, Fresh Air podcast segment “From Upspeak To Vocal Fry: Are We ‘Policing’ Young Women’s Voices?”

Some questions I had while researching these pieces: are our voices a true reflection of ourselves until outside forces pressure our tone to conform in situations? Is this tone more of an oppressive mask or alternative growth for our voices?

Speech varies by location and different factors play into how a voice will sound. With Vocal Fry and Uptalk, women are being targeted by heavy criticism for the way they speak in professionally set jobs. Some argue a sense of insecurity is shown in their tone of voice, but it is more determined by location and nurture, with sexism being a factor for criticism as women are being targeted more than men that use the same speech. Medical damage to the vocal cords is also used as an argument against vocal fry, but there is little proof of this. Different speech patterns

are spread out all over the world, through religions and culture, until there is more research, these patterns are an expression of a person/people. "For me, the way I spoke was not - I didn't think reflected who I was. It also interfered with my ability to professionally do what I wanted to do." (Grose, Fresh Air min.33). After hearing this, I thought if changing your voice helps you survive, then the cause must be with reason. But with the way our society is, conformity is highly useful for acceptance and many people change themselves for that acceptance. It does help you survive, but we are in a new era of humankind with the ability to make changes that ripple in the world. If you want to use your natural voice, then you should use it, but also keep an open mind to see the perception of voice from others. Instead of bluntly using your voice, educate yourself more on the different types of factors involved with voice. Then you could use a blend of voices to serenade your audience into perceiving you as professional while also breaking ground for others to do the same.

This segment connects a lot with me and where I am from. In the Lakota language, we use guttural in our voices very heavily. It has affected my voice with the diverse accent I picked up in the last 18 years of my life. I don't destroy my natural voice, but instead I learn to train my voice for matching different situations. If there are problems in the way of oral presentations, I learn why they exist and how to fix them. I have failed a lot with the use of my voice especially with how fast my thoughts are and how hard it is to keep up with them without falling behind, stumbling, or going too fast. However, these failures helped me grow and develop. If I see criticizers, I work to fix whatever parts they perceive as broken without affecting the whole system of my true voice.

Analysis of Student #1 Response

Student #1 has provided an adequate response to the assignment. For context, Student #1 is very enthusiastic and engaged in class – he speaks up often and always is able to make relevant and interesting connections, particularly to his multilingual background. However, he often rushes assignments (by his own admission) and generally performs written work at a level below what I know he's capable of.

Student #1 struggled to fully address the assignment, though he's getting there. This writing comes from the second week of class, so I wouldn't expect the analysis and synthesis to necessarily be sophisticated at this point. Student #1 falls back on what many students do, especially early in the course, which is personal connections and response phrases such as "this made me think of..."

Student #1 also treated the source material (the assigned reading) in the way that most students do – by randomly dropping in a quotation and then addressing it, rather than integrating the quotation into his writing:

“For me, the way I spoke was not- I didn’t think reflected who I was. It also interfered with my ability to professionally do what I wanted to do.” (Grose, *Fresh Air* min.33). After hearing this, I thought if changing your voice helps you survive, then the cause must be with reason.”

For this assignment, I might comment generally to the whole class on strategies for integrating quotations. However, I didn’t dock Student #1’s grade for source integration, not only because it’s not something I’d yet addressed with the class, but also because this is a low-stakes assignment – I’m more concerned with the ideas the student articulates (though, of course, form can aid or hinder the accessibility of content).

I do think Student #1 exhibits an awareness of his audience (especially his peers) by relying on personal evidence. As I mentioned earlier, Student #1 was passionate about the course content, though it didn’t always come through his writing, and got a lot of positive feedback from his classmates when he’d relate course content to his experiences with native languages.

Student #1 also demonstrates an awareness of the importance of audience in general. He connects the assigned material to the idea of rhetorical flexibility or code switching/meshing, though he doesn’t (yet) know those terms:

“This segment connects a lot with me and where I am from. In the Lakota language, we use guttural in our voices very heavily. It has affected my voice with the diverse accent I picked up in the last 18 years of my life. I don’t destroy my natural voice, but instead I learn to train my voice for matching different situations.”

And

“Instead of bluntly using your voice, educate yourself more on the different types of factors involved with voice. Then you could use a blend of voices to serenade your audience into perceiving you as professional while also breaking ground for others to do the same.”

Though roughly articulated, these two passages hold a lot of potential for class discussion and further development into researched writing. After having Student #1 read this portion of his response to the class, I could ask the class to consider what it means to change your voice to meet particular situations. This question, in turn, could lead to a discussion of rhetoric, code meshing, and the political/social implications of linguistic dexterity.

Student Response #2

Where's Like, the Hard Evidence, You Know?

This post regards the articles "Uptalk Anxiety," "Vocal Fry: 'creeping in' or 'still here?'" and podcast "From Upspeak To Vocal Fry: Are We 'Policing' Young Women's Voices?"

How seriously should we be taking this issue when so little noteworthy research has been done on it? Do we run the risk of jumping to conclusions before we have a chance to review a body of evidence about speech patterns?

These sources discuss two vocal phenomena (vocal fry and uptalk) and examine their social implications. A case is made among the three resources that both vocal fry and uptalk are being seen as a negative quirk in modern speech, and some preliminary research shows that using these speech patterns might make one seem less credible and hire-able. Opinions vary, some suggesting a generational bias is to blame for this perception, others seeing it as an implicitly sexist viewpoint against women to dissect their use of vocal fry. On the whole, all three sources agree that these speech patterns are pervasive in our everyday speech and that they can have a significant impact on the speaker and the listener, depending on their personal biases and opinions.

Around the twenty-eighth minute of the Fresh Air podcast, Jessica Grose, who was criticized for her use of vocal fry and uptalk, makes an interesting statement. When listening to a beer commercial, she admits that she finds the female speaker's voice annoying due to her vocal fry. I think this is an extremely important moment in the podcast that has major implications for our discussion. Grose says she feels "like a traitor" for having such an opinion, and that's because a case is being made that women are being attacked in a sexist way for their voices, yet Grose's observation seems to undermine that contention. The fact that she simply finds the commercial-narrator's voice annoying, outside of any sexist or generational bias, seems to open the discussion up for closer scrutiny. It enables one to turn a speculative eye toward the podcast speakers and ask "who are they to know why or why not these speech patterns are being criticized?" There's an incongruity between Grose's argument and her observations, and that shows that no one is yet qualified to "say what's right" when

considering social issues around speech patterns. A body of evidence hasn't been amassed yet, and this can help remind us that no single viewpoint, be it generational or feminist or sexist or anything else, should be able to shape an argument along their terms simply based on opinions and anecdotal evidence.

Last week we discussed three broad relationship types as described in Steven Pinker's lecture, and how what is permissible in one relationship type often isn't permissible in the others. I think phenomena like vocal fry and uptalk can further illustrate this. In this week's readings we are pointed to evidence from a sorority leader's speech that she used uptalk as a method of pointing out her dominance and compelling her subordinates to listen to her. On the other hand, people in positions of power considering hiring someone were said to have disliked uptalk, considering it a sign of weakness or insecurity. While this evidence is far from comprehensive or convincing, I think it might be showing that just like all types of communication, what's acceptable in one type of relationship can have a completely different connotation in another.

Analysis of Student #2 Response

Student #2 demonstrates a stronger response than Student #1 because he's actively working to make larger connections, both to his audience and to our academic community at large. Though these rhetorical moves are clumsy, they show a willingness to engage beyond the safe scope of "what does this mean to me personally" or "here's how I felt when I read this."

We see these moves as early as the discussion questions:

"How seriously should we be taking this issue when so little noteworthy research has been done on it? Do we run the risk of jumping to conclusions before we have a chance to review a body of evidence about speech patterns?"

The consideration of academic convention is an important one. In class, this might lead us into a discussion of genre, and give me the opportunity to discuss misperceptions about academic writing (it's always boring and dry; it has no stories to tell) as well as best practices in research (find the narrative, etc.). Rather than simply addressing the content, Student #2 has taken a step back and considered the context, and that's a move that I'd praise in class and encourage other students to work toward.

Like Student #1, Student #2 shows an awareness of audience, though Student #2 does so explicitly:

"I think this is an extremely important moment in the podcast that has major implications for our discussion."

Student one has not only identified an important point in the material, but has signaled that this point is important to not only himself but the whole class. He goes on to integrate the source material as evidence of the moment's importance:

"Grose says she feels "like a traitor" for having such an opinion, and that's because a case is being made that women are being attacked in a sexist way for their voices, yet Grose's observation seems to undermine that contention. The fact that she simply finds the commercial-narrator's voice annoying, outside of any sexist or generational bias, seems to open the discussion up for closer scrutiny."

Here we see Student #2 not only identifying an important point to discuss with the class, but we again see that move toward contextualizing – to considering convention, academic community, and thoughtful critique – and to questioning what's *not* in the material.

In our class discussion, Student #2 repeated his concerns about the reliability of the scientific evidence the authors and speakers used. This allowed the class to have a productive conversation about genre – in what forms of communication is it vital to provide all your sources and be transparent about where each of your conclusions come from? In what other forms is this less important? What's the job of the reader or listener in each situation? What research could we find (or conduct ourselves) in order to better understand the topic? These questions are fruitful not only for our understanding of one set of class readings, but for understanding how one navigates language generally – an important consideration for freshmen just entering the world of academe.



Geography and Genealogy (FSEM)

Erika Trigoso

Department of Geography and the Environment

House Genealogy Project: City Park West and Capitol Hill North Neighborhoods

This exercise will explore house genealogy information in partnership with community volunteers from two Denver neighborhoods: City Park West and Capitol Hill North. The main goal is to assist community members who are interested in pursuing landmark status and historic preservation for their properties. Our FSEM will assist with research about selected properties that are at least 100 years old and are contributors from an architectural or historical point of view. The properties were selected after a detailed communication was shared through the neighborhoods Facebook and Nextdoor pages. Since its foundation, the University of Denver has had the goal of becoming “...a great private university dedicated to the public good.” This academic project contributes to this vision.

Objective

Assist with the preservation of contributing architecture/historical properties and help maintain the historic character of the city of Denver.

Deliverables

Historic property report based on primary and secondary sources and fieldwork. The students are expected to provide evidence of library research (Denver Public Library), ancestry.com research, and fieldwork. The report should consist of up to 5 pages of information about the property, historic occupants, contributing architecture, etc. The report should include photographs of the candidate properties (front and sides) and any supporting documentation: maps, obituaries, newspaper articles, etc. **Project due on Thursday, November 5.**

Step 1: Group Selection and House Pairing

Houses:

- 1563 N Lafayette Street
- 1725 N Williams Street
- 1748 N High Street
- 2141 N Gilpin Street

- 2211 N Vine Street
- 1571 - 1583 N Ogden Street

Step 2: Fieldwork

The project involves a fieldtrip to visit the properties and to meet the community volunteers (Saturday, Oct. 24 → 11am meeting at Beet Box Café - 1030 E 22nd Ave, Denver, CO 80205). The students will walk in groups to the vetted properties and will collect first hand information from the current owners. In addition the students will photograph their assigned property (front and sides) in a professional way. The students then are expected to meet at Kitchen Table Café → 1426 E 22nd Ave at 12pm for lunch and debriefing with their professor.

Step 3: Web Research

The students will be trained on accessing digital collections at ancestry.com and the Denver Public library that will allow them to locate information prior to their library visit. These collections can include census forms, property records, wills, obituaries, biographical accounts, and architectural information among others prior to their library visit. The students will organize these visits based on their schedules.

Step 4: Library Research

Once former occupants and architectural styles have been identified the students will proceed to the genealogy center (Level 5) at Denver Public Library (Civic Center Downtown) to collect maps, obituaries, directories, newspaper articles, and other relevant information about the properties.

Step 5: Report

Based on all the information found, the students will prepare a final report that will be submitted to the owners for comments. The report will be up to 5 pages long excluding citations. This project is worth 10% of the final grade.

Reflection

The FSEM I teach is entitled Geography and Genealogy and the main objective of the class is to provide a detailed overview of genealogy in relation to the geographic, religious, economic, political and social processes that shaped the migration choices of our ancestors. The course focuses on intensive research of a variety of primary and secondary sources such as Ellis Island records and census records.

Within this learning framework this past Autumn 2015 term, I developed a final research project that helped to sharpen the students' research skills while engaged in a service learning project related to the historic preservation of older properties in Denver. The final project consisted of pairing student teams with community members interested in applying for historic designation status based on three categories: geography (location contribution to the city of Denver's character), history (association with the historical development of the city or with a person or group of persons who had influence on society), and architecture (possesses distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style).

The community partners were recruited via City Park West / Park Hill Neighborhoods Next Door and Facebook websites. The project involved a field trip in which the students met the

community partners and collected information and pictures of the property. The students went to the downtown Denver Public Library to further investigate property records with the aid of librarians. The students also conducted research via ancestry.com (a required class tool) to research the property's census records and occupant's biographies. The main goal was to provide our community partners with a complete report to be used as part of the historic designation application.

The students were quite engaged with the project once they visited their assigned properties and got to meet the property owners and collect information in situ. The students had the chance to polish their recently acquired research skills with primary and secondary sources of information, and to participate in old fashioned field trips and library research. Their main strategies were to pair up with a librarian at the Denver Public Library who guided them through the available databases. The students had to do research about the architectural types and also the geographic aspect of the neighborhood so they could learn a little bit more about Denver.

This was a great opportunity for the students and for me as the instructor. We got to experience service learning while contributing to the preservation of the geographic/historic/architectural character of Denver. Many of the out of state students were able to learn in depth about Denver's development as a city and got to enjoy the unique downtown architecture which is threatened by rapid urban development and infill. The students got to immerse themselves into old Denver.

Some of the challenges were that the properties were very different from each other. Some properties had lots of available information, while others were lacking. Some had significant advantages historically/architecturally in comparison to the others. It was somewhat difficult to provide a comparable experience for all students. Next time, we would like to partner with a city councilman who is seeking to conduct research of historic properties along Colfax Avenue. Due to the large number of properties involved, it will be easier to provide all students with a similar and meaningful experience. It will be also beneficial to have the city of Denver as our project partner since the results will be incorporated in the larger Colfax Avenue Development Project.

There were several interesting research results: 1) matching a property to a previous owner who was the first City of Denver librarian, 2) linking a property to a former presidential candidate, and 3) determining that one property owner was the founder of the Jewish National Hospital. To complete the loop, we are eager to learn if any of the community partners were successful in obtaining historic status for their hous



The Rough Draft of History: Film and Video Documentary (ASEM)

Diane Waldman

Department of Media, Film and Journalism Studies

My ASEM presents an historical study of documentary film and video, from the earliest films we now place in the documentary tradition to several contemporary examples. In addition to several longer and more formal writing assignments, I require weekly screening reports on the films and accompanying reading assignments that are 2-3 double-spaced pages in length. These are written in response to specific questions with which I conclude my introductory lectures and I also post them on Canvas each week. The purpose of the screening reports in general is to promote student engagement with the course material and to prepare students to be more active and thoughtful participants in class discussion.

The assignment I've chosen to analyze is based on material I taught the final week of class. Here is the assignment:

The film for this week is *The Hunting Ground* (Dick, USA, 2015). When you watch the film and subsequently write about it in your screening reports, here are some things to think about:

- What is this film about? What is its purpose or argument and what are the rhetorical strategies and/or techniques used to make its argument?
- What is Emily Yoffe's critique of the film? Do you think it's valid? How do the filmmakers and Crowdus respond to Yoffe's (and similar) critique?¹

¹ The articles referenced are:

Crowdus, Gary. "Transforming Trauma into Political Activism: An Interview with Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering." *Cineaste* (Summer 2015): 43-49.

Yoffe, Emily. "The Hunting Ground: The failures of a new documentary about rape on college campuses."

In addition to the general goals of the screening report assignments described above, I was hoping that students would be able to apply the analytical skills we had been developing all quarter to this specific film, that they would be able to identify the specific reasons one writer was critical of the film and the ways in which the filmmakers and a more sympathetic interviewer responded to this critique, and most importantly, that they would be able to come to some conclusions about the film based on these readings and their own experience of it.

I received a full variety of responses to this assignment, ranging from those who addressed all aspects of the prompt (and even went beyond it) to those who ignored certain facets of it (not discussing specific techniques the film uses to make its arguments, not fully addressing the readings, or even not addressing them at all). I should mention at the outset that the subject of the film is sexual assault on college campuses, a topic that affected most of the students in the class quite emotionally. For example, one (male) student wrote,

This film was without a doubt the most difficult film to watch all quarter. Of course I was aware of the problem of campus sexual assault before watching this film but *The Hunting Ground* added even more gravity to this topic. I think there are very few people on a college campus today who haven't been affected by this in one way or another. I have not been affected directly but I know people who have been on both sides of the system. I know people who feel that they were wronged by the system both as an accuser and as an accused. The film is not perfect but it absolutely serves to call attention to one of the most frightening problems we face as college students.

Another (female) student began her essay,

Within the first 5 minutes of *The Hunting Ground*, I was surprised to see my university on the screen. I had heard of DU being a part of this film, but seeing the Ritchie Center, Sturm, and the sports complex up on that screen hit me hard. I have loved coming to this school; I consider it one of the best decisions I have made, but to see my school included in a film about campus rape is eye opening. It brings the problem that much closer to home. In fact, it makes me that much more furious. To know that an institution that I have benefited so much from is failing other female students is heartbreaking to me.

http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2015/02/the_hunting_ground_a_campus_rape_documentary_that_fails_to_provide_a_full.html

In general, I feel that this high level of involvement in the subject matter aided students' ability to do this assignment. Because I anticipated these kinds of reactions to the film (and those of students even more directly affected by its content), I permitted students to watch the film on their own on CourseMedia instead of coming to the in-class screening.

While most students were able to identify the overall purpose and argument of the film, the better essays were more specific, for example,

The Hunting Ground exposes the issue of sexual assault on college campuses but it is also about how the administration and other officials at and around the university mishandle the reporting of rape. This film demonstrates that the physical and mental safety of students on campus is not a priority because they want to protect their reputation and continue to bring in money from various programs, such as fraternities and sports.

Similarly, the better papers identified specific strategies and techniques used by the film to make its arguments. Several students mentioned the opening of the film, as in this example:

The Hunting Ground opens with a sequence of young women's reactions upon learning they were accepted into their dream college. Although joyful content, I couldn't help but feel sad as I knew the story of the film was about sexual assault. How many of these young women will be assaulted during the college career they were so thrilled about starting? I felt the purpose of this opening was to evoke those exact emotions from the audience.

Others mentioned the narrative structure of the film (following two victim/survivors who become advocates), the use of interviews, written statistics, re-enactments, TV news clips, university promotional videos, and music. The weaker papers focused solely on the subject matter of the film without attention to the material it uses or its rhetoric.

Because most of the students were deeply affected by the film, the Yoffe article evoked much anger. Several of the students thought her insensitive to and belittling of the victims of sexual assault. The best papers, however, were able to go beyond this anger to accurately summarize the writer's specific critique, for example,

Emily Yoffe's critique of the film is that it does not fairly represent both sides of the story and that labeling the problem of sexual assault as an epidemic has led to an overreaction to try and correct the situation. In addition, she critiques the fact that there is no universal definition of sexual assault across college campuses and believes that it is problematic. She also states that it infringes on the rights of men who are falsely accused and then

punished, saying that they are refused an education by kicking them out of school. She believes that the statistics presented in the film are misrepresented and the issue is not in fact an epidemic. She also defends the punishments of fines and writing papers presented in the film as being acceptable of fitting a crime that includes pressure for contact such as kissing.

This writer then describes how Crowds and the filmmakers respond to this critique, weighing the various arguments and coming to her own conclusions. Weaker papers were very vague about the nature of Yoffe's critique, did not discuss the response of the filmmakers, and/or did not state any opinions about whether they considered any aspects of Yoffe's critique to be valid.

Additionally, however, the best papers went beyond the questions I posed to connect the film, the readings, and the exercise of evaluating them to some of the larger issues raised by the course, such as the (constructed) nature of documentary representation. After describing Yoffe's critique, for example, one student wrote,

I understand that point of view after taking a class that discusses how documentary can create a subjective truth and how Yoffe utilized legitimate research and statistics to prove her counterpoint to the argument of the film. Thus I believe it is a valid and interesting critique but I still stand on the side of the documentary perhaps due to how powerful the individual testimonies are and the fact that I personally believe no rape is acceptable.

Another concluded,

Given the amount of extensive citations and discussions with a vast amount of people, I find myself in more support of the argument presented in the film rather than suspicious of it. However, it is still important to remember that documentaries are a construction of the truth, something made apparent by Emily Yoffe's argument.

These essays, I believe, are engaging in best kind of intellectual work and writing: the ability to weigh contrasting opinions and evidence and come to one's own conclusions, and the ability to draw from the recognition of documentary's constructed nature a response other than cynicism. Yes, I recognize, these essays seem to say, that no documentary can fully capture the messy complexity of reality, but we can still make judgments about a nonfiction film's relative merits and act upon those judgments.

In conclusion, I'm happy that I showed *The Hunting Ground* and accompanied it with readings that offered both support and critique for the film. I realized I was taking a risk with this

subject matter, but the overwhelmingly favorable response from students made me glad that I took that risk. As far as this particular writing assignment goes, I definitely would make one small adjustment: for the second series of questions I would reverse the order so as to ask the students about the nature of Yoffe's critique, then about the response of the filmmakers and Crowdus to Yoffe's critique, and then ask them to evaluate whether they thought Yoffe's critique had any validity. In other words, if I want them to weigh the different arguments and state their own opinions I shouldn't bury the part of the question that asks them to do so. This also would have the advantage of asking the students to conclude their essays in their own voices rather than by summarizing others' responses. Additionally, since I was so pleased with the responses of those students who made connections between this assignment and some of the larger issues raised by the course I might explicitly ask all the students to make those connections, especially if I teach this film again at the end of the quarter.



Coming of Age in Spanish Literature and Film (FSEM)

Susan Walter

Department of Languages and Literatures

Present your assignment and what you hoped students would achieve and demonstrate through it

The Assignment: Book Review

Your first extended writing assignment for the quarter will be a book review. In this short essay of 2-3 double-spaced pages (with 1” margins and 12” Times New Roman font), you must review either of the texts that we’ve read so far. Your book review should briefly summarize the primary themes of the text and evaluate the text’s quality. You must be sure to avoid any “spoilers” that will give readers too much information, like, for example, what happens at the end of the novel. The main purpose of the review is to give your reader a recommendation as to whether or not s/he should read the book. You should imagine that you’re going to publish your book review in DU’s student newspaper *The Clarion*, so your audience is other DU students. While it is not necessary to include a bibliography with your book review, you should give full bibliographical information on the book you are reviewing as part of your header for the piece. More detailed instructions will be given closer to the due date of the book review.

I decided to include this assignment in my FSEM course after a December 2014 workshop that Doug Hesse led. In that workshop one of the topics we discussed was the types of writing students typically do in high school, with Doug encouraging us to keep this in mind as we develop writing assignments for our FSEM classes—thus avoid assignments that are significantly more challenging than ones they have done in the past. What I learned from our discussions that day was that my expectations for students were likely too high, especially on the first two writing assignments that I had typically assigned in my FSEMs up until that point—writing short literary analysis essays. The other aspect of student writing that we discussed back in 2014 that resonated with me was that creating “real-life” writing assignments that students may encounter outside of an academic context often motivates them more because they are able to engage more fully with an assignment that could have a purpose outside of the classroom. For these reasons, I decided to incorporate a book review

as the first essay assignment for students in my FSEM class.

In this assignment I am hoping that students can do four primary things: (1) distill out the primary themes and relevant socio-historic context for the texts we've discussed in the first few weeks of class and present them in an organized and interesting way; (2) use appropriate voice, and solid stylistics; (3) give a convincing recommendation to their reader; and finally, (4) that students are capable of discerning how much plot description is appropriate in a review, and the importance of avoiding "spoilers".

Explain strategies or approaches that the students used, citing aspects of the responses you chose for analysis

I chose two student papers, one by Olivia and another by Michelle. Olivia's paper is quite strong, while Michelle's is weaker, although not a bad essay. In general Olivia's paper has a stronger personal voice and her prose flows very well for a first-year student, in my opinion. It seems likely that Michelle did not devote much time to editing her work because her prose is a fair bit less fluid than that of many of her classmates with some odd word choices, and she also includes some "spoilers."

More specifically, Olivia's essay opens with a helpful introduction of the author and her work, which was appropriate to the assignment:

The author of the novel was born in 1851 and had a strong passion to write. However, in Spain during this time period, women were suppressed and their writing, if they did any, was not appreciated in the same way as would a man's. Bazán was an individual who fought for what she believed in, and she believed in equal opportunities for women. She continued writing and wrote several novels and short stories. She is most known for *Los Pazos de Ulloa*, *La Madre Naturaleza*, *La Cristiana*, and others. *Midsummer Madness* is consistent in the theme of feminism and women's rights ...

In my opinion, this information is essential for a reader to gain a sense of the novel's content and themes, and Olivia does a good job summing up the socio-cultural context and the author's works in a brief paragraph. Likewise, Michelle gives similar information about the author and novel, but her writing style is notably weaker than Olivia's, and she is also less successful in giving her reader a sense of where this novel fits into the author's fictional corpus:

This book was written by Pardo Bazán in 1889. It was not her first book, but one of many that dealt with the feminist theme and more specifically, a woman's role in society during that time. Pardo Bazán's experience and struggle with being female can assure readers and those interested in this piece that she is no amateur on the subject. She had a desire to belong to the literature societies during that time, but the members were male, and she, of course, was not. This struggle led to her writing and being an advocate for woman and their

aspirations. Many of her stories, whether they be novels or short stories, were written in many different styles, for example third or first person or who the narrator exactly is, but many of them are centered on women's role in society.

Another aspect of Olivia's essay that sets it apart is her description of the novel's important themes as well as its general strengths:

The novel is an original piece of writing that highlights the role that women play in society through the perspective of a woman who constantly worries what society will think or say about her. Status was very important during this time period, and determined what was demanded from an individual. The characters are well rounded and believable: they truly demonstrate individuals during this time period from different parts of Spain.

In contrast, Michelle's essay focuses more on plot summary, even divulging some spoilers, and she does not discuss general themes of the novel.

One thing that Michelle does more successfully than Olivia is give a more nuanced recommendation based on a reader's interests:

This book for me was more about the theme of feminism rather than the plot itself. As a person that is interested in feminism and issues surrounding it, this novel provided an engaging way to look at it. I got to gain an understanding of this issue not only in itself, but in another culture and during another time. I would recommend this book to anyone who, like me, is interested in studying and looking at feminism. If you are someone who just wants a good read, perhaps this is not the best book for you. This book is not just for entertainment, but for society to learn from it.

In the handout for this assignment I had suggested that students could describe a particular audience that might enjoy this work more than another, which Michelle successfully does here.

Explain what you thought was successful—or less so—and why. Discuss possible implications, including any changes you might make on this assignment or in any instruction or scaffolding you might provide.

I think both essays are fairly successful in giving general introductions of the author and her work and very briefly the socio-cultural context of Spain's nineteenth-century. I devoted some time to an overview of class, gender and social norms during Spain's nineteenth-century during our discussions of these works in the first few weeks of class so I was glad to see that students seemed to assimilate well that information and present the relevant aspects of it in their book reviews. In the handout I gave students that describes this assignment, I also suggested that they place the author and her works within this context, which these two students did successfully. In addition, I believe that the sample book review we read and

discussed in class did this very well, which may have helped students by giving them a model of what to do in a successful review.

In both of the essays I can see that the students used more plot summary than they should have, with Michelle even including some spoilers in her description of the plot. Avoiding spoilers was addressed both in class and in the assignment handout, but I don't believe I emphasized enough that they should dedicate only a sentence or two to plot summary. I can refine the handout and also modify my discussion of this assignment in class in order to highlight this aspect of the essay.

The main difference I see between these two essays is the more refined stylistics of Olivia's piece versus the fairly choppy nature of Michelle's prose. To some degree I think this is something that all writers naturally develop over time, so I'm not sure that there is a lot that I can do in class to help with this particular issue. As we discussed in the workshop, I think the quality and variety of what the students' read also determine at least partly the sophistication and refinement of their writing. Nevertheless, I do think there are some common stylistic issues that come up regularly with FSEM students that I could highlight and ask students to avoid, such as including transitions, solid word choice, ending sentences with a preposition (something I see somewhat regularly in Michelle's essay, for example).

In order to address these stylistics issues in the future I could include a less successful example of a book review for evaluation by students and ask them to edit it so they can start to see these issues first hand. I also think that reading an essay out loud is essential to catching different stylistic issues, which I could have them practice in class with some writing samples I bring in. I always encourage students to use this technique during their editing process but I'm not sure they actually do it.

Another technique that I could implement for this assignment is peer-review. It seems likely that this could be a helpful tool for a few different reasons: (1) I've found over the years that student work is often of higher quality when they know that their work will be read by their classmates; (2) students will get a sense of what another classmate at their same level is capable of, so the weaker students will see that they have work to do to improve their writing (and the stronger students will likely gain more confidence in their writing ability); and, finally, (3) the process of peer-review allows students to look at writing critically, thus helping them to view their own writing in a more critical way.



Politics, Policy, and Economics of Health and Healthcare (ASEM)

Yavuz Yasar
Department of Economics

Context and Background

I consider writing in my course an important part of a broader learning experience, rather than the sole or ultimate goal and/or outcome. I expect my students to learn the content of the course as much as using and developing their writing skills. That is the main reason why I feel that I need to briefly describe the context in which writing activities take place in my course. It will also help me to explain my approach to the writing aspect of the course and its evaluation.

The course is designed in four modules by following the course objectives and learning outcomes as the table below shows. Since the course is an interdisciplinary one, it employs readings from different disciplines. I also use various learning tools and methods such as screening documentaries, holding in-class discussions, and reading articles and chapters from journals and books. Thus, students are exposed to different writing styles and formats as well as various ways and formats of learning about the topics in the course.

Course Objectives	Learning Outcomes
1. To understand inequities in health and their consequences from the social determinants of health perspective.	1. To identify, differentiate and evaluate the relative significance of individual (or life-style) and social determinants of health, and their role in health inequities.
2. To understand the way health care services are delivered and financed in the U.S. and their relation with economic theory from a political economy perspective.	2. To understand how utilization, access, and quality of health care services are affected by different financing mechanisms (i.e., the ability vs. need-based) and organization of delivery of health care services (i.e., the organized vs. disbursed delivery).
3. To understand equity in health and health care from different ethical perspectives such as medical ethics, moral and political theories, social justice and human rights approaches.	3. To understand the role of different conceptualizations of health, financing mechanisms, and delivery of health care services in terms of equity and equality in access and utilization of health care services.
4. To understand political and policy aspects of health and health care in the context of a comparison with national	4. To understand and critically evaluate the U.S. health care system in comparison with other health care systems and health care

health systems in other countries and health reform debates in the U.S.	reform proposals in light of policy making and politics in the U.S.
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The modules build on each other. Students read, discuss, learn and finally write about the basic concepts and ideas and move to the more complex ones that require knowledge of previous modules. Writing activities in my course follow the same structure and they are twofold: informal and formal. Informal writing assignments are exploratory, spontaneous, in-class writing activities. They aim to prepare students for the formal writing activities by allowing students to think and write about the key components of the question that they will see in their formal writing activities. I do not grade them. I only use them to give students feedback and count as their participation.

For formal writing activities, I assign four essays, one for each module. These essays are usually two to three pages long (except the last one, which is longer) where students are asked to discuss a specific case (e.g., discussing mortality statistics in a table by race, gender, and social class, or a medical ethical dilemma regarding who has the priority of receiving donated organs, etc.) in the context of the associated module. By following specific instructions, students write their essays that have two major goals:

- demonstrating their knowledge and background from each module to a specific case discussed by a proper use of terminology, rather than simply producing a summary of whatever they learn.
- writing a concise, well-organized, and authentic essay by following the rules of grammar and punctuation.

So, I want to achieve both learning about a topic and improving students' writing skills in such essay assignments. (Mission impossible?).

Formal writing activities accommodate different writing styles: from an analysis and interpretation of data to writing a speech for a presidential candidate who defends one reform proposal over another. This allows some students to express themselves in different writing formats and styles.

Finally, I consider writing assignments a way of communication between myself and students that takes time to develop. Therefore, I assign weights in a gradual fashion (i.e., from lowest to highest) to each essay. As students get feedback about each assignment, they are expected to pay attention to those points so that they can improve their writing skills over time.

Assignment

The assignment that I submitted for this workshop is about the fourth course objective and learning outcome. The following is the assignment:

“You are the only speech writer in town for two candidates for presidential nomination. One candidate favors **the existing Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act** and the other a **single-payer** approach. Write an essay regarding what points you would have made for each candidate about the strengths of his/her position and the weaknesses of other candidate's position.”

This assignment relies on the fact that students have written about the building blocks of the topic from different perspectives in their first three essays. In this essay assignment, my expectation is to have the students demonstrate their background on the topic by writing two speeches for two candidates with opposite positions about healthcare reform. As I remind students in my instructions, their audience does not have the technical and academic background or terminology about the topic. So, students need to provide a clear, direct and well-organized argument without watering down the complexity of the topic. More importantly, they have an election to win.

Assessment of Two Sample Assignments

Among the two samples that I picked, the relatively better one (#1) is a good example for achieving both of the goals that I mentioned above. The student provides a concise and well-organized speech where he uses the relevant terminology and concepts by explaining their meaning to a lay person without compromising the complexity and significance of the issue at stake. In addition, he achieves these by putting himself in two opposite views and criticizing the other side while he is making a convincing case for his own proposal. All these indicate that the student did process what he learned in the previous modules and articulates those issues in a speech writing activity by implementing the feedback that he received in his previous writings. However, I have to admit that the student did not exploit most of the possible opportunities that a speech writing activity can offer. He preferred to play it safe and produced a not-so-passionate, very formal, and perhaps to some extent a dry speech. I say this because, in the past, I read essays that took advantage of this format and produced some creative ways of making ambitious and convincing arguments even if they were not as successful as the current essay in terms of conveying the key aspects of a health reform.

In comparison with the first essay (#1), the second one (#2) is relatively less successful in terms of conveying the key aspects of the reform proposals. The student is selective in her touch on the issues related to the reform proposals even though instructions explicitly ask students to focus on specific aspects of healthcare reforms as we discussed in the class. In other words, she provides an incomplete and sometimes inaccurate representation of the two proposals, particularly of the one that perhaps she is less familiar with (i.e., the single-payer solution), despite the fact that both proposal ideas have been studied at length and discussed in detail in class. Moreover, this student provided a reconciliatory third perspective about the issue after putting herself in the shoes of two opposite views. This was not asked or required. I think that the reason she did that was because she could not reflect on or address the contradictions and complexities of those health reform proposals within the existing format that she needed to follow.

On the other hand, the student uses a less formal, more personable and relatively more engaging language to convey the message about a complex issue for ordinary people. In that sense, she does a relatively better job than the first essay (#1). Yet, this approach sometimes leads to seriously poor writing choices made by her (e.g., "The U.S. is too capitalistic and autonomic to make such a drastic change.") Among the four essay assignments, perhaps this was the best for this student who definitely took into account previous feedback and showed improvement as we moved from the first to the fourth essay during the quarter.

Appendix A

Call for Participants

ASEM/FSEM Workshop: Learning from Your Students' Writing

June 15, 2016

9:30 am to 12:30 pm

+ Writing Due on June 17

\$500 honorarium for completing the entire workshop.

How do students perform on our writing assignments?
And what do we make of it?

This workshop will address these questions by having participants look at a particular assignment in their FSEM or ASEM course, then analyzing how two or more students actually completed that assignment. You learn ways to analyze your students' writing and to apply what you've learned, either in assignment-making or teaching strategies. You'll also have written a short article. Most importantly, you'll get a chance to learn from other ASEM/FSEM faculty.

To participate in the workshop, you'll need

1. A writing assignment you're willing to share and analyze from an ASEM or FSEM course that you taught in 2015-2016.
2. At least two student writings in response to the assignment. One of the writings should be a relatively strong piece, while the other should be "less successful" or "average" (but not weak or bad).
3. To be able to participate in a three-hour workshop from 9:30 am to 12:30 pm on Wednesday, June 15. Alas, you'll need to be able to commit to the entire time.
4. To be able to devote at least 3 or 4 hours to complete a piece of writing between the end of the Wednesday workshop and Friday afternoon at 2:00 pm. This writing will a) present your assignment and explain what you hoped students would achieve; b) explain strategies that the students used, citing aspects of the responses you analyzed; c) have a conclusion about implications, including any changes you might make on this or other assignments. (You'll receive further instruction.)
5. Be willing to have your writing read by other workshop members. We will invite participants to develop their writings for further campus publication.

Participation is open to 20 faculty. We'll accept folks on a first-come/first served basis, with a couple of considerations. It's desirable to have a disciplinary mix (not 20 English professors, engineers, or economists) and some mix of ASEM and FSEM folks. Please register via the Google Doc at <http://bit.ly/1NO7GI7> . As I mentioned, first come/first served, but the deadline will be June 10.

Appendix B

Workshop Schedule Learning from Your Students' Writing

June 15, 2016
9:30 am to 12:30 pm + Writing due on June 17
AAC 280

Led by Brad Benz and Doug Hesse

Schedule

- 9:00 Breakfast
9:30 Welcome, introductions, plan for the morning. What was your most memorable undergraduate writing experience?
9:50 Through the lens of assignments: Thinking about the (good) writing challenges we present students.
10:20 Break
10:30 What are the aspects and elements of student writing? (How to read papers analytically.)
11:15 How might we explain writing that doesn't quite make it—or does?
11:45 Break
Noon Reading examples, preparing to write.
12:30 *Fertig*

Final Project

You've identified at least two student writings in response to an assignment, one of them a relatively strong piece, the other a "less successful" or "average" (but not weak or bad) piece. By Friday, 6/17, at 2:00 pm, draft an analysis of those student writings. This analysis will a) present your assignment and explain what you hoped students would achieve and demonstrate through it; b) explain strategies or approaches that the students used, citing aspects of the responses you chose for analysis; c) explain what you thought was successful--or less so--and why; and d) discuss possible implications, including any changes you might make on this assignment or in any instruction or scaffolding you might provide. Quoting or summarizing from the papers you've chosen will help your readers understand them and what you've learned about them.

Please send your draft to lauren.salvador@du.edu by Friday afternoon. Copy dhesse@du.edu. We'd like to select writings—perhaps all of them!—for modest digital publication. Of course, we'll ask your permission first, and we'll ask you approve (or not!) any light editing/proofing we might suggest.

Appendix C

A Dozen Elements to Consider While Analyzing Student Writing Doug Hesse

1. Is the student doing the task assigned? If not, does the task that the student is doing have sufficient merit that you can sanction it? How has the student interpreted the task? Has anything seemed to miscue him or her? If there are multiple elements of the task, are they given appropriate weight or due in the paper?
2. How effective, appropriate, or ambitious is the focus? What is the quality/ambition of the students' thesis or purpose relative to the assignment? Is the thesis or topic clearly established and maintained throughout? Worth proving or addressing? Manageable in the situation available?
3. How effective is the quality of thinking throughout the paper? Are insights appropriately original—or originally expressed?
4. How accurately and appropriately does the student represent key source materials or concepts? Are you convinced the student understands them?
5. How well does the paper fit its intended audience? Does the writing assume the right things of readers in terms of knowledge, information, facts, basic assumptions (explaining neither too much nor too little)? Does it assume the right things about beliefs, values, positions?
6. What is the ratio of summary (or information deployment) to analysis or argument? Is it appropriate to the task? To what extent is there an information dump? An information desert?
7. Does the paper have the right kinds and amounts of evidence for claims? Are evidence and support present, or are they missing or inadequate? Does the writer address countering positions or confounding information or alternatives, if the task calls for it? Does the writer explicitly connect evidence to claims, or does he or she merely deploy it?
8. How are source materials used? Integrated or inserted? Deployed or discussed?
9. Is the structure of the paper effective? Does the introduction provide enough context or clearly signal purpose, without being padded or gratuitous? Is the introduction appropriately engaging? Is the paper rightly weighted in development? Do important ideas or elements get relatively more attention than less important ones? Is the organization clear to readers? Is the sequence of parts the most effective one? Is the conclusion apt and engaging, or is it absent, superfluous, or perfunctory?
10. Is the style of the paper effective? Are word choices and sentence types appropriate for the audience? Is the paper free of stigmatized grammar, usage, and punctuation errors? Is the style appropriately economical and lively? Does the voice of the paper emulate the voice associated with good professional writing in this area?
11. What about conventions (format, voice, documentation style, essential elements, expected rhetorical moves, etc.)?
12. How well is the paper edited or proofed?

Appendix D

So Why Does a Given Piece of Writing Turn Out the Way it Does?

Doug Hesse

Expert writers and novice writers differ not only in terms of their experiences but in terms of the range and depth of writing strategies and repertoires they have internalized. Consider some factors that influence how (and how easily) writers produce a specific text. Any of these, especially in combination, may account for the success or shortcomings of a given piece of writing.

1. Knowledge of the subject matter.
2. Ability to acquire new or additional knowledge on the subject (library research, direct observation, empirical study, experimentation, interview, etc.).
3. Familiarity with the genre, including the degree to which genre conventions are deeply internalized or known tacitly.
4. Ability to learn new genres.
5. Experience working within the physical/social constraints of the task (amount of time available, working alone or with others, setting for the writing—for example, in class or office vs. at home—and so on).
6. General reading experience; specific reading experience.
7. Past experiences and general fluency with writing.
8. General knowledge of a range of topics and subject matters (among other things, influences ability to draw connections, develop examples, devise metaphors, etc.)
9. Repertory of rhetorical strategies (invention, arrangement, style, etc.).
10. Facility with the technologies of writing, including word processing or design skills.
11. Editing and proofreading skills, ability to produce conventional standard edited American English.
12. Relationship to the target reading audience. For example, do readers know more than the writer on a particular subject (this is the difficult situation in which students generally write), or does the writer know more than the reader (which has the advantage of performing from authority but the challenge of translating that knowledge into an intelligible form)?
13. Willingness to ask for help, to work with peers and professors. Presence of a writing support group, however formal or informal.
14. Care and attention to the task, including allocating it the proper time.
15. Ability to distance oneself from one's own work, seeing possibilities or shortcomings.
16. Clarity of the task, as perceived by the writer; ability to understand “code language,” such as “synthesize” or “discuss” or “argue.”
17. The writer's confidence in his or her ability.
18. The relationship of this writing task in relation to other activities competing for time and attention.