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ENGL 791

Reflection/Rationale for syllabus revision

 For this second round of revisions, I’ve avoided large-scale changes, instead reworking and clarifying issues that you and the writing center tutor mentioned. The most substantial clarifications and re-workings are on my assignment sheet, which I’ve made more specific and have formatted to make (slightly) less daunting. That said, the majority of this reflection will look very familiar—it is, in fact, my reflection from the 101-revised-outcomes revision, with a few minor tweaks. I hope this isn’t cheating!

In a lot of ways, my syllabus already aligned with the new learning outcomes—I was already planning a portfolio-based course, and my course outcomes cover the new series of three outcomes. “Rhetorical Composition” is covered by course outcomes about responding to the needs of difference audiences and working in multiple genres. Each of these outcomes is manifested in a major assignment—a rhetorical analysis paper and also the final assignment sequence, which asks students to “translate” a traditional research paper into a creative genre. “Critical Thinking and Reading Resulting in Writing” is encompassed by my focus on the ability to highlight key debates in readings, articulate theoretical issues in science studies, and identify debates and arguments in the study of science and culture, and then to apply those theories and historical contexts to their own projects. The sequence of annotated bibliography to thesis-driven research paper to creative project entails an incorporation of the types of reading we will be doing—social, historical, and ethics based interventions into science and medicine. The outcome “Writing as Process” is addressed both in course outcomes like “understand the revision process as integral to developing strong prose,” and by considerable use of the peer review process. Students will be asked to do readings on the craft of writing throughout the semester and to apply what they learn in those readings to reflections on their own work and on suggesting revisions to their colleagues.

 I revised much of my syllabus with the focused three-part outcomes in mind—adding significant amounts of peer review and reflection on genres, and using informal writing assignments like blog posts to scaffold larger projects. The most substantial change that I’ve made to the syllabus is an attempt to finish up the course by emphasizing all three outcomes. In my original syllabus, the final assignment was a thesis-driven research paper that made proposals for advocacy on a certain scientific or medical concept or practice. In this revised version, that assignment has been bumped to mid-late semester, and the final project (other than the portfolio) will now be a creative project that repackages their researched claim and proposal into a format of their choosing. The assignment will require students to pick a very specific audience and then make a plan for how to actually get their project to that audience. The focus on audience as well as the shift in genre will speak to “Rhetorical Composition,” their “Critical Thinking and Reading Resulting in Writing” will be evidenced by the synthesis of research and science studies concepts into a focused piece, and “Writing as Process” will emerge through workshops on their final projects, and also, I hope, by a reconsideration of their research paper after working on translating the medium of communication. They will still be revising that research paper for inclusion in their portfolio, and I’ll ask them to reflect not just on their creation and revision process on the project, but also on how the creative process shaped their revision of the research paper. I’ll also use the reflection to ask students to think through and give examples of how the work they’ve done in the semester embodies the course outcomes, and to project how it will transfer into other courses. Ultimately, my hope with this assignment is that it will help the class feel less like a checked box that can be moved past, and more as a course that provided tools to critically engage in public conversations, develop personal passions, and cultivate an individual style that includes but also ranges beyond academic prose.