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2019 Teaching Reflection

GSU Lower Division Studies

2019 was an informative year as an educator. Rather than having to play catch-up all year, I was able to plan ahead. Having that extra time to prepare helped. Those odd instances in class in 2018, when approached with foresight, are easily avoidable. As a result, I was able to spend far more time teaching and sculpting a pedagogy for my classroom. The previous year, I felt that my students did not quite know how to write the essays they were assigned. I focused much of my class on discussion of theory. What I failed to recognize is that Freshman Composition is really a transitional class. For most of the students, they see this as the 13<sup>th</sup> grade. They have not developed the skills necessary to navigate a college level class. With that in mind, I shifted my focus from theory to the practical examples. For example, for my favorite assignment, the new media project, I exhibited a wide variety of videos. Music videos, commercials, PSA's. For each genre of video, I showed a "good" example and a "bad" example when framed through the lens of the assignment. I asked the students to discuss why each video was good or bad. We discussed the various rhetorical appeals each video was making (or wasn't making). This in-class breakdown of the components of the visual rhetoric helped each student recognize the purpose of the assignment and how they can apply their own tools to learning that lesson.

My appreciation for absences has also broadened a bit. I feel it is inherently classist for me to require a doctor's note for students to be excused from an in-class writing assignment when we live in a country that does not offer healthcare as a right. I intend to implement a

new policy in my class where four in-class writing assignments will be exempted. That way, if a student is sick, they do not have to choose between an expensive doctor's visit that could potentially bring financial ruin and coming to class.

I also, after listening to Jenn Olive's presentation on Trans recognition in the classroom, decided to surreptitiously add trans related material to my syllabus. At Jenn's suggestion, I simply added my preferred pronouns to the header of my syllabus. I also discussed deadnaming during my lesson on citation, using the Wachowski Sisters as an example of deadnaming. I never came out and said, "We are discussing trans-awareness today." I didn't wish to draw unnecessary attention to any student who may be sensitive to unfair scrutiny. Rather I let those students know this is a safe place for them by doing little things like wishing the class to have a safe and fun Pride weekend. By being inclusive but not drawing specific attention to those issues, I feel I created a safe environment while simultaneously reinforcing the learning material.

Next term I am hoping to apply some of the lessons I learned at the GTA Training meetings. My specific interest rest in the use of a theme for the course. When I sat in on the presentation about Civil Writing and how the instructor (her name escapes me) incorporated a discussion about protest movements throughout history into the assignments themselves, I was inspired. The idea that I can tailor all the assignments around a singular theme makes absolute sense. It will encourage each student to be more invested in the assignments as they proceed. They will have a context for their work that will help them form that connection that exists between each assignment. I also am hoping to introduce additional reading material for the class. I was chatting with Prof. Schmidt about a study conducted that measured the academic

outcomes of student who take Freshman Comp vs. those who do not over their collegiate career. I think that would be useful for the students to read because it will show them that while their writing may not seem to them like it is improving at all, that there is value to being in the class and investing fully in it.