TEACHING WRITING

TCXG 464
SPRING 2008

Writing teachers draw upon three distinct areas of expertise. We must know our students. We must know how to teach. And we must know something about writing itself.

--Ralph Fletcher (What a Writer Needs)

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course introduces future teachers to the practical and theoretical aspects of teaching writing in K-12 environments, with a focus on writing instruction in secondary schools and consideration of teaching a diverse student population. In this course, emphasis will be placed on theories and practices of writing education, teaching inclusively, and the challenges of evaluation and assessment. Topics to be addressed include: motivating writing in school settings, writing process theory, improving academic literacies, writing instruction pedagogies, grading effectively and efficiently, and the ideologies and assumptions behind various approaches to writing curricula.

By and large, this course combines a pragmatic and theoretical approach to training you as a writing teacher. This course is hands-on and relies heavily on small group work, discussion, and presentations; therefore, the success of this course is directly correlated to engaged participation. Throughout the quarter, everyone will read, write, and discuss their own and others’ writing; plan and evaluate writing activities; and research issues related to curriculum development of state-mandated writing assessment.

We will begin with an exploration into theoretical foundations and “best practices” for teaching writing, through reading about and employing these practices in own writing activities. We will address pre-writing, drafting, responding, revising, and editing in our classroom practices, to engage in and reflect on writing process approaches. To complement our discussion of writing processes, we will discuss designing assignments and curriculum.

Next, we will critically examine process approaches and move our attention to issues of teaching a diverse student population. Whereas process approach often assumes a generic student writer—usually white and middle-class, social constructivism assumes the student writer comes from a range of cultures and classes—with different experiences, abilities, and language fluencies—who are constantly negotiating multiple discourse communities, of which the classroom is only one. This diversity complicates the learning environment and creates challenges in designing, responding, and evaluating assignments. In order to prepare ALL students for success, we will explore pedagogical questions related to social class, ethnicity, multilingualism, language politics, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and nationality. At the same time, we'll examine documents describing school districts and schools within districts for
what they tell us about the student population and we will consider ways to adjust assignments and curriculum to be more inclusive of a broader student population.

Finally, we will bring the course to a close by taking up issues of evaluation and assessment. Our topics will cover: strategies and challenges of grading; using portfolios for evaluation; large-scale assessment such as the WASL (Washington Assessment of Student Learning), the AP English exams, and the ASSET test required in Washington’s community college system.

Broadly, this course has been designed to provide you with a theoretical background and practical tools for teaching writing. More specifically you will learn:

- about theoretical issues underlying the teaching of writing
- how to identify and analyze well designed writing activities that engage learners
- how to design effective writing assignments for a diverse population
- how to respond to student writing
- how to apply assessment tools to evaluate writing

**REQUIRED TEXTS**


Additional readings will be posted through E-Reserve and the course website.
*E-Reserves are posted through the UWT library; please contact the library if you are having difficulty accessing readings.*

**CLASSROOM COMMUNITY**

Consider this class as your reading and writing community where everyone’s ideas and opinions are worthy of attention and consideration, regardless of whether you agree with them. I encourage you to use inclusive language and non-sexist language whenever possible. Respect for diversity of all kinds—in terms of race, ethnicity, age, sex and gender, sexual orientation, ability/disability, political and ideological belief, and so on—is essential to creating a respectful, safe, and STIMULATING intellectual environment. These diversities and differences can be our most valuable asset as a class. Please respect the other members of this class so we can all be open and honest about who we are and what we think and believe.

**TEACHING AND LEARNING CENTER (TLC)**

The Teaching and Learning Center offers academic support for students at all levels of expertise—review, undergraduate, graduate and TA. TLC also has phone conferences weekdays for students who are unable to make it into the TLC and an Online Writing Center—open Mon-Thurs until 7 pm, Friday until 3 pm, and Sunday evenings from 4-8 pm. Online and phone conferences employ many of the same pedagogies that are found in the face-to-face writing conferences. For your writing, reading, learning strategies and public speaking needs, please make an appointment online at http://moodle.tacoma.washington.edu/signup/index.shtml or visit KEY 202.
**Graded Work**

**Participation (20%)**
Participation grades will be evaluated on a check system (plus, check, minus, zero) based on engagement in classroom discussions and writing activities. Intellectually rigorous engagement during discussion is vital to the production of valuable knowledge; therefore, small group work and discussion, in which thoughtful and engaged participation will be evaluated positively, will be a regular classroom activity. Members of the class will participate in an online discussion board, which is meant to locate our writing in a network that is readable by all and allows for continuing conversations amongst groups. You will be required to post responses to the board, which will be evaluated based on critical insight and productive use of “comments.” Irregular attendance or tardiness impedes your ability to participate fully and will affect your final grade.

**Response Papers (25%)**
Though we will discuss the assigned readings in class, you will be required to write a two-page response paper, which will be due every Tuesday at the beginning of class. Response papers are intended to help you prepare for discussion and participate fully in class and small-group activities. These response papers should first fully summarize the main points of the article, describe the type of evidence used with appropriate quotations, and then evaluate the author’s conclusions based on your own experience in classrooms (as either teachers or students) and, as the quarter progresses, the accumulated readings for the class. Each response must contain these elements. In short, the response paper combines a concise summary with a reaction to a specific aspect of the text that interests you. As with participation, these responses will be evaluated on a check system, which I’ll convert to the numerical version. You may revise three of the responses to turn in during the last week of the quarter.

**Collaborative School Profile (25%)**
For the midterm, you will work on a collaborative research project to learn about a particular school and its student population, produce a written report and present an oral presentation during Week 5. You will also need to design one unit plan on writing that speaks to teaching all the students. We’ll take a look at three school descriptions in class; your group will need to select another school for the project. In the final written report and oral presentation that the group produces the group will need to make use of library databases and other research and provide an annotated bibliography, as well as using the course materials, to justify the unit plans. I will provide examples of unit plans and will provide a separate assignment sheet.

**Research Project & Essay (30%)**
In lieu of a final exam, you will do independent empirical research about teaching writing and produce an 8-10 page final paper. The project allows you to investigate an aspect of writing in-depth and synthesize what you have learned. This is not an expository book report, in which you merely describe; rather, this is an empirical research project in which your focus needs to be on the analysis of materials, drawing from the course materials as necessary and applying what you have learned. I will provide detailed guidelines for this assignment. This assignment is due the last day of class, BUT you will need to have a completed draft two class days prior to the last day for peer review.

**Your project options include:**
- Observation or ethnographic study of writing in social context
- Analysis of writing guides or textbooks
- Analysis of teacher feedback
- Analysis of teaching materials (e.g., syllabi, assignments, notes, memos)
LATE WORK

Because assignments build upon each other, turning work in late seriously impedes your ability to complete the required work of the course and negatively impacts your ability to contribute to discussions and group work. Therefore, work submitted late will result in penalties which will affect your overall grade for the course. It is your responsibility to be aware of deadlines and turn your work on time. Daily informal writing assignments will not receive any credit if turned in after the beginning of class on the appropriate due date. In regard to formal writing assignments, I will subtract .5 (or half a letter grade) for every class day that the paper is late. Assignments not received in soft-copy AND in hard copy at the beginning of class are considered late and will be graded accordingly. I do not accept assignments via email. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get the hard copy to me in class or during office hours AND it is your responsibility to get the assignments from a classmate or from the course website. You must attend class regularly in order to stay informed and should not count on the course website as your only source of information.

COMMUNICATION

It is my goal to create an environment where both teacher and students routinely practice a respectful exchange of thoughtful ideas. Because I want to avoid anything that causes a breakdown of good dialogue, I’ve learned to be wary of email. While it is convenient, email can also create problems precisely because it is so instant. People have been known to say things in email that they never would have said if they were facing their listener or if they had taken time to gather their thoughts. Feel free to email me questions that need quick answers or to set up appointments, but anything important should be discussed in a way that promotes maximum understanding. So let’s plan on face-to-face conversation when anything of issue is at stake—that’s what my office hours are for, and I’d love for you to stop by. If those times are impossible for you, then we can arrange for another mutually convenient time. (By the way, another insufficient time and place to discuss anything of substance is the busy setting before or after class.) Because email is another form of course-related communications, you should not expect a response to emails sent outside of traditional working hours (such as evenings and weekends). If you are absent for any reason, please do not email me to ask what you missed; better to contact a trustworthy peer and to check the course website.

EXPECTATIONS

As the grader of your classroom participation and written work, I have high expectations. I am most interested in seeing you demonstrate your ability to: work with complex ideas; take intellectual risks; use language and conventions rhetorically; adapt to different audiences, genres, and rhetorical purposes; consider counterarguments and make concessions to opposing viewpoints; explore and evaluate resources thoughtfully and seriously; comprehensively revise your work and rethink your approaches to ideas and writing.

I don’t grade on a curve. That means anyone has the opportunity to earn whatever grade his/her work merits as measured by the course grading rubric. Final grades in the “A” range (4.0) will be reserved strictly for exceptional work. “B” grades (3.0) will be considered for work above the average. “C” grades (2.0) will reflect the typical expectations of college work for a sophomore-level class. “D” grades (1.0) will be for work below typical expectations. “F” grades will be for work that does not meet the class standards.

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ACADEMIC HONESTY

Academic honesty involves properly citing other people's ideas and language in your writing. In your writing in this class you are encouraged to cite extensively from the work of others. However, if you fail to cite other people's ideas and language in your work, you've committed plagiarism. Summarizing someone else's work and not citing them is also plagiarism. Don't plagiarize. If you run out of time or energy on an assignment, come and talk to me about an extension. For more information on academic honesty and how to avoid plagiarism see http://www.tacoma.washington.edu/orientation/guide/guide-13.html.

INCLEMENT WEATHER

In the case of inclement weather (snow and ice), Call the UWT snow #: 253-383-INFO. This number will inform you whether the campus has been closed. If the campus is open, we will be having class. You can also call us at our offices (253.692.4755 or 253.692.4624) for recorded information about the meeting of our class. In almost all cases, we will meet as long as the university is open; I will send an announcement to the class listserv if class is to be cancelled.

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES

If you would like to request academic accommodations due to a temporary or permanent disability, contact Lisa Tice, Manager of Disability Support Services (DSS) in the Mattress Factory Building, Suite 206. An appointment can be made through the front desk of Student Affairs (253-692-4501), by phoning Lisa directly at (253) 692-4493 (voice)/(253) 692-4413 (TTY) or via email at ltice@u.washington.edu. Appropriate accommodations are arranged after you have conferred with the DDS Manager and presented the required documentation of your disability to DSS.

Because this class is a living and changing organism, the schedule and the syllabus are subject to change.