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GENERAL EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES

September 20, 2016

9:30 am – 10:30 am

Old Main - Champ Hall

Present: Lee Rickords, Agriculture and Applied Sciences (Chair)

Michele Hillard, Secretary

Larry Smith, Provost's Office

Mykel Beorchia, University Advising

Kacy Lundstrom, Library

Melanie Nelson, USU Eastern

Dean Adams, Engineering

Dick Mueller, Science

Dan McInerney, American Institutions

Kris Miller, Honors

Claudia Radel, Natural Resources

Shelley Lindauer, Education and Human Services

Eddy Berry, Social Sciences

Brock Dethier, Writing Program

Harrison Kleiner, Connections

Bob Mueller, Regional Campus

Laura Gelfand, Arts

Absent: Dan Coster, Quantitative Intensive

Brian McCuskey, Humanities

Stephanie Hamblin, Exploratory Advising

Janet Anderson, Office of the Provost

Ryan Dupont, Life and Physical Sciences

Jessica Hansen, Academic and Instructional Services

John Mortensen, Student Services

Kathy Chudoba, Business

Ashley Waddoups, USUSA President

Peggy Petrzela, Social Sciences

Cindy Dewey, Creative Arts

Call to Order – Lee Rickords

Approval of Minutes – August 16, 2016

Motion to approve minutes from the August 16, 2016 meeting made by Harrison Kleiner.

Seconded by Dean Adams. Minutes approved.

Course Approvals/Removals/Syllabi Approvals

APEC 5040 (CI) **Approved**.....Brock Dethier
Motion to approve the CI designation made by Shelley Lindauer. Seconded by Dick Mueller.
Designation approved.

HIST 3483 (DHA) **Approved** Brian McCuskey
Motion to approve the DHA designation made by Kris Miller. Seconded by Laura Gelfand.
Designation approved.

Business

Concerns with Student Written Communication Skills - [link](#)

The use of writing centers was addressed. Currently, there are writing centers at the following locations:

- *Merrill Cazier Library*
- *Widstoe Hall/ESL*
- *English Department*
- *Logan Library*

Tutoring was suggested as a means of helping the students. However, it was felt that Teaching Assistants (TA) may not be the best resource for grading writing skills. If well designed rubrics were provided for grading it was felt that the TAs could be trained and be successful in assisting with grading and feedback. Faculty need to work within their own courses and talk about writing in their own disciplines as every discipline has a different writing style. Most of the issues with written communication cannot be fixed in an introductory class. Brock Dethier presented information ([link](#)) regarding assignments, writing, etc.

Each college representative was asked to discuss this issue with their colleagues and look for national data. It would also be a good idea to bring students into the discussion. This review should be thoughtful and thorough so that there is data that can then be provided back to the Gen Ed committee as well as university administrators. Mykel Beorchia and Dean Adams will work together regarding email communication and Dean will return next month with an outline of Engineering's communication plan.

Adjourned: 10:20 am

Motion to adjourn made by Brock Dethier. Seconded by Harrison Kleiner.

Writing Beyond the English Department

Brock Dethier
brock.dethier@usu.edu

To help you understand the following suggestions, I want to summarize for you some of the latest thinking in the teaching of undergraduate writing. For starters, we have totally abandoned the idea that a year of college composition can somehow prepare students for all their college writing tasks. Learning to write well is a lifelong task, and since each discipline defines “good writing” differently, a writing course can’t possibly teach students everything they’ll need to know to write well in their disciplines. So writing teachers now search for skills, ideas, and attitudes that will productively *transfer* from an English class to a course outside our discipline. We have had to admit that the personal essay, favorite of English teachers for centuries, does not always transfer well, and in fact may teach students writing habits—like using “I”—that may not be appropriate in other writing situations.

We can’t prepare student writers for all the different writing tasks at the University and beyond, but we CAN prepare them to see that those tasks vary in important ways, and we can train them to analyze each new writing situation so they’re in the best position to learn quickly how to respond to the situation in writing.

Writers need knowledge in five domains to engage in any writing task: they need to know about the *subject matter*, about the *discourse community* they’re working in, about the *genres* that are available to them, about *writing processes* that might help them get the writing done, and about *rhetorical strategies* they can use to make their points most effectively.¹ In composition courses, we give students practice with writing processes, we study rhetoric, we have students write in a number of difference genres, and we explore discourse communities. But we can’t venture far into subject matter knowledge, and we can’t make the crucial connections between subject matter, genre, discourse community, and rhetoric.

That’s where you come in. You know better than I how best to help students practice writing in your discipline, and I have no desire to mess with what’s already working for you. But if you have a little time to think about your students’ writing, please consider the following suggestions.

1. Analyze your own writing. What do you produce from day to day? Keeping a log for a week or a month would be terrific, but just taking stock of what you spend your writing time doing would be helpful for your students. Traditionally, when we talk about “writing time,” we think only of the writing that may help get us tenure—publications in academic journals. But you probably devote more time to emails than to writing-for-publication, and you may actually spend a majority of your writing time on recommendations, grants, or committee summaries.
2. Ask yourself what non-academics in your field write. What did you write on your way up the career ladder? What do technicians, interns, assistants, and managers in your field write?
3. Consider how you learned to write. Did you have models, mentors, on-the-job training?
4. Share with your students what you’ve gleaned from 1-3 above. They need to know that writing is important in your area, that it’s something even professors work

on all their careers, and that many people who have no dream of writing a journal article do a lot of important writing.

5. Discuss with your students the peculiarities of your particular discourse community. They may be better than you are at seeing how differently your discipline thinks about the world. What are your assumptions? What do you try to do or to avoid in writing for your discipline? What counts as evidence (eg. experimental results, surveys, quotations from experts)?
6. Help students see the variety of ways they can communicate about their work. And ask yourself what's the most beneficial use of their writing time and energy in your class. Do you want them to practice writing the kind of journal articles you write, to use writing to learn about the subject matter, or to write primarily to demonstrate to you their knowledge?
7. Be as explicit as possible in your instructions for writing assignments. Students taking English 1010 at USU now practice analyzing assignment instructions using the attached questions. Could your students answer those questions based on the information you've given them?
8. Share with students insights from your own writing. Does writing help you understand the material? Students need to know that writing is thinking and that we learn about our subject as we write about it.
9. If you're going to mark up students' papers and let them revise, be sure to call attention to the most important things. It's much easier to circle spelling mistakes than it is to explain a breakdown in logic, but students need you to engage with them on content and organization, and if you only mark spelling, that's all they'll think about.
10. Take advantage of campus resources. Have you ever used Writing Fellows or sent students to the Writing Center? I may be able to help you think of ways to focus more on student writing without investing a lot of time, and our librarians are fabulous at coming up with creative ways of nudging students to do better research.

¹Anne Beaufort, *College Writing and Beyond*. Logan: USU Press, 2007.

QUESTIONS ABOUT ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS

(referenced in suggestion #7 of “Writing Beyond the English Department”)

1. Who are the audiences for the paper you’re supposed to write? *Are you supposed to write so that anyone could understand your paper, or are you writing for a specialized, knowledgeable audience?* If you don’t know the answer to the italicized question, can you ask? It’s an intelligent question, and the assigner should be able to answer it.
2. What are the purposes of the paper you’re supposed to write? Look at the verbs in the assignment. Are you supposed to “persuade,” “inform,” “explore,” “compare”?
3. What are YOUR purposes in writing the paper? Clearly you want to get a good grade, but what strategies will lead you to that goal? Do you need to show your knowledge, write perfect prose, change a professor’s bad impression of you, or simply regurgitate what’s been said in class?
4. Now ask yourself, **what are the ASSIGNER’S purposes?** Does the assigner want to see that you did the reading or research, or that you know enough about a project to take over leadership on it? Imagine that the assigner wants to use the assignment to teach you something. What would that lesson be? Do you see any aspect of the assignment that might be intended to trip-up would-be plagiarists? Might the assigner have institutional purposes like “meeting the total writing required to have a Communication Intensive designation”?
5. What genres are expected? Are you writing an essay, a report, a summary, an abstract, a review? Are there models or guidelines for how to do it “right”?
6. What’s the due date? Are multiple drafts encouraged? What’s the penalty for missing the deadline?
7. What are the boundaries of the assignment and your work on it? Are there length minimums and maximums? Are you allowed, encouraged, or forbidden to work with others?
8. What are the assigner’s formatting preferences? Font choice and size? Margins? Single-spaced versus double-spaced? Use of title page? Name, date, etc. in particular places? Documentation style? Use of bullets, lists, headings? Are you expected to have particular sections in a particular order?
9. What are the audiences’ stylistic preferences? Is “I” acceptable? Are personal experiences or opinions welcome? Should you use particular vocabulary? Is there a preferred tone? Are there certain special words, phrases, or structures that the assigner is fond of?
10. What kinds of research are you expected to do? Are you expected or required to find non-Internet sources? Are you allowed to build on work you’ve done for another class or project?
11. How is the work being assessed? On how well it answers a question? On how thorough the research is? On how quickly it gets done?