

State University of New York at New Paltz

Composition Program

Assessment

Prepared by Composition Program/Freshman English Committee

Jan Schmidt, Professor of English

Coordinator, Composition Program

Composition Program/Freshman English Committee, Chair, ex officio

Pauline Uchmanowicz, Associate Professor of English

Associate Coordinator, Composition Program

Co-Chair, University Writing Board

Director, Writing Across the Curriculum, ex officio

Rachel Rigolino, Instructor of English

Coordinator, SWW and ESL Program

Coordinator, Composition Program Publications

Lynne Crockett, Instructor of English

Coordinator, Teaching Assistant Professional Development Program

Co-Director, All University Teaching Assistant Professional Development

Program

Mary Fakler, Instructor of English

Consultant, Composition Program Information Technology

Joan Perisse, Adjunct Instructor of English

Kathena Hasbrouck, Teaching Assistant in English

Ethel Wesdorp, Project Assistant, Composition Program, Department of English

Method

Soliciting ideas and recommendations from all Composition Program faculty members, the Composition Program/Freshman English Committee collaborated in writing our program assessment. (Representing our teaching faculty overall, the committee is regularly comprised of a cross-section of all ranked instructors in the Composition Program, from full professor to teaching assistant.) Modeling administrative procedures governing the Composition Program as a whole, the committee worked under the direction of Jan Schmidt, chair, holding exploratory meetings to reach consensus about our current program structure and goals. Each committee member next worked on drafting parts of the assessment document. We then shared responsibility for proofreading and formalizing the final assessment document.

Program Assessment Plan Template

Program Name: Composition Program

Department: English

Assessment Year: 2003-2004

Plan Contributors: Freshman English Committee

Step One: Who are you and how do you do what you do?

I. A. *Mission Statement: (Who are you and what do you do?)*

The mission of the Composition Program is to provide writing instruction to all incoming students: to teach students to communicate effectively, correctly, and cogently and to prompt students to gain proficiency in all aspects of the writing process. In addition, Composition I and II develop students' critical thinking and critical reading abilities and emphasize writing as a mode of discovery, inquiry, and of learning. Conceived as a workshop course, Composition I focuses on writing for different rhetorical situations and in various rhetorical modes; stresses the composing process, particularly revision; moves from expressive to expository and argumentative writing (i.e., from writing for self, to writing to convey information or to present an argumentative position to others); and concentrates on developing students' abilities to write focused, well-developed, well-organized, clear and grammatical academic essays. Designed as a freshman seminar, each section of Composition II focuses on a particular theme; stresses the development of critical thinking and reasoning; and concentrates on critical analysis and evaluation of texts, research techniques, and methods of argumentation. Both Composition I and Composition II include discussion, analysis, and interpretation of selected texts and the development of computer and information literacy and of oral presentation skills. Our Composition curriculum is designed to appeal to students diverse in age, ethnicity, and educational background and to prepare them for academic writing in other college courses.

I. B. *Scope of your program: (What are the boundaries of your program?)*

The Composition Program is responsible for a variety of courses related to the teaching of writing and writing theory. Composition I and II are required of all incoming freshmen and form the bulk of the program. The Composition Program provides selected General Honors English courses for those students with unusually strong writing abilities; and designated ESL (English as a Second Language) and SWW (Supplemental Writing Workshop) classes for those in need of additional writing assistance. The program also offers co-requisite experiences in the FIG (Freshman Interest Group) and FYI (First-Year Initiative Program), averaging four per semester. Courses in Intermediate Composition and Expository Writing further develop non-fiction writing skills for students who have already taken Freshman Composition. Outside the Composition Program, the English Department offers Theories of Writing for undergraduate and Modern Theories of Writing for graduate students but does not provide a concentration in Composition and Rhetoric in the MA program.

Enrollment during the Fall 2003 semester for Composition I was 869 and Composition II was 188, with 30 in Honors English I and 11 in Honors English II. Enrollment for Expository Writing was 95, Intermediate Composition 15, Theories of Writing 20, and Modern Theories of Writing 15. Enrollment for Spring 2004 for Composition I will be approximately 80 students; for Composition II 870 students; for Honors English II 30 students. These numbers are consistent each fall and spring semester.

The composition faculty consists of 17 teaching assistants, 22 adjuncts, and 5 full-time instructors, 2 of whom are tenured and regularly serve as Director of Writing Across the Curriculum through the University Writing Board. Composition Program faculty members participate in the coordination of the teaching assistant and adjunct development programs, providing support through regularly scheduled meetings, class observations, orientations, and bi-annual faculty retreats.

I. C. What activities/processes contribute to the program? (How do you do what you do?)

The following activities promote the learning objectives of the Program.

Students do the following:

Write in a variety of rhetorical situations and modes; develop their processes of composing:

- Complete writing assignments—required out-of-class essays (organized in terms of stages of the composing process—gathering, shaping, drafting, revising, editing, proofreading).
- Complete required in-class timed writings (e.g., mid-term examination).
- Revise drafts of assigned essays.
- Compose focused, well-organized, well-developed, and clear paragraphs and essays.
- Engage in in-class writing exercises designed to involve students in stages of the composing process (e.g., free writes, journal entries, brainstorming and clustering activities, proposals, and outlines).

Develop abilities to write grammatical, clear and cogent essays:

- Take grammar and proofreading quizzes.
- Do editing and copy editing exercises.
- Edit essays for grammatical correctness, clarity, coherence, and cogency.

Develop critical thinking and reasoning and critical reading abilities:

- Compose reader-response journals.

- Participate in collaborative learning workshops:
Do peer reviews.
Critique forms of writing.
Practice features of modes of discourse (e.g., compose a descriptive passage).
Discuss questions about selected works.
- Discuss, analyze, and interpret selected texts (literary, non-literary, visual, and sonic).
- Evaluate selected literary and non-literary texts.
- Construct and evaluate written arguments (develop a position, reasons, and evidence).
- Compose in-class writing exercises and answer discussion questions based on assigned readings.
- Hold debates.

Develop oral presentation skills:

- Develop oral presentations in expressive, informative, or argumentative modes (e.g., reading presentations, group reports on selected topics, debates, research presentations, power point presentations).
- Critique the oral discourse of members of the class.

Develop computer and information literacy skills:

- Complete a computer literacy assignment (pre- and post-test on Blackboard for the information literacy requirement).
- Complete an assigned research exercise (develop a working or annotated bibliography).
- Complete a research methods assignment (summarize, analyze, evaluate and synthesize information).
- Complete a documentation exercise (summarize, paraphrase, and quote information; follow guidelines for academic integrity governing the use of primary and secondary sources).
- Compose a research essay incorporating primary and secondary sources and MLA (Modern Language Association) documentation.

Have opportunities for public presentation of their work:

- Participate in scheduled in-class readings of work.
- Participate in regularly scheduled readings for students in the SWW Program.
- Submit work to *New Voices/New Visions: Composition at New Paltz* (an anthology of the best writing done by students in the Composition Program as judged by a committee of instructors from the Composition faculty).
- Submit work to *Fresh Perspectives* (a compilation of writing done by both ESL and SWW students).

In addition to these learning outcomes for students, an important aspect of the Composition Program is its faculty development initiative.

Faculty members do the following:

- Have background and training in the teaching of writing.
- View the teaching of writing as their primary mission.
- Engage in ongoing curriculum development at program meetings and at bi-annual retreats.
- Participate in professional activities/development/associations/conferences.
- Attend bi-annual retreats that focus on pedagogical and theoretical issues in the teaching of writing.
- Attend events sponsored by the Composition Program such as invited speakers, workshops, and Brown Bag lunches.
- Involve students in research and writing activities.
- Engage in ongoing evaluation of student writing.
- Engage in ongoing assessment of students and of the Program.
- Read and assess final Composition I portfolios.

The Teaching Assistant Professional Development Program has the following components:

- Summer orientations.
- Weekly meetings.
- Observations of classes by the Director of the TA Professional Development Program.
- Review of graded student essays.
- Peer observations.
- Faculty-mentor observations.
- Faculty mentors.
- Peer mentors.
- All-university TA professional development sessions.
- Faculty development resources (i.e., common syllabi, *Resources for the Teaching of Composition*, edited by Donna Baumler, Rachel Rigolino, and Robert Singleton).

The Adjunct Faculty Development Program has the following components:

- Monthly meetings.
- Observation of classes by the Director of the Adjunct Faculty Development Program (Coordinator or Associate Coordinator of the Composition Program, ex officio).
- Consultation with the Director of the Adjunct Faculty Development Program and the Coordinator of the Composition Program.
- Review of graded student essays.
- Opportunities to engage in pedagogical training and discussion during Brown Bag lunches.

The SWW and ESL Faculty Development Program has the following components:

- Monthly SWW meetings planned in conjunction with the Educational Opportunity Program.
- Observation of new faculty members' classes.

Step Two: Where are you heading and what performances show your progress?

II. A. *What are your priority goals for the next five years?*

1. What do you want graduates to know? Be able to do? To value?

- Write well-developed, well-organized personal, academic, and professional essays in different rhetorical situations (i.e., for different purposes, for different occasions, and for different audiences), using a variety of rhetorical modes (i.e., description, narration, exposition, and particularly argument and interpretation).
- Understand and practice composing processes (i.e., gathering, shaping, drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading) and be able to transfer these skills to effectively read and critique their own writing as well as that of others.
- Use critical thinking and reasoning skills to analyze, to infer, to synthesize, to interpret, and to evaluate effectively, including information, arguments (i.e., premise, deductive and inductive reasoning, forms of appeals, and forms of evidence), and literary works as well as to argue effectively (i.e., to develop a position, reasons, and evidence) when presenting information or analyzing and interpreting texts.
- Conduct and document research (i.e., develop a research topic and search strategy; locate, retrieve, and evaluate information sources; use general or specialized databases; use internet search engines; construct a bibliography; organize, synthesize, and evaluate information; cite information sources used in-text for summary, paraphrase, direct quotations, and ideas; follow guidelines for academic integrity governing the use of primary and secondary sources).
- Use oral presentation skills (i.e., present expressive, informative, or persuasive speeches) and critique the oral discourse of members of diverse learning communities.
- Continue the development of writing, critical thinking, critical reading, research, and speaking skills in discipline-specific classes beyond Composition I and Composition II (e.g., in a writing-intensive course in their selected majors).

- Remain conversant in new forms of texts, new technologies, new composing strategies (including those requiring computer skills), and new standards recognized in the field of Rhetoric and Composition Studies.
- Initiate reading, writing, and speaking experiences independent of course work (e.g., read self-selected works for pleasure, intellectual enrichment, or critical investigation and examination; attend, perform, or participate in public forums, such as a poetry or a fiction reading or research conference; or submit writing to campus or professional publications).

2. *What goals do you have for your program (e.g., out of class experiences, advising, curriculum, faculty development)?*

- Further develop and generate additional shared experiences for all students in the Composition Program, including summer reading, speakers' series, and special writing workshops.
- Further develop and generate additional faculty development programs, such as bi-annual all-faculty retreats, professional development workshops, brown-bag discussions, speakers' series, TA and peer-mentoring, observation of instructors, and bi-annual grading and portfolio evaluation sessions.
- Further develop established relationships with campus administration as well as with other affiliate departments, offices, and organizations on campus, including programs and initiatives with the Educational Opportunity Program, the Tutoring Center, Center for Academic Development and Learning, FIG and FYI programs, and the Honors Program.
- Further develop and generate new curricular initiatives that improve relations between the college and greater communities, including Service Learning and student-internship programs.
- Provide funding for all student enrichment, faculty development, and curricular-initiate programs.
- Provide funding for TA, adjunct, and full-time faculty to travel to and participate in professional conferences and workshops.
- Negotiate adequate release time for all administrators and program heads within the Composition Program.
- Develop and institute an MA (master's degree) program in Rhetoric and Composition Studies, including the sub-field of Technical and

Professional Writing. (Graduates of our MA in English Program regularly enroll in doctoral programs in Rhetoric and Composition Studies.)

- Hire three (or convert existing instructor lines) to five full-time, tenure-track faculty in Rhetoric and Composition Studies, including those with expertise in Technical and Professional Writing and Communication.

II. B. *What is the performance you desire to gauge your progress?*

1. *Student Learning Performances (outcomes)*

- Student Essays: Develop the abilities to write in different rhetorical situations and in a variety of modes (i.e., description, narration, exposition, and argument).
- Oral Presentations: Present ideas, concepts, and analysis via oral communication to an audience.
- Grammar and Editing Quizzes: Complete, successfully, those assignments that measure the student's ability to edit texts for correctness.
- Library Research Skills: Demonstrate the ability to use the library in the production of texts that require research.
- Technological Proficiency: Demonstrate the ability to use word processing, electronic databases, and other technological resources such as Blackboard.
- Analyses of Literary and Non-Literary Texts: Demonstrate critical thinking and critical reading skills.
- Composition I Final Portfolio: Demonstrate the ability to compile and present a collection of well-written essays.

2. *Program Performances*

- Create a diverse curriculum: a diverse range of readings, writing assignments, and in-class and out-of-class experiences, which tap into and take advantage of the rich cultural, socio-economic, and ethnic diversity of our school.
- Expose students to a diverse range of literary traditions and texts.
- Engage students in out-of-class experiences (e.g., service learning, wilderness learning, and connected peer-review networks).
- Guide every student in Composition I to complete a writing portfolio.
- Publish exemplary student writing (e.g., *New Voices/New Visions* and *Fresh Perspectives*).
- Prompt the creation of effective writing by our students as defined in our Composition Program Handbook.
- Encourage the development of exemplary student writing in a variety of genres.
- Effectively engage students in all aspects of required course components, including timed and revised writing, oral presentations, library research, and journal writing.
- Encourage students to view writing as a mode of inquiry and learning.
- Assist students in becoming empowered and confident as writers.

D. *What additional resources will you need to complete your plan?*

We will need additional resources to complete the following:

- Continued financial support for graders for portfolio assessment (ongoing fall semesters).
- Financial support for evaluators to review sample Composition II portfolios—Summers 2004/2005.
- Financial support to train faculty members to conduct focus groups and to interview students--graduates of the Composition Program—Spring 2005.
- Additional tenure-line specialists in Composition and Rhetoric to ensure stability of the Composition Program and continuity of the assessment process.