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# Come On In, The Writing's Fine: Preserving Voice and Generating Enthusiasm in My English 100 Syllabus

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COME ON IN THE WRITING'S FINE:  
PRESERVING VOICE AND GENERATING ENTHUSIASM WITH MY  
ENGLISH 100 SYLLABUS

A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of English  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

By  
Elisa Leah Berry

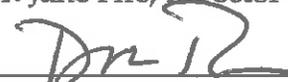
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ENGLISH 100 SYLLABUS

Date Recommended 11/11/2014



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Date

I dedicate this tome to my grandmother, Marjorie June Wolfe Levine, who started me down this rabbit hole many years ago. I've been curiouser and curiouser ever since.

*In a Wonderland they lie,  
Dreaming as the days go by,  
Dreaming as the Summers die.*

*Ever drifting down the stream –  
Lingering in the golden gleam –  
Life, what is it but a dream?*

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COME ON IN THE WRITING'S FINE:  
PRESERVING VOICE AND GENERATING ENTHUSIASM WITH MY  
ENGLISH 100 SYLLABUS

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Directed by: Jane Fife, Dale Rigby, and Christopher Lewis

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This thesis explores the potential for creating a composition syllabus that presents a model of good writing, is an enthusiastic invitation to the discipline, and provides a clear roadmap to success, not only for the course, but also for the students' college career. This is especially useful for an increasingly diverse student community that arrives to college with a varying knowledge of the academic institution, with its specialized language and systems. The project explores the existing research on syllabus crafting, uses current composition studies and a survey of English 100 students to interrogate the rhetorical situation of the author's own syllabus, and finally reflects upon a section-by-section revision of that syllabus. With a present and positive voice from the teacher that includes students in the process of their own learning, a dynamic composition syllabus can initiate trusting relationships in the classroom, and support greater success for the students.

## Introduction

The course syllabus, a document that tends to be part personalized instructor expectations, and part institutional policies, provides students their first glimpse into their new classes, and serves as the teacher's first impression. With the increasingly digitalized dissemination of course documents, students very often have access to the syllabus before the first day of class, resulting in an impression that stands on its own well before any face-to-face contact. And yet, as I reflect upon the totality of my graduate school education in becoming a writing instructor, no discussion was really devoted to crafting my syllabus—other than the required inclusion of aforementioned institutional policies—or using the syllabus as a rhetorical device. When the time came to teach my own classes, I did what many of my peers were doing; I looked at other syllabi, the department's guidelines, and created a document that was perfectly fine, and certainly correct. But I never felt satisfied or confident in it. Like Jane Tompkins in "Pedagogy of the Distressed," I cobbled together a syllabus, "by hook or by crook" (658). And so, how better to finish my graduate school career than with a gaze toward beginnings, and do a full study of my own syllabus.

I aim to use this opportunity as a reflective exercise to examine, investigate, deconstruct, and ultimately reconstruct, my own first year writing syllabus, creating a student-centered document that not only serves them as a first impression of me and to the class, but also jump starts the creation of classroom relationships, creating an atmosphere where good writing is born.

Here's the thing: a syllabus for a composition class should be three things that it too often currently isn't – a model of good writing (including being interesting!), a working document that sets an *encouraging* tone for the course, as well as functioning as a *positive* invitation to the discipline, and a text that fosters college inclusivity and supports a clear roadmap to success. For, I want to take my teaching beyond clarity and comprehensiveness, to cajole keenness, create collaboration, and get in cahoots with my students. It's a tall order, there's no time to waste, and the syllabus has got to start the ball rolling.

Why place this much scrutiny on my syllabus, you may ask? I mean, there is a downloadable version, ripe for the picking in our general education guidelines manual, very easily customizable to each instructor and their class. Indeed, that template syllabus includes required material – an issue I shall address and even embrace – in the coming syllabus analysis. And sure, haunting my efforts are the great volumes of complaints lamenting students' semester long ignorance of material that's, "In. The. Syllabus." And yet in their book, *Teaching College Freshmen*, Erickson and Strommer note that one of the top three responses students give to the query of what might have better helped them was, "provide a better syllabus" (81). They are out there! If I hope, dream, and pray that my students will not file their syllabus away after day two of class and then proceed to ask me questions throughout the semester – the answers to which lie lurking within the dusty pages of said syllabus – it seems appropriate that I put forth a great effort that matches the expectations I have of my readers.

With so much riding on a single document, it is surprising that in the vast sea of composition publications, there is relatively little research or theory focused specifically on syllabi. The authors of, “The Syllabus as a Tool for Student-Centered Learning,” written in 2001, devote a significant section of their article to addressing the lack of research in syllabus crafting, even as its position in the classroom has taken on greater importance in the last thirty years, evolving from simply a course outline to a complex communication device and institutionally binding contract (Eberly 58). Indeed, Eberly et al. find that W.J. McKeachie, author of *Teaching Tips: A Guidebook for the Beginning College Teacher*, the very educator they cite in stressing the increasing importance and “changing perception of the syllabus” (58), devotes only three pages of his book to syllabus development. And while academic consensus recognizes the increasingly prominent rhetorical role the syllabus holds, “the structures and formats of written syllabi tend to be handed down from one generation to the next, rarely considered as part of curriculum redesign” (56).

In their review, Eberly et al. cite one book devoted completely to syllabus design: *The Course Syllabus: A Learning Centered Approach*, written by Judith Grunert O’Brien in 1997 and revised in 2008. They state that it is the only full length book on the subject (59), and I have found none written since. There does seem to be an increase of articles written from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, but then again it drops off; in my research I failed to find analysis devoted specifically to syllabus design published after 2009. Many of these articles

heavily reference the O'Brien text, illustrating both the desire for a dialogue around syllabus design, and the limited support material available.

I too have found O'Brien's book invaluable to my analysis. The book is comprised of three sections: "Focus on Learning," a section that "reflects on the implications of the learning context and adopting a focus on learning" (xiv) that is collaborative and student-centered; "Examples," which includes excerpts from other syllabi, and general suggestions section by section; and "Suggested Reading," a bibliography of works including a wide array of texts on areas such as collaborative learning, critical thinking and assessment. O'Brien's book deeply informs my second chapter, where I do the actual revision of and reflection on my working syllabus.

The congregation of articles focused specifically on syllabi comprise a significant portion of support for my own analysis. They essentially back up, and give more pedagogical force to some methods I was already tinkering with as a new teacher, giving fuel to my fire, as it were. With some exceptions, they tend to fall in three categories: a descriptive study of a collected number of syllabi, usually within the author's institution or discipline in an effort to identify trends or deficiencies; analysis oriented from a pedagogical viewpoint, beginning with appeals to that theory, and then concluding with applications and/or recommendations; and articles focused on syllabus self-analysis.

The Eberly article is a part of the first group, focusing their study on quantifying what was presently included in 145 general education syllabi across

three disciplines at Oakland University in 1997-98 academic year (61). Certain revealed exclusions, such as the low number of syllabi in which the instructor included their email address (only 25%), led the authors to hypothesize that while communication methods were rapidly changing due to increased use of technology, the tendency to duplicate, rather than revise syllabi from year-to-year, means that instructors may be slow to adapt to important changes in the teaching-learning exchange (68-9).

Another worthwhile study, Darlene Habanek's "An Examination of the Integrity of the Syllabus," approached it more subjectively. Her analysis of twenty-five syllabi does include collation of content inclusion, but her focus is oriented towards language that models enthusiasm, resulting in a more holistic analysis. Conversely, but equally intriguing, is Diann L. Baecker's "Uncovering the Rhetoric of the Syllabus: The Case of the Missing I," which analyzes fifteen syllabi for pronoun usage and discusses how that relates to power exchange in the texts. This inspired me to conduct a pronoun analysis of my own syllabus, which is included in chapter one, and led to some good introspective re-visioning.

The articles that analyze and suggest best practices in syllabi were all published in the same journal over a ten-year span: *College Teaching*. These pieces, "Designing a Great Syllabus" by Matjeka and Kurke (1994), "Preparing an Effective Syllabus" by Slattery and Carlson (2005), and "The Purposes of a Syllabus" by Parkes and Harris (2002), with some nuance, tend to agree on the

major roles a syllabus plays in a class, and how it can better meet those undertakings. There is consensus that the syllabus serves as a contract – in some capacity – between the student, the instructor, and the institution. They also tend to agree that the syllabus is a communication device, delivering important information to the student about assignments, due dates, policies, and grading rubrics. These elements are viewed as standard, and regarded as necessary aspects of a good and complete syllabus.

Also in consensus, is that the syllabus should become a learning resource for students to use throughout the semester, and a text that can encourage and motivate the student. Matejka and Kurke suggest accomplishing this by adopting an informal voice that conveys a friendly tone, even if only as a positive closing note (117). Similarly, Slattery and Carlson report that recent conference presentations suggest that students remember information better when the instructor anticipates “positive student outcomes, rather than merely attempting to prevent problems” (159), explaining their expectations in a friendly manner.

Parkes and Harris also champion developing the syllabus as a learning tool, but they focus on the content, rather than the language employed. They suggest adding less traditional sections such as “informing students about the instructor’s philosophical beliefs” (58), a rationale for the course, and including resource tools and study habit advice. They also examine the potential of using each section as an opportunity to educate the student, such as including within the plagiarism section why academic dishonesty is problematic. Though different

from the other two articles, the mission is the same: to invite the student into the discipline.

Like Parkes and Harris, Terrance Collins calls for writing syllabi with an eye to inclusivity. A first generation college student himself, he reminds us that for many of our students, college is a foreign land, with its own mores and terminology that we “have been quietly socialized [to] by extended stays in college, then graduate school” (79), not recognizing that they do not yet speak its language. The academy, a world that’s “a bit of the monastery, a tinge of the jet set, a piece of the marketplace, a dollop of politics, a touch of the shopping mall” (80) is a closed system, and newcomers neither understand nor value it in the beginning. The syllabus can be a crucial first document that can help these students navigate their first days, weeks, and semesters in strange new world. I will be using Collins’ insightful piece in both of the following chapters to first, discuss inclusivity and then to invigorate my own syllabus. It’s pretty much my favorite text.

Articles that examine the author’s own syllabus report various techniques to achieve similar ends. Making rationale explicit, inviting students to have a say in the curriculum, employing informal language—these are all features of publications on personal syllabus revision. Suzanne Hudd explores collaborative learning in her syllabus construction; she distributes a skeletal work-in-progress syllabus on the first day of class, and tells her students that their first job is to create the assignments for the semester (196). As a sociology instructor, much of

what she does is not directly applicable to the composition classroom, but her method of engaging students in their own learning is inspiring, and generates ideas.

Other self-analysis articles such as Keith Dorwick's "The Last Bastion: Student Self-Determination and the Making of a Syllabus," and Todd Estes' "Constructing the Syllabus: Devising a Framework for Helping Students Learn to Think Like Historians" yield some beneficial support to my own re-visioning. Like Hudd, Dorwick is another proponent of getting students involved in the curriculum, reflecting "student self-determination opens up a class in a way I had not experienced before in my teaching" (2). And Estes has made a great project of his own syllabus, positioning his syllabus as an inviting gatekeeper to his discipline, "giving students a tone, an approach, a way to think about the work we do as historians that will stay with them long after they leave my classes" (195). Their own self reflections impacted chapter two sections about student reading and assignments.

The piece that most similarly aligns with my own project is Roxanne Cullen's introspective essay, "No Ordinary Syllabus." An English professor writing in 2004, Dr. Cullen shares her experience applying learning centered practices to her syllabus in an effort to align it with her curricular goals (1). Her target areas were: community building, renegotiating power, and making assessment explicit (Cullen 2). As a closing assignment to a deliberative first week, Cullen makes the classes' contribution to the syllabus construction the

prompt for the students' first essay. Her distinction "between assessment as ongoing formative feedback that goes both ways, . . . and evaluation, the measure I use to determine if students have met the learning outcomes" (2) promotes inclusivity and highlights writing as a process. She notes that in part she felt her "work was being evaluated by them" (2) by extending the project of shared control into this first writing assignment. I like doing an early in-class diagnostic essay, though I wasn't satisfied with my previous prompts. Adopting Hudd and Cullen's syllabus tinkering could elevate the merit of a reflective diagnostic essay.

The theorists and educators that informed my project in a more holistic sense include Ken Bain and his *What the Best College Teachers Do*. His discussions around challenging students, respecting students, and most importantly, trusting students both supports and motivated my desire to make my syllabus a document that meets and exceeds the standard. His text also reinforces my positions on assessment, particularly in allowing students to make mistakes without great penalty in the early stages of their writing. Rather than having any specific recommendations or theories, Bain speaks to a positive approach, and friendly style that "avoid[s] the language of demands and use[s] the vocabulary of promises" (37), allying himself with Matejka/Kurke and Slattery/Carlson articles. His book adopts a narrative style, but does reflect fifteen years of researching teachers, and his resulting optimism provides a good back up to the deeper research I found in shorter form.

A reading of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* helps to address problematic established norms in the traditional syllabus that are formal and institutional. It feels unnecessary to explain too deeply the premise of Freire's seminal pedagogical text, regarding the traditional "banking model" of education, with the authoritarian teacher as depositor, and the student a meek receptacle. The receptacle, once filled, becomes integrated into the structure – the student, once oppressed, now an oppressor, a depositor, a vanguard for dominant society (Freire 74). Not only does this eliminate the potential of what the student may bring to the classroom, it eschews any need for the teacher to have transformative experiences to the result of becoming a better educator.

For the purposes of my project – building a happy little syllabus that rewards, encourages, and invites – I need to highlight the revolutionary approach in Freire's work: his theory of *conscientizacao*, or critical consciousness. The first critical element to critical consciousness is that students are not outsiders to be folded into a dominant structure: "the solution is not to 'integrate' them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become 'beings for themselves'" (Freire 74). To achieve this a democratizing process must occur, where the teachers become students (teacher-student) and the students become teachers (students-teachers), which can then create relationships that foster "authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality [and] does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication" (Freire 79).

Now, within a dialectic between teacher-student and students-teachers, where one is not seeking to incorporate the other, the deposit model of education is replaced with problem posing education, and “people develop their power to perceive critically the *way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world, not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (Freire 83). The students-teachers become a part of that ever evolving transformation. A syllabus that represents this kind of educational model, should use language that deciphers the terminologies of unknown systems, and invites a relationship with encouraging language. However, it renders authority ambiguous, and doesn’t fully reconcile how to help a student succeed in a system that will continue to exert authority as they go forward in their college career.

Freire’s emphasis on dialogue as a “means to critical consciousness because it requires a horizontal relationship between persons” (Gale 24) provides a framework for Xin Liu Gale’s book *Teachers, Discourses and Authority in the Postmodern Composition Classroom*, which offers a new paradigm to classroom authority, suggesting that by utilizing power relationships, rather than obscuring them, teachers have the ability to turn “constraints of discourse, authority, and institutional practices into creative and enabling power” (6). Gale recognizes that in the traditional hierarchy (institution-teacher-student), the student sits at the bottom (55). Within this hierarchy, a student’s only recourse for resistance is doing poorly in their classes or leaving the university entirely. It’s an attempt to

correct this, she postulates, that brought about the pedagogical theories like expressivism, cognitivism, and social constructionism that seek to “down play or even eradicate institutional authorities” (55). However, by making authority invisible, these theories, like Freire’s, make authority ambiguous, and thereby dangerous. It’s impossible to remove authority from the classroom, and inadvisable. Regardless of efforts to design a composition curriculum in which they function more as guide than guru, the power dynamics in a classroom will always center around the teacher.

Gale employs the notions of Richard Rorty in his book, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* to construct a two level interaction model for composition teachers. At the core, is what Rorty defines as normal and abnormal discourse: “Normal discourse . . . is any discourse (scientific, political, theological, or whatever) which embodies agreed-upon criteria for reaching agreement; abnormal discourse is any which lacks such criteria” (qtd. in Gale 68). Gale expands and applies these concepts by first illustrating that academic speak is the normal or dominant discourse. She then advises that teachers speak to their students, in what she defines as Responsive Abnormal Discourse, a voluntary discourse defined by its interaction with the dominant discourse. Not only is it voluntary, it is rebellious, in that engaging with students in abnormal discourse is a rejection of normal discourse, even while it is dependent upon the “normal discourse for its creation and existence” (Gale 80). Responsive Abnormal Discourse is characterized by its familiarity with the dominant, but also by its

conscious rejection of it, in order to better communicate with nonresponsive speakers. Students speak Nonresponsive Abnormal Discourse, an involuntary discourse that exists “innocently, aware of the latter’s awesome presence and power, but unaware of its content and secrets” (80).

Educators who wrestle with the authoritarian component of their role, who make it explicit to their students, using it as a positive force in a democratic classroom by speaking with their students in abnormal discourse – Gale calls these people edifying teachers (69). Edifying teachers view normal discourse with a critical mind and consequently teach their students both how to interact in that dominant discourse, but also to be critical of it. This is the two levels of interaction that the teacher negotiates. While at the same time familiarizing students with the “norms, conventions, ideologies, and major concerns of normal discourse” (Gale 80), she “keeps a watchful eye on normal discourse’s authority lest it become silencing” (118), essentially reconciling a nuanced methodology to Freire's ideology. Gale’s framework deepens the discussion of inclusivity in the language of my syllabus (engaging in abnormal discourse to draw students into the language of the institution), and the balance I seek of a friendly tone that also conveys clear boundaries and expectations.

I have divided the following study into two chapters. The first will deal with my major goals of what I want my syllabus to be: an encouraging invitation to my class and composition studies, employing friendly, informal language; a document that strives to be inclusive to all students by being explicit in language

and definition; and a piece of good writing, including employing interesting words and ideas, giving credit where it is due, modeling format and style techniques, and providing clear information. This chapter also addresses what the *students* want the syllabus to be – by exploring the results of a survey I conducted in several English 100 classes, in the early part of the Spring 2016 semester with roughly ninety students. With our viewpoints in collaboration, I will then use the second chapter to revise my syllabus, with analysis and reflections within each significant section.

## **Chapter One: Building a Better Syllabus - Objectives**

In this chapter I will illustrate some of the more interesting approaches to crafting a composition syllabus, approaches that challenge its low ranking status as a prescribed and prescriptive text, and discuss how, exactly, I would like to move beyond that, to a more responsive and elaborate introduction to our discipline. As customarily conceived, syllabi have serious obfuscating potential, speaking for dominant discourses (Gale 72) (instead of for and to our students) to implement institutional objectives. While its status in the classroom is ever-shifting (Eberly 58), this very potentiality creates a space to explore how our syllabi are currently received, and how they might become a more integrated and useful part of the curriculum. By scrutinizing how we think about, write about, and use our course syllabi, we can contribute to our students' recognition of writing as an act of citizenship. If, as Paulo Freire demands, teaching is a political act (66), then it is imperative that the most complete and complex example of our own writing that we will give our students evolves into an emboldening manifesto.

### **Once Upon a Tone: Presenting Positivity, and Pronouns**

As I established in the introduction, an often overlooked potential of the syllabus is as a positive introduction to the discipline, course, and instructor. In their descriptive study of general education syllabi at Oakland University, Eberly et al note in their rationale that in addition to providing specific information for the course, "students' first impressions of the *interpersonal* aspects of the

classroom are derived from the syllabus and its presentation” (emphasis mine) (59). I certainly found that in my own teaching, diagnostic writing assignments revealed a dominant feeling of dread towards English classes amongst my students. So a first impression that seeks to quell a few fears and create a feeling of camaraderie can be very useful for first year composition students’ success. In a study wherein political science professors John Ishiyama and Stephen Hartlub had students read and assess their impressions of both “rewarding” and “punishing” style syllabi, they found that “the most affected by the working of the syllabus were the first and second year students,” (569) who were much more likely to seek help from their teachers if the syllabus used the rewarding approach in their requirements. For example, crafting an attendance policy that allows students to earn points for good attendance, rather than penalizes them for bad attendance, while having the same impact on the student’s grade, has a vastly different impact on their impression of the teacher (568). There was a real wow factor for me upon reading this, and I immediately started looking throughout my syllabus to see where I could make these transformations.

In addition to rewarding policies, how those policies are conveyed can really impact how students perceive the course. Similar to the trend in moving away from jargony, objective prose in essay writing, a more informal approach where the author/teacher is present in the writing seems perfectly appropriate. Ken Matejka and Lance Burke, business and law professors, respectively, warn that an “unimaginative, ‘cold’ syllabus is usually a precursor of a boring class”

(116). They even cajole the readers of their article on syllabus design to “lighten up!” (116). Now, if educators in these typically more rigid disciplines can do this, certainly we literature, composition, and creative *writers* can do it too. This typically comes easy to me in my own writing; however, in looking over my syllabus, I realized that occasions when my voice came through were random and rare. Going forward, I’ll be making an effort to approach syllabus writing the way I do any other piece: with fun, and appealing to my own informal sense of academic style.

A positive, learning centered syllabus that establishes an enthusiastic approach to the course is a document that Ken Bain refers to as a “promising syllabus” (74). His “best teachers” tend to emphasize trust, rejection of power, and authentic goals, rather than specific schoolwork assignments for their invitation to the course. Upon scanning the learning objectives, course description, and instructor information, students see “promises or opportunities . . . offered to the students,” which presents like an “invitation to a feast” (75) and engages the students in optimism towards the course.

Now, of course Bain is mainly addressing the content in the syllabus, but this also made me think about presentation. In the initial drafts of my syllabus, there is a lot of all caps, bold font, and underlining – and these were almost always to make admonitions more visible, like the instances when I will not accept late work, and my no cell phone policy. Why did I do that? I was emphasizing what I **DO NOT** want them to do, and what I **WILL NOT** accept,

rather than what they *can do* to succeed, and I *will do* to help them achieve it. Of course, we do this because we want our students to see these boundaries before they push up against them, but if I put enough energy and class time into getting them to read it by making it informal, engaging, and creating assignments that require them to read it fully, I really shouldn't need to do that. An invitation to a feast filled with promise, and asking students to trust me should not look like a **DANGER!** sign. So, not only am I changing the way I emphasize – replacing bold and capitalized font with italics and asterisks – I am also changing what I highlight to emphasize positive opportunities for success.

Further micro-examination of my language led me to Baecker's article on pronoun choices in syllabus design. In, "Uncovering the Rhetoric of the Syllabus: The Case of the Missing I," she examined fifteen English composition syllabi, focusing her study on pronoun usage in order to glean clues about how power and authority are negotiated in the classroom. Syllabi are complicated contracts in which "so many of us try to establish solidarity with our students even as we demarcate lines of authority" (61) and often result in contradictory tones. And truly – as illuminated in the Habanek study – of the twenty-five syllabi studied, those that model enthusiasm for the course were rarest:

Three of the syllabi included language that modeled enthusiasm for course content and/or addressed collaboration between instructor and student around learning throughout the semester. Twenty-two modeled no enthusiasm or collaboration. Overall, eight syllabi

included many rule-oriented details, three were unorganized and hard to follow, and three were conversational in tone and conveyed a positive attitude. (Baecker 63)

And while this may be an unintentional result of crafting a document designed to convey requirements and expectations (O'Brien 77), paying careful attention to language usage can prevent these necessary boundaries from negatively impacting student's inclinations and the tenor of the class (Collins 100-1).

Most educators are to some degree influenced by Paulo Freire's concepts of power/authority issues in the classroom, and Baecker observes a similar difficulty I discussed in the introduction in "coming to terms with the problems inherent in applying Freireian pedagogy in an institutional setting" (58). Considering these complexities, she is concerned that "probably no other contract we will ever encounter is drafted with so little attention paid to the language" (61). This is particularly pertinent to my project; the most challenging aspect of balancing authority in the classroom occurs with syllabus crafting. It is a document filled with expectations and requirements, delivered before any establishment of personal relationship. Therefore, how I deliver the coursework information, is at least equally important as what information I deliver.

Baecker focuses her study on the use of *I*, *you*, and *we*--calculating their percentages within each document, and then pulling back to look at how those differing percentages relate to and affect the rhetorical atmosphere of each text. In her pronoun usage calculations, Baecker finds that "*you*, by far was the most

frequently used pronoun in the syllabus" (58). This is unsurprising, given that the text is focused on the reader and how they will be expected to perform in the class. She also notes the overall lacking presence of *I*, and how quite often *we* is substituted for the other two, in a way that can be obscuring and coercive. The purpose of what she calls the "false", or "academic" *we* is as a "rhetorical device that allows the speaker(s) to distance themselves from whatever is being said, thus making it more palatable because it appears to come from the group as a whole" (59). Basically, *we* can be used to honestly explain aspects of the class where the instructor and the students will be engaging in the curriculum together: "we will work together as you work through the writing process" but is also often employed to blur sites of responsibility: "*we* will develop habits of thinking" (60). But, of course, the instructor has already developed these habits and skills. What Baecker implies, is that the false *we* is most often used in place of *you*, to obscure the students' work load and responsibility for their own performance, and to create a false sense of community. While well intentioned, it obscures the truth that the student will be the true arbiter of their own success, even while the instructor is the guide to it.

This is not to say that Baecker advocates for the removal of *wes* from our syllabi, but rather that we explore the authenticity of them. Her focus is really more on the use of *I*, and she finds that the more *I* is used, the more the instructor claims authority in the classroom for himself. For example, the syllabus in her study containing the highest *I* to *we* ratio, is also full of *nevers*, *musts*, and *no*

*exceptions*. In this particular syllabus, more than any, Baecker states, “lines of authority and power are well defined. He makes clear how *I* will determine *your* grade and what policies *I* expect *you* to follow” (61). Not only is the authority defined, it is claimed by the instructor, and rarely shared. He makes the determinations and policies, and the students are expected to follow them. The language used here neither creates a feeling of community, nor invites the students to participate in creating a path to their own success, other than by following a path already meted out to them.

Conversely, the syllabus with the highest *we* to *I* ratio takes an opposite rhetorical tone, seeking to “establish community with his students by diminishing his own authority (61). Notably this is also the syllabus that has the most authentic, rather than false *wes*. A prominently placed quote from this syllabus exemplifies his tone well: “*I* intend this syllabus to offer only the barest skeleton of this semester because *I*, like *you*, am open to discussion. *You* have *your* expectations; *I* have *mine*. *We* will determine the finer points of this semester together” (61). All the pronouns used refer to a concrete individual or group: the instructor, the students, the classroom as a whole. The language is plain, clear, and invokes the beginning of a relationship between real people. It also invites the students inside the course crafting process, presenting the syllabus as a jumping off point, from which they will go forward together. The result is that the responsibility for the success of the class is shared honestly. It’s nice. Baecker

concludes by imploring instructors to recover the *I* in their dialogue, and I accept, wanting to make myself more present in my syllabus.

The logical next step for me was to investigate my own language as it relates to pronouns. In my previously existing syllabus, I had a whole lot more *yous* than anything. I also had several sections where pronoun usage was artificially absent, resulting in discussing students in the third person; using articles in place of pronouns. In total, not including the required portions of the syllabus cut and pasted from the general education guidelines (sections not written by me), I had 73 *yous*, 18 *Is*, and 8 *wes*. I had only one false *we*, in the plagiarism section: "*we* will learn to quote, paraphrase, and properly cite sources in this class (Appendix A)." This certainly smacks of Baecker's assertion that the false *we* acts as a misdirect when asserting authority, and attempts to cajole the students into a false sense of community with the instructor (59). In revision, I have made explicit our distinct roles--what the student will be doing: "*You* will learn how to do this," and what my role will be: "*I* will help you along the way."

I found myself initially making the addition of honest *wes* the main goal. Certainly engendering community is one of my top priorities, but I found that there actually were not many occasions to naturally include more than the original version. And while frequent users of *Is* in Baecker's article were the most authoritarian, my *Is* often function to make my presence explicit and personal: "I invite you to call me by my first name," "I am happy to consult with you." Upon examination of my power signifying *Is*, I decided to keep them--I think they are

used judiciously and couched with encouraging language throughout. The largest example is in my cell phone policy, which has a whopping eight *Is*:

*I hope you will discover my general easy going nature as we get to know each other. However, one thing I just have to be rigid about is cell phones. If I see a cell phone in use, I will (without mentioning it) mentally remove you from class and you will receive no participation grade for that day, as well as a partial attendance deduction. Essentially, I do not have the stomach to physically kick you out, but in my mind you will have gotten up and left class the second I see you messing with your phone. Look, I have a pretty compelling social life too, but if I can wait until class is over to engage in it--so can you.*

It's pretty clear here that my *Is* impose authority. I am constantly interrogating authority in the classroom; my overt use tends to be wry and rare. That infrequency lends impact to the moments when I draw boundary lines. Also, notice that not all the *Is* are rule enforcing. The first and last two in the paragraph are humanizing *Is*, which bookend the interior message. And it proved highly effective; with very rare exceptions, I didn't see cell phones in my classes. I'm keeping it.

Some authority is necessarily appropriate in the classroom relationship between instructor and students; therefore, it has a place in the syllabus. And it's an extremely dynamic area of renegotiation in radical pedagogy. Xin Liu Gale reports that in the chronological trajectory of composition pedagogies, as

constructionists and expressivist theories became the trend, the teacher's role became increasingly uncertain and in some circumstances invisible to the point that they fail to "explain why the teacher should still exist given that writing is unteachable" (29). These two prevailing theories, which form the foundation of process writing, re-form the teacher into what looks more like a summer camp counselor. Even Lad Tobin, a vocal and well published scholar in the areas of process pedagogy, has recognized the complex and as yet unsatisfactorily determined role authority plays in writing instructors approaches (Tobin 338-9).

Expressivism, Gale explains, "errs in its downright denial of the teacher's authority in the classroom" (29). And constructionism, though challenging the assumption of the teachers as "truth holder" (Gale 30), and emphasizing student authority through group work and peer review, reinforces that very authority by privileging academic discourse, which students are compelled to master, if they want to succeed in the course (31). And while Tobin does call for a redefinition in the writing teacher's role, he also views a rhetorical rejection of all authority an act of denial, and a renegeing of responsibility: "we hold so much power . . . we are largely responsible for success and, even worse, failure" (Tobin 338). Like the false *we*, rejection of authority is inauthentic--though these teachers may call themselves facilitators or collaborators, even in the most de-centered classroom, the teacher is still the focus point for the students, and our authority is secured by the academic community. Better to redefine it than try to get rid of it.

Revisiting Baecker's article, I noted her conclusion: "A balanced syllabus is not one in which power is shared, but rather one in which power is made explicit . . . *Wes* are relatively rare in such a syllabus, as they tend to be in the classroom, while *Is* appear only slightly less frequently than *yous*. In short, pronoun usage in the syllabus mirror actual power relationships in the classroom, where the bulk of the work falls on the student but the teacher retains the gatekeeper role" (60). In the end, I was pretty happy with my pronoun usage, and if anything I'm using more *Is*. The result is that I got rid of all third person generalities, as I found them just as inauthentic as Baecker's false *wes*. I gained a lasting awareness around some aspects of language in my syllabus, which has had a positive effect, not just in the revision of the existing draft, but in the reconstruction of it going forward. I may not agree with everything Baecker found or extrapolated from her analysis, particularly in the relationship of authority and the use of *I*, but the meditation on it was highly useful.

### **Strangers in a Strange Land: Using the Syllabus to Achieve Inclusivity**

While diversity in college classrooms has been increasing for a solid generation now, sideline groups – such as first generation students, non-traditional students, international students, and students with "minority" status – still experience roadblocks to their education. One of the ways teachers can make bridges out of these roadblocks, is through an infusion of inclusive language in our syllabus design. For the purposes of re-visioning my own syllabus, I am using the word inclusive the way Terrance Collins does in his

chapter, "For Openers...An Inclusive Course Syllabus," wherein he discusses strategies to make explicit the closed systems and language of academic institutions.

Many students come into college with no previous experience with the mores of higher education, a system that educators have mostly internalized throughout our years in college, graduate school, and years teaching (Collins 79). For many students though, this closed system can quickly make them feel like outsiders, and this has a huge impact of their ability and desire to succeed. Course syllabi, and I think most especially a first-year composition syllabus, can transform students' conception of themselves in relation to the academic community, so that they quickly feel a part of it.

This means taking nothing for granted. There is so much assumed knowledge in a syllabus, that everything is an opportunity to open a door, and make something closed explicit. As a non-traditional student myself, who entered college after dropping out of high school and getting a GED, I approached teaching with a vision of myself as a guide from the beginning. In the classroom I tend to take any opportunity to both explain rationales for what I'm lecturing, assigning, asking them to do, and help my students understand what their other teachers expect from them, both current and in the coming semesters. This can range from big issues like paying attention to the differing writing styles that various professors might want from them, to little nuances that will help them make good impressions such as knowing the difference

between instructors and professors, and the appropriate honorifics to call them. Integrating this approach into my syllabus design is a natural extension of what I already bring into the classroom. If I am a guide in their college experience, my syllabus can be also serve as a reference manual for this new world they have entered.

### **Modeling Good Writing**

While most first-year composition classes use readings – issues based, craft based, theme based – to generate ideas and model good writing approaches, the only fully formed piece of writing the students may see authored by their teacher is their syllabus. Therefore, it just makes sense to me that a composition teacher would want to present their students with a text that models all the elements that make for good writing; clear, correct, organized – but also interesting, unique, and with a good sense of audience.

This is the area where I have found the least discussion, and other than researchers giving brief concluding advice that syllabi can model writing by being “clearly written, organized, helpful, appropriately humorous, thoughtful, and perfect in style and grammar (Parkes 58), or that “good syllabi make good reading” (Erickson 86), I really feel like I’m on my own here in my attempt to transform my syllabus to mimic the style and form of an essay, while still delivering the appropriate content and mood.

### **Subject to Change: Students Have Their Say**

Having researched and reflected on my own objectives of what a syllabus could be, I thought I should then consult my audience. During the Spring 2016 semester, I conducted a brief survey in several English 100 classes on the Western Kentucky University campus. The survey, as given, is included in the appendix. I kept it short: three objective questions about how they currently use their syllabi, and two open ended, that asked for further thoughts, and suggestions for areas of improvement from the students. I conducted this study in the third week of classes, after the students had begun to settle into the regular rhythm of the semester. My hope is that they would have read, and utilized, their syllabi at this point, and might have some insight into its strengths and weaknesses.

Of the three objective questions that I asked, there were two areas where the students had the most unified opinions. The first concerns what the students consider to be the most important information in the syllabus. Whether they expect to consult their syllabus weekly, or just a couple times during the semester, students cited assignment descriptions and due dates to be the information they zeroed in on. Of ninety-one students surveyed, sixty-three chose them as the most interesting/engaging sections of their syllabus. Many students reiterated this in the last question, which invited their comments. Some expressed desire for more explicit expectations in these areas: "I like how some professors write in descriptions of big assignments so I feel prepared" and "I love having due dates on the syllabus. I like to look at them and write them in my planner." This second student also answered the question of what she wishes

her syllabus had: "I wish there was a course schedule that was easier for me to follow." These students also tended to be ones with a history of higher grades in their previous English classes. For them, organization is key; they want to be able to map out the full load of their semester with clear expectations, balancing their time between all their classes.

As a beginning teacher, I have found the course schedule one of the most challenging sections to craft. I am still unsure how much or little I will be able to cover in a fifty-five or eighty-minute class period. I have also observed in the syllabi of even the most seasoned comp instructors, that this is the section most cobbled together, most loosey-goosey and vague. It's understandable: idea generating, discussion-based classes take on lives of their own, and two are never the same. Crafting these classes is a creative endeavor, and it feels artificial to constrain their developmental stages to specific dates. And yet, what these students want is not inappropriate or too much to ask for. As I embark upon my third time around teaching English 100, I have been able to identify what did and did not work concerning due dates for the formal essays. I have made these the major landmarks in my schedule, and as I develop more experience, this will be an area of concentration for future re-visioning.

The second overwhelming response deals with a question concerning emotional experience. I asked the students how the syllabus made them "feel." On a spectrum of feeling excited, somewhat nervous, defeated, or nothing about the course after reading the syllabus, most students felt a little nervous or

nothing at all. Of the ninety-one students, forty-two said they felt nothing, and thirty said they felt nervous after reading the syllabus. Only six students said that the syllabus contributed to their class experience by getting them excited about the course. The first day of class is a sink or swim moment for student enthusiasm. Even more so during the first semester of college, a time when students often take their first-year composition class. College is more than ever a pathway to career, and students are so goal oriented, as seen by their focus on due dates and grades, that it is up to instructors to shake things up a bit and get them interested, maybe even excited about writing. Our own writing is the first step in that process. Aside from essay prompts and assessment annotations, the syllabus is the *only* full piece of our writing that our students may see. It better be good.

I also found some trends in my final question, "What information, explanation, and/or resources would be helpful to add to your syllabus?" Certainly, many responses supported the earlier objective responses, "Take out all the extra stuff, leaving only the important thing(s) i.e. schedule, grading scale, materials etc.," and ". . . the only thing I care about is schedule, points, and absent policy." These comprised the most students, with sixteen students mentioning schedule, due dates or assignment descriptions. However, two other subjects concerned several students, and considering the more individualized response this question invited, their numbers are significant. Six students

expressed a desire for information about the instructor, from academic background to personal information:

- A little 'get to know you' information about the professor. It would make students feel more comfortable starting off the course.
- I wish the syllabus had more about the instructor on it that way we weren't as nervous walking into class.
- Introduction of the professor (degrees, etc.).

While somewhat surprising, this is the kind of insight I was hoping for. By getting to know their instructor, these students hoped for emotional connection.

They want to "feel more comfortable," and be less "nervous." Any authentic

writing demands that an author reveal themselves, and in that act they are made vulnerable. Beginning writers can find this a frightening exercise.

Additionally, the path to success in their first college courses is an unknown journey, and increasingly, our classes are filled with first generation college students. For these reasons, a personal connection with the instructor can be crucial to maintaining that initial enthusiasm, creating it where it may not have yet existed, and supporting students' engagement with their own writing.

Students also expressed a desire for extra-curricular assistance. Fourteen students said they would like their syllabus to include help finding outside resources that will help them succeed in the class. Some called it "information about citations," "where we can get help and useful websites" But some students are more specific and comprehensive: "More resources for writing. More places

to go for help and activities that might be helpful.” This jibes with O’Brien’s suggestion to include a “Resources” section in the syllabus (67). I have a blurb about the Writing Center, as most WKU composition instructors do, but with very little added space devoted to it, this can easily be expanded to include other physical spaces that offer assistance, like the TLC tutoring lab, and online resources, such as Purdue’s MLA OWL website.

Collins suggests that outside resources can be crucial information for students’ success, and providing this information on the first day helps them to get a head start in navigating how to access them (93). He also hypothesizes that making our own interactions as instructors with these resources explicit, encourages students to use them:

Tutors in the reading and writing skills center . . . have met with me, have gone over the writing assignments for this course and my expectations of those assignments, and are prepared to review drafts or work in progress either in person or via email. (93)

This seems like a good way to prompt students to utilize the writing center and that they will be able to get help, specific to their individual composition class and assignments. Additionally, in my re-syllabus-vision, I have included the fore-knowledge that we will be visiting the center as a class.

Before moving on to the actual re-visioning of my syllabus, I want to wrap this all up with a short discussion on length. Crafting a syllabus that is positive, encouraging, inclusive, interesting, and that includes a detailed course schedule

students can rely upon to help organize their semester – it’s going to be long, probably longer than the current standard. There’s a lot of trepidation, even animosity directed at this issue, indeed columnist and professor Rebecca Schuman excoriates the trend in longer syllabi, and blames them for the “decline and fall of American higher education” (Schuman) caused by helicopter parents, adjunct instructors and CEO administrators. While I do understand that a syllabus that gets its length from standardized institutional requirements and learning objectives are tedious, even these can be an opportunity to educate students in an aspect of their academic experience. How many of our students pay attention or even fully comprehend the rationale and worth of our Colonnade program? While Schuman calls for putting these institutional requirements in tiny font, with a demeaning title like, “Boilerplate,” which by the way, is what I did my first year teaching, I can’t help but think, considering what I’ve read and written about inclusivity and good writing, I need to make it more explicit.

But Schuman also eschews the trend in making syllabi more thorough, including sections such as email etiquette, plagiarism, course policies, and rubrics for grading. She insists that no student will ever read it thoroughly or at all – in fact she brags, “I myself have never read parts of my own syllabus all the way through” (Schuman). But I choose to heed what Bain’s *best* college teachers do: “they reflect a strong trust in their students. They usually believe that students want to learn . . . and they believe that they can” (18).

Diametrically opposed to this philosophical viewpoint, Roxanne Cullen addresses the issue of length in a rumination of her exhaustive syllabus revision for her composition class. Because the first goal of her revision was to cultivate community in her classroom, she asked for extensive evaluation in the form of an essay assignment the first year she used it. Several students actually addressed the length, stating “the very length showed that I had worked hard and put considerable time into thinking about the class and their learning” (Cullen 3). Ericsson and Strommer note, “good [syllabi] tend to be longer rather than shorter, and . . . the best may run several pages” (82). So, while I’m aware of the increased length all of this revising is going to add to my syllabus, I am confident that its evolution as a resource tool and course text makes the added pages worthwhile. And I’m not too worried about Schuman’s criticism, because anyone who would tell her students that “any college course actually worth attending is going to begin with [at] least some air of mystery about what you need to get an A” (Schuman) is not at risk of influencing me.

## Chapter Two: De/Reconstructing My Syllabus

### *The Composition Chronicles: Your English 100 Syllabus*

*\*\*This is your first reading assignment! Take it home and read it thoroughly; you will be demonstrating your knowledge of what lies herein at our next meeting.\*\**

Any piece of good writing deserves a title! From day one, I am seeking to model what I will be asking students to do throughout the semester: produce original, interesting work that shows effort and investment. I also am trying to get their attention in these crucial first few moments of the first college composition class they will ever take. We all know the optimistic, albeit idealistic, feeling a first day of class endows, even more so in the first semester, of the first year, of the student's first experience in college. The sooner, the better, I say! And I do not want to play any part of shattering that idealism. No! I seek to wield that hopeful tool to my immediate benefit, and to the lifelong benefit of these wonderful beginning writers. We teach our composition students that the title is the hook to engage your reader, and I want to hook them as quickly as possible. In their article, "The Novice as Expert: Writing the Freshman Year," Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz refer to this initial moment a first year writing student experiences as a threshold. They assert that these initial college experiences offer "students the double perspective of the threshold, a liminal state from which they might leap forward-or linger at the door (125). A syllabus that has life and voice, one that is encouraging instead of admonishing, can greet them at that door and invite them in.

I choose not to read to my students what they can read themselves. I do, however, want them to read this document closely (it's one of our department's goals to teach students to do close reading of college level material after all (Ervin 19), and to use it as the semester progresses: "It doesn't take long for most first-year students to become aware of the different expectations between high school and college writing, that something more is being offered to them and, at the same time, asked of them" (Sommers 125). And so, this is the first event where I treat them as adult students, and I treat the syllabus as a dynamic part of the course.

Students get a hard copy of the syllabus on the first day of class. It is available on Blackboard. I always have extra print copies for those in need. I try to safeguard my self-esteem, because unfortunately, the syllabus is often the first place an educator's ego rears her Medusa-like head. "It's in the syllabus!" she screams. But why do we expect our students to read this document and know it fully (one of three to six they receive a semester, by the way) if all we do is hand it to them, read the most punitive elements at them, and then move on to the first "real" assignment. Therefore, I will treat it like any reading assignment: we will discuss it as a class after they have read it, we can all ask and answer questions, and for this assignment, there will be an informal reading quiz.

While I took this classroom approach to the syllabus in my first year of teaching, not reading it to them, quizzing them and asking for questions the next class, I did not craft the syllabus *itself* as a part of that assignment. The title

ensures that the student is first greeted by me, my writing voice, my personality. The prompt makes sure their first mission is clear. Before this syllabus re-design, the above header did not exist. It began here:

***Western Kentucky University***  
*Department of English*

And while this is a perfectly correct title – reflecting the university and department in which I teach – it in no way distinguishes me or the class in any way. When this is the title, we are all just cogs in a wheel. The tone suggests that the university is king here, and the department his duke. I want the student to be the primary focus, and our class the microcosm within which he or she can thrive.

*--"The time is right to mix sentences with dirt, the sun with punctuation, the rain with verbs, and for worms to pass through question marks, and the stars to shine down on budding nouns, and the dew to form on paragraphs."*  
*--Richard Brautigan, Please Plant this Book*

I've added the epigraph, because nothing expresses enthusiasm like a little bit of poetry. And it models good writing too; I certainly introduce the epigraph and encourage students to use them in their essays. It also introduces students to my literary side: Richard Brautigan is one of my favorite authors. I also like both writing and dirt.

***English 100-000 – Introduction to College Writing***  
*Time and Place: Cherry Hall somewhere; sometime*

***Greetings!***

*Welcome to English 100, your first in a series of classes designed to prepare you for college writing. Whatever path you took to get here, whether it be directly from high school, or a more winding journey that includes jobs, marriage, military, children, maybe*

*even an international flight or two, you are all enrolled in this class, because it is required! But also to learn skills – critical thinking; rhetorical analysis; close reading; writing and revising, knowing your audience – that will not only help you in your college career, they will help you to better speak and be heard, in your emails, resumes, published works, whatever you want. One way or another, you will be writing for the rest of your life. You are going to want be good at it.*

*Academic writing is hard folks; it requires you to grapple with big ideas, intertwine them with your own, and distill it down into clear and thoughtful words. It is your effort and hard work that will best ensure success in this class, along with my own to help you along the way. These are my thoughts on how to achieve that success:*

- There are rules to college writing, and you will learn them here. But too many rules get in the way of good writing, especially in the beginning. First let's explore some ideas and play with language.*
- The relationships and personality of this class are crucial to our success. Talk to each other, get to know each other, respect each other.*
- Give a damn! Care about what you say in class and on the page. It'll make everyone's experience better.*
- Remember we are all here to learn; with some mechanical skills, a critical mind, and a lot of heart--you will discover the great power of your own written words.*

Before beginning my revision of the above section, I read through what I had previously titled "course overview," with O'Brien's advice in mind: "a strong course description early in the syllabus can generate student interest by providing a stimulating overview of the course, including its content, value, and philosophical assumptions behind it" (51) and I thought it fell pretty short. Having written it five years ago, I actually felt like I was reading one of the required institutional components, and had to go back to check that it was in fact, my own writing. While it concisely described the structure of the class and expectations of the students, "this course is designed as a writing workshop and reading discussion group, which means that during almost each class meeting you will be asked to write something . . . as well as synthesize and respond to

assigned reading,” there was just no heart, no voice, no authorial presence. This is the first narrative component of the syllabus, and I want it to be good! I allowed myself to use the natural voice in my personal essay writing, and I think the result is much improved.

With tone set, I returned to O’Brien’s text and incorporated several components she suggests into what I now call “*Greetings!*,” a rationale for the course, the course description, and purpose for the course. The description explains what the course will cover and the purpose discusses why it exists, and how it will benefit the student. O’Brien’s rationale for the course is directed at the educator, something best defined before crafting a syllabus. Serving as a thesis to the scholarly argument that is your course, the rationale is a “set of critically examined core assumptions about why you do what you do in the way that you do it” (qtd. In Grunert 15).

Obviously my core assumptions begin from the standpoint that building strong relationships and open dialogue in the classroom supports good idea generation, and writing material. In addition to that, I believe grammar killed the composition star: too many students come into their college English classes with battle wounds from grammar classes that have effectively rendered them mute. I like to read essays with proper grammar, I know that students need to have proper grammar to succeed in college, and I wish that they came to college with a working knowledge of proper grammar. But whether they do or not, I want them to relax and write something interesting that they can be proud of, and I do

not find that grading students harshly in the beginning of the semester helps them to get there. Considering Gale's two-level interaction model, this positions me between my students and the dominant discourse "to ensure that the conversation is not stopped and students' sense of wonder is not suppressed" (91). This is why I emphasize effort and enthusiasm in the greeting, and why I explicitly tell them not to worry about the rules for a little while.

***Instructor: Elisa Berry** - I invite you to call me by my first name (pronunciation: el.EE.sah), or Ms. Berry if that is more comfortable to you. (I am an instructor with a Master's degree, so Ms. is the proper honorific. A professor or instructor with a PhD would be called Dr.)*

What's in a name? For the students, I find, it is everything. "Who are you taking?" they ask each other, "I heard she's tough!" or, "Uh oh, he's crazy." The instructor's name is the student's version of a section number, the individual identifier in a sea of English 100 classes, which can vary greatly depending on who designed it. So their first lesson is to get my name right. Collins recommends taking a line or two to address your preferred form of address (90). We have all experienced the social attention and/or anxiety associated with remembering and getting someone's name right, and the classroom is no exception. By putting my preferences down in writing, students can reference, not only the options I've provided about how I prefer to be addressed, I've given them a pronunciation guide to my historically problematic first name.

And I may as well use it as an opportunity to teach the students some academic language. I have noted that many students, often first generation to

college, do not know the levels of education that their teachers may or may not have and the honorifics attached to them. Now this becomes an educational moment that my students can take into their other classes; it “levels the playing field” (Slattery 160) in a subtle area that helps them avoid the potential for making a bad first impression. For many professors, their hard earned PhD, and the title Doctor that goes along with it, are very important; being called such is viewed as a sign of respect. For others, not so much. That’s up to them to negotiate with their own classes, but it rhetorically benefits my students to go forth into their future classes with a correct starting point for addressing their educators. My method here is to explain the traditional norm, and introduce the terminology.

Collins agrees, suggesting that this is an early place in the syllabus to start ushering inclusivity, and setting a tone that promotes success (90). Additionally, as a “very tall white man of middle age” (91), Collins reflects that it takes a great effort to make himself accessible to his students, and inviting them to call him “Terry” is a shortcut. He makes note that for women this can be complicated by the “trivialization” they often experience in the academic realm, from colleagues and students alike. It’s true that in the classes designed to prepare me for teaching, I was counseled to not only insist on being called by my last name, but also to dress professionally, preferably in dark clothing, to exert my authority from day one. This is just not my style, and I find it a pretty unfortunate way to try to gain the respect of one’s students. I would rather start openly and honestly,

with an inviting and friendly manner, and certainly without an inaccurate authority of rank, to build honestly earned credibility with my students.

***My Teaching (and Learning) Philosophy***

*My core belief about learning and teaching, is that it is community based. Even if that community is you and a book. My point is that everyone has to learn from someone or something, and if you are teaching it is to someone other than yourself. Caring about the other people in the room is crucial to success, in both directions. I entered graduate school when I was 36, after working odd jobs, traveling to odd places in the world, and meeting odd, extraordinary people. I bring all of these experiences with me into the classroom, just as you bring yours. We are going to get to know each other – our strengths and fears, our interests and apathies, our goals and confusions. And because we're doing this as a group, you are going to get to know each other too. These relationships foster ideas that I firmly believe give you engaging things to think about, and write about. It is in the magical space of those relationships, the unique creature that is each class personality, that I believe the best learning and teaching occurs.*

Making my teaching philosophy explicit and sharing it with my students allows them to get to know me on a professional and personal level, models good writing, and initiates the connection I hope to achieve with my students. Until I entered into my thesis research, I did not have this section in my syllabus, nor have I seen teaching philosophies included in other syllabi during my research, or in my own educational history, that I can recall. Most references to crafting a teaching philosophy discuss them in terms as an introspective exercise, professional development, or a possible component to a teaching portfolio-- something to benefit the teacher herself and the advancement of her career. However, Goodyear and Allchin suggest that when teachers share their philosophies, they help their students understand, “what the professor is doing and why. Given this information, students may engage more productively in the learning environment while also knowing how to learn and succeed in the

course” (109). My decision to include the statement in my syllabus, making it available to my students, is an invitation to get to know me, something I personally want, and that surveyed students asked for, and it also helps to make learning objectives explicit. The students are invited closer on both a personal and academic level. Additionally, the simple exercise of crafting and then periodically revisiting and revising a philosophy of teaching statement stimulates reflection, helps teachers reflect on their own growth, and can help revitalize dedication to our unique goals and values of our own pedagogy methods. And as my goals and values are still in the development stage, the process of writing them down for an audience – the beneficiaries of my teaching – feels very useful.

In her publication on the subject, Nancy Chism comments, “one of the hallmarks of a philosophy of teaching statement is its individuality.” Certainly one of my key goals in crafting my syllabus is that I introduce myself to my students, and distinguish myself as an actual individual human. It also invites an opportunity for me to write in a more narrative style than the syllabus format allows, and can function as a more personal aside in the larger dissemination of information of the document. This involves the students in my ideas about how I think learning happens, the role I plan to play in that process, and that my role is an active and deliberate one. Goals instructors have for their students typically go beyond the classroom and its content; they include “help[ing] their students

to value and nurture their intellectual curiosity, live ethical lives,” (Chism), and hopefully help them to fulfill their own life goals.

The essential components of a philosophy statement fall into four parts: conceptualization of learning, conceptualization of teaching, goals for students, and implementation of the philosophy (Chism). That is a lot to cover, and my space is limited. I began by writing a draft (Appendix C) for my own benefit, and then distilling that into the smaller incarnation you see included above. The two are very different, but so are the audiences. Grappling with the more esoteric elements of pedagogy, conceptualizing learning and teaching, can feel like a daunting task. While the exercise itself helped ideas emerge in more concrete language, ideas that probably already existed on an intuitive plane, it was more difficult than I initially imagined. Chism notes that “most college teachers agree that one of their main functions is to facilitate student learning; yet most draw a blank when asked how that learning occurs” (Chism). This seems especially accurate with regards to composition instruction where the learning process is highly experiential and mastery of the craft is unique to each writer.

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### **Contacting Me**

Office: TBD

Office Hours: DOW 00:00-00:00, or by appt.

Email: [elisa.berry@college.edu](mailto:elisa.berry@college.edu)

Phone: 270-555-1221

*Email is the best way to get in touch with me; on weekdays I check it several times a day and will respond within 24 hours. On weekends, I will answer your email when I see it, which may not be until Monday. The best time to reach me by phone or in person is during my office hours. If your schedule conflicts with those hours, I welcome you to see me after class and we can set up an appointment. In the unlikely event that I am out of contact with my students for more than 48 hours, I will alert you of it, and tell you when I will be back in communication.*

While the standard contact information is sufficient, the tone conveys nothing, and is so minimal “to the point of seeming brusque” (Collins 91). The best syllabi I’ve seen include some explanation and invitation to communication. Erickson and Strommer wryly note that “freshmen have a knack for finding themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time” (82), and so an extensive contact policy benefits both student and teacher. I also want students to know that they can rely on my consistent responses; accordingly, I feel like it’s respectful to let them know that in the event that I am temporarily unable to respond that they will know it ahead of time. This behavior also models how I want to be treated, and how it behooves them to treat others. Finally, I’d also like to mention that Collins recommends including directions to wheelchair accessible entrances near the classroom and the teacher’s office (91). Of course, I don’t have an office yet, so I’ll add that later. These extras may be viewed as unnecessary additions that just make the syllabus longer, but I believe they add up to an inclusive reference tool that can only benefit the students.

*The Cautionary Tales*

*\*\*We're about to get into the nitty gritty here, including all the expectations, requirements, and boundaries of the class. There are exceptions to every rule, but they are extremely rare, and must be well deserved. Read everything carefully, do your best, and work hard. With those standards met, you will find me much more likely to be flexible.\*\**

*\*\*Absolutely no electronic devices may be visible or turned on during class, other than what we use together for presentations and the like. That means no computers, cell phones, beepers, mp3 players or tablets. I will certainly make an exception if you have written verification from the Office of Disability Services that you require accommodations. And I can help you figure out how to do that if you need assistance.\*\**

*\*\*It is critical to the success of this class that we treat each other respectfully. This class is designed to be topical, meaning we may be talking about issues dealing with race, class, gender, politics, history and more. Many of us have opinions on these subjects, and many of those opinions will conflict with each other. That's great – it's important to learn how to engage in hotbed subjects and remain civil. So, no bullying, shouting, interrupting or other aggressive behavior. Listen attentively, to me, and your fellow classmates; I will do the same. Rude or distracted behavior is grounds for being asked to leave and loss of participation points. \*\**

I struggled with whether or not to take this section out. I'm not so much concerned with a block of admonitions that could potentially upset the tone of my work, as I really had to weigh how necessary it is. This kind of stuff is definitely what critics of length like Rebecca Schuman decry in the documents of their colleagues. But you know, I do think it's necessary. There are plenty of students who enter a class without the study skills and social etiquette to thrive in an academic setting that it becomes important for the protection of my own class, and beneficial for their future learning experience to bring these things up.

Why do so many students enter their classrooms with a sense of entitlement to act however they may want? O'Brien notes that a high tech, consumer driven society may be the driver: "When our institutions respond to

consumer expectations by creating student centers where, in one location, students can buy a meal, arrange for financial aid, take placement tests, register for courses, purchase texts, and find personal tutors . . . we inadvertently shape students' attitudes to regard the learning experience in the same way they regard one-stop shopping" (9). The university impresses a mall-like setting upon the students, and as this is often their first sphere of adulthood, it's highly impressionable. And that can seep into the classroom space if not addressed.

Increasingly, students expect their electronic devices to be tolerated in the classroom. For a workshop and discussion based class to be successful, it is necessary for the students to be present in mind and body. I'm judicious with my boundaries, but I find it so problematic to police students' use of electronic devices, making sure laptops are open only to take notes or look up pertinent information, that I have decided to just say no to them all. I realize I'm in the minority here; in casually surveying my former students, they report that most classes allow devices, even cell phones, especially the large lecture classes. Well, this can be a singular experience for them then, and they can take notes the old fashioned way, with pencil and paper. I do have back up: in a 2014 study published by *Psychological Science*, Mueller and Oppenheimer concluded that, "participants using laptops were more inclined to take verbatim notes than participants who wrote longhand, thus hurting learning" (1166). Students taking notes on laptops were able to take more notes because it takes less time to type

than write; however, the extra processing of information required to distill it into shorter notes benefited the students when it came to retention. While this does have a sort of a priori ring of truth to it, it's pedagogically beneficial for me to have the study for support.

***Required Materials:***

- *The Writer's Presence, 8th Edition by Donald McQuade and Robert Atwan (eds). ISBN 10: 1457664461; ISBN 13: 978-1457664465*  
*(At the time of this posting, Amazon has used copies, starting at \$34.00. Abebooks, Alibris, and Half.com are other good venues for used textbooks. Buy early and save yourself some cash.)*
- *One book of your choosing (more on this later).*
- *Pen/Pencil and Paper.*

In my first semester teaching, I saved the students the cost of a textbook, and instead sent pdf files of their readings. This became really time consuming, because I also have them vote and choose their own readings, which I'll talk more about coming up. I now use a reader that still allows me to do this, but they have to buy it. So to try and help them save some money, I've added the suggestion about several places they can buy the book online.

***Rules of the Road***

***Attendance/Tardiness:***

*My expectation is that you come prepared for active attendance to every class. This is a most important first step in earning your participation grade. (See details below). I do not distinguish between "excused" and "unexcused" absences. You are welcome to tell me why you weren't in class, as I am interested in your lives, but it will not change this truth: an absence is an absence. Use them wisely.*

*Note: There is one, and only one, way to earn your participation grade without attending class, essentially dropping an absence. Produce at the next class meeting, a typed, 500-word, interesting, creative, even outlandish excuse for why you missed class. I*

*will assign a participation grade for these based on your writing's energy, voice, and style. You can do this up to three times.*

### ***Participation***

*Your participation in your classes is a vital part of your learning. Each class period, you have the opportunity to earn 5 points toward your total participation grade. Earning all 5 means that you are, 1) present (1.75 pts), 2) prepared (1.75 pts) , and 3) taking an active, thoughtful and voluntary role in your learning, and in the learning atmosphere of the classroom (1.5 pts). Do the math – showing up prepared will get you a good, solid C. It's in that third component that you're going to get the above average or excellent grades of A/B.*

*By questioning, expressing your ideas, and listening to others, you demonstrate a genuine desire to be present, and make everyone's experience better. So, initiate discussion, ask significant questions, contribute in your group activities with motivation, support, and energy. Take risks by asserting your opinion, and respect others when they do the same. Argue amiably. When you participate you make our class work, and you also practice important job (and life!) related skills: cooperating with others, learning with others, listening to others, supporting others, and working as part of a team. Extra points for smiling.*

*Note on Cell Phones: I hope you will discover my general easy going nature as we get to know each other. However, one thing I just have to be rigid about is cell phones. If I see a cell phone in use, I will (without mentioning it) mentally remove you from class and you will receive no participation grade for that day. Essentially, I do not have the stomach to physically kick you out, but in my mind you will have gotten up and left class the second I see you messing with your phone. Look, I have a pretty compelling social life too, but if I can wait until class is over to engage in it – so can you.*

I've been pretty attached to my attendance policy – an approach I borrowed from my mentoring professor – because it allows students to erase an absence with an essay. Makes sense; it's a writing class! Because of my attachment to that absence essay, I thought I had to have the kind of policy that only allows a certain amount of missed classes before it starts dropping the students' grades. But, with a little creative thinking, I've been able to turn the attendance policy into a positive opportunity for students to earn their participation grade. As I mentioned in chapter one, the Ishiyama/Hartlub article

about rewarding policies inspired me to take another look at this, and the result is not only that I was able to turn a punishment into a reward, I also had to really examine how I wanted to award participation points, and now it's more explicit to my students. I have always had this nagging feeling that participation points were too subjectively assigned by me, and too opaquely viewed by students to really be effective. And as such an important component to generating ideas in my students, it felt like I was missing an opportunity to use participation points to motivate students to engage in the class. Now I have what feels like a positive policy that can really motivate the students and understand. Win, win, win.

***Late/Make up Work:***

*The essays you write will always be due at 11:59 pm on Sunday nights. Late essays will be accepted for up five days (Monday to Friday at 11:59 pm) after the due date. Ten points will be deducted from the final grade for each day (not class period) it is late. You can always submit your essays early. Make up work for in class writing, quizzes, and reading responses will not be accepted/graded, since these assignments are integrated into the daily flow of the class.*

As accepting late work is generally a matter of preference on the part of teachers, there is not a lot of theorizing about it. I have taken the lead of my mentors and former composition professors; I accept late work on formal essays, but not on reading responses or in-class assignments. The only revision I made here was to make the policy more explicit and uniform, by including when essays can be expected to be due, and which days count as days late. I experienced students in the past thinking class periods were "days," meaning an essay due Monday would be a day late turned in on Wednesday. Or hoping.

I did find a video by educator Rick Wormeli about applying differentiated learning techniques to late work. This was geared more towards secondary schools, but what I gleaned from it was empathy to beginning learners and writers. Late work tends to be viewed as the result of procrastination and/or ambivalence, and while that is true some of the time, sometimes students really are struggling with new concepts and skills. With that in mind, it feels more supportive to allow for late work on the bigger assignments.

Wormeli also makes the point that though teachers often make the case to their students that strict late policies prepare them for the real world, where deadlines are rigid, this isn't completely true. This caused me to reflect on my own life (hint, hint), and it rings true. There are drawbacks to late completion, but generally, most scenarios in life allow for some wiggle room. The drawback here is the point reduction, and lesson enough in time management, without being too punitive.

### ***Writing Assignments and Workshopping***

*This course is designed as a writing workshop, which means that during almost every class meeting you will be asked to write something or bring to class something you have written, and very often you will read each other's writing and give constructive feedback. Early in the semester you will form groups that you will work with all term. The ability to collaborate with a team is a skill that will benefit you in college and the professional world.*

*You will write four essays this term. To help you understand the importance of the writing process, each essay will be revised at least once. You will bring typed, complete drafts to class for workshopping, and I will help you develop skills to give constructive criticism on each other's work. You will also present a draft of your fourth, and longest essay at a conference you and I will hold. Drafting, revising, discussing ideas with peers, experimenting with writing, playing with language, as well as polishing, proofreading,*

*editing, and finalizing a draft are all part of the writing process that you will practice in this course.*

While research certainly supports the use of group work, with prominent composition professors (Bruffee, Elbow, Harris) espousing its benefit, executing it effectively seems elusive. I've had great and not-so-great success using workshopping techniques, and in re-examining this aspect of my course design, I have questioned whether or not to keep it. Too often, students simply go through the motions of the exercise as prescribed by the instructor, resist giving real critical feedback to their peers, and end up with very little benefit. After reading several takes on the subject, I've decided I need to structure it more, and provide more input from me on the front end.

If, as Collins mentions, I regard peer review as a valuable course component, then it should go into the syllabus, with explanation, rationale, and time built into the schedule to teach "the processes and skills needed to carry off productive collaboration. In any case, to build a coherent syllabus and to support students' success in the course, you should be overt about such skills acquisition" (84). Considering that, the revision of this section resulted in focusing on the workshopping, rather than also talking about discussing reading, which a previous revision of this section had. I also describe group work in more detail, and show its relationship to revising a final draft.

Fiona Paton has an excellent essay about how to use peer review workshops in a classroom setting. While mostly applicable to daily classroom

implementation, there are areas that inform my syllabus revision too. Her discussion on crafting a “handout summarizing such skills” (292) that students will master, inspired me to introduce such concepts in the syllabus explanation. She also advises avoiding phrases like “rough draft” (293), which encourage sloppy, half completed drafts. I had used that wording in my initial revision, so I replaced it with “typed, completed draft.” Just by way of revising the language of my syllabus, my course design has been greatly influenced, and I actually anticipate make workshopping a more, rather than less, prominent part of my classroom.

### ***Workshopped Essays***

- *Essay #1: (800+ words) This I Believe Essay: no outside sources necessary*
- *Essay #2 (1000+ words) University Issues: quote and cite one outside source*
- *Essay #3 (1200+ words) Local Issue Essay: quote, paraphrase, and cite two outside sources (one academic)*
- *Essay #4 (1500+ words): I-Search Essay: four academic sources quoted, paraphrased, cited, with annotated bibliography*

*All of the multi-draft essays that you will write in this class will be personal and reflective. This means you will explore things you like, and intensely want to know more about; you will also reflect on the process of researching these subjects as you write about them. Increasingly, you will integrate your viewpoints with ideas and published academic work from experts in those areas you write about.*

In revising my section explaining the major essay assignments, I made two significant changes. I cleaned up the layout of the essays – made their descriptions more uniform, and removed the discussion of a final exam essay, which is different in process and result, and can be described in the course schedule. I also added a short paragraph introducing the approach of my

progressing essay assignments. Fully explaining the I-writing concept will come later, but for now they can at least get the impression that their voice and experiences will guide their writing.

In the past, I've wrestled with what the essays leading up to the "big, consummate research paper" should be. I'm not fond of the narrative-to-expository-to-argumentative approach to composition curriculum, as if these styles are necessarily distinct, or that they are the building blocks to writing research papers. I also find it boring. In a very Gerald Graff kind of way, I think all essay writing asserts a viewpoint, and that the writing skills taught in first year composition classes should be making that viewpoint more compelling, and joining in more deeply with the bigger conversation around it.

From my first semester in graduate school, during which I visited the classrooms of various composition professors, I gravitated towards the I-writing concepts, and used Ken Macrorie's book, *The I-Search Paper*, to inform my teaching that last essay. Now, revisiting that text, and expanding my research to include Karen Paley's *I-Writing: The Politics and Practice of Teaching First Person Writing*, and balancing it with Graff's *Clueless in Academe* and *They Say/I Say*, I view it almost as a theme for the course. These are basically the textbooks that I use to design discussions and assignments in class. So the paragraph above—introducing the concept of I-writing that participates in the bigger conversation of ideas—represents that approach.

I must add that I do find Macrorie lacking in one area that's important to me. He seems to cast off the academic rigorousness that most professors are going to expect as my students continue in their chosen major disciplines. He really seems to emphasize encouraging students to conduct interviews, and consult whatever papers, pamphlets, or other documents they come across during that process. After presenting an example of two finished student papers in his book, Macrorie writes: "They did little reading of books or documents, but the answers to their questions probably couldn't have been found in publications" (61). Now, I totally get this on the front end, which is why until the last two essays I don't ask for "academic" sources. But students need to learn to grapple with the difficulty of finding, citing, and discussing peer reviewed material in their fields. I would be irresponsible to not teach it to them. It's also not helping them to learn the mores of the institution as Collins advises, or guiding them towards the dominant discourse, as Gale suggests.

### ***Informal and In-class Writing Assignments***

*Throughout the semester, you will have writing homework and in-class writing sessions. These will include reading responses, process comments (reflections on your own "completed" essays), peer review feedback, free writing/brainstorming, possible "pop" reading quizzes and other workshop related assignments. I'll be looking for insightful/interesting writing on these.*

This was in my "Reading Assignments" section, I guess because of its relationship to the reading responses. Making a short, distinct section makes it clearer, since it is a component of the overall final grade for the course. In the original version, I had a line about how these writings would not be graded

down for grammar issues. I took it out; similar to Paton's admonition that calling a draft "rough" can lead to sloppy drafts brought to class, I don't want students to think there are no standards to these assignments. With that in mind, I also took out the words, "short," and "informal" to describe the nature of the writing homework.

### ***Reading Assignments and Your Responses to Them***

*During the first week of class, we will choose our reading material together. From our text, The Writer's Presence, you will vote for the six themes you would most like to read about and discuss. (You are also encouraged to mention an individual essay that you'd like to read, should that unit win a spot.) I'll tally the votes and those will be our units. I'll then plug the reading assignments into the course schedule and put it on blackboard.*

*You will write a response for every reading assignment, and come to class ready to discuss the reading and turn in the response. These papers should be typed and double-spaced (about 250 words, more or less). They will enable you to grapple with issues, identify questions for discussion, and give voice to your convictions. A model reading response is in the "Documents" section of our blackboard site. I will not accept late responses, as they are linked to preparing you for class discussion of the reading.*

I like experimenting with having my students take a role in their own learning, what I have now come to know as "collaborative learning." During my first semester, I used a composition reader, of which only I had a copy, gave the students introductions to several options, and had them vote on which essays they would prefer to read. While I did have positive results, the logistics were unwieldy. I was spending a lot of time scanning and converting essays into pdf files, and my class preparation was different for each English 100 class. So my first revision was to adjust the policy. It actually wasn't the weariness that inspired me to do this, but rather several articles about involving students in the

creation of course material. Hudd does a similar thing, having students choose their assignments, and then plugging them into the course schedule, and I adapted my reading assignments design based on that (197).

Now, I thought this up all by myself, during my tenure as a graduate student, teaching English 100. But as we know, there are no original ideas, and in my research I found a conference paper by Kenneth Dorwick, reporting, “student self-determination opens up a class in a way I had not experienced before in my teaching . . . students do more self-assigned reading . . . and they read more carefully. Further they seem to be more involved in both class discussion and in their own writing” (Last Bastion). Even though it does create more work on the front end of the semester, having the students invest in the material they will read during the semester made a huge difference in reading rates in my classes. They found the voting fun, got invested in their choices, and their reading responses presented thoughtful reading of the material.

Something else Dorwick wrote caused me to reflect back on Gale’s theory of multiple discourses in the classroom:

Student literacy, the ability to read, write, and think critically, and to make an argument in terms and through logical modes that are accepted by the academy must occur, though students must find ways of doing so that preserve their own ways of knowing. Whether we like it or not, they are in a power struggle with us and with the institutions to which we are beholden. One of the loci for that struggle is the choice of texts (Dorwick).

By allowing students to “self-assign” their reading material, I also invite them to take a more dynamic role in the discourse relationships in the classroom. In reference to teaching literacy (literal, cultural, academic) through collaborative learning, Gale poses the question, “how can the professor initiate the students into the currently acceptable academic practices without risking forcing them into conformity and submission” (87). I think drawing students into the course design in this way, helps resolve that problem.

### ***Individual Book Project***

*Your ability to write thoughtful and grammatically correct prose is directly connected to how much and how often you read. With this in mind, you will have a semester long assignment to read one book of your choosing (with my approval) outside of class. This can be fiction or non-fiction. At the end of the semester, you will present your impressions of this book, and recommend to the class whether or not we should read it. As part of our conferences throughout the semester, you will be expected to bring your copy of the book and I will check in with your progress on your reading. Choose something you will enjoy!!! Part of the point here is to read for pleasure, so pick something in your area of interest, whether it be science fiction, mystery, fantasy, action adventure, history, travel, horror, sports, biography, comedy, etc. My approval will be based on amount of text (no comics or cartoon books though graphic novels may be accepted) and some level of quality (let's try to do better than shirt ripping romance novels).*

I don't remember what inspired me to add this to my classes, but each time it has been hugely successful. I remember the incomparable joy I felt as a kid, reading deep into the night, or sitting in the middle of a loud chaotic day, completely immersed in a book. To be so absorbed in a story, transported to another land – it's a pleasure no person should miss. And these days, I see more and more young adults who have never had that experience. So, if nothing else, this is my attempt to give that to my students.

Pedagogically, it is simply an extension of my previous discussion about self-assigned reading, and even more so it allows students to bring their discourse into the classroom. The only significant revision I made here, was to take out the last line that reminded students that “this will be ten percent of your grade, so take it seriously.” First of all, now it’s only five percent, second, I’ve found they don’t need the warning; without exception, every student that finished the semester completed this assignment and gave a thoughtful recommendation to the class. And finally, it feels contradictory to say on the front end, “choose something you will enjoy!” and then finish with, “take it seriously.”

### ***Grading***

*Your grade is a result of the points you earn with your daily hard work and enthusiasm. While there may be occasional opportunities given to the entire class to earn bonus points, I don't give individual extra credit. Why should I have to do extra grading work at the harried and hurried semester's end because someone did less course work throughout the semester?*

*Breakdown - 1000 possible points*

*Formal Essays (2 @ 75, 1 @ 100, 1 @ 250) = 500*

*Informal writings, in and out of class (reading responses, quizzes, free writing) = 140*

*Participation (attendance, conferences, peer review, discussions, rough drafts) = 210*

*Individual Book Project (reading and recommendation) = 50*

*Final Exam Essay = 100*

*Final Grading Scale*

*1000-900 = A; 899-800 = B; 799-700 = C; 699-600 = D; Below 600 = F*

I made the paragraph above the grade breakdown shorter, and more conversational. I really don’t think it’s necessary to describe in detail how grades are earned. It’s probably beneficial though to mentioned that they are *earned*, not

given. I also revised my explanation about extra credit. Since the last time I taught, I've seen some interesting bonus points opportunities for the whole class, especially in the beginning of the semester. I want to leave that open. But I despise the request for extra credit late in the semester after a student has screwed the pooch on their grade. And I'd like them to realize why I, and many other teachers, don't like it. So, I've added an explanation, which is actually an example of inclusivity. Students can build better relationships with their teachers if they have more of a sense of how much time grading takes, and how busy they are at the end of the semester. Just like the students. And better relationships will help them to succeed.

***Plagiarism (It's a Big Deal)***

*Plagiarism means taking and using someone else's words and/or ideas as your own. All definitions, terminology, concepts, and patterns of organization taken from an outside source must be given credit in any essay you write. These may be either directly quoted or paraphrased. The key to avoiding plagiarism is to remember that when an idea, phrase, term, definition, or pattern of organization is not your own, you are responsible for giving credit to the source from which you took these elements. I have posted the WKU English Department's full policy on plagiarism, with FAQ's on our blackboard site. Consult that, or me, with any questions you might have.*

*Look, giving credit to your sources takes skill; you have to learn how to craft sentences that have more than one voice – yours and your source's – and give them credit where it is due. Guess what: this makes your paper longer! You will learn how to do this; I will help you.*

*Intentional plagiarism will result in penalization that may range from failure for the assignment or entire course, to disciplinary action from the university. Just don't.*

Plagiarism is so tricky that I didn't want to mess around with trying to explain it the first time out, and so I ended up borrowing my original plagiarism section from a professor I had in my undergraduate years. His teaching style is

very explanatory, and he's a great mentor. But, it's not my voice. And, going back to read it now, his explanation borders on being a full lesson on the subject, and I think I'd rather incorporate it into my assignments regarding plagiarism and citing sources correctly, than keeping it in my syllabus. I kept some of his writing, but changed the diction, and compressed it into one paragraph. I also wrapped that up with the direction that there is a full copy of WKU's plagiarism policy on our blackboard site. That way, they can see how to avoid plagiarizing, and what can happen to them if they are caught doing it.

The two following sections are new additions, which are meant to soften the policing tone discussions on plagiarism can often take. Particularly in the case of first-year composition courses, I really dislike the private investigator tone educators fall into when discussing plagiarism with their students. This neither prevents plagiarism nor helps us to teach proper citation, quoting, and paraphrasing. But at the same time, it is really serious, and I've observed that English teachers have an increasingly hard time designing assignments and curriculum that lowers the ability for plagiarism. You know, Internet. So, while I try to make a very clear distinction between accidental and intentional plagiarism, I also put the hammer down at the end, and let the students know that blatant stealing of other's work will result in varying degrees of failure.

The increasing pitfall of adopting a policing persona toward potential plagiarists has become its own subject for analysis in composition studies. As I mentioned, the Internet has increased our students' ability to plagiarize; it's also

expanded our ability to catch it. In an excellent study on the subject, Sean Zwagerman explores the implications this has on us as teachers, and our relationships with our students. Concentrating on the impact plagiarism policing, with extended emphasis on detection programs, has on teachers' roles and classroom dynamics, Zwagerman asserts that, "by intensifying efforts at surveillance and punishment, the current crusade against academic dishonesty is a far greater threat than is cheating to the integrity and the ideals of academic communities" (677). His article is peppered with teachers' anecdotes about finding plagiarized passages in their students' papers, often with a *gotcha!* flair. And, I grant you, it's understandable. Both Zwagerman and I understand that it is a personal affront to the work we put into our course design, and to the academic fields that we value, to have them so cheaply regarded by students who would rip off another's hard work and attempt to pass it off as their own (683).

And yet, are we at risk of ballooning the issue? And further, are we seeking a solution at the wrong end? Indeed, Zwagerman seems to think we have become paranoid in the perceptions of plagiarism as an epidemic: "While plagiarism may or may not be rampant, the belief that it is rampant is certainly rampant" (678). While plagiarism is a problem, especially so in writing classes, it is still a fraction of our students who will attempt blatant "cut and paste" cheating. With that in mind, what do we risk by policing the entire community of our students with methods like detection software programs? Apparently,

everything I am trying to accomplish with my feel good syllabus, and general convivial approach:

Within a critical pedagogy, writing is a process through which students, with the assistance of a trusted teacher, can explore and critique dominant social processes, particularly those in which students – and perhaps teachers, too – would otherwise participate unawares. Conversely, plagiarism detection treats writing as a product, grounds the student-teacher relationship in mistrust, and requires students to actively comply with a system that marks them as untrustworthy. (Zwagerman 692)

No Bueno. Not only have I historically found the idea of submitting my students and their essays to these kinds of methods, I think it is just the wrong way to teach students about academic integrity, and fails to foster a commitment to their own authorship.

I would rather tackle the problem on the front end, and get students invested in their own writing, even if that only flourishes while they are with me. This method directly refers back to the I-writing essay assignments, and as much as possible, allowing students to choose their topics. Zwagerman amusingly conjectures, in an interchange between host and teacher in a television interview on plagiarism, that the teachers' assignment to, "write about 'their favorite American explorer'" may be partially to blame for her problems with cheating:

I feel it is important to point out that sixteen-year-olds don't have favorite American explorers. Most adults don't have favorite American explorers. I

don't have a favorite American explorer, and to be honest, I think I would have plagiarized that assignment and spent the time saved doing something I actually cared about. (695-6)

I have to confidently claim here, that I rarely had reason to suspect my students of plagiarizing their essays. Between teaching students to write themselves into their essays, developing an open relationship with them, and emphasizing workshopping in the class, there really is very little room for it. So I don't see the need to employ too much fear-inducing language in my syllabus, or my teaching.

By the way, isn't it interesting that in the section on plagiarism, I confessed to copying someone else's writing about plagiarism into my syllabus?

Do not despair. You will see more on this in my reflection on my *References* section at the end of this chapter.

### ***Resources, On Campus and On the Internet***

*Campus Tutoring Services - WKU supports a Writing Center in Cherry Hall Rm. 123, staffed by trained peer writing consultants who can assist you in improving your writing skills. Free service. We will visit it early in the semester so you can learn how to make appointments with them. The Learning Center (TLC) is another peer-to-peer tutoring center that can also help you in this course, as well as your other classes. Visit their website, or their front desk on the second floor of the Downing Student Union for information about how to schedule an appointment.*

*Grammar Assistance - While I do not require you to purchase a grammar handbook, if you find certain elements of grammar still a challenge, I will alert you to it in your drafts, and you will want your final products to be error free. We may, as a class, trouble shoot common grammar problems, but formal grammar instruction is not a part of the curriculum. There are several websites that can help you address your problem areas, such as Grammar Girl, and Grammar Bytes. You may also ask me or a writing center tutor for explanation of any grammar rules that keep giving you a headache.*

*Online Formatting Labs - After the initial essay, you will increasingly be learning how to cite sources correctly and format your papers in an academic style, for this class that will be MLA. Two excellent online resources to assist you are: Purdue MLA OWL (online*

*writing lab); and Excelsior OWL, which also has a fun and interactive grammar component.*

*Reference Materials - You need a dictionary. You may have a print dictionary, and if it's fairly current, that will serve you well. There are also several thorough, credible online sources as well. My favorites are: the OED (Oxford English Dictionary), which also gives the history of the word, and has a built in thesaurus; Cambridge Free Dictionary and Thesaurus, and Merriam-Webster Dictionary online.*

*ADA Notice: Students with disabilities who require accommodations (academic and/or auxiliary aids or services) for this course must contact the Student Accessibility Resource Center, Room 1074, Downing Student Union. The SARC telephone number is (270) 745-5004 (TDD: 270-745-3030). Please do not request accommodations directly from the instructor without a letter of accommodation from the Student Accessibility Resource Center.*

*Me - I am happy to consult with you at any stage in your writing via email or during my office hours. You needn't wait until there is a crisis. And remember, we can set up another time to meet if my hours do not fit your schedule, just contact me.*

This may be the area where I've made the greatest revision. Previously, I only had the section on the writing lab, an invaluable resource for first year writing students, and I think almost every teacher has a similar note in their syllabus. But I've made it more explicit, included that we will be visiting the lab as a class, and included the other tutoring labs the university offers.

As far as the succeeding sections: the reference materials, and a grammar handbook used to be part of my required materials. I used to require a specific grammar book my students had to buy, then I just said they were required to have "a current grammar handbook." With so many excellent online sources though, and the fact that I now have a reader they have to buy, I like moving this into the resource section, and encouraging them to solve their grammar problems independently.

And just to close with a final bit of encouragement and positivity, I have included myself as a resource, reiterating that I am approachable and happy to help. I think it's a nice touch.

### *References*

Grunert O'Brien, Judith et al. *The Course Syllabus: A Learning Centered Approach*. Jossey-Bass, 2008.

Collins, Terrence. "For Openers... An Inclusive Syllabus." *New Paradigms for College Teaching*, edited by Wm. E. Campbell and Karl A. Smith, Interaction Book Company, 1997, pp. 79-102.

*\*This syllabus borrows from the syllabi of Dr. Dale Rigby, Dr. Jane Fife, Michael Gray (including this appreciation endnote), Dr. David Lenoir, Dr. Roxanne Cullen and Dr. Blake Hobby. Thank you all for your input, generosity of experience and general good instincts.*

In an article describing his own syllabus design, Todd Estes illustrates the purpose of having a "So What?" section in his syllabus, an idea he got from Ken Bain's book, *What the Best College Teachers Do*. Bain reports on an instructor's method of employing the "principle of . . . WGAD, Who gives a Damn" (38-9) wherein students are invited to question the rationale of any element of the curriculum. Now, in the article Estes explicitly describes the idea and the acronym, giving credit where it is due. He also gives citation credit in the endnotes. But, in the syllabus – no credit. And he doesn't just use the idea, he uses the same wording: "The first question we should all ask of any book or chapter or essay or article we read is 'so what?' Another less delicate way to phrase that is WGAD--'who gives a damn?'" (199). He then goes on to explain the same invitation to students as the instructor in Bain's book. So, not only does

he not give credit to source, he disparages Bain's phraseology! This does not feel like modeling good writing, even if the students don't know about it. It's a missed opportunity make the academic conversation explicit to his students, illustrating how thinkers can be inspired by each other.

And what about the academic esteem we give syllabi? As I mentioned in my introduction, when I began my journey compiling my first syllabus, the first place I looked was at the syllabi of teachers I respect. Having never taught, I relied heavily upon the elements of classes I had taken as an undergraduate and graduate student, and classes I had observed as a teacher in training. Without that guidance, if I had been required to author a syllabus without borrowed ideas, I would have been at a great loss. Ultimately, my students would have suffered. It just wouldn't have made any sense to start from scratch. And it makes just as little sense to not give those excellent teachers credit.

In an essay titled, "When a Syllabus is Not Your Own," Jennifer Sinor recounts her experience discovering that her entire syllabus was being used by another teacher. Not only did she discover that she had no grounds for recourse, as documents crafted for the university are the intellectual property of the institution, she found that neither her colleagues nor her department head could really understand why she was upset. After much discussion, and historical research on it, Sinor concluded that the lowered status of the syllabus is directly associated with its lack of monetary value, and this has implications for valuing teaching: "To decide that a syllabus is not a made thing, not worthy of protection

without regard to market value or aesthetic value, erodes the terrain of the classroom . . . To devalue the documents made for the classroom is to devalue the classroom itself, not to mention the teacher who made them” (4, 5).

When I first began compiling this syllabus, I included the “shout out” to the teachers I had borrowed from in a general end note. At this point, I don’t remember all the particular elements that I borrowed. If I did, I would go back and make specific footnotes. And going forward, if I borrow again, I’ll cite it specifically. These efforts model good writing practices for my students, and honor the good works of the professors and instructors I have been fortunate enough to know. It also shows how hard I worked on this document, that it is an original piece of writing, and has academic integrity.

### *Course Schedule*

Revising the course schedule, means revising the entire course design. And that’s another project, for another day. But I do want to say, I learned from the student surveys that, for them, the course schedule is potentially the most important piece of this whole document, at least initially. At the beginning of the semester, when everything is tinged with a bit of the unknown, the schedule grounds them, and allows them to chart their near future. So I’ll be putting more effort into creating a more detailed schedule. That’s hard for a new teacher, who also has uncertainties about things like time management and class development. But I’ll do my best, and I gain more experience, this will be a main focus point for continued revision.

Because of the importance students give the schedule, I'm eager to see the benefits of making part of it skeletal, and I have them fill in their self-assigned readings, once determined. It is an excellent opportunity to weave in that feeling of inclusivity and self-determination. As I go forward, I might play with making additional areas of the course student led. Hudd collaborates with her students to design the courses assignments (197), while Cullen consults with her students regarding late work and attendance policies (3). I don't see myself adopting those measures, but as I continue to get to know my own course design, I might play with students determining aspects of the workshop structure.

***WKU English 100 Course Policies, Objectives, and Guidelines\****

*(See Appendix B for full version)*

Argh, I've really struggled with where to put this stuff. As I continue to revise and improve my syllabus, I have become more resentful of having to incorporate the formal, less personal tone of these sections with my own. It isn't that I don't want to deliver the information to my students, I just wish it didn't have to be in *my* syllabus. But I really thought about both Collins and Gale here; this is a perfect opportunity to be explicit and act as a guide with all three levels of discourse represented.

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\* *These are the policies crafted and set forth by the university for all English 100 classes. They are guidelines and goals for all of us, teachers and students alike. If you have any questions about them, please ask me, or you can talk to someone in the English Department office.*

First, I switched around the organization. I've separated it from the body of my syllabus by situating the schedule in between the two. In that way, I can make it distinct from my own prose. Now this could be seen as a diminishing act, but I've also given it a snappy title, which brings prominence to its section. The title also introduces the author as "WKU," and determines the audience as "English 100 Course(s)."

But my real genius moment, was putting a footnote on it. Using my writing voice, I am able to explain this section, identify the author and join the audience that it speaks to. Recalling Gale's delineation in the academic hierarchy institution-teacher-student (55), I've made each entity distinct and present, and with a positive tone, demonstrate supportive relationships all around.

## Conclusion

Let's face it: many students walk into their first-year writing class with a bad taste in their mouths about English. Maybe they have trauma from past grammar instruction, reading "boring" texts, or simply don't have the practiced skills reading and writing demand. In a society that increasingly bombards people with multiple social and entertainment possibilities at the touch of a screen, writing requires some capacity for solitude, introspection, and focus; achieving these can be hard for our students. One of our first challenges as composition teachers is to dismantle those negative impressions that keep students on the outside, revealing the world of ideas of which everyone is a part, and where everyone can find their niche. An interesting, inviting, encouraging syllabus unlocks the door to our world.

After revision, my syllabus has lengthened by two pages – it's more narrative, less bulleted – so there is a lot more text, and I know not every student may read it all, or get into it. But for those students it does reach, my syllabus is teaching them about writing before I even meet them. The project is still in its theoretical stage; I imagine that as I gain more classroom experience, there will be more revision to do. Employing Cullen's use of the syllabus-as-prompt for an initial writing assignment can inform this ongoing process (2). O'Brien also suggests that a mid-term questionnaire, when students have been working with the syllabus for a while, can glean good information for revision (37). I like the idea of involving students in the evolution of the document. Obviously, they are

my best resource, but it goes beyond that. If I'm telling them that writing is a process, this is a good exercise to illustrate that it applies to all of us.

Your syllabus provides an opportunity to bring academic creativity into your classroom. Generally untapped, a syllabus that hooks 'em by the nose hairs has potential to jumpstart learning and relationship building with your students, providing a visual course representation of enthusiasm and explicit expression. Both research and reflection demonstrate that revolutionizing approaches to syllabus crafting improves dynamics in the classroom and heightens potential for student success. Long after they leave your classroom, your unique authorial voice and pedagogical approach affects your students' lives, and your syllabus is the principle artifact of that impact. Why not make it exceptional?

A friend sent me a *New York Times* op-ed piece on syllabus craft that came out during this very week that I am finishing my own elaborate experiment in syllabus re-vision. Christy Wampole—a self-proclaimed syllabus fetishist—simply wanted to write about how much she loves writing syllabi, just as she loved receiving them as a student. The essay is neither academic nor controversial. It's a celebration of the genre. She concludes that while the impact of a fun loving, creative syllabus may vary, "At the end of it all, I can guarantee it: your syllabus will be a portrait of yourself" (My Syllabus). This is reason enough to write a compelling syllabus! Presenting a unique and spirited document to our students is an investment in ourselves as educators. It benefits our disciplines and values our vocation.



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## Appendix A: Original Syllabus

Western Kentucky University  
Department of English

### English 100-033 – Introduction to College Writing, Fall 2011

Time and Place: Cherry 004; MWF 12:40-1:35

#### Instructor: Elisa Levine

Office: Cherry Hall, 20g

Email: elisa.levine763@topper.wku.edu

Phone: 745-4456

Office Hours: MWF 11:00 - 12:30, or by appointment

#### Required Materials:

Troyka, Lynn, and Douglas Hesse. Quick Access COMPACT. 2nd edition. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2010. Print. ISBN 0205687342.

\* I have decided to save you the \$50-90 on a composition reader. I am also interested in encouraging active reading skills. With these things in mind, we will be choosing weekly readings together from a collection of essays that examines language and how it affects various forms of personal and cultural identity. I will send you these readings via email in a pdf file. You will be expected to print these out and turn them in with your reading responses (see more on this below under "Reading Responses").

A decent dictionary and thesaurus of your choice (Dictionary.com simply will not cut it).

One book of your choosing (more on this later).

\* I expect you to bring your books, a functioning writing utensil and a pad of paper to class every meeting period. Laptops are distracting for us both; take notes the old fashioned way.

**ABSOLUTELY NO ELECTRONIC DEVICES MAY BE VISIBLE OR TURNED ON DURING CLASS.**

**NO: COMPUTERS, MP3PLAYERS, CELL PHONES, BEEPERS, BLACKBERRIES  
NO EXCEPTIONS**

#### Important Dates to Remember

Labor Day - Monday, September 5

Drop/Add deadline - Tuesday, September 6

Fall Break - Thursday and Friday, October 6-7

Last day to drop with a "W" - Wednesday, October 19

\*FN (failure for non-attendance) date - Monday, October 31

Thanksgiving Break - Wednesday-Friday, November 23-25

Final Exams Week - December 12-16

\*F/N date is the 60% point in the semester. Students who stop attending class before this date, or in online classes, students who stop participating before this date, are assigned a final grade of FN, not F. The grade of FN, according to the undergraduate catalog, indicates "Failure due to non-attendance (no semester hours earned and no quality points)." This grade could have implications for financial assistance.

## Course Overview

Welcome to English 100, your first in a series of classes designed to prepare you for college level writing in any discipline. This course is designed as a writing workshop and reading discussion group, which means that during almost every class meeting you will be asked to write something or to bring to class something you have written as well as synthesize and respond to assigned readings. Students who succeed in English 100 work through several drafts of each essay, and hone their writing skills by composing shorter, informal assignments (reflective writing, free writing), as well. Drafting, revising, discussing ideas with peers, experimenting with writing, playing with language, as well as polishing, proofreading, editing, and finalizing a draft are all part of the writing process that you will practice in this course.

## Course Policies

### **Late/Make up Work:**

Late work will be accepted for up to a week after the due date with ten points deducted from the final grade for each day (not class period) it is late. Make up work for in class writing and reading responses will not be accepted/graded.

### **Attendance/Tardiness:**

My expectation is that you come prepared for active attendance to every class. Note that 5 absences drops you one letter grade; 6 drops you two letter grades; more than 6 unexcused absences results in failure. Fractions count: I will deduct partial time for tardiness, consistent mid-class "slip-outs" and early departures; three late arrivals and/or early departures add up to one absence. The slipping out will be assessed at my discretion. I do not distinguish between "excused" and "unexcused" absences. You are welcome to tell me why you weren't in class, as I am interested in your lives, but it will not change this. You get four absences before it affects your grade and that should cover the usual illnesses, mechanical troubles and off days that plague us all in any given semester. Use them wisely.

**NOTE:** the **ONLY** way to be considered for an dropped absence is to produce **AT THE NEXT CLASS MEETING**, a typed, 500-word, creative, even outlandish excuse for why you missed class. I will accept/reject these excuses on the basis of your writing's energy, voice, and style.

## **Grading**

Students aiming to pass this course will (1) complete multiple drafts of writing assignments; (2) submit **ONLY** writing created by you, for this class, this semester; and (3) come to class prepared and ready to participate in discussion. Grades are based solely on points earned and are non-negotiable. I don't do extra credit.

### **Breakdown - 1000 possible points**

Formal Essays (2 @ 75, 1 @ 100, 1 @ 250) = 500

Informal writings, in and out of class (reading responses, article summaries, free writing) = 150

Participation (attendance, conferences, peer review, discussions, rough drafts) = 150

Individual Book Project (reading and recommendation) = 100

Final Exam Essay = 100

### **Final Grading Scale**

1000-900 = A

899-800 = B

799-700 = C

699-600 = D

Below 600 = F

## **Writing Assignments**

You will write four formal essays this term. To help you understand the importance of the editing/revision process and to help you grow as a writer, these essays will be produced in stages. You will present one draft of the essays at a conference you and I will hold (missing a conference will constitute **TWO ABSENCES**) and one draft in class. Strive to do your best work so that we can target areas of growth and assess areas of improvement. Doing so will enable you to receive a higher grade on final essay drafts.

- Essay #1: (800+ words) Literacy Narrative: no outside sources necessary
- Essay #2 (1000+ words) University Issues: paraphrase and cite one outside source
- Essay #3 (1200+ words) Persuasive Local Issue Letter: directly quote and cite two outside sources
- I-Search Paper (1500+ words): four academic sources quoted and paraphrased, annotated bibliography

### **Final Exam Essay**

The final for this class will consist of an in-class essay reflecting upon the content and experiences you have in this class, including advice for me in future classes. The form of this essay should reflect what you have learned and so should be well-organized, your opinions should be supported with evidence and your rhetoric should be effective and likely to persuade your target audience (me). Length will be roughly three double spaced typed pages.

### **Informal Writing**

Beginning with an ungraded diagnostic piece, which you will write in the first week, there will be several in-class writing opportunities throughout the semester. These will include process comments (reflections on your own "completed" essays), peer review feedback, NYT article summaries, reading responses, free writing/ brainstorming, possible "pop" reading quizzes and other workshop related material. These will NOT be graded for grammar or structure, only for thoughtful and thought provoking prose.

NOTE: On Reading Responses (RR's) - You will write a response for every reading assignment; these responses will be due before we discuss the works in class. These papers should be typed and double-spaced (about 250 words, more or less). They will enable you to grapple with issues, identify uncertainties, raise questions, and give voice to your convictions. Feel free to include your own experiences into your responses if they will help put the readings into perspective. Responses are due at the beginning of class on the assigned. Accompanying this, you may be asked to show me evidence of active reading in your textbook. LATE RESPONSES WILL NOT RECEIVE CREDIT.

### **Participation**

Student participation is a vital part of learning. The student who receives an "A" for participation takes a voluntary, thoughtful, and active role in her/his own learning, challenging herself/himself on a daily basis. Through participation and inquiry, she/he consistently demonstrates a genuine desire to learn and shares ideas with the teacher and her/his classmates. She/he initiates discussions, asks significant questions, and contributes actively to group activities, often acting as a leader or providing the motivation, support, and energy to make any team effort work. These students are willing to take risks, to assert an opinion and support it, and to listen actively to others. When you participate you make our class work, and you also practice important job-related skills: cooperating with others, learning with others, listening to others, supporting others, and working as part of a team.

**NOTE ON CELL PHONES:** I hope you will discover my general easy going nature as we get to know each other. However, one thing I just have to be rigid about is cell phones. If I see a cell phone in use, I WILL (without mentioning it) mentally remove you from class and you will receive no participation grade for that day, as well as a partial attendance deduction. Essentially, I do not have the stomach to physically kick you out, but in my mind you will have gotten up

and left class the second I see you messing with your phone. Look, I have a pretty compelling social life too, but if I can wait until class is over to engage in it--so can you.

### **Individual Book Project**

I firmly believe that your ability to write thoughtful and grammatically correct prose is directly connected to how much and how often you read. With this in mind, you will have a semester long assignment to read one book of your choosing (with my approval). This can be fiction or non-fiction. At the end of the semester, you will present your impression of this book, and recommend to the class whether or not we should read it. As part of our conferences throughout the semester, you will be expected to bring your copy of the book and I will check in with your progress on your reading. **CHOOSE SOMETHING YOU WILL ENJOY!!!** Part of the point here is to discover enjoyment in reading, so pick something in your area of interest, whether is be science fiction, mystery, fantasy, action adventure, history, travel, horror, sports, biography, comedy, etc. My approval will be based on amount of text (no comics or cartoon books though graphic novels may be accepted) and some level of quality (let's try to do better than shirt ripping romance novels). This will be ten percent of your grade so please take it seriously.

### **Writing Help**

I will not pre-grade your assignments, though I am happy to answer general questions via email or in office hours. Western Kentucky University supports a Writing Center in Room 123 Cherry Hall, staffed by trained peer writing consultants who can assist you in improving your writing skills beyond what this class is designed to do. Free service.

### **Contacting Me**

Email is the best way to get in touch with me; I am not on campus the days I do not teach. I am on email several times a day Monday-Friday. On weekends, I will answer your email when I get to it, which may not be until Sunday evening (though if I am on-line and see a message, I will respond). During the week, I will respond by the end of the day (9 pm).

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism involves the appropriation and use of someone else's ideas or words as one's own. All definitions, terminology, concepts, and patterns of organization taken from an outside source must be identified and given credit in any essay or exam you write. When outside reading is undertaken for an assigned paper you are responsible for recording accurate reading notes so that later, should you wish to incorporate some of the ideas or phraseology encountered in your reading, you may properly and adequately identify the source. Facts of general knowledge (such as the place and date of an author's birth, honors granted during his or her lifetime, the titles and dates of published works, etc.) need not be footnoted. However, facts that are not in the area of general knowledge must be credited to the source. Ideas, interpretations, terms, and patterns of organization taken from an outside source may be either directly quoted (in which case the exact words should be placed in quotation marks) or paraphrased. Paraphrase is recommended whenever possible in order to avoid a disproportionate amount of direct quotation in your paper.

***In either case—whether you are quoting or paraphrasing--credit must be given to the source.***

A good definition of paraphrase is this one: "To paraphrase is to express the sense of a passage entirely in your own words, selecting and summarizing only information and ideas that will be useful . . . It is the recording of relevant information in the student's own words. It extracts items of information instead of merely recasting the entire passage and line of thought in different words." (emphasis mine) The key to avoiding plagiarism is to remember that when an idea, phrase, term, definition, or pattern of organization is not your own, you are responsible for giving credit to the source from which you took these elements.

**Course Prerequisite:** Minimum score of 16 on English section of ACT or successful completion of DENG 055C with a grade of “C” or better.

**Catalog Description:** Emphasizes writing for a variety of rhetorical situations with attention to voice, audience, and purpose. Provides practice in development, organization, revision, and editing. Introduces research skills.

English 100 helps to fulfill the A.1. (Organization and Communication of Ideas) general education requirement at WKU. The course will help you attain these general education goals and objectives: 1. The capacity for critical and logical thinking and 2. Proficiency in reading, writing, speaking.

### **Course Goals**

The goals of the course are to introduce students to college-level writing and critical reading, to give students instruction and practice in writing and reading college-level essays, and to make students aware of how various audiences and rhetorical situations call for different choices in language, structure, format, and tone. Students receive instruction and practice that allow them to clearly articulate their audience, purpose, and rhetorical situation for writing assignments. Reading assignments stress how and why authors make rhetorical choices and are designed both to immerse students in written language and to develop critical thinking, reading, and writing skills.

### **Learning Objectives**

Students who succeed in this course will have learned the following:

- Write short formal essays that include expository, evaluative, and basic argumentative language and structures, and that have minimal surface errors.
- Make choices of voice, tone, format, structure and usage based on an analysis of audience and rhetorical situation.
- Articulate a basic understanding of their own writing processes and employ those processes to produce text.
- Work in a collaborative setting both with their texts and with those of other students.
- Be able to read basic college-level non-fiction and to comment critically on its meaning and structure.
- Use library and other online databases to identify, locate, and obtain research/scholarship that is appropriate for use in general education writing.
- Produce generally error-free prose that is appropriate for a general academic audience.
- Summarize, paraphrase, and quote meaningfully and correctly from appropriate research.
- Utilize in-text documentation consistently according to a recognized documentation style (MLA, APA, for example).
- Write a correctly-formatted list of references cited in research-based writing (according to the documentation style used in the class – MLA Works Cited page or APA References page, for example).

### **Technology Failure**

Technology failure is not an excuse for turning in work late. Examples of technology failure are: your computer dying/crashing and deleting your work, failing to email yourself any work you need printed, your printer not working, etc. You will have plenty of time to prepare all for class assignments, so factor in technology failure and always back up your work on a flash drive or email yourself any work you have done.

### **Recycled Writing**

Recycled writing means reusing an essay written in a previously or simultaneously taken course (this includes high school essays). All assignments turned in for this course must be original to our ENG 100 class. The purpose of ENG 100 is to learn the process of invention, writing, and revision. If you turn in a paper that already went through these processes, you nullify the purpose of the course. If I find out you have submitted a recycled assignment, you will receive a zero for the assignment's grade, and will need to draft an original essay to fulfill the minimum requirements of the course (see minimum course requirements section mentioned earlier in this syllabus).

### **Resolving Complaints about Grades**

Any student who takes issue with a grade or another aspect of a course should first speak with the instructor. If the student and instructor cannot resolve the issue, the student may refer the matter to the Director of Composition, who will assist the instructor and the student in reaching a resolution. If either party is dissatisfied with the outcome at that level, the matter may be appealed to the Department Head. The Student Handbook (available online at <http://www.wku.edu/handbook/2009/>) outlines procedures for appeals beyond that level. ADA Notice Students with disabilities who require accommodations (academic and/or auxiliary aids or services) for this course must contact the Office for Student Disability Services, Room A200, Downing University Center. The OFSDS telephone number is (270) 745-5004 V/TDD. Please do not request accommodations directly from the instructor without a letter of accommodation from the Office for Student Disability Services.

### **Military Policy**

If you are either reserve or active duty military personnel and are deployed during this course, bring me your orders, and I will make every effort to help you complete this class via internet or snail mail.

### **Program Assessment Notice**

As part of a university-wide accreditation study, a small sample of papers will be collected from randomly-selected individuals in all ENG 200 classes this semester. The papers will be examined anonymously as part of a program assessment; results will have no bearing on student assessment or course grades.

\*This syllabus borrows from the syllabi of Dr. Chris Ervin, Dr. Dale Rigby, Dr. Jane Fife, Michael Gray (including this appreciation format), Dr. David Lenoir, and Dr. Blake Hobby. Thank you all for your input, generosity of experience and general good instincts.

### **Course Schedule (TENTATIVE and subject to change)**

(Omitted)

## Appendix B: Reconstructed Syllabus

### The Composition Chronicles: Your English 100 Syllabus

**\*\*This is your first reading assignment! Take it home and read it thoroughly; you will be demonstrating your knowledge of what lies herein at our next meeting.\*\***

*--"The time is right to mix sentences with dirt, the sun with punctuation, the rain with verbs, and for worms to pass through question marks, and the stars to shine down on budding nouns, and the dew to form on paragraphs."*

--Richard Brautigan, *Please Plant this Book*

### **English 100-000 – Introduction to College Writing**

Time and Place: Cherry Hall somewhere; sometime

#### **Greetings!**

Welcome to English 100, your first in a series of classes designed to prepare you for college writing. Whatever path you took to get here, whether it be directly from high school, or a more winding journey that includes jobs, marriage, military, children, maybe even an international flight or two, you are all enrolled in this class, because it is required! But also to learn skills – critical thinking; rhetorical analysis; close reading; writing and revising, knowing your audience – that will not only help you in your college career, they will help you to better speak and be heard, in your emails, resumes, published works, whatever you want. One way or another, you will be writing for the rest of your life. You are going to want to be good at it.

Academic writing is hard folks; it requires you to grapple with big ideas, intertwine them with your own, and distill it down into clear and thoughtful words. It is your effort and hard work that will best ensure success in this class, along with my own to help you along the way. These are my thoughts on how to achieve that success:

- There are rules to college writing, and you will learn them here. But too many rules get in the way of good writing, especially in the beginning. First let's explore some ideas and play with language.
- The relationships and personality of this class are crucial to our success. Talk to each other, get to know each other, respect each other.
- Give a damn! Care about what you say in class and on the page. It'll make everyone's experience better.
- Remember we are *all* here to learn; with some mechanical skills, a critical mind, and a lot of heart – you will discover the great power of your own written words.

**Instructor: Elisa Berry** - I invite you to call me by my first name (pronunciation: el.EE.sah), or Ms. Berry if that is more comfortable to you. (I am an instructor with a Master's degree, so Ms. is the proper honorific. A professor or instructor with a PhD would be called Dr.)

#### **My Teaching (and Learning) Philosophy**

My core belief about learning and teaching, is that it is community based. Even if that community is you and a book. My point is that everyone has to learn from someone or something, and if you are teaching it is to someone other than yourself. Caring about the other people in the room is crucial to success, in both directions. I entered graduate school when I was 36, after working odd jobs, traveling to odd places in the world, and meeting odd, extraordinary people. I bring all of these experiences with me into the classroom, just as you bring yours. We are going to get to know each other – our strengths and fears, our interests and apathies, our

goals and confusions. And because we're doing this as a group, you are going to get to know each other too. These relationships foster ideas that I firmly believe give you engaging things to think about, and write about. It is in the magical space of those relationships, the unique creature that is each class personality, that I believe the best learning and teaching occurs.

### **Contacting Me**

Office: TBD

Office Hours: DOW 00:00-00:00, or by appt.

Email: [elisa.berry@college.edu](mailto:elisa.berry@college.edu)

Phone: 270-555-1221

Email is the best way to get in touch with me; on weekdays I check it several times a day and will respond within 24 hours. On weekends, I will answer your email when I see it, which may not be until Monday. The best time to reach me by phone or in person is during my office hours. If your schedule conflicts with those hours, I welcome you to see me after class and we can set up an appointment. In the unlikely event that I am out of contact with my students for more than 48 hours, I will alert you of it, and tell you when I will be back in communication.

### **The Cautionary Tales**

**\*\*We're about to get into the nitty gritty here, including all the expectations, requirements, and boundaries of the class. There are exceptions to every rule, but they are extremely rare, and must be well deserved. Read everything carefully, do your best, and work hard. With those standards met, you will find me much more likely to be flexible.\*\***

**\*\*Absolutely no electronic devices may be visible or turned on during class, other than what we use together for presentations and the like. That means no computers, cell phones, beepers, mp3 players or tablets. I will certainly make an exception if you have written verification from the Office of Disability Services that you require accommodations. And I can help you figure out how to do that if you need assistance.\*\***

**\*\*It is critical to the success of this class that we treat each other respectfully. This class is designed to be topical, meaning we may be talking about issues dealing with race, class, gender, politics, history and more. Many of us have opinions on these subjects, and many of those opinions will conflict with each other. That's great – it's important to learn how to engage in hotbed subjects and remain civil. So, no bullying, shouting, interrupting or other aggressive behavior. Listen attentively, to me, and your fellow classmates; I will do the same. Rude or distracted behavior is grounds for being asked to leave and loss of participation points. \*\***

### **Required Materials:**

- The Writer's Presence, 8th Edition by Donald McQuade and Robert Atwan (eds). ISBN 10: 1457664461; ISBN 13: 978-1457664465 (At the time of this posting, Amazon has used copies, starting at \$34.00. Abebooks, Alibris, and Half.com are other good venues for used textbooks. Buy early and save yourself some cash.)
- One book of your choosing (more on this later).
- Pen/Pencil and Paper.

### **Rules of the Road**

#### **Attendance/Tardiness:**

My expectation is that you come *prepared for active* attendance to every class. This is a most important first step in earning your participation grade. (See details below). I do not distinguish

between "excused" and "unexcused" absences. You are welcome to tell me why you weren't in class, as I am interested in your lives, but it will not change this truth: an absence is an absence. Use them wisely.

Note: There is one, *and only one*, way to earn your participation grade without attending class, essentially dropping an absence. Produce *at the next class meeting*, a typed, 500-word, interesting, creative, even outlandish excuse for why you missed class. I will assign a participation grade for these based on your writing's energy, voice, and style. You can do this up to three times.

### **Participation**

Your participation in your classes is a vital part of your learning. Each class period, you have the opportunity to earn 5 points toward your total participation grade. Earning all 5 means that you are, 1) present (1.75 pts), 2) prepared (1.75 pts), and 3) taking an active, thoughtful and voluntary role in your learning, and in the learning atmosphere of the classroom (1.5 pts). Do the math – showing up prepared will get you a good, solid C. It's in that third component that you're going to get the above average or excellent grades of A/B.

By questioning, expressing your ideas, and listening to others, you demonstrate a genuine desire to be present, and make everyone's experience better. So, initiate discussion, ask significant questions, contribute in your group activities with motivation, support, and energy. Take risks by asserting your opinion, and respect others when they do the same. Argue amiably. When you participate you make our class work, and you also practice important job (and life!) related skills: cooperating with others, learning with others, listening to others, supporting others, and working as part of a team. Extra points for smiling.

Note on Cell Phones: I hope you will discover my general easy going nature as we get to know each other. However, one thing I just have to be rigid about is cell phones. If I see a cell phone in use, I will (without mentioning it) mentally remove you from class and you will receive no participation grade for that day. Essentially, I do not have the stomach to physically kick you out, but in my mind you will have gotten up and left class the second I see you messing with your phone. Look, I have a pretty compelling social life too, but if I can wait until class is over to engage in it – so can you.

### **Late/Make up Work:**

The essays you write will always be due at 11:59 pm on Sunday nights. Late essays will be accepted for up five days (Monday to Friday at 11:59 pm) after the due date. Ten points will be deducted from the final grade for each day (not class period) it is late. You can always submit your essays early. Make up work for in class writing, quizzes, and reading responses will not be accepted/graded, since these assignments are integrated into the daily flow of the class.

### **Writing Assignments and Workshopping**

This course is designed as a writing workshop, which means that during almost every class meeting you will be asked to write something or bring to class something you have written, and very often you will read each other's writing and give constructive feedback. Early in the semester you will form groups that you will work with all term. The ability to collaborate with a team is a skill that will benefit you in college and the professional world.

You will write four essays this term. To help you understand the importance of the writing process, each essay will be revised at least once. You will bring typed, complete drafts to class for workshopping, and I will help you develop skills to give constructive criticism on each other's work. You will also present a draft of your fourth, and longest essay at a conference you and I will hold. Drafting, revising, discussing ideas with peers, experimenting with writing, playing

with language, as well as polishing, proofreading, editing, and finalizing a draft are all part of the writing process that you will practice in this course.

### **Workshopped Essays**

- Essay #1: (800+ words) This I Believe Essay: no outside sources necessary
- Essay #2 (1000+ words) University Issues: quote and cite one outside source
- Essay #3 (1200+ words) Local Issue Essay: quote, paraphrase, and cite two outside sources (one academic)
- Essay #4 (1500+ words): I-Search Essay: four academic sources quoted, paraphrased, cited, with annotated bibliography

All of the multi-draft essays that you will write in this class will be personal and reflective. This means you will explore things you like, and intensely want to know more about; you will also reflect on the process of researching these subjects as you write about them. Increasingly, you will integrate your viewpoints with ideas and published academic work from experts in those areas you write about.

### **Informal and In-class Writing Assignments**

Throughout the semester, you will have writing homework and in-class writing sessions. These will include reading responses, process comments (reflections on your own “completed” essays), peer review feedback, free writing/brainstorming, possible “pop” reading quizzes and other workshop related assignments. I’ll be looking for insightful/interesting writing on these.

### **Reading Assignments and Your Responses to Them**

During the first week of class, we will choose our reading material together. From our text, *The Writer’s Presence*, you will vote for the six themes you would most like to read about and discuss. (You are also encouraged to mention an individual essay that you’d like to read, should that unit win a spot.) I’ll tally the votes and those will be our units. I’ll then plug the reading assignments into the course schedule and put it on blackboard.

You will write a response for every reading assignment, and come to class ready to discuss the reading and turn in the response. These papers should be typed and double-spaced (about 250 words, more or less). They will enable you to grapple with issues, identify questions for discussion, and give voice to your convictions. A model reading response is in the “Documents” section of our blackboard site. I will not accept late responses, as they are linked to preparing you for class discussion of the reading.

### **Individual Book Project**

Your ability to write thoughtful and grammatically correct prose is directly connected to how much and how often you read. With this in mind, you will have a semester long assignment to read one book of your choosing (with my approval) outside of class. This can be fiction or non-fiction. At the end of the semester, you will present your impressions of this book, and recommend to the class whether or not we should read it. As part of our conferences throughout the semester, you will be expected to bring your copy of the book and I will check in with your progress on your reading. Choose something you will enjoy!!! Part of the point here is to read for pleasure, so pick something in your area of interest, whether it be science fiction, mystery, fantasy, action adventure, history, travel, horror, sports, biography, comedy, etc. My approval will be based on amount of text (no comics or cartoon books though graphic novels may be accepted) and some level of quality (let’s try to do better than shirt ripping romance novels).

### **Grading**

Your grade is a result of the points you earn with your daily hard work and enthusiasm. While there may be occasional opportunities given to the entire class to earn bonus points, I don't give individual extra credit. Why should I have to do extra grading work at the harried and hurried semester's end because someone did less course work throughout the semester?

Breakdown - 1000 possible points

Formal Essays (2 @ 75, 1 @ 100, 1 @ 250) = 500

Informal writings, in and out of class (reading responses, quizzes, free writing) = 140

Participation (attendance, conferences, peer review, discussions, rough drafts) = 210

Individual Book Project (reading and recommendation) = 50

Final Exam Essay = 100

Final Grading Scale

1000-900 = A; 899-800 = B; 799-700 = C; 699-600 = D; Below 600 = F

### **Plagiarism (It's a Big Deal)**

Plagiarism means taking and using someone else's words and/or ideas as your own. All definitions, terminology, concepts, and patterns of organization taken from an outside source must be given credit in any essay you write. These may be either directly quoted or paraphrased. The key to avoiding plagiarism is to remember that when an idea, phrase, term, definition, or pattern of organization is not your own, you are responsible for giving credit to the source from which you took these elements. I have posted the WKU English Department full policy on plagiarism, with FAQ's on our blackboard site. Consult that, or me, with any questions you might have.

Look, giving credit to your sources takes skill; you have to learn how to craft sentences that have more than one voice – yours and your source's – and give them credit where it is due. Guess what: this makes your paper longer! You will learn how to do this; I will help you.

Intentional plagiarism will result in penalization that may range from failure for the assignment or entire course, to disciplinary action from the university. Just don't.

### **Resources, On Campus and On the Internet**

Campus Tutoring Services - WKU supports a Writing Center in Cherry Hall Rm. 123, staffed by trained peer writing consultants who can assist you in improving your writing skills. Free service. We will visit it early in the semester so you can learn how to make appointments with them. The Learning Center (TLC) is another peer-to-peer tutoring center that can also help you in this course, as well as your other classes. Visit their website, or their front desk on the second floor of the Downing Student Union for information about how to schedule an appointment.

Grammar Assistance - While I do not require you to purchase a grammar handbook, if you find certain elements of grammar still a challenge, I will alert you to it in your drafts, and you will want your final products to be error free. We may, as a class, trouble shoot common grammar problems, but formal grammar instruction is not a part of the curriculum. There are several websites that can help you address your problem areas, such as Grammar Girl, and Grammar Bytes. You may also ask me or a writing center tutor for explanation of any grammar rules that keep giving you a headache.

Online Formatting Labs - After the initial essay, you will increasingly be learning how to cite sources correctly and format your papers in an academic style, for this class that will be MLA. Two excellent online resources to assist you are: Purdue MLA OWL (online writing lab); and Excelsior OWL, which also has a fun and interactive grammar component.

Reference Materials - You need a dictionary. You may have a print dictionary, and if it's fairly current, that will serve you well. There are also several thorough, credible online sources as well. My favorites are: the OED (Oxford English Dictionary), which also gives the history of the word, and has a built in thesaurus; Cambridge Free Dictionary and Thesaurus, and Merriam-Webster Dictionary online.

ADA Notice: "Students with disabilities who require accommodations (academic and/or auxiliary aids or services) for this course must contact the Student Accessibility Resource Center, Room 1074, Downing Student Union. The SARC telephone number is (270) 745-5004 (TDD: 270-745-3030). Please do not request accommodations directly from the instructor without a letter of accommodation from the Student Accessibility Resource Center."

Me - I am happy to consult with you at any stage in your writing via email or during my office hours. You needn't wait until there is a crisis. And remember, we can set up another time to meet if my hours do not fit your schedule, just contact me.

### References

Grunert O'Brien, Judith et al. *The Course Syllabus: A Learning Centered Approach*. Jossey-Bass, 2008.

Collins, Terrence. "For Openers... An Inclusive Syllabus." *New Paradigms for College Teaching*, edited by Wm. E. Campbell and Karl A. Smith, Interaction Book Company, 1997, pp. 79-102.

\*This syllabus borrows from the syllabi of Dr. Dale Rigby, Dr. Jane Fife, Michael Gray (including this appreciation endnote), Dr. David Lenoir, Dr. Roxanne Cullen and Dr. Blake Hobby. Thank you all for your input, generosity of experience and general good instincts.

## Course Schedule

### Important Dates to Remember

Labor Day - Monday, September 5

Drop/Add deadline - Tuesday, September 6

Fall Break - Thursday and Friday, October 6-7

Last day to drop with a "W" - Wednesday, October 19

\*FN (failure for non-attendance) date - Monday, October 31 Thanksgiving Break - Wednesday-

Friday, November 23-25 Final Exams Week - December 12-16

\*F/N date is the 60% point in the semester. Students who stop attending class before this date, or in online classes, students who stop participating before this date, are assigned a final grade of FN, not F. The grade of FN, according to the undergraduate catalog, indicates "Failure due to non-attendance (no semester hours earned and no quality points)." This grade could have implications for financial assistance.

(Schedule omitted)

## WKU Potter College English 100 Course Policies, Objectives, and Guidelines\*

**Course Prerequisite:** Minimum score of 16 on English section of ACT or successful completion of 055 with a grade of "C" or better. Students with ACT English scores of 16 and 17 will be required to attend ENG 100E sections which include an extra hour of class time. Students who have unsuccessfully attempted ENG 100 (earned grade of "W," "F," or "FN") may not retake ENG 100 as a WEB section except under extraordinary circumstances, and then only with the written permission of the Director of Composition.

**Catalog Description:** Emphasizes writing for a variety of rhetorical situations with attention to voice, audience and purpose. Provides practice in development, organization, revision and editing. Introduces research skills.

### Pre-2014 General Education Goals Met by this Course

English 100 helps to fulfill the A.1. (Organization and Communication of Ideas) general education requirement at WKU. The course will help you attain these general education goals and objectives: 1. The capacity for critical and logical thinking and 2. Proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking.

### Colonnade (Fall 2014 and later) Learning Outcomes Met by this Course

Upon completion of this course, students will demonstrate the ability to:

1. Write clear and effective prose in several forms, using conventions appropriate to audience (including academic audiences), purpose, and genre.
2. Find, analyze, evaluate, and cite pertinent primary and secondary sources, including academic databases, to prepare written texts.
3. Identify, analyze, and evaluate statements, assumptions, and conclusions representing diverse points of view, and construct informed, sustained, and ethical arguments in response. Plan, organize, revise, practice, edit, and proofread to improve the development and clarity of ideas.

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\* These are the policies crafted and set forth by the university for all English 100 classes. They are guidelines and goals for all of us, teachers and students alike. If you have any questions about them, please ask me, or you can talk to someone in the English Department office.

**Incompletes:** Typically, incompletes will not be granted for E100. If you have extenuating circumstances – for example, if you are in the military and are deployed toward the end of the semester, or if you have a personal or medical crisis that comes up toward the end of the semester – discuss your situation with your instructor if possible and he will consider an incomplete. He will only consider an incomplete for students who are in good standing in the course.

**Resolving Complaints about Grades:** The first step in resolving a complaint about grades is for the student to attempt to resolve the problem directly with the course instructor. See the Student Handbook, available at <http://www.wku.edu/handbook/> for additional guidance.

**Program Assessment Notice:** As part of a university-wide accreditation study, a small sample of papers will be collected from randomly-selected individuals in all ENG 100 classes this semester. The papers will be examined anonymously as part of a program assessment; results will have no bearing on student assessment or course grades.

## Appendix C: Syllabus Survey

### Syllabus Impact and Efficacy in Composition Classes: Student Survey

*\*Please, do not write your name on this sheet; participants are strictly anonymous.\**

#### Participant Information

Age\_\_\_\_\_

Gender      M      F

Year in College (freshman, sophomore, etc) \_\_\_\_\_

Major\_\_\_\_\_

Average Grade on English Papers\_\_\_\_\_

#### Survey Questions

1. Throughout the semester, how often do you expect to consult your syllabus in this class? Circle the statement that most closely applies to you.
  - (A) Prior to each class meeting
  - (B) Once a week
  - (C) Once a month
  - (D) A couple times during the semester
  - (E) I have no expectations to consult my syllabus.
2. When reading through your syllabus for this class at the beginning of the semester, what sections were most interesting/engaging to you?
  - (A) Grade breakdown and assessment
  - (B) Major assignment descriptions and due dates
  - (C) Course overview/introduction

(D) Course policies, including prerequisites, goals, learning objectives, and grievances

(E) Other (please specify)\_\_\_\_\_

3. Circle the statement that best approximates how your syllabus has contributed to your overall class experience thus far. Circle as many answers as apply.

(A) Reading the syllabus got me excited about this course.

(B) Reading the syllabus made me a little nervous about this course.

(C) Reading the syllabus made me feel like maybe I should drop this course.

(D) I didn't feel anything while reading this syllabus.

(E) I have not read the syllabus.

4. What information did you find most important in your course syllabus?

5. What information, explanations, and/or resources would be helpful to add to your syllabus for this class?

## **Appendix D: Teaching Philosophy Statement**

As a new teacher, who has only taught as part of my graduate school experience, developing a philosophy statement seems initially daunting. But if I look at my own learning history, including learning how to teach, I think I know where to start.

I never wanted to be a teacher, I mean I love it now, but it was never a dream of mine, and even now, as I re-enter the academic world, it is one among many interests, most of which I engage in alone. Perhaps it is because my other passions are solitary – gardening, cooking, animal care, yoga, reading, and knitting – that I have developed such a relationship oriented approach to teaching. My core belief about learning and teaching, is that it is community based. Even if that community is a book. My point is that everyone has to learn from someone or something, and if you are teaching it is to someone other than yourself. And so, caring about the other people in the room is crucial to success, in both directions.

When I was a middle and high school age student, I did not have any teachers that movies are made about--they didn't care about me, and I didn't care about them. And very quickly I checked out, eventually dropping out of school in my junior year, and staying out of school for about ten years. When I did return, to a community college at the age of 26, my experience was the absolute opposite. I met teachers who were invested in my success, and I became invested in their approval. Gradually, my motivation to please them turned inward and

became self-sustaining, my skills skyrocketed, and my very concept of myself changed. All of a sudden, I was “educated.”

I entered graduate school when I was 36, after working odd jobs, traveling to odd places, and meeting odd, extraordinary people. When I began teaching in my second year, I brought all of these experiences with me into the classroom. And I shared them. Initially, I did this because that is just who I am; I tend to lay it all on the table. In the classroom, I am casual and humble. I told my students that I have a G.E.D., that I spent many years feeling like an academic failure, and about the great joy I now get from engaging in critical and complex thinking. I got to know them – their strengths and fears, their interests and apathies, their goals and confusions. Because we did most of this as a group, they got to know each other too. And in each of the four classes I taught, those relationships fostered ideas that gave my students engaging things to think about, and write about. By the end of the semester I looked around those classrooms at students leaning forward in their desks, laughing with each other, spending time with each other outside of class. I had to rein in discussions, because everyone had something to say. It was great! Their writing, while not perfect, was fun, took risks, and showed great improvement. And now, I’m hooked. It is in the magical space of those relationships, the unique creature that is each class personality, that I believe the best learning and teaching occurs.