

Statement of Teaching and Administrative Philosophy

Kristi McDuffie

The main thread that ties my teaching together is my commitment to increasing access to literacy. Whether I am teaching first-year composition, a content class on race and technology, or rhetorical theory for new writing instructors, my learning goals center on providing students with the knowledge and skills that will support them as critical consumers and ethical producers of communication.

In first-year composition, my literacy goals are primarily achieved by focusing on genre and transfer. First-year writing is often an introduction to academic discourses that will prepare students for writing in their undergraduate studies and beyond. While this purpose of first-year composition is often debated, my goal is to facilitate students' desires when they want access to the literacies that will help them adapt to a variety of future writing situations, and underprepared and at-risk students are often further away from academic literacies that are valued in the academy. Genre and transfer approaches to teaching writing help students address this need by developing strategies and tools for approaching new writing situations. For example, if we assist students in mastering the conventions of a particular assignment, but fail to discuss the socio-historical context of that writing situation, they are unlikely to understand the broader concepts that inform their writing practices. If we help them master a style guide, but fail to discuss the purposes and practices behind style guides in general or differences in style guides in particular, the student is unlikely to have the ability to utilize a different style guide when presented with one.

In practice, I enact my goals for first-year composition by facilitating students in researching writing situations and developing meta-cognitive knowledge about their practices that can transfer to new writing situations. As they work through their writing and research practices, I ask students to articulate their choices and reflect on their growth as writers in order to gain meta-awareness about the relationship between the intentions and outcomes of their work. For example, my first-year composition course scaffolds the research process over numerous assignments. I begin with an exploratory assignment where students propose research questions based on preliminary research. The next assignments ask them to critically and rhetorically evaluate their sources and they continue to revise their research questions. My favorite assignment in this trajectory is a synthesis essay, where students create an academic conversation based on their sources and articulate an argument making a nuanced contribution to that conversation. This is a difficult cognitive task, one that many students have not yet been asked to do in their prior educations. During the drafting process, I engage them in conversations about their project development; my goal is to further their writing and research knowledge beyond what is represented on any particular page and to help them make choices that are conscientious and intentional. Awareness of these choices ideally translates into the meta-knowledge that will help them make informed choices about their future writing.

My focus on genre and transfer affects other courses that I teach as well. In a general education course concentrating on racial justice and the Internet, I asked students to analyze a social media campaign related to some form of social justice. In addition to composing the analysis itself, students were to explain their various choices in a reflection document. This reflection served to document their learning, allowed them to share their writing, research, and analytical processes, and helped them to develop meta-cognitive knowledge for future writing situations. One successful group project in this course analyzed the hashtag #RacismEndedWhen, which was a hashtag campaign protesting a Republican tweet in celebrating Rosa Parks for "ending racism." In addition to the analysis itself, students discussed their work in invention documents, in class, in workshop, and in their reflections to illustrate their learning processes. They were able to articulate their critical framework of systemic racism, their data selection, and their collective drafting process. They also demonstrated successful multimodal composition skills throughout the semester. It is my goal that these knowledges and skills traveled beyond their successful projects.

As I take these pedagogical dedications to my administrative roles, I teach composition instructors and writing center consultants about the reasons for my commitment to genre and transfer as a social justice

endeavor, as well as about the range of pedagogical values and styles within Rhetoric and Composition. I support instructors in attending to the programmatic learning goals while also developing their own teaching identities and individualized pedagogical goals. When teaching the Proseminar in the Teaching of Rhetoric for new graduate teaching assistants, I thus provide foundational material in Rhetoric and Composition, such as about writing as a process, alongside resources about different pedagogical approaches, such as about feminist teaching practices. Throughout the semester, we explore the numerous tensions that arise between the historical influences on first-year composition, including Greco-Roman rhetorical traditions, alongside recent research trajectories, such as the effects of mobile composing technologies. While addressing these various conversations, I also provide space for instructors to work through the factors that affect their own developing teaching identities, such as their liminal positionalities, benefits and limitations to critical pedagogy, concerns with self-disclosure, and more. At the same time that they are working through the ways that their own identities affect their teaching personas, they are learning about the ways that students' identities and prior experiences emerge in the classroom and affect their learning.

These same principles guide my design and implementation of composition theory and praxis courses for preservice teachers. To adjust my teaching practices to future middle- and high-school teachers, I maintain many foundational readings and assignments about teaching writing while adding more hands-on practice in developing daily lesson plans and adapting to different learning styles. In addition to the teacher preparation assignments vital to this class, I also include coursework guiding students in thinking about themselves as teachers rather than students. One of my assignments that implements these goals leverages my digital literacy commitments by asking them to assess their social media profiles for how they might be read by future employers. Through this process, I provide them with information and support as they make their desired adjustments to manage their online presences with intentionality.

Mentoring both developing and seasoned teachers is but one responsibility that I have as a writing program administrator. I also advocate for all of the stakeholders in our composition classes. I promote responsible labor practices for teaching assistants and full-time lecturers, while simultaneously making strategic hiring and staffing decisions as a steward of University funds. I am often a mediator for the different interests of upper-level administrators, instructors, and students in a variety of situations where those interests do not necessarily align. I navigate these situations by seeking feedback and using transparency. When I undertake a new initiative or change, I am careful to seek feedback from as many people as I can and to communicate as much as possible. One way that I have enhanced programmatic transparency is by implementing "Town Hall" style meetings at the beginning of every semester where I provide updates on new and ongoing initiatives to all our constituencies and make space for questions. I also lead the creation of an annual report that is sent to the English department, our college, and key administrators throughout the University. In addition to communicating about our program and providing information about our decision-making, these initiatives enhance writing program visibility. Furthermore, strategic planning with longer timelines has also helped enhance feedback and transparency. In building a programmatic textbook, for example, I was able to take instructor concerns into consideration. Even for smaller updates, such as digitizing scheduling processes, I was able to user-test the form in order to make it the most useful for the multiple personnel affected, such as the business office, course directors, and instructors.

My commitment to literacy access also drive my administrative goals. My role affords me with multiple opportunities to support individual students and focus on their unique needs as they navigate through university structures. At the same time, I have been able to address access and inequality at higher levels. For example, we have been assessing our composition placement practices over the past few years in order to move toward more racially equitable placement measures based on current research. We have been able to effect change even with institutional constraints such as shrinking budgets and hiring freezes. In sum, my administrative goals are synergistic with my teaching goals in that I aim for all of the students and teachers I encounter to have the literate skills and confidence they desire to succeed and affect change in any arena that they enter.