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ABSTRACT

An English 812 class in expository writing at Georgia State University was restructured by the instructor to become a seminar in academic publishing. Often, lengthy assignments are assigned in graduate seminar courses, with professors incorrectly assuming that graduate students already have knowledge of the writing process, when they often do not. The class is based on four assumptions of communicative competence graduate students must master: (1) research methodology and the model of knowing; (2) research by the extended research community is shared through professional journals and meetings; (3) to publish and to be cited is to enter the community's discourse; and (4) students' initiation into the research community is through the reading and writing they do. In this course, students are asked to review a book relevant to either their seminar presentations or final projects; report on an issue listed in the course overview or one of their own choosing; keep a daily notebook; provide 10 annotated entries on writing instruction; write an abstract for a specific conference; and rework existing papers or write a new paper for publication, with peer editing before the due date. The instructor completes all assignments with the students. (CR)

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Designing a Graduate Seminar in Academic Writing

L. Gaillet

ED 402 595

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

As a graduate student, I was lucky enough to have a wonderful mentor, Winifred Bryan Horner, who not only instructed me in the ways of conducting and organizing my own research but also helped me to discover publication opportunities in my field-composition and rhetoric. Many of my fellow graduate students were not so fortunate. When I came to Georgia State University as an untenured assistant professor, I hoped to encourage the graduate students to join the conversations of their own particular fields. That opportunity presented itself in an unexpected manner.

I was assigned to teach English 812, a class in expository writing. Quite honestly, I had no idea what this class should entail. My worst nightmare was that English 812 had been designed as a glorified advanced English 101 class and that I was expected to teach the current-traditional modes to graduate student, many of whom were teaching introductory English classes themselves. Upon taking over English 812, I decided that this class could be restructured under the existing rubric into a seminar in academic publishing.

The first time I taught the class (in the summer quarter) only six people signed up, but their output was enormous: conference abstracts accepted for presentation (one in London), revised papers and book reviews accepted for publication, and a request for travel and equipment funds granted. Word soon got out (as is wont to do among graduate students) that this class could help you get a job by providing fodder for your vita! The

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next time I taught it, I allowed overflows and there was still a waiting list to get in. One student in her final evaluation of the class succinctly sums up the goals of the seminar:

Yes, we are expected to publish and present at conferences, but we are never told how to accomplish getting an article into print or how to propose a presentation for a conference--almost as if publishing and presenting are some sort of secret initiation into academia, mysterious skills that some can achieve easily and others never achieve at all, even a weeding out of those who have "it" and those who don't. Deep down I knew that getting my work into print couldn't be that hard or even necessarily require talent--I've certainly read my share of dreary, dull, poorly written articles. But I was still terrified at the prospect of needing to publish and present because I didn't know how to go about it. English 812 solved those problems for me.

I think one reason accounting for the popularity of the class is that so often lengthy assignments are assigned in graduate seminar courses; yet, professors assume that graduate students have knowledge of the writing process--particularly the process of academic writing--and don't teach writing at all in their classes. As Patricia Sullivan explains, "Often professors assume that 'graduate students 'already know how to write' by

virtue of their higher educational status." This assumption, Sullivan proposes

is the cognitive corollary of a current-traditional theory of writing and a product-oriented pedagogy; writing itself is conceived as a set of skills that a student 'masters' at some point in his or her educational life... [T]he teaching of writing to graduate students is held to be redundant or superfluous. If writing problems manifest themselves in a text a graduate student composes, such problems can be attributed to personal deficiency, not institutional *praxis*. ("Writing in the Graduate Curriculum" 37).

So often, professors don't review drafts of students' works in progress, allow students to discuss their written work with other students in the class, or help students target their writing to a specific audience--other than the professors themselves. I asked my students in the expository writing class to read and respond to Sullivan's essay "Writing in the Graduate Curriculum; their remarks are quite revealing.

A Chorale of Voices

Student 1:

When the due date of the first paper I wrote in graduate school drew near and I asked the professor what he expected

as a topic or format for the paper, he replied, "I don't think I need to explain that. I think 99.9 percent of you know what I expect for a short paper like this one. You've done a paper like this before." This statement resounded in my mind when I read Sullivan's words, "little discussion occurred with regard to the papers in terms of their purpose, methods of development, audience, or form."

Student 2:

I, somehow, have fumbled my way successfully through all of the courses I gave so far taken, but to know that my paper would be evaluated at some point along the way by the professor would give me endless relief.

Student 3:

The master's program in English professes to be focused on teaching literature, but grades are awarded almost exclusively based on writing. And that writing is performed in a vacuum, outside the classroom, with almost no input from faculty or other students.

Student 4:

The "current-traditional" method of assigning writing in graduate courses not only leaves students without instruction in the writing that determines their grades, but assigning writing on limited topics can also detract from the goal of imparting knowledge of a body of literature to the students. Writing is certainly "separated from the study of a subject," but not necessarily relegated to the

bottom tier of a tacit hierarchy"; in a sense, the dichotomy between course content and reward structure elevates writing above reading, which intensifies the problem that writing is not taught in graduate programs.

Plan for the Class

I base the goals of the class on the four "assumptions" of "communicative competence" graduate students must master, as outlined by Carol Berkenkotter, Thomas Huckin, and John Ackerman in "Conventions, Conversations, and the Writer: Case Study of a Student in a Rhetoric Ph.D. Program." The class structure, assignments/evaluation, and discussions all reinforce these goals:

1. Members of a research community share a "model of knowing" (Miles and Huberman, 1984). This model of knowing is embedded in the research methodology that incoming students in graduate programs learn and is encoded in the language that community members use.
2. A research community actually extends beyond a student's graduate school to include researchers at other institutions who use the same methodologies and who ascribe to compatible models of knowing. These researchers constitute an "invisible college," (Crane, 1972) or "thought collective" (Fleck, 1979), sharing

their work with one another through publications in professional journals and through papers delivered at professional meetings.

3. Papers and publications constitute a research community's communicative forum; significant issues are raised, defined, and debated within the communicative forum. In this sense, to publish and to be cited is to enter the community's discourse.
4. Graduate students are initiated into the research community through the reading and writing they do, through instruction in research methodology, and through interaction with faculty and with their peers. A significant part of this initiation process is learning how to use appropriate written linguistic conventions for communicating through disciplinary forums. (12)

When asked to comment on the goals of the course, one student said:

English 812 is not only a valuable introduction to the requirements and processes of academic writing, but also a way for a graduate student in any discipline to begin mastering the many skills of research and rhetorical applications that are necessary for success in a university position. Few graduate students know the importance of academic presenting and publishing and of the benefits of developing collaborative, collegial relationships with others in their field. I

believe that English 812 should be taught across the curriculum and could be exported to other college and university campuses.

Course Requirements and Evaluation: I complete all assignments along with students.

Book Review and Query Letter 15%

I encourage students to review a new book relevant to either their seminar presentations or final projects, if possible. Students should target this review to a particular journal in their areas of concentration and follow the format appropriate for that journal. I encourage students to examine other reviews of the work (if available). If they are targeting a journal which does not accept unsolicited reviews, I tell them to send a query letter, asking to be considered a reviewer for that publication and enclosing a copy of the review as a sample.

Seminar Presentations 20%

Students may report on an issue listed in the course overview or one of their own choosing (in consultation with me). I assist students with bibliographical information. Students are responsible for introducing the topic to the class and initiating discussion. They prepare a 1-2 page handout (including bibliography and key quotations) for each seminar participant. Possible topics for seminar presentations include:

Writing the Conference Abstract

Rhetorical Elements of Published Documents
Turning Conference Presentations into Published Works
Publishing (Or Not) Theses and Dissertations
Deciding Where to Submit
Journal Review (Refereeing) Procedures
Collaborative Writing (how and who gets top billing)
Revising for Publication
Writing for Commercial Publication
Grant Writing

Publication Notebook/Daily 15%

The students are required to create a "place" to file information concerning publication in their concentration areas. I look specifically for this information in their notebooks (organized according to their needs):

1. A list (or copy) of all possible papers (already drafted) for submission.

2. Copies of "Calls For Papers" (chapter and article publications and conference presentations).

3. A list of journals in the area of concentration.

4. Submission guidelines with addresses and contact names for journals in the student's concentration area (see MLA Directory of Periodicals).

5. Information on presses committed to publishing in the student's concentration.

6. An annotated list of bibliographical information related to the student's area of interest.

7. A list of working titles or topic the student would like to explore.

8. A list of organizations, e-mail lists, etc. in the student's area.

9. Grant writing information.

Class Bibliography 10%

Students must provide ten annotated entries for our collective bib on writing instruction at the graduate level or information concerning getting work published or becoming an academic professional. See appendix.

Conference Abstract 10%

Each student writes an abstract for a specific conference. I suggest places to look for call for papers and also encourage students to establish relationships with professors in their areas of concentration.

Final Paper 30%

Students are encouraged to rework existing papers (perhaps ones commended by the professors for which they were written originally **OR** write a new paper for publication. We discuss the papers with class members throughout the term and peer-edit before the due date. Students turn in the final copy ready to be mailed (correct number of copies, SASE, etc.)

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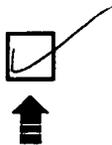
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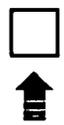
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