

# Taking the High Road: Teaching for Transfer in an FYC Program



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The bottom line for writing instruction may be this: We get what we teach for. And if we want to help students to transfer what they have learned, we must teach them how to do so. That is, we must find ways to help novices see the similarities between what they already know and what they might apply from that previously learned knowledge to other writing tasks.

—David Smit, *The End of Composition Studies*

Current theoretical conversations in the field of Rhetoric and Composition, particularly conversations related to first-year curricular design, are increasingly concerned with the issue of “teaching for transfer,” a trend evidenced by the recent flurry of books, articles, empirical studies, and professional discussions on the topic. Many writing teachers and scholars who discuss knowledge transfer draw on work by educational theorists D.N. Perkins and Gavriel Salomon, who together define two different types of transfer and two related pedagogies. Distinguishing between reflexive and reflective cognitive acts, Perkins and Salomon describe low road transfer as an automatic and highly routinized cognitive practice, while they characterize high road transfer as both mindful and analytic (25). Answering the question, “Can we teach for transfer?” in the affirmative, Perkins and Salomon offer two techniques: “hugging” and “bridging” (28). While the former “means teaching so as to better meet the resemblance conditions for low road transfer” by creating situations that trigger automatic responses, the latter, bridging, “‘mediates’ the needed processes of abstraction and connection-making” through activities that promote problem solving and generalizing across disparate examples (29). Both in theory and in practice, writing teachers generally prioritize high road transfer that entails application of writing knowledge to other courses and contexts, although David Smit and others believe that it is “rare” for general education writing courses to teach high road transfer effectively (134).

While developing successful transfer pedagogy is a challenging undertaking, one that may require writing instructors to revise both course content and teaching styles, there are good reasons for facing the challenge, starting with the changing face of college writing instruction. Over the past several years, both stand-alone first-year composition (FYC) programs and programs within English departments have become less isolated from the rest of the university, and it is not uncommon for them to be identified with (or even renamed) “University Writing Programs.” In addition, FYC is often affiliated with Writing-Across-the-Curriculum (WAC) or Writing-in-the-Disciplines (WID) programs, and FYC is frequently supported by Writing Centers, which serve college and university communities as true centers of local writing culture. In this context, first-year writing gains new responsibilities, becoming students’ introduction not only to college composition, but also to writing transfer in other courses and contexts. Anne Beaufort addresses this shift in *College Writing and Beyond: a New Framework for University Writing Instruction*, where she explains the role that FYC has the potential to play in extending writing knowledge beyond the first year:

Freshman writing, if taught with an eye toward transfer of learning and with an explicit acknowledgement of the context of freshman writing itself as a social practice, can set students on a course of life-long learning so that they know how to learn to become better and better writers in a variety of social contexts. (7)

For Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) and FYC teachers who accept this challenge, the question they jointly face is how to develop a program that can help students acquire the rhetorical knowledge and skills vital to communicating effectively in multiple contexts. How, in other words, do we design a writing curriculum that creates the conditions for high road transfer? In response Smit provides a general suggestion: “If we want to promote the transfer of certain kinds of writing abilities from one class to another or one context to another, then we are going to have to find the means to institutionalize instruction in the similarities between the way writing is done in a variety of contexts” (120). Clarifying “the means” by which we might accomplish this feat, Beaufort and others have suggested that we should “teach those broad concepts (discourse community, genre, rhetorical tools, etc.) which will give writers the tools to analyze similarities and differences among writing situations they encounter” (149).

When we initiated program-wide FYC curriculum revisions at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, we considered these issues closely in relation to the twinned goals of teaching students core writing strategies and encouraging them to communicate confidently in multiple situations. Regarding rhetoric as the best “mediator” between these two goals, we chose to center our new curriculum on rhetoric and the transferability of rhetorical knowledge across different situations, mediums and assignments. As a result, we reinforced and strengthened the rhetorical foundations of both English 101 and English 102, and we worked to ensure each course retained distinct content and focus. Ultimately, then, English 101 concentrates on analysis and argument, and we redesigned shared assignment sequences to emphasize the importance of learning to read and write critically and self-consciously about other people’s texts. In English 102, our new priorities resulted in even greater changes: namely, the integration of multiple methods (including field research and historical research) into a course that previously focused on literary studies and included only traditional academic research methods.

Thinking especially about our desire to increase students’ awareness of how writing can be used in different ways for different purposes, we also chose to integrate an expanded range of texts, including multi-media and digital texts, more strongly into our courses. As we began program-wide curriculum revision, we revised our outcomes to emphasize the ways in which emerging multimedia, multimodal, and multi-disciplinary FYC curricula inform the acquisition and transferability of academic literacy learning, a move necessitated by the changing nature of writing in the academy. As one of our new outcomes states, our revised courses are designed “to help students develop a variety of strategies for writing for multiple audiences and purposes; to develop their ability to create a wide range of texts (including multimedia and electronic texts) and communicate by means of multiple modes of communication” (UTK Composition Program Outcomes Statement). In making this change, we join those teachers and scholars of writing and literacy who have recently renewed their commitment to better understanding and promoting multimodal literacies, or literacy across different mediums and communication situations (Jewitt and Kress 2003; Kress 2003; Selber 2004; Wysocki 2004). As Kathleen Blake Yancey describes in “Made Not Only In Words: Composition in a New Key,” multiple literacies play a leading part in “new curriculum for the 21st century” and programs of study designed to address how texts “move across contexts, between media, across time” (312). Attentive, thus, to the seemingly endless, past and present proliferation of rhetorical situations, genres, and communicative media, the pedagogical model Yancey describes is not only a guide to the new products of twenty-first century composition, but also an index to “the *content* of composition” for the millennials and those who teach them (308).

As first-year composition programs reassess their curricula and come to grips with the “content envy” that Richard Fulkerson identifies in his recent summary and critique of “Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century,” WPAs face critical questions about the transferability of learning in their courses. Such concerns invite us to think about how we can develop FYC programs that are both responsible and responsive to the writing needs of students beyond the first year. The program profile that follows focuses on how members of the FYC program at a Research-1 university, the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, came together over the course of three years to address these questions in curricular revisions. Examining the institutional context for curriculum review and the process of implementing new courses, we describe the impetus for change along with the goals and theories that informed each stage of decision-making. It is our hope that the local example we present here will provide insights into the challenges and opportunities that composition programs nationally face as they are increasingly called upon to address the question of transfer.<sup>{1}</sup>

## The Local Context for Curricular Change

Our curriculum review began in Fall 2004 and was equally prompted and shaped by a combination of departmental, institutional, and programmatic factors. First of all, the departmental context: The English Department at the University of Tennessee is a fairly traditional one comprised of three divisions: literature, criticism, and textual studies; creative writing; and rhetoric, writing and linguistics or RWL. While the RWL faculty has eight members and the department recently formalized a Ph.D. track in the division, the majority of tenure-track positions are held by literature specialists and—with a few exceptions from the RWL group—none of the professorial faculty regularly teaches FYC. Instead, composition courses are taught by very qualified and talented lecturers and graduate TAs, although with a few exceptions, most of these instructors have disciplinary interests in literature or creative writing. This was the demographic and the situation that external reviewers addressed when, in 2003, our department underwent a 10-year review. At the end of that process, reviewers recommended strongly that FYC undergo “a thorough review of the requirements (led by the Rhetoric and Composition staff),” and they singled out English 102, a course focused on literature and composition, as requiring particular attention and reconsideration. The reviewers’ final report offered this summary:

English 102 was criticized inside and outside the department for being inconsistent over sections in

requirements; some sections require much writing, while others (often taught by TAs, who probably see the course as preparation for teaching advanced literature) are taught as literature courses, with comparatively little writing. The program director should have the authority to examine book orders and syllabi to see that the focus in 102 stays on writing. (Final Report, Department of English, External Review, 2003)

While this report underscored the need to shift the focus in 102 from literary analysis to writing and rhetoric and to make the course more meaningful for students within varied fields of study, there were other institutional changes taking place that further emphasized the need to focus on broader, more transferable skills. In fall 2004, UT implemented new general education requirements, which grouped English 101 and 102 under “basic skills requirements” and added a third required writing course that students could take in one of 32 disciplines. These changes transformed FYC courses, turning them in effect, into prerequisites for writing in the disciplines. The UTK Undergraduate Catalog underscores this idea in the General Education section under the heading “Communicating through Writing”:

Good writing skills enable students to create and share ideas, investigate and describe values, and record discoveries—all skills that are necessary not only for professional success but also for personal fulfillment in a world where communication increasingly takes place through electronic media. Students must be ... aware that different audiences and purposes call for different rhetorical responses. To satisfy this requirement, students take the first-year composition sequence and, upon completion of English 101 and 102 or their equivalent, take one other course designated as “writing-intensive” (WC), [requiring] formal and informal writing assignments that total 5,000 words.

Together, these institutional factors—both the outside review and new general education requirements—pushed us to reconsider how our curriculum is responsive to the writing needs of students beyond the first year.

These changes helped to create the context in which the Composition Committee began revising the first-year writing curriculum in the Fall of 2004. The Committee includes the Director of First-Year Composition (Mary Jo Reiff); the Director of ESL; the Director of the Writing Center; an RWL faculty representative (Jenn Fishman); a full-time lecturer, a part-time lecturer, and a graduate student. Working together, we turned to our knowledge of “best practices” in the field, and we looked for ways to reinforce the objectives described in the “WPA Outcomes Statement” (the development of rhetorical knowledge, writing processes, critical thinking and reading skills, and use of conventions); at the same time we worked to incorporate current research and pedagogical perspectives on transfer, such as Beaufort’s knowledge domains (which include rhetorical knowledge, contextual knowledge, and writing process skills). We designed our new curricula to emphasize the idea that rhetorical actions are culturally situated; we formulated assignments to create better opportunities for students to learn rhetorical awareness through experiences with a diverse range of texts and genres, including multi-media texts; and we highlighted for students and teachers both the role of visual and multi-modal rhetorics in student engagement and learning—an additional outcome that Yancey calls for in her afterword to *The Outcomes Book* (220-221). Based on all of these factors, we identified three main curricular objectives:

1. **Rhetoric:** To increase students’ rhetorical awareness of how their subject, purpose, audience and context for writing can shape their message, mode of inquiry, methods of research, and presentation of ideas.
2. **Multiplicity:** To expose students to a diverse range of texts (print, digital, multimedia), methods and perspectives and to teach them to communicate via multiple modes of communication—written, spoken, and visual.
3. **Transferability:** By way of the first two goals, to further develop the rhetorical tools of inquiry, analysis, and research and experience with writing in varied situations and mediums that will transfer to writing situations outside of FYC.

In addition, we were concerned with more programmatic issues. First, we wanted to find ways to reestablish and then maintain a coherent program so that students across our 200 sections could see clearly they were working to reach the same goals and fulfill the same general requirements. Second, we wanted to find ways to improve the curriculum for faculty. Recognizing the expertise our FYC faculty bring to the classroom as well as the full range of responsibilities they carry within the department, we wanted to provide teachers with new ways to personalize their courses and teach to their strengths. Further, we wanted to provide them better support, taking into account the needs of both TAs, who are usually teaching two courses while also taking two courses, and lecturers, who generally teach across the department's undergraduate curriculum and carry a 4:4 teaching load.

In an effort to meet these goals, we took steps to engage teachers fully in the process of revision. To that end, we proceeded gradually over several semesters, and we solicited feedback at every stage, beginning with a faculty survey of current teaching practices (see [survey, Appendix 1](#)). While our questions covered every aspect of our FYC

program, we were especially interested in teachers' comments about the organization and content of 102, and we received the following replies to the open-ended question, "What are the biggest challenges of teaching English 102?":

- Student motivation, apathy for literature;
- Keeping argument (vs. literary analysis) the focus of the course; getting students to see literature as an argument;
- Negotiating between teaching writing and research and teaching literature;
- Establishing relevance of literature courses to writing across the curriculum;
- Difficulty with teaching literary research and question of whether or not to expose students to literary criticism;
- Difficulty with teaching the generic research paper

Reading these responses, we were struck by their consistency with the external review and with our own sense of how 102 had become a course that limited high road transfer. Teachers confirmed this idea during an open forum, and their comments further reinforced our belief that 102, in particular, was ripe for reform. As teachers reported, the standing goals of 102 seemed disparate, even contradictory, and they required teachers to do—and to try to do well—the nearly impossible task of teaching both a fully-fledged introduction to college-level research and research writing *and* a comprehensive introduction to literary studies and analysis. Deciding that, at best, our curriculum promoted low road transfer, or students' relatively automatic application of previously acquired reading and writing knowledge, we began to articulate new program-wide goals. From this point onward, we turned our attention to identifying pedagogical practices we could build on and revise, while also singling out specific curricular areas with the greatest need for attention and improvement.

To continue making our revision process as collaborative as possible, the Composition Committee organized focus groups in Spring 2005, inviting teachers to meet with us in small groups and share their ideas about how the first-year writing curriculum could better serve its students and better support their writing needs beyond their first year (see [invitation memo, Appendix 2](#)). From the focus groups, we learned that teachers were generally receptive to shifting the emphasis in 102 from literature to inquiry, and they were intrigued by the idea of defining their own inquiry subjects. At the same time, instructors were skeptical of their ability to increase attention to the rhetorical aspects of writing while also teaching diverse methods of inquiry (field research, historical research, and academic research). In addition, while there was general appreciation for a more structured and coherent curriculum, many teachers also expressed concerns about the additional work that would come with having the freedom to shape their courses and assignments. As all of us noticed, few of the inquiry methods and subjects we discussed are covered adequately (if at all) by the FYC textbooks and readers that crowd our bookshelves, and that observation prompted us to talk at length about how we might balance the intellectual and pedagogical opportunities presented by teaching without textbooks and the work involved in gathering or designing substitute resources, from readings and related reading guides to assignment sequences, rubrics, and prompts.

The courses we designed as a result of these deliberations speak equally to our desire for curricular coherence and faculty support, and we addressed these two goals in similar ways in both English 101 and English 102. Similarly, then, our new curricula are anchored by common assignment sequences, and both courses foreground broad knowledge domains (rhetorical learning, genre knowledge, discourse community knowledge). Additionally, they also feature transferable tools or bridging mechanisms that our program goals emphasize:

- To teach students a rhetorical awareness;
- To teach students to read rhetorically and to read as writers;
- To help students develop strategies for writing to multiple audiences for multiple purposes using multiple mediums and modes of expression;
- To teach students to produce complex arguments that matter (i.e., to teach students a sense of rhetorical exigence);
- To give students extended practice with composing processes;
- To demonstrate how to argue purposefully with sources;
- To teach students how to conduct purposeful primary and secondary research;
- To move students from analysis of texts (how texts work) to production of knowledge through inquiry and research.

Our new courses address these goals recursively, giving students opportunities to acquire new knowledge and skills cumulatively over the semesters, while also enabling students to read and write different kinds of texts consistently over the year. Our new curricula also establish new bridges between courses: with rhetoric as a foundation, the revised sequence moves from a first-semester focus on analysis to a second-semester focus on production. In this way, we hoped to move from "hugging" to "bridging" or from low-road to high-road transfer as we asked students first



to develop their rhetorical, social, and genre knowledge and use it within the local contexts of the 101 classroom, and then, in English 102, to transfer that knowledge to the production of new knowledge in contexts extending beyond the English classroom.

## English 101: (Re)Emphasizing Rhetoric

In our new curriculum, English 101 is the intellectual as well as the practical foundation for English 102, and we redesigned the former to teach students general rhetorical strategies that will, we hope, provoke “broad-spectrum practice” that reaches beyond discipline-specific subject matter (Perkins and Salomon 25). As Perkins and Salomon might say, we “shaped instruction to hug closer to the transfer desired” (30), and we developed the following sequence of assignments, which moves from reading rhetorically to arguing with multiple sources:

- **Reading rhetorically:** assignments/activities help students develop strategies for reading critically; they also introduce rhetorical terms and concepts (primarily as heuristic tools);
- **Rhetorical analysis:** assignments/activities emphasize ways writers use language and textual conventions effectively to communicate with readers;
- **Contextual analysis:** activities/assignments explore ways context shapes communication for both writers and readers;
- **Argument paper (i.e., position paper):** activities/assignments invite students to find common ground and take a stance (or more than one stance) on an issue that invites deliberation or debate;
- **Source-based argument:** activities/assignments go through the stages of developing a well-supported, focused argument using provided (largely) by the instructor.

As illustrated by these assignments, our aim when we begin teaching reading rhetorically is both to focus on reading critically and to introduce rhetorical concepts and terms, including the rhetorical triangle, the rhetorical situation, and rhetorical appeals. The next two assignments, rhetorical and contextual analyses, ask students to begin working self-consciously with rhetoric as not only readers but also writers. The former asks students to read (or view or listen to) and describe other people’s arguments, while the latter asks students to put such focused analysis into broader cultural and/or historical context. The next assignment, the position paper, emphasizes the importance of finding common ground for arguments at the same time that it compels students to take a stance or argue more than one position on a complex and possibly controversial topic. In sequence, these assignments are designed and ordered to build toward the final source-based essay, which invites students to work closely and deliberately with multiple sources in order to formulate and sustain an extended argument.

During Fall 2005, Jenn Fishman and Stacey Pigg led a group of instructors in a writing study, the Embodied Literacies Project,<sup>[2]</sup> that piloted the new English 101 (see [syllabus, Appendix 3](#)). The course, titled “Self, Community, and Culture,” had three main units, each of which focused on a different primary text paired with a set of related secondary readings, which researchers compiled in a custom-published reader. In addition, each unit sought ways to lead students from hugging to bridging by working from literary texts (and literary analysis students learned to do in high school) toward rhetorical analysis and synthesis of different genres, mediums, and types of argument. Teachers started the semester by asking students to work with *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, the common book chosen by the university for all incoming students to read. Rather than treating the book as an entrée into college-level literary studies, assignments asked students to read *Curious Incident* alongside texts that offered contrasting perspectives on the novel’s subject, autism. As a result, students learned rhetorical terms and ways of reading while they compared perceptions of autism and arguments about its treatment in medical texts, print and online essays, and images, as well as their own writing.

The second unit included both the rhetorical and contextual analysis assignments, and it brought visual and verbal rhetorics to the fore by focusing on Marjane Satrapi’s graphic autobiography *Persepolis*. Satrapi grew up in Iran during the Iranian Revolution, and students read her work alongside materials that helped put her story into historical and cultural context. Unit three turned to *The Laramie Project*, a play that explores reactions to the murder of Matthew Shepherd, a gay college student killed by two Laramie, Wyoming, residents in 1998. The play is based on hundreds of interviews with members of the Laramie community, and it vividly portrays the town’s response to a brutal, hate-motivated murder. As an English 101 text, the play dramatized both unit assignments (taking a stance and arguing with sources) and the close relationship between research and community, which is emphasized in English 102. Establishing connections between FYC semesters, the final 101 unit was designed to help students work with multiple sources in order to take an informed stance and sustain an extended argument. This unit also challenged students to select and group texts drawn primarily from a custom-published course reader in order to insert themselves into ongoing arguments about topics ranging from masculinity and the West to defining and

understanding hate crimes. In both of these units (according to the research plan that structured different course activities), some teachers integrated online activities, including blog writing and peer reviewing as well as Instant Messenger discussions and conferences. Further, all teachers incorporated both formal and informal oral presentations into several units, developing creating ways for students to use oral communication both as part of their writing process and as a final means of delivering well-prepared and well-supported arguments.

## English 102: From Literature to Inquiry

While the revised English 101 course focuses on rhetorical analysis and argument, English 102 moved from its previous focus on literature (and low road transfer) to engaging students in rhetoric and research as part of different communities of inquiry (high road transfer). To this end, new 102 units and assignments—while focused on a subject or topic defined by the instructor—concentrate on identifying various expert communities; recognizing each community's primary research resources, questions, and strategies; and joining in expert conversations as reviewers, participant-observers, and contributors. According to our revised outcomes for English 102 students who complete this course should be able to:

- read critically to identify, define, and evaluate problems/complex issues, taking into account audience, as well as intercultural issues and multiple points of view;
- recognize how writing/research methods are used in different expert communities;
- enter and participate in different ongoing expert conversations using a range of written and visual texts;
- use multiple investigative methodologies (field research, historical research, academic research) to define and develop positions on issues/questions of their own choosing;
- construct effective arguments using appropriate material gained through “active scholarship”;
- locate and evaluate information for specific research questions and audiences using a range of research sources;
- present research effectively in multi-modal formats, using genres and rhetorical appeals appropriate to audience and purpose.

With these goals, our 102 clearly emulates many WAC and WID curricula, although our courses also remain distinct. While we want English 102 to help students learn, first-hand, how different groups of people—both in and outside of the university—argue about issues that concern them, our courses aim to teach students general rhetorical concepts and moves that they can use as tools for communicating in different and different kinds of contexts. To that end, English 102 guides students into different communities in order to help them gain a sense of how different groups of people produce knowledge recognized as valid and authoritative. We also want students to see themselves as writers and rhetors who are capable of participating in varied scenes of writing, and we want students to develop “habits of self-monitoring” so that they can support their own learning for transfer after they leave our classrooms (Perkins and Salomon 29).

English 102 approaches these goals by focusing not only on rhetoric and writing, but also on research, and we place a great deal of emphasis on teaching students different research methods along with related argumentative strategies (see [sample 102 syllabus, Appendix 4](#)). In this respect, our new curriculum differs substantially from our previous course, which followed the model offered by many FYC textbooks and treated research as a generalist activity. Falling into the trap that Gerald Graff criticizes in *Clueless in Academe*, overly general instruction fails to prepare students for authentic situated scholarly work because it fails to help them understand how resources as well as information gathering- and producing- activities differ from discipline to discipline and community to community. Our new curriculum responds to this problem by resituating research into a sequence of discrete course units, each focusing on the rhetoric and rationale of different research methods. As we describe in our formal overview of the curriculum (see “[English 102: Course Sequence](#)” sidebar), English 102 now spans three general types of research.

## The English 102 Pilot Project

Although our new curriculum was formally implemented in Spring 2007, we invited teachers to pilot the new 102 during the spring of 2006. The collaborations between WPAs, the Composition Committee, and teachers in the program were key to our revision process, and 16 teachers volunteered for

## *English 102: Course Sequence*

The English 102 curriculum also has a required course structure: a sequence of course units that begins with hands-on or field research, moves to historical research, and culminates with academic research.

this project. Together, we worked to devise pilot syllabi and assignments and to create a custom-published rhetoric for 102, which has been paired with an instructional website featuring materials developed by teachers (see [Table of Contents, Appendix 5](#)). The pilot project was invaluable, not least because it enabled us to give the revised 102 a test run, and it allowed us to discover objectives and methods that needed to be defined more clearly or supported more fully with better teaching materials. Even more importantly, the pilot teachers became a corps of experienced instructors who can share resources and co-lead faculty development workshops as we have begun implementing the new curriculum. [\[3\]](#)

At the beginning of the pilot process, interested teachers self-selected by answering a program-wide call for proposals. A mix of graduate students and lectures, these volunteer teachers submitted a course description, a list of texts, and writing assignment descriptions. The composition committee reviewed proposals and organized follow-up workshops for teachers whose proposals had been accepted. Some of the inquiry topics for our pilot sections included “Inquiry into Weblogs,” “Inquiry into Travel,” “Inquiry into Southern Appalachia,” “Inquiry into Protest Writing,” and “Inquiry into the Unreal.” Once proposals were accepted (and in some cases, revised), we posted them to a 102 Pilot Blackboard (course management) site, and we returned to the electronic space not only for posting similar documents (additional syllabus materials and assignments), but also for hosting discussion groups and for troubleshooting.

During the spring semester, while pilot courses were in session, we also held meetings with pilot instructors, and they shared successes, challenges, and concerns. Some of the problems teachers identified were good problems, like the overlap between research units and methods, which Perkins and Salomon have indicated can actually foster transfer. As they discuss in “Teaching for Transfer,” points of intersection are highly teachable moments, which teachers use to help students make generalizations about inquiry rhetorics and practices across multiple subject areas and settings. Of course, other concerns were more challenging, especially the difficulty teachers had introducing students to unfamiliar research methods (like field research) and research in unfamiliar fields. Since students were encouraged to investigate subjects of personal interest, teachers also found themselves planning lessons for students who were researching and writing about very different texts and topics, and they found it difficult, at times, to maintain a unified focus in class. Perkins and Salomon suggest mediating this process of abstraction and connection by teaching transferable principles: general rhetorical strategies, research strategies, strategies for critical inquiry, and an awareness of investigative methodologies that can be applied in multiple contexts. Beaufort agrees with the idea of “teaching a set of tools for analyzing and learning writing standards and practices in multiple contexts” (11), with which our multidisciplinary investigative approaches in 102 are consistent.

When some of our 102 teachers reflected on their experiences at the 2006 National Council of Writing Program Administrators Conference (in Chattanooga), they focused on transfer, and

### **Unit 1: Being “present” in your research: Field Research**

Students will learn hands-on research or “field research” methods, with the focus on the tools of observation, interviews, and surveys. They might write field notes or descriptions of places and activities they observed, profiles of persons interviewed, or reports of data gathered in surveys. Option: Students with particular interests/majors could interview an individual working in their field or a professor or advanced student in that field (or could survey a group of student majors) and then write up their findings.

### **Unit 2: Answering questions by looking to the past: Historical Research**

Students will carry out historical research, by examining artifacts, visiting museums, consulting archives, reviewing or (since methods overlap) interviewing someone with an historical perspective on the question being asked. Students might write oral histories or create visual essays or family trees (paired with a family history paper). Option: Students with particular interests/majors could explore the history of a discipline or area of study or analyze an artifact of the field or discipline and its significance.

### **Unit 3: Entering the parlor: Academic Research**

This unit will introduce students to a range of traditional research methods (library sources, databases, internet sources) and disciplinary methodologies. For their research project, students will decide on methods and genre appropriate to audience and purpose (and may choose to write a website or pamphlet to a popular audience, for instance). Option: Students may choose to do a research project exploring how research is conducted in their field of interest; for instance, they could examine journals in the field to determine methods used, interview people, or observe disciplinary electronic listservs.

they sought to articulate how our new curriculum fosters the transfer of writing and research knowledge across multiple contexts. Catherine Phillips, an instructor who taught “Inquiry into Urban Legends and Myths,” describes the way her topic of inquiry guided students down the high road, creating a variety of opportunities for them to practice rhetorical analysis:

Rhetoric and writing were always an explicit part of the course, and my students spent as much time working on voice, audience, and other rhetorical strategies in their own writing (in workshops, in in-class assignments, and so on) as on any other aspect of the course. But also, because my section’s content moved from one discipline (folkloristics) to quite a few others (including media studies, sociology, psychology, and even cryptozoology), my students quickly became familiar with many different expert communities and the various research methods and methodologies therein. All of these papers demonstrated not only a fairly sophisticated grasp of the writing and rhetorical skills my students had been building since 101, but also a surprising willingness to think critically, to explore various disciplines, and to add to critical conversations—with quite a bit of confidence.

Catherine’s reflections run parallel to Elizabeth Wardle’s research findings. As Wardle argues, reflecting on her longitudinal study of FYC transfer, teaching rhetorical strategies and rhetorical analysis of texts can create a “meta-awareness” that cultivates transfer. While discipline-specific writing is best taught in the context of particular disciplines, “what FYC can do,” Wardle argues, “is help students think about writing in the university, the varied conventions of different disciplines, and their own writing strategies in light of various assignments and expectations” (82).

Another 102 pilot teacher, Jessica Abernathy, reflects on how her course, “Inquiry into Madness,” combined emphasis on different aspects of the topic and curricular objectives, while reinforcing, in miniature, the three primary goals of rhetoric, multiplicity, and transferability:

The “Representing Madness” unit was particularly geared towards increasing students’ rhetorical awareness, to encourage them to concentrate on the mechanisms, effects, and successfulness of various texts (including their own), and to help them realize the crucial role of medium, context, and audience in shaping texts. In doing so, students were exposed to a variety of texts using different techniques and different media — print, film, art, music, and more. Students not only learned to analyze these texts in medium-specific ways, but also to communicate in different media themselves. Finally, though other course units and assignments were more specifically targeted at transferability (teaching students mutability, or “code-switching,” across various fields), this unit encouraged flexibility, fidelity to research, and awareness of audience and context, all of which aids students in writing and communicating in the world outside of first-year composition.

## Implementation of the Revised English 102 Course

Beginning in Spring 2007, all 102 sections have followed the new inquiry model. During the fall semester before teaching 102, teachers are asked to submit a proposal describing the course topic, goals, assignments, and texts (see [CFP, Appendix 6](#)). A few sample descriptions of courses and research units/assignments included as part of the proposal are reprinted in [Appendix 7](#).

Once proposals are reviewed by the Composition program staff, including the Director, Associate Director (a lecturer), Assistant Director (a GTA), and the Writing Center Director, teachers submit their own book orders. All 102 sections share the common custom-published text, *Rhetoric of Inquiry* (see [Appendix 4](#)), but teachers are free to choose their own supplementary texts. Following approval of the proposals, the English 102 topics are then listed in the university’s Course Timetable, and short descriptions (written for a student audience) are also listed on our department website: [http://web.utk.edu/~english/courses/f\\_102desc.shtml](http://web.utk.edu/~english/courses/f_102desc.shtml). For us, this relatively straightforward process represents a significant administrative change that is worth noting. Prior to our curriculum revisions, sections of English 102 were listed in the timetable only by date, time, and instructor name, and course registration proceeded as though additional details were irrelevant. However, with the thematic focus of the new 102s, we felt it was important for students to have more information. For the first time, then, and after a significant revision of our enrollment procedures, our students can now read about the courses online, and they can make informed choices about what they choose to take.



# Conclusion, or “If We Knew Then What We Know Now”

In order to figure out “What We Know Now,” several of us in RWL have been conducting studies of our first-year program, making transfer our focus. The studies we have undertaken include an cross-institutional inquiry (with University of Washington) into college students’ transfer of prior genre knowledge into FYC (<http://utuwpriorggenre.blogspot.com/>); the Embodied Literacies Project’s two-year investigation into first- and second-year students’ transfer of rhetorical knowledge across academic writing situations and media (<http://el-utk.blogspot.com>); and a survey-based study of how students perceive the transferability of FYC research skills. In addition, during the 2007-2008 academic year, the Writing Center Director, Kirsten Benson, led a study entitled “Perceptions and Performance of Research and Writing in English 102.” Gathering survey and writing data, as well as teacher feedback, her study will produce comparative results from year two of the new curriculum.

While our research is ongoing and our assessment of the new curriculum is still in progress, some of our early findings are useful indicators of the general success of our curriculum revisions. In particular, results from surveys administered during the spring of 2006 and 2007 show high levels of student engagement, with a majority of students choosing their 102 section based on their interest in the topic (see [Appendix 8](#) for a sample of the 2007 survey). In addition, preliminary findings from the Embodied Literacies Project suggest that students who take our courses are finding a road to transfer, carrying knowledge across different media and assignments (Year 1) and from course to course (Year 2). Although, to be sure, we have a great deal more work to do, we nonetheless find this data encouraging because it suggests the potential for fostering high road transfer in FYC. Thus, while some teachers and scholars associate teaching for transfer with the end of first-year composition, we see reason to remain committed to general writing courses. As Smit argues, novice writers “may need to be immersed in the discourses they need or want to learn as part of their own goals and ambitions” (159), and they “may need to be introduced to the critical frameworks necessary to understanding how groups function, so that they can develop a metacognitive sense of how writing functions in groups” (159). These types of activities take students and teachers alike far from the “generic” undergraduate research papers that Graff and others have criticized, and they leave behind the various “skill and drill” exercises and cookie-cutter, workbook-like assignments that are familiar to many of our students from high school language arts. And yet, as we are discovering, especially in our new English 102, when first-year writing involves genuine inquiry and research, and when it is supported by substantial rhetorical instruction, college writing has the potential to become a vastly different landscape.

As the teacher testimonials above illustrate, when course content varies, as it does from section to section of 102, students still gain the common ground of shared rhetorical concepts and writing experiences. Of course, this important benefit does not erase the problems that arise when writing courses have strong thematic elements, and both teachers and students have raised concerns about the potential for inquiry subjects to overshadow rhetoric and writing and thus limit the high road transfer of rhetorical knowledge and skills in 102. Perkins and Salomon note that “the occasional bridging question or reading carefully chosen to ‘hug’ a transfer target gets lost amid the overwhelming emphasis on subject matter-specific, topic-specific, fact-based questions and activities” (25). However, because the focus in 102 is inquiry—with goals emphasizing the investigation of a subject from multiple perspectives, methods, and methodologies—we encourage students to engage with subject matter self-reflectively. That is to say, we encourage them to explore content issues that take them outside the boundaries of the course, and we also ask them to be self-conscious about how and why they pursue the inquiries they choose. Such activities are “bridging” activities, which Perkins and Salomon describe as “broad-spectrum practices [capable of] reaching beyond subject matters” to establish knowledge of general, transferable principles and procedures (25). With the focus on course units that emphasize various methods of research and with the goal of engaging students in reading and writing a variety of different types of texts and writing for various situations, we hope that students leave English 101 and 102 better able to “take the high road” to transfer, and we hope they are able to continue developing their transfer abilities as they travel into new academic, professional, and personal rhetorical situations. Understanding that it is not only teachers who “get what we teach for,” but also students, we firmly hope our students get it, and though conventional wisdom tells us “you can’t take it with you,” we hope in this case, they do.

## Appendices

Because of their length, appendices are available on a [separate web page](#) (see links below) and [as a Microsoft Word file](#).

1. [Appendix 1: Survey regarding English 101 and English 102](#)

2. [Appendix 2: Invitation to focus groups for revising first-year composition curriculum](#)
3. [Appendix 3: Sample syllabus for English 101](#)
4. [Appendix 4: Sample syllabus for English 102](#)
5. [Appendix 5: Table of Contents for English 102 rhetoric](#)
6. [Appendix 6: Call for Proposals for English 102 courses](#)
7. [Appendix 7: Proposals for English 102](#)
8. [Appendix 8: Survey for English 102 students](#)

## Notes

1. This article is based on a paper the authors presented at the 2006 National Council of Writing Program Administrator's Conference held July 13-16 in Chattanooga, TN. The session was entitled "Bringing Rhetoric Back on Board: Toward an Inquiry-Based FYC Curricula." Joining Jenn Fishman and Mary Jo Reiff were several instructors who piloted English 102 co-presented and shared their experiences teaching the new curriculum: Jessica Abernathy, Casie Fedukovich, Bill Hardwig, Christopher Kilgore, Misty Krueger, and Catherine Phillips. ([Return to text.](#))
2. The Embodied Literacies Project began as a semester-long study of first-year writing designed to examine whether and how embodying literacy through oral and digital performance helps college students develop rhetorical strategies associated with transferability, especially in academic writing contexts. Together, co-principal investigators Jenn Fishman and Stacey Pigg developed and led the first phase of the project, which involved a team of co-teachers and researchers, including Miya Abbott, Devon Asdell, Bill Doyle, Casie Fedukovich, Nina Nell Haeckel, Jerod Hollyfield, Mary Jo Reiff, Hiie Saumaa, and Amanda Watkins. In the second year, Jenn Fishman and Mary Jo Reiff co-lead follow-up research, working with a sample from the original research subjects (N=204), and their preliminary results can be found online: <<http://el-utk.blogspot.com>>. ([Return to text.](#))
3. Along with our pilot teachers, colleagues from the university libraries and from different technology and computing centers on campus have helped us realize the curricula we designed. We owe particular thanks to Kawanna Bright and Kristin Bullard from Hodges Main Library; Nick Wyman from Hoskins Special Collections Library; Michelle Brannen and the staff of The Studio; and Chris Hodge and his Sunsite colleagues. ([Return to text.](#))

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"Taking the High Road" from *Composition Forum* 18 (Summer 2008)

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