

To: Stephen Ruffus, English Department Chair

From: Tiffany Rousculp

Subject: Noted Differences between 1000- and 2000-level Composition Course Descriptions Across USHE Institutions

Date: July 29, 2013

As I am developing a curriculum for “Connected” English 1010/2010 to start in the Fall 2013 semester, I have been examining the relationship between SLCC’s English 1010 and 2010 curriculum. During this process, I noticed that a distinction between the two courses may not be readily apparent to students. I also noticed that the assignments in 1010 might be interpreted by students as more rigorous than those in English 2010, given that the more “academic” assignments (rhetorical analysis, researched and documented essays, etc.) take place in that course, whereas 2010 includes memoir, profiles, reviews, letters, and other public genres.

Accepting that rigor is subject to vast differences of interpretation, and no genre of writing is necessarily more rigorous than another, I wanted to see the courses as an SLCC student would see them, not as a scholar of rhetoric/composition would. To that end, I examined how the other USHE institutions describe their composition course sequences, and then compared them to SLCC’s description (and curriculum).

METHODS

I reviewed course descriptions for the 100(0)-level and 200(0)-level English or Composition courses at the following institutions:

- University of Utah
- Utah State University
- Weber State University
- Southern Utah University
- Utah Valley University
- Brigham Young University*
- Westminster College*

*BYU and Westminster have a single composition course.

I conducted a textual analysis and located the following curricular terms of relevance:

- Academic
- Analytical (analysis)
- Argument/Persuasion
- Audience
- Collaboration
- Critical (reading or writing)
- Genre (or Purpose)
- Research
- Research
- Rhetoric

I looked at the SLCC English 1010 and 2010 course descriptions and departmental syllabi for these terms.

FINDINGS

Main Differences

There were some significant differences in the descriptions of 1000-level courses and 2000-level courses at USHE institutions. (The presence of the terms in SLCC courses is indicated in *italics*.) They are:

- 2000-level courses more frequently included the term “academic” writing in their descriptions. All 2000-level courses used it, whereas 3/5 of the 1000-level courses did.
 - *Neither SLCC course description uses this tem, but both include it on departmental syllabi.*
- All 2000-level courses indicated “argument/persuasive” writing as a course element. Only one 1000-level course indicated as such. (Both BYU and Westminster’s single composition course included it.)
 - *Neither SLCC course description uses this tem, but 2010 includes it on the departmental syllabus.*
- All 2000-level courses indicated “research” as a part of their curriculum. Only one 1000-level course indicated as such. (Both BYU and Westminster’s single composition course included it.)
 - *Neither SLCC course description uses this tem, but both include it on departmental syllabi.*
- Four out of five 1000-level courses noted attention towards “process” in their descriptions, whereas only one 2000-level course did so. (Only BYU’s single course noted it.)
 - *Neither SLCC course description uses this tem, but 1010 includes it on the departmental syllabus.*

Similarities

The 1000-level and 2000-level course descriptions were fairly consistent for the following terms:

- Audience: 1000 – 4 out of 5, 2000 – 4 out of 5, single course – 1 out of 2
 - *Neither SLCC course description uses this tem, but both include it on departmental syllabi.*
- Analytical: 1000 – 1 out of 5, 2000 – 2 out of 5, single course – 2 out of 2

- *Neither SLCC course description uses this tem, but both include it on departmental syllabi.*
- Collaboration: 1000 – 4 out of 5, 2000 – 3 out of 5, single course – 0 out of 2
 - *Neither SLCC course description uses this tem, but both include it on departmental syllabi.*
- Critical (reading or writing): 1000 – 2 out of 5, 2000 – 3 out of 5, single course – 2 out of 2
 - *English 1010 notes this in the course description. Both include it on departmental syllabi.*
- Genre (or Purpose): 1000 – 1 out of 5, 2000 – 1 out of 5, single course – 1 out of 2
 - *Neither SLCC course description uses this tem, but both include it on departmental syllabi*
- Rhetoric: 1000 – 3 out of 5, 2000 – 3 out of 5, single course – 2 out of 2
 - *Both SLCC courses include this in the course description and syllabi.*

THOUGHTS

I believe strongly that SLCC's English Department faculty, especially those invested in the composition sequence, to be teacher/scholars of the highest caliber. As such, our curriculum has been more forward-thinking and innovative than that at many of our peer institutions.

That said, I also believe that our 1010/2010 sequence has become somewhat “out of shape” in relation to our peer institutions in a few key areas.

- I would like to see our 2010 class more explicitly dealing with argumentative/persuasive curriculum, though with an important awareness that all writing is argument, even that which may not be overtly so.
- I would like to see less emphasis on external research and formal documentation in 1010 and increase it in 2010. I think that research should be organically scaffolded into the 1010 curriculum, and should become a larger part of 2010. (Additionally, as I understand it, requests from other institutions—in Utah and elsewhere—for 2010 syllabi are specifically looking for “research” in order to provide transfer students with credit for the course.)
- I'd like to loosen the genres of writing in 1010 and narrow them in 2010. I'd like to see 1010 as more of an exploratory course and 2010 as the more “academic” course. I've noticed in my time teaching 2010 that the curriculum seems to be ever expanding to include more genres, many of which are already being explored/taught in other English department course offerings.

Conclusion

I will work on my own curriculum for the 2013-2014 academic year with these findings and thoughts in mind. I will keep you apprised of how it goes.