Semester project

Bradley Dilger ~ 680 WPA ~ Spring 2016 ~ http://dtext.org/

Summary: Develop a unique focus and form for a two-part semester project, with the first and larger academic element focusing on academic audiences, and the second smaller activist project explicitly intended to cross the disciplinary boundary of rhetoric and composition: taking our work public, or writing another field into connection with ours. Present in class and at a public showcase.

This semester, I would like you to complete a scholarly project which engages the issues and texts we read this semester, with a particular eye toward your long-term academic goals. We often imagine the seminar paper as the best form for graduate work, but that's not always the case. Frankly, it's a poor fit for many students. I'd like you to consider alternative forms which enable you to develop scholarly skills, improve existing work, and/or target teaching or other needs.

While there is a common framework, this assignment will be highly individualized. If you're new to writing program administration, you might focus on background research, building and documenting connections with others in the field, and developing the base of knowledge needed to think about our subject matter across the field. More experienced students could conceptualize and begin to develop a research project, or even work which will contribute to a thesis or dissertation. Discussions in class and on Mixable will help you flush out an approach which works best for you.

Some ideas for the academic project:

- Build a reading list and detailed plan for writing an essay publishable in a journal (or answering a call for proposals), identifying an issue, reading broadly and taking notes, and developing a draft essay You can imagine working at nearly any stage of the game here—just getting started or revising existing work to submit at the end of the term.

- Revise an existing essay in preparation for submitting it to a journal at the end of the semester, commissioning readers' reports, conducting additional research, developing a revision plan, and completing the revisions.

- Create a web presence which investigates one or more of the arguments made about writing program administration in our course texts, using services such as Twitter, Mendeley, or WordPress.com.

- Respond to a conference call for proposals, and create a conference presentation and accompanying media (handout and/or PowerPoint deck), or materials which will enable creating one in the future.

- Develop a media-intensive portfolio, including an administrative philosophy, outcomes for FYW courses, and other documents which demonstrate the ways you'd deploy the theory we're reading this semester in courses and/or curriculum design.

Not only an academic project, but an activist project too

From this academic project, you'll derive a smaller activist project (thinking of Linda Adler-Kassner's approach in *The Activist WPA*) intended to consider the material and subject matter you're engaging outwardly, not inwardly. This could be achieved by considering the challenges shared with writing program administration and other disciplines and professions, rather than assuming everything is unique to our field. It could be explicitly targeting external audiences, actually enacting composition's charge of teaching writing for broad forward-looking purposes. The point is to cross the Heavilon walls, so to speak: to engage very different public or academic audiences and deliver material germane to WPA work to them—or find ways to help WPAs build bridges to other fields. If you're targeting a non-specialist audience in your semester project, simply pick a different one here—academic or otherwise.

The activist project, then, will be a form of "double dipping." (Again, for students enrolled in both this course and Harry Denny's writing center administration seminar, we can work out a "triple dipping" approach if it suits you.) Another way to describe it: select an interesting chunk of your academic project material, identify relevant audiences with whom it can be shared, then create, test, revise, and hopefully publish. I hope this will help you begin to confront some issues long-standing for writing program administration:

1. How do we share what we know about reading and writing with other specialists, without being reduced to as bearers of academic services, and with generative possibilities in mind?

2. How can we better understand the contexts in which others in our institutions work, and the way those contexts shape their writing tasks?

3. How can we make more informed decisions about our use of scholarship from other fields?

Testing will be required for your academic project. I won't expect formality, and methods will vary, but expect to write a short report (two or three pages) about your approach to testing your activist project, and reflecting on the process overall. I will provide some help with testing methods on my web site, and can discuss them at any time.

Some forms these projects could take:

• A white paper or set of press releases which target non-academic audiences;

• Visualizations which use PiktoChart or similar software;

• Remediation of key lessons with a short video or series of videos;

• Materials (handouts, talk outline) for a brown bag (modeled on those from the Writing Lab).

For those attending CCCC 2016, I will encourage you to extend this work to the "Knowledge Shaping" event in the action hub, in cooperation with Elizabeth Wardle and a team from UCF. Details to follow.

For both projects

Our course texts are just a start—get beyond them by finding texts which are relevant for your specific needs. *This is absolutely essential.* I reserve the right to reject projects which rely primarily on course texts—especially those like McLeod or Malenczyk, which are by their nature introductory.

Consider Anne Beaufort's model of writing as you write: what rhetorics, genres, content knowledge, writing processes, and discourse communities are involved in the act of translation and transformation required to explain content across fields? What do you know and not know about the fields and audiences you are crossing? Some research will be required—a mix of library work, conversations with people who can help, reading what's out there for other fields. Consider what we're learning about writing program administration, too—this assignment is a laboratory for putting that theory into practice.

Whenever possible, you should work publicly, sharing in-progress writing on our course weblog (via links to your own spaces, Google Docs, etc.).

This work is broken up into several milestones. I will offer comments on each one. See below for details.

Preliminary project ideas 1/28

Sketch out some ideas about your project: what issues were you considering on the first day of the semester? What have you been thinking about as you read McLeod and Adler-Kassner? This doesn't have to be that long (350 words will probably do), but could be as many as 1,000 words if you sketch out a couple ideas. Nothing will be set in stone here; the point is to start the wheels turning and to give me some guidance for shaping the course.

Try to address both the academic and activist projects, and feel free to add metadiscourse which explains your reasoning, certitude, etc. Addressing audiences, deliverables, and processes explicitly would be great.

Delivery: Create a Google Doc and set the permissions so it's public. Share it with me. Send me an email with the URL, and share with the class via Mixable.

Project proposal & lightning reviews 2/18

After we've got a little further in the reading, and I've offered some feedback on your ideas, you'll be able to write a more formal proposal which outline the specific issues you plan to engage, and the deliverables you imagine appropriate for your target audiences. One way to imagine this project pitching a book project to a publisher, or writing the abstract for a conference presentation. So while you can have some wiggle room, I expect that from this point forward, you'll be committed to the subject matter you've selected.

In the same Google Doc you created for your ideas, propose the projects you want to complete this semester. (Write at the top and push the ideas down.) This should include, but not be limited to:

1. Name the subject matter you are interested in, share web sites and other information which is relevant, and describe why it appeals to you. Identify any specific books, web sites, or other texts you expect to include in your work.

2. If you can, identify individuals and professional organizations which are relevant and may be able to provide support or prior knowledge.

3. Outline the form and content of your work, looking ahead to all the other milestones here—make a plan for the deliverables you'll complete at key points, for both the academic and activist components of the project.

4. Describe your rationale for picking the content and form you have selected.

5. Explain any questions or uncertainties which might shape your work, or places you'd like extra help.

Delivery: Send me an email with the URL of your Google Doc, and include anything else you'd like to share. Post a link to your proposal in the project proposals thread I will create on Mixable.

In class on 2/18, we'll review each other's proposals in "lightning review" format: we'll pair up, read each others' work, discuss them for about 5 minutes, then switch — giving you a chance to get quick feedback from several people. So please bring a device to work on, or three printed copies of your proposal.

Project conference 3/07 – 3/11

Before Spring Break, share a brief (less than 500 word) update about your projects with me, then meet to discuss them. Please engage my prior feedback, feedback you received in our proposal speed date, and explain any shifts from your project proposal. Our key goal here is a check-in which allows me to offer you ideas and helps ensure you are on target for a successful draft.

Delivery: Write an email which contains the update or a link to it. Meet with me to discuss your project.

Project drafts 3/31

Submit drafts of the projects you outlined in your proposal and project conference. At this point, you should be at least two-thirds complete with the work; you can favor one side of the project over the other (e. g. focusing on the academic project and developing the activist partially), but you should have something for each one. Include a brief note which indicates what work you've completed and what's left.

Feel free to use annotations or comments to show, in your documents, the specific things you'd like extra attention in my review. You can create this draft electronically and/or on paper—whatever's best for you.

Delivery: Varies—choose a method which fits best for you. But make sure I get an email which contains the update, a link to it, or directions for finding it up (e. g. if you delivered hard copy to me, remind me). As before, I will create a Mixable thread for drafts; please post an update there, sharing a URL if possible.

Project showcase ~4/26

Prepare a version of your project to share publicly—perhaps as a talk, perhaps as a poster—to share with the public in a joint showcase with Harry Denny's class. Details TBD: Denny and I will schedule the event and develop more specific guidelines with your input. Expect the event to be on 4/26 or 4/27.

Final project 5/05

Complete your work, making revisions and/or extensions which consider my suggestions, your own review, and the feedback of your classmates.

Delivery: Same as the draft. Plan to include a short reflective report which describes your methods for testing your activist project and reflect on the entire process and assignment. I will provide a more specific prompt just after I review all of the project drafts.

Errata and addenda

None yet.

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