**College Writing Course** (revised spring 2014)

With an emphasis on the connections between reading and writing, College Writing introduces students to practices and conventions of expository academic writing. Students read expository writing and use the ideas they encounter to develop and refine their own arguments and perspectives. Students learn how thinking and writing change through processes of reading, drafting, rereading, revision, editing, and proofreading. At the end of the semester, students in College Writing demonstrate an understanding of sentence structure and syntax as central to meaning. Students can compose, in coherent and correct written English, essays that reflect a point of view, engage with readings, and focus on a central thesis or project.

**Learning Outcomes:**

Students completing college writing should be able to

**Engage in reading and writing as an academic**

1. Learn how to read, understand, and think critically about the ideas and language of others, including rethinking previous knowledge in light of new readings and ideas.
2. Make interpretive connections between separate readings.
3. Understand and explain their own processes of reading, prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing.
4. Write and revise expository critical papers that
   - are at least 4 pages long,
   - focus around a thesis or project,
   - represent the student writer’s point of view,
   - go beyond summary or reporting to engagement with and analysis of texts.

**Demonstrate understanding of sentence structure and syntax as central to meaning**

5. Use standard written English.
6. Identify, create, and intentionally use phrases, clauses, and larger syntactical patterns to inform both their reading and their writing.
7. Employ a variety of sentence structures.

**Practice academic conventions for referring to the writing of others**

8. Know and apply the conventions of citation, quotation, and paraphrase.
9. Use a handbook and other tools for reference and support.
10. Locate and evaluate sources in a variety of media and use an appropriate citation format (such as MLA, Chicago, or APA).
**College Writing recommended course characteristics:**

1. Treat writing as a recursive, multi-stage process. Ask students to do some or all of the following.

   - generate drafts in small steps, through homework and in-class writing about smaller portions of the reading, [choosing passages/sources], class discussion where they have to take a position and make a counterargument, individual concepts, or simpler questions than they will address in a 5-page draft.
   - write multiple drafts
   - review their drafts from different perspectives, significantly reorganizing, refining, and reimagining their ideas and analyses
   - return to readings after beginning to write, or after having read other sources
   - try out different revision processes, such as outlining before and after writing, drawing diagrams or charts of their ideas, or writing abstracts
   - write about the choices they have made in revision. Why begin with one piece of evidence rather than another? Why structure your introduction around an anecdote rather than a startling quotation or statistic? What difference would it make?

2. Conference

   - Meet with each student one-to-one at some point during the semester. This can happen during class time, when other students are drafting or revising. Or cancel a class to make time for meeting with students.

3. Use sentence-combining and clause-embedding. Teach sentence-level writing through the lens of style, rather than the lens of error.

   - Teach students to identify and create clauses and phrases (use the concept of “tag questions” from linguistics).
   - Teach students to identify the way they currently use clauses and phrases.
   - Teach students to use clauses and phrases in new ways.
   - Test students on their ability to create and manipulate clauses and phrases.
   - Key your comments on papers to the way you are covering the material in class.
   - Use Hacker and Sommers’ A Writer’s Reference.

4. When you write feedback and response on student papers,
Find something specific and positive to say (a well-chosen quotation from the text, a correct semicolon, a well-handled complex sentence).

List 1-2 specific actions the student should take in future writing.

Relate comments specifically to material you have covered in class.

Assume that students will initially misinterpret your comments, and create opportunities to clear up confusion (have them write responses to your comments, discuss your comments one-to-one, have them use your comments on paper 1 as they revise their first draft of paper 2).

5. Teach reading and reading comprehension as a self-reflective practice.

Teach students what reading is: beyond decoding letters into words, a process of connecting background knowledge, syntactical patterns, and generic conventions to create meaning.

Ask students to reflect on their own reading. What do they usually read, and how do they usually read it? How does this reading differ from what college professors do when they read? (Demonstrate this by reading a passage aloud and explaining what you are thinking/looking for). When they run into difficulty, what do they usually do? What do other people do in difficulty?

As a way in to discussing course readings, spend time discussing HOW to read the material, and WHY reading it that way produces particular results.

Model summary, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Identify those activities when students perform them in class.

Assign expository readings that make arguments.

6. Texts

Use Hacker and Sommers, *A Writer’s Reference*. Ask students to buy it and keep it for their whole college career.

Consider using pdfs for course readings, rather than a reader. Articles and chapters can easily be scanned and put on Blackboard. This choice is up to individual instructors.

Along with course readings, consider a book about academic writing, such as Parfitt’s *Reading in Response* or Graff and Birkenstein’s *They Say/I Say*.

Student writing is also a text in the class.

7. Assignments

Students should complete 20-25 pages of edited, final draft writing by the end of the semester.
By the end of the semester, ask students to use *concepts*, not just examples or information, from at least two readings.

Ask students to analyze (rather than simply summarize or personally respond to) texts, and develop arguments about ideas.

Ask students to go beyond comparison and contrast into analysis and argument.

In your written assignment, state what the students are supposed to do and how the teacher will determine grades. Don’t just announce the topic in class—give the students something to take home with them.