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**GER Guided Reflection on Student Learning**

**Course: ENG 101 Academic Writing and Research**

**GER Category Objectives: Writing and Speaking**

Each course in the writing and speaking category of the GERs will provide instruction and guidance that help students to:

1. communicate effectively in specific writing or speaking situations, which may include various academic, professional, or civic situations; and
2. understand and respond appropriately to the critical elements that shape communication situations, such as audience, purpose, and genre; and
3. critique their own writing or speaking and provide effective and useful feedback to enable other students to improve their writing or speaking; and
4. demonstrate critical and evaluative thinking skills in locating, analyzing, synthesizing, and using information in writing or speaking activities.

**ENG 101 Student Learning Outcomes**

The Course Objectives listed in Section B. above are instantiated here as learning outcomes. The GER category objectives they are designed to achieve are indicated in parentheses.

Students should be able to

1. Identify basic rhetorical principles and apply those principles in analyzing sample written texts as models, in evaluating their own developing texts in order to revise, and in evaluating the texts of other students to provide feedback for revision. (GER Category Objectives 2 & 3)
2. Examine similarities and differences in forms of inquiry and writing across academic disciplines, and apply these disciplinary conventions in their own written work. (GER Category Objective 2)
3. Comprehend and analyze source materials in order to critique and respond to others' ideas; select and integrate evidence from scholarship into original arguments; and paraphrase, summarize, and cite sources appropriately as needed in their own writing. (GER Category Objective 4)
4. Find and evaluate print and electronic source materials appropriate for academic research projects. (GER Category Objective 4)
5. Develop original arguments for a range of academic purposes. (GER Category Objective 1)
6. Evaluate their own and others' work and collaborate with other writers throughout the writing process. (GER Category Objective 3)
7. Demonstrate competent use of grammar, mechanics, and documentation of source materials in their own written work.

## **Means of Evaluating GER Learning Outcomes**

All sections of the course will include activities in each of the following four categories:

1. Formal written projects requiring analysis of rhetorical features and disciplinary conventions, such as a rhetorical analysis of a journal article, or an argument summary and response. (Student Learning Outcomes 1 & 2)
2. Formal written projects requiring students to apply their knowledge of disciplinary and general academic conventions, such as argument response or evaluative comparison of sources. (Student Learning Outcomes 2, 3, 5, & 7)
3. Formal written projects requiring students to conduct library research, analyze and evaluate source materials, integrate ideas and evidence from others into their own arguments, and document source materials appropriately, such as a literature review, evaluation of disciplinary resources, or researched issue analysis. (Student Learning Outcomes 3, 4, 5, & 7)
4. Reflective and evaluative activities such as (1) written or oral response to other students' work in progress, (2) effective revision of their own work in successive drafts in response to peer and instructor feedback, and (3) written or oral commentary on their writing processes and progress, e.g., summaries of writing goals and plans, reflection on revisions attempted and accomplished, self-assessment of writing and reading strengths, weaknesses, and plans for improvement. (Student Learning Outcomes 1 & 6)

## **Results and Reflections**

1. Two projects were explicitly designed to heighten students' awareness of rhetorical features and disciplinary variation: Project 1, Rhetorical Analysis of a Formal Observational Report in the Sciences, and Project 2, Social Science Argument Summary and Response. Students' written work varied in fluency and development but clearly focused on rhetorical features, an important shift in perspective for most freshmen. In fact, this goal may have worked too well: some students continued to describe authors' writing strategies in later projects that asked them to respond to content issues instead, suggesting the need to help students recognize the descriptive purpose of these early assignments as distinct from the goals of other sorts of academic analysis.
2. Students' knowledge of disciplinary and general academic conventions was assessed via their work on all five major written projects. In particular, students were introduced to the common genre of the Literature Review in Project 3 and practiced comparison/contrast and evaluation strategies in Project 4, Evaluative Comparison in the Humanities. Grade distributions on these two projects were slightly lower than Projects 1 & 2, reflecting the greater challenge of these assignments and the difficulty some students had in understanding the goals of these activities as distinct from the earlier projects.

3. All five projects provided practice in using source materials: documenting ideas and quotations from other authors, referring to authors by name, using appropriate citation formats. Some students still struggled with these skills by the end of the course but most had clearly mastered the basics and I was pleased at the progress some particularly weak writers had made in this area. The fact that some still struggle indicates that incorporating this type of instruction in all major projects is not overkill. I will continue to emphasize the logistics and ethics of using sources in all units of the course. Projects 3, 4, and 5 required students to find their own sources, and the library's instructional package on information literacy (LOBO), required in all sections of ENG 101, was an integral part of this instruction. LOBO's immediate goals seem to have been achieved, in that all students were able to access online academic databases and use key words to conduct basic searches. Some students learned only the bare minimum, however, and I found myself having to second-guess students' choices of sources more often than I would have liked. In several cases I needed to continually push students to move beyond the first or the briefest sources they came across to find more substantive resources to stimulate their work. This trend indicates the need to spend even more time helping students understand the difference between academic and popular sources, the significance of that difference for college-level work, and how to evaluate the sources they find.
4. Students engaged in reflective and evaluative activities throughout the course. The practice of developing evaluative criteria for each project and using those criteria as the basis for peer evaluations was very successful; students generally provided useful feedback to each other on work in progress, and reading each others' work led to good questions about the goals of individual assignments. In a mid-semester reflective exercise in which they were to describe ENG 101 to prospective NCSU freshmen, all students demonstrated a good grasp of the purpose and features of the course, describing, for example, the increased challenge of college-level writing, the difference between summary and analysis, the value of library databases, and the unexpected range of variation among disciplines in writing and documentation. (A particular favorite: "Writing and researching in ENG 101 isn't meant for light use... You will find yourself forced to understand what you are writing about, even if it's the hardest thing you've ever read in your life. You will work with the topic so much that you will most likely get it.") Finally, students' end-of-semester written reflections on their progress during the semester evidenced good awareness of their individual strengths and weaknesses as writers, suggesting the course helped provide the self-knowledge and rhetorical awareness that can support further writing development.