NEW MEXICO HIGHLANDS UNIVERSITY

COMPOSITION PROGRAM

INSTRUCTOR HANDBOOK, 2009-2010

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE HIGHLANDS COMPOSITION PROGRAM

MISSION

The Composition Program serves the university mission through its commitment to preparing lifelong learners through research, teaching, and service. In English 100, 111, and 112, students learn that writing is a social practice and that the effectiveness of writing depends on the writer's situation, context, purpose, and audience. Thus our program goal is not only to improve student writing, but also to teach students to learn how to analyze every new situation they encounter in order to effectively respond to it in writing, which is the essence of literate and critical citizenship.

The Composition Program is committed to ongoing inquiry, training, and support for all teaching assistants and instructors. In addition to staying current on research in teaching and assessment methods effective for Highlands' unique student population, the program's instructors continually share the mentoring and classroom practices that work for them. We also reflect on those aspects of teaching and course design that don't work so we can collectively improve them. In these ways, we cultivate a culture of reflective practice that benefits students and teachers and continually improves our program.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The English and Philosophy department is made up of a nine-member faculty specializing in linguistics, literature, creative writing, composition, and technical writing. We offer a Master of Arts, and most of our graduate students receive teaching assistantships. This means that a mixture of faculty, graduate students, and full- and part-time instructors teaches our first-year composition sequence.

ENGLISH 100

English 100 (Reading and Writing for College) is Highlands' equivalent of a "basic" or "developmental" writing course, and students who score 16 or below on the ACT or below 80 on the COMPASS Reading exam must take this course as a prerequisite for English 111. Because we focus on the interrelatedness of reading and writing rather than treating them separately, English 100 students receive direct instruction in reading strategies that pertain to their academic essay writing.

The course objectives below should be reflected in written assignments and copied or paraphrased onto all English 100 syllabi:

"By the end of ENGL 100, students will:

1. Communicate an ability to read texts strategically;
2. Demonstrate understanding of relationships between ideas in a text and relationships between texts;
3. Communicate an ability to synthesize information/ideas in and between readings, social experience, and the world;
4. Compose an essay that responds accurately to the writing situation and sustains a controlling idea;
5. Select and use textual, cultural, and/or personal evidence as primary research to support the controlling ideas in their writing;
6. Maintain focus by organizing paragraphs that are tied to the essay's controlling idea;
7. Demonstrate improved grammar and mechanics such as usage, sentence structure, punctuation, and capitalization."

ENGLISH 111

English 111 (Freshman Composition 1) is a required writing course that teaches the academic essay genre and writing practice as situation- and context-dependent.

The course objectives below should be reflected in written assignments and copied or paraphrased onto all English 111 syllabi:

"By the end of ENG 111 students will:

1. Summarize, paraphrase, and quote from a complex text.
2. Recognize the distinctions between opinions, facts, and inferences.
3. Analyze and evaluate written communication in terms of situation, audience, purpose, genre, and point of view.
4. Express a primary purpose in a thesis statement and organize supporting evidence from a variety of sources.
5. Practice writing and speaking processes such as planning, collaborating, organizing, composing, revising, and editing, in print and electronic genres.
6. Demonstrate academic conventions regarding essay structure, appropriate tone, formal citation, and sentence clarity.

Students enrolled in English 111 must complete a minimum of 16 final pages of academic writing to pass the course."

ENGLISH 112

English 112 (Freshman Composition 2) is also required of all students; it teaches the research process and culminates in a required research paper of at least ten pages.

The course objectives below should be reflected in written assignments and copied or paraphrased onto all English 112 syllabi:

> "By the end of ENG 112 students will:
>
> 1. Summarize, paraphrase, and quote from a complex text.
> 2. Recognize the distinctions between opinions, facts, and inferences.
> 3. Analyze and evaluate written communication in terms of situation, audience, purpose, genre, and point of view.
> 4. Practice writing and research processes such as drafting and revising, demonstrated in research genres such as the proposal, essay, and annotated bibliography.
> 5. Effectively use rhetorical strategies to persuade, inform, and engage.
> 6. Integrate research correctly and ethically from at least eight credible sources to support a primary purpose.
> 7. Demonstrate mastery of academic conventions regarding essay structure, appropriate tone, formal citation, and sentence clarity.
>
> Students enrolled in English 112 must complete a minimum of 20 final pages of academic writing to pass the course."

ABOUT OUR STUDENTS

The student population you will serve at Highlands is a unique one. Highlands is a Hispanic-serving institution, which means that over half of its students self-identify as Hispanic. We also serve a sizeable population of Native American students, usually from the Navajo and Pueblo tribes of New Mexico, and a significant number of international students from Cameroon and China.

The Hispanic and Native American students at Highlands are often members of families who have lived in this area for generations, and many of those students are commuters. The "cowboy" isn't just our mascot—ranching is a way of life for many of our students, and an important aspect of New Mexico culture.

Highlands is also an open-admissions university, and its students are generally underprepared for college. Most of them work; most of them are also first-generation college students who have been poorly served by schools all their lives. They will not necessarily demonstrate the kind of academic literacy that came easy enough (or at least enjoyably enough) to those of us who pursued graduate work in English. However, activities that identify students' prior knowledge, value what they care about, and build upon the literacies they bring with them are extremely effective with our students.

It is also important to know that Native American students show respect by *not* meeting the eyes of someone in authority—it is not a sign of indifference or sullenness. They are also sometimes absent to fulfill ceremonial obligations, yet they are not supposed to talk about these ceremonies. If you have a Native American student, please be aware that their cultural norms can conflict with ones you are used to.

English 100 and English 111 have been designed with our students and their already significant language expertise in mind. We try to assign our most experienced instructors and faculty to English 100 where their repertoire is most needed.

If you have questions about the parameters of these courses, please ask. We look toward improving them every year.

RESOURCES AND REQUIREMENTS

RESOURCES

THE ENGLISH OFFICE

Here are some ways Prescilla Salazar and the English Office can assist you:

- Request office supplies through Prescilla at the beginning of the semester.
- Make all photocopies of class materials through the English office. In order to get copy jobs done on time, make your copy request to Prescilla at least 12-24 hours in advance. There is a binder by the copier where you can enter your name, date, number of copies needed, and description of copy job.

  All graduate Teaching Assistants are allowed to make up to 750 copies per semester. There is no photocopy limit for instructors.

- If you allow students to drop off assignments in your office mailbox, be sure to tell them to sign the "Student Sign-in Binder" on Prescilla's desk. This benefits everyone in case something gets lost.
- Outcomes Assessment data entered through Banner at the end of the semester should be printed and given to Prescilla.

WHO TO TALK TO IN THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

Should you need any kind of advice or support in your position as instructor in the Composition Program, here are the people you ask.

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT:	CONTACT:		
Department operation and procedures	Prescilla Salazar	DH 134	454-3414
Curriculum, the classroom and teaching	Prof. Holly Middleton	DH 150	454-3450
Curriculum, the classroom and teaching	Stephen Weatherburn	DH B29	454-3313
The Writing Center	Prof. Donna Woodford	DH 144	454-3253
Your teaching schedule and hiring	Prof. Barbara Risch	DH 140	454-3451

THE WRITING CENTER

Dr. Woodford directs this most valuable resource for Highlands students. English 100 and 111 students are required, as part their courses, to attend tutoring sessions in the Writing Center. Ensure that your students are aware of these requirements, and that they provide evidence of having attended the center. Also, encourage other students you interact with to use the center--it is of great value to junior, senior, and even graduate students, not just freshmen.

COMPUTER LABS

If a lesson plan would benefit from your entire class having simultaneous access to the Internet or to word-processing programs, you can reserve a computer lab in Donnelly Library or Sininger Hall. For Donnelly, call 454-3401. For Sininger Hall, call Evonne Roybal-Tafoya at 454-3271.

INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY AND E-RESERVES

Charlene Ortiz-Cordova and the team at EOS Technology Services train faculty on how best to enhance courses and instruction with E-Luminate and Blackboard. Charlene can also help you with resources such as PowerPoint and Smartboard. Contact Charlene at 426-2249 for further information. The help desk staff in EOS is also extremely helpful.

Electronic reserve is available at Donnelly Library. It is a useful resource for providing students with additional materials without the costs of photocopied handouts.

Another way to avoid excessive photocopying is to use an overhead projector or use the Smartboard installed in most Douglas Hall classrooms. Using an overhead or Smartboard is a great way to model revision and editing strategies for students.

If you plan on using the TV and VCR/DVD player, you should reserve it ahead of time. Sign up for it on the calendar in Prescilla's office.

For other technology issues, like discussing virus protection, how to rescue a crashed hard-drive, installing a new program, etc., visit ITS in the basement of Donnelly Library, or call 454–3496.

Also, be sure to check out the NMHU information technology usage policy at:
http://www.nmhu.edu/IntranetUploads/000194-policy_draft-55200583151.pdf

STUDENT COURSE EVALUATIONS

Before students can access their grades online at the end of the semester, they must fill out an online course and instructor evaluation. Students evaluate the course and the instructor according to the following criteria:

1. The grading system was clearly explained.
2. The instructor created an atmosphere conducive to learning.
3. Overall, I would rate this instructor effective.
4. I put considerable effort into this course.
5. The physical environment was favorable for learning.
6. The equipment in the class functioned properly.
7. The instructor effectively leads class sessions.
8. Class sessions increased my understanding of the subject.
9. Course objectives were clearly stated.
10. The course was intellectually challenging.
11. The instructor effectively organized the course.
12. The instructor was fair and impartial in assigning grades.
13. The instructor was respectful of student views, ideas, and differences.
14. Overall, I would rate this course as valuable.
15. The text and/or course materials were appropriate.
16. The instructor was knowledgeable about the subject.
17. The assignments increased my understanding of the subject.
18. The instructor was willing and available to help students outside the class.
19. The instructor was enthusiastic about the course.

You can access your students' evaluations through Banner a couple of weeks after the end of the semester:

- Click on "Quick Links" on the NMHU homepage
- Click on "Banner"
- Click on "Enter Secure Area"
- Log in with user name and password
- Click on "Faculty and Advisors"
- Scroll down to close to the bottom of the list and click on "Course Evaluation Results"

Aside from the course instructor, deans and department chairs have access to all course evaluations. Student course evaluations are sometimes consulted to help determine whether or not instructors will be offered future teaching contracts. For tenure-track faculty, they are used to help determine whether or not the faculty member will be retained, awarded tenure, or promoted. The course evaluations of graduate students are not typically viewed at all.

DUAL CREDIT

The Dual Credit Program enables high school students to get a jump-start on college by enrolling simultaneously at their high school and at NMHU. For the most part, these students behave like college students, not high school students. However, it is good to be aware of their situation, as they might need clarification on a project, and their high school requirements can create schedule conflicts.

Elizabeth Ratzlaff will email you if you have a dual credit student in your class. If you have any questions, she can be reached at 454-3281.

CAMPUS CONTACT INFORMATION

Academic Affairs
(505)454-3311
Rodgers Administration Building
Services: appeals, retroactive withdrawals, add a class

Academic Support
(505)454-3188
Felix Martinez Building

Bookstore
(505)454-3598
(877)248-9856 (Toll Free)
Student Center

Business Office
(505)454-3444
Rodgers Administration Bldg.

Counseling
Teresa Billy
(505)426-2049
Felix Martinez-101

Child Care
Child Development Center
Diane Luna (Director)
(505)454-3510

Personal Counseling Services
(505)454-3085

Financial Aid
(505)454-3318 or 3317
financialaid@nmhu.edu

Human Resources/ Affirmative Action
(505)454-3058
Rodgers Administration Bldg-108

International Education Center
(505)454-3372
Felix Martinez Bldg-213

Library
April Kent
(505)454-3139
Donnelly Library

Police Security Services
(505)454-3278

5555 on-campus emergency

Registrar's Office
(505)454-3438
Rodgers Administration Bldg.

Student Affairs
(505)454-3020
Felix Martinez Bldg.

Students with Disabilities
David Esquibel
(505)454-3252
108 Felix Martinez

Student Health Center
(505)454-3218
Student Center

Student Support Services
(505)454-3236
Felix Martinez Bldg.

Writing Center
(505)454-3537
115 Douglas Hall

PAYROLL ISSUES

Problem with your contract? With payroll not knowing who you are? With no paycheck and lots of rent due? Contact Cynthia Gurule, the employment coordinator in the Human Resources department, at 454-3393, or email her at: cinthiagurule@nmhu.edu. She will be happy to help.

NMHU PERSONNEL POLICIES

To view details on NMHU personnel policies and procedures:

- click on the NMHU homepage
- click on "faculty and staff"
- click on "human resources"
- click on "other HR documents"
- scroll down to "personnel policies and procedures manual"

Or, you can go directly through this link:

http://www.nmhu.edu/faculty_staff/hr/documents.html

This document covers all of the legal and technical aspects of being a NMHU employee. This is of particular relevance to full-time instructors and will be helpful if a personnel situation arises.

REQUIREMENTS

A SUMMARY OF INSTRUCTOR RESPONSIBILITIES

During the first week of classes, all English faculty, instructors, and graduate teaching assistants are required to file a course syllabus and a Faculty Schedule form with Prescilla Salazar.

Other responsibilities include:

- Teach the objectives for each course.
- Be punctual and meet with students for the entire scheduled time.
- Keep accurate attendance records for all students.
- Maintain a safe learning environment for each student.
- Post office hours and maintain those hours.
- Give an assignment in the first three weeks of class and promptly respond and return, so instructor and students have some means of gauging progress early in the semester.
- Participate in Early Alert.
- Check NMHU email account at least once every 48 hours.
- Enter mid-term and final grades into Banner before the deadline.
- Enter NMHU and NMHED SC outcomes into Banner.
- Maintain professional relations with all students, staff, faculty and other instructors.

SYLLABUS REQUIREMENTS

The course syllabus is your contract with the students – your commitment to provide them with a given course of study, and their agreement to successfully complete it. It is crucial that the syllabus is given to students and reviewed in class during the first week. Students should have an opportunity to discuss it and to raise questions about it.

All syllabi should include:

- Your name and contact information: office #, office hours, phone #, email
- Course description and objectives
- Required textbooks and materials
- Calendar/schedule
- Basic descriptions of major assignments
- Deadlines for major assignments
- Grade breakdown
- Attendance and late work policies
- Disabilities statement, below

Paste the following statement into all of your syllabi:

NOTE: "In accordance with federal law, it is university policy to comply with the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). If you believe that you have a physical, learning, or psychological disability that requires an academic accommodation, contact the Coordinator of Accessibility Services by phone at (505) 454-3188 or 454-3252, via e-mail at desquibel@nmhu.edu, or visit the Engineering building on the Las Vegas campus. If you need the document upon which this notice appears in an alternative format, you may also contact the Coordinator of Accessibility Service." David Esquibel, Student Advisor/Coordinator of Testing and Accessibility Services

OFFICE HOURS

Composition instructors are required to hold three office hours per week for each section they teach, and are encouraged to include thirty minutes before and/or after each class. Be sure to announce your office hours to your students often and to be there during those scheduled times. Let your students know that they can make appointments for discussion of their work-in-progress. While students are certainly permitted to arrive unannounced to your office hours, encourage them to provide you with information about topics they would like to discuss prior to their office visit, if possible. This will allow you to prepare for the meeting and to provide them the best possible assistance.

Important: Only meet with students in your office, not in a coffeehouse or on the Astroturf.

ATTENDANCE

Accurate attendance records help us assess our program and improve retention efforts, so please find a system that helps you easily keep track of attendance.

English program policy states that students can fail a course if they accrue a total of three weeks of absences--six absences if the class meets twice per week and nine absences if the class meets three times per week. However, instructors can craft their own attendance policy within these guidelines and implement it at their discretion.

EARLY ALERT

This is a feature offered by the academic advisors in the Felix Martinez building designed to improve Highlands student success and retention. It allows instructors to identify struggling students early on in the semester, which enables advisors to contact the student and see if they can address the issue.

Three weeks into the semester, you will receive an email from the Early Alert Program, requesting your participation in the system. You will then want to:

- Click on "Banner" in the "Quick Links" on the NMHU homepage
- Click on "Enter Secure Area"
- Log in with user name and password
- Click on "Faculty and Advisors"
- Scroll down to close to the bottom of the list and click on "First Early Alert"
- Select a term
- Select a CRN
- Follow the instructions

When you identify a student in the Early Alert Program, an advisor will contact the student via email and cc you to keep you in the loop. If you are experiencing difficulties with a student, feel free to contact their advisor – it can really help resolve misunderstanding if you and the student's advisor can touch base.

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHO TO REPORT TO EARLY ALERT?

If a student:

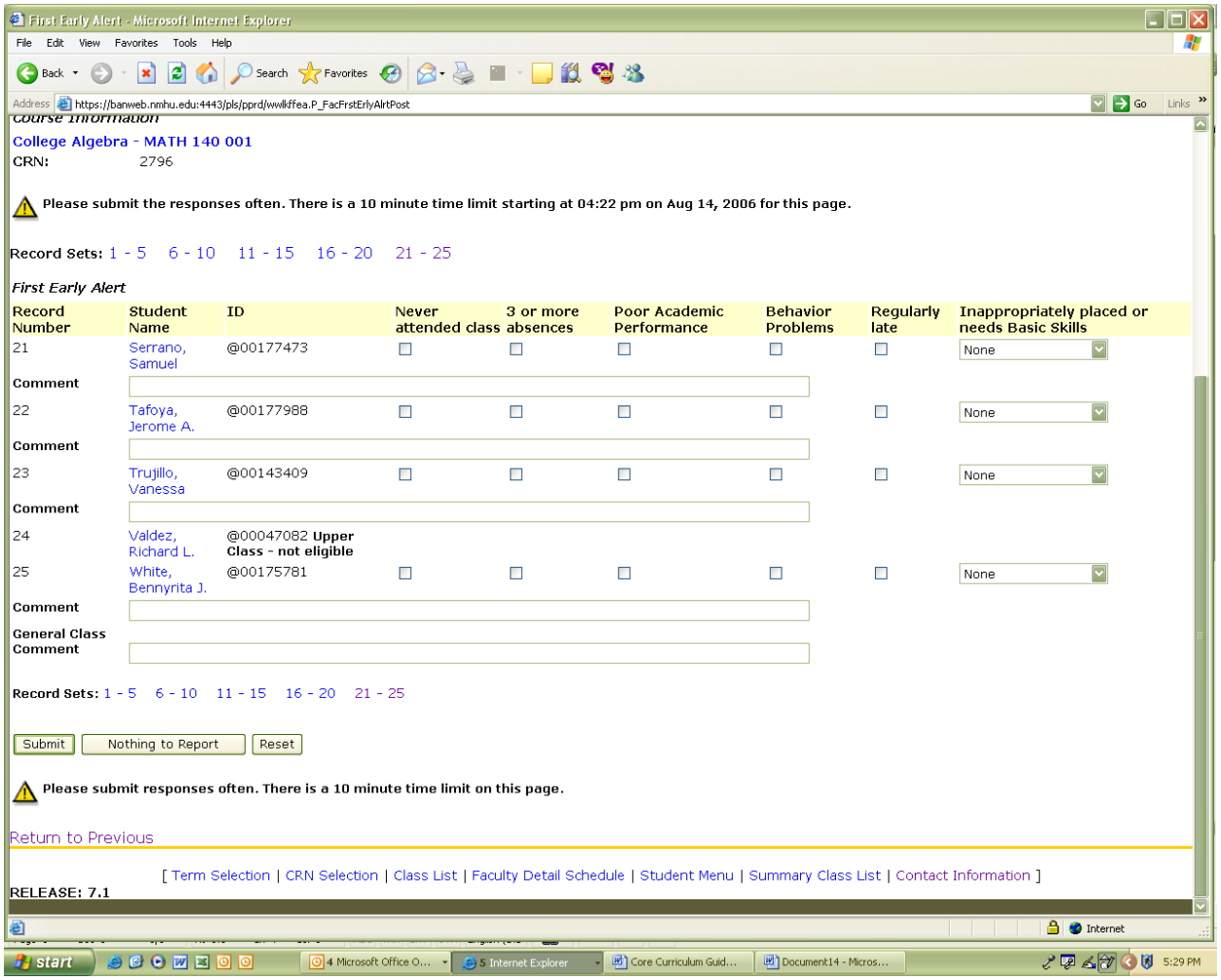
has had more than one absence;

or has not turned in an assignment;

or has made a D or F on an assignment,

they should be flagged for Early Alert. You can elaborate on the student's situation in the "comments" section.

Do *not* use Early Alert to give positive feedback on students. It will only slow down the advisors.


First Early Alert - Microsoft Internet Explorer
File Edit View Favorites Tools Help
Back Search Favorites
Address https://banweb.nmhu.edu:4443/pls/pprd/wwlkffea.P_FacFrstErlyAlrtPost
Go Links
Course Information
College Algebra - MATH 140 001
CRN: 2796
Please submit the responses often. There is a 10 minute time limit starting at 04:22 pm on Aug 14, 2006 for this page.
Record Sets: 1 - 5 6 - 10 11 - 15 16 - 20 21 - 25
First Early Alert
Record Number
Student Name
ID
Never attended class
3 or more absences
Poor Academic Performance
Behavior Problems
Regularly late
Inappropriately placed or needs Basic Skills
21 Serrano, Samuel @00177473 None
Comment
22 Tafoya, Jerome A. @00177988 None
Comment
23 Trujillo, Vanessa @00143409 None
Comment
24 Valdez, Richard L. @00047082 Upper Class - not eligible
25 White, Bennyrita J. @00175781 None
Comment
General Class Comment
Record Sets: 1 - 5 6 - 10 11 - 15 16 - 20 21 - 25
Submit Nothing to Report Reset
Please submit responses often. There is a 10 minute time limit on this page.
Return to Previous
[Term Selection | CRN Selection | Class List | Faculty Detail Schedule | Student Menu | Summary Class List | Contact Information]
RELEASE: 7.1
Internet
start
4 Microsoft Office O...
5 Internet Explorer
Core Curriculum Guid...
Document14 - Micros...
5:29 PM

MIDTERM GRADES, FINAL GRADES AND OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

All Highlands instructors submit midterm grades, final grades and outcomes assessment data through Banner. You can access these on the same page you find the option for Early Alert.

The English and Philosophy Department has a policy of limiting midterm grades to C, D, and F. It helps to clarify this policy to students on your syllabus; feel free to copy the statement below:

> It is English department policy to give "passing" or "not passing" grades at midterm, which means the options are limited to C, D, and F. This means that the highest grade reported at midterm is a C. Please know that C means "passing," not the average of all work to that point, and it is not averaged into your final grade. We will be discussing your course progress in more detail during conferences.

You might also want to include a statement on the connection between grades and financial aid:

> This class has a minimum requirement of C or better. Anything lower (a D or an F) means you will have to retake the course and that will not be covered by financial aid. As far as financial aid eligibility is concerned, the only distinction between a D and an F is the effect on GPA.

The procedures for reporting outcomes assessment are detailed in the back of this handbook.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT EXCESSIVE ABSENCES

Unfortunately, at Highlands we have high attrition rates. You may find yourself with only three quarters of the students in your class attending by midterm. Use every tactic in your repertoire to retain your students, but realize that some may simply stop showing up despite your best efforts.

Make sure that you get current contact info on your students the first week of class, and if a student begins to accumulate a lot of absences, please contact them via phone or email. Below is a model for the kind of tone and message to convey when contacting students about their absences:

> "Dear Mark,
>
> I'm writing because I'm concerned that your recent absences and incompletes are hurting your English 111 grade [or have made it impossible for you to pass the class]. Please contact me so we can discuss how to improve your progress in the course. I also urge you to see your advisor to discuss this situation."

The keys to remember are: give the student an accurate assessment of where they are at the time; urge them to see their advisor; and, even if you may think they'd be better off, don't suggest they

withdraw. They can easily lose their financial aid or athletic eligibility if they go below full-time, so their advisor is the one best equipped to handle this issue.

PROCEDURES FOR COVERING YOUR CLASSES

A class should be canceled only in emergency circumstances; if you have a looming schedule conflict, always find a colleague to cover the class. Please follow the procedures below.

In the event of a planned absence:

1. Find a colleague to cover your class.
2. Hand in a Faculty Absence Form to Prescilla five days prior to your absence. (See Prescilla for the form.)
3. Email Holly Middleton with the date, time and location of the class, and the name of the instructor who will be covering it.
4. Cc the above information to both Prescilla Salazar and the instructor who has agreed to cover the class.

Your colleague will need your lesson plans and any handouts, so be sure to plan the class in detail and discuss it with them ahead of time.

In the event of an emergency absence:

- Email or call Prescilla Salazar (psalazar@nmhu.edu / 454-3414) *and* Holly Middleton (hsmiddleton@nmhu.edu / 454-3450). Include information about the class time, the classroom, and (if possible) include a description of your lesson plans for the day.

They will either cover your class or notify your students of a cancellation.

FERPA

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education. FERPA gives parents certain rights to their children's education records when they are under 18, but college students have their own rights to privacy. It might seem legitimate to discuss a student with a parent (for example) but *we cannot give information about a student's academic performance to anyone outside of the university without a written release from the student.*

Always avoid discussing a student's grades, their ADA status, the reason they missed the last assignment deadline, etc., in front of the class. It is equally unprofessional to discuss other students during an office conference, even if you know the students concerned are all friends. If someone

phones your office and asks where and when Miguel or Maria attends your class, it is best to refer the caller to the academic advising office.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY STATEMENT

It is the policy of New Mexico Highlands University that sex-related harassment in the workplace is a form of sexual discrimination, barred under the employment protection provisions of the New Mexico Human Rights Act, and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1064, as amended.

"Sexual harassment," as used in this policy statement, is defined as "any unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature."

Because English instructors are in positions of power relative to their students, romantic relationships between them are forbidden for the duration of the student-teacher relationship.

ON TEACHING

SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR GOOD PRACTICE IN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION[1]

We have tried to build the seven principles below into our teacher training, course design, and program practice, and you will see them represented in the following pages.

1. **Good Practice Encourages Contact Between Students and Faculty**

   Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of class is a most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Faculty concern helps students get through rough times and keep on working.

2. **Good Practice Develops Reciprocity and Cooperation Among Students**

   Learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one's ideas and responding to others' improves thinking and deepens understanding.

3. **Good Practice Uses Active Learning Techniques**

   Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing prepackaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write reflectively about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves.

4. **Good Practice Gives Prompt Feedback**

   Knowing what you know and don't know focuses your learning. In getting started, students need help in assessing their existing knowledge and competence. Then, in classes, students need frequent opportunities to perform and receive feedback on their performance. At various points during college, and at its end, students need chances to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to know, and how they might assess themselves.

5. **Good Practice Emphasizes Time on Task**

   In college, time plus energy equals learning. Allocating realistic amounts of time means effective learning for students and effective teaching for faculty.

6. **Good Practice Communicates High Expectations**

   Expect more and you will get it. High expectations are important for everyone—for the poorly prepared, for those unwilling to exert themselves, and for the bright and well motivated.

7. **Good Practice Respects Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning**

   Many roads lead to learning. Different students bring different talents and styles to college. Students need opportunities to show their talents and learn in ways that work for them. Then they can be pushed to learn in new ways that do not come so easily.

[1] Excerpted from Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda F. Gamson, "Applying the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* Vol. 47, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991.

PREPARATION

BEFORE CLASSES START

1.) *Check out your classroom.* Once you have your teaching assignment, check out the room(s) in which you will teach. Get a feel for the room: check to see if there is space for you to walk around, if there is ample blackboard space, fire up the Smartboard and computer. If you don't like your room for any reason, you can request a room change. Check with Prescilla to see what your options are.

2.) *Practice saying your students' names.* Print out a first student roster and practice saying the names aloud. Changes are especially common before the add/drop date, so you may want to be on alert for new students at the beginning of each class. Some of these may not be enrolled in your section—always keep up with who is and who is not officially on your roster to avoid big problems later in the semester.

3.) *Plan your first two weeks of classes in detail.* Draft and start revising the writing assignment for the first paper. Set clear learning goals, plan a variety of activities, and decide on the order of these activities for each day. This will give you a level of confidence at the beginning to the semester, which will be apparent to students and give them a positive attitude toward the course.

DURING THE FIRST WEEK OF CLASSES

1.) *Prepare an "icebreaker" for the first day*. Icebreakers are activities that give students the chance to get to know each other as well as give them a chance to practice speaking in class. Even experienced instructors find they have some nervousness on the first day of class, but it's worthwhile to remember that students are apprehensive as well. You can deflect whatever nervousness you may feel, and help students get comfortable in your class, by devising plenty of activities encouraging active student participation.

2.) *Go over the syllabus.* Present the syllabus as a contract and take the first week to review it in detail. It's best to give an overview the first day and come back to it in detail over the week. Make the syllabus your primary text, and one you regularly return to with your students.

3.) *Remind students to buy required textbooks.* Be aware that students are often awaiting loan checks or other forms of financial aid during the first week (or two) of school or may delay purchasing books until their schedules are entirely set. A good rule of thumb is not to have readings from the textbook during the first week of class—use handouts and plan activities instead.

4.) *If you are assigning one, plan a diagnostic essay early.* Diagnostic essays are not required in composition courses, but if you are giving one, do it in the first week.

THE DIAGNOSTIC ESSAY

The diagnostic essay is a short, preliminary writing assignment that is generally given within the first week of the course and is *not submitted for a grade*. To clarify, this essay is not for placement—moving students can be very disruptive for them, so unless you have an extreme case, assume your students will stay where they are. The assignment allows you to become familiar with the skill and style of your students' writing at the beginning of the course, and to give your students early feedback.

CLASSROOM PLANNING

CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT

It seems intuitive to think that what we do as teachers is the most important aspect of the classroom, but we need to change our thinking on that. Active learning has proven to be the most effective way to improve student learning, especially for underprepared student populations. What do you want your students to learn? The answer to this question is not what *you* do—it's what your *students* do. To help them get there, you will need to figure out what they need to do in order to achieve the learning objectives you have set for your class.

John Biggs's principle of *constructive alignment* is helpful here. Learning objectives should always be expressed as what students will do—it's all about verbs. This is why the course objectives for English 100, 111, and 112 are all expressed as student actions. You can also do this for your planning, however, and expressing your daily or unit class goals as student actions will focus your thinking.

A course is aligned when the curriculum objectives, course objectives, teaching/learning activities, and assessment tasks all express the same action. If you want your students to achieve a learning objective, then, make sure that they are practicing that objective in class and on their assignments.

PLANNING WHAT STUDENTS DO WITH READING

College students everywhere, and Highlands students especially, have little experience reading the kinds of texts required in college. You will want to plan what students do with their reading as carefully as you plan what you want them to write.

Students won't read if they don't have a reason, so:

- Know your purpose for each assigned reading: how does it connect to the writing assignment and learning objective?
- Have pre-discussions on what students already know or think about the topic of a reading before the reading is due;
- Explicitly connect each reading to a learning objective;
- Give students a purposeful way to do the reading itself; (ex: reading guides)
- Require students to do something with what they read;
- Apply (and ask students to apply) the reading to personal experience, other course readings, history, and current events.

Reading struggles are related to plagiarism, absenteeism, and success in writing, so:

- Monitor students' reading comprehension;
- Write syllabi and assignments at a 9-10th grade reading level;
- Create short in-class activities where you model and students practice summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting readings.

CREATING A GOOD CLASS DYNAMIC

CLASS DYNAMIC

Instructors use the terms "dynamic," "feeling tone," "vibe," and "culture" to describe the learning environment and the day-to-day interactions between students and teachers. Planning and preparation help you establish a good dynamic because they build your credibility and give students a structure within which to work. When students know what is expected of them and are listened to, they trust the instructor more and are more inclined to participate in positive ways.

That said, most class disruptions are not the result of "rude" students—they are simply part of the difficulty of getting twenty individuals to participate in a common project when they are tired, distracted, and so on.

Here are some simple ways to deal with common problems:

- If you have an extremely active or outspoken student, make him or her your assistant: give them handouts to pass out, ask them to open the blinds for you, and so on. Keep them busy.
- If a couple of students are talking, make an announcement that appeals to their better selves: "I know it doesn't seem disruptive when you're talking in a low voice, but it really is—it makes it difficult for the rest of us to hear. It's really important that only one student speaks at a time so we all can hear what that person has to say. Anthony, would you repeat what you just said?" Phrase it in a way that shows you know they're not trying to be rude, but that it's rude to other students (not just you).
- Move around a lot: if something is going on in the back, walk to the back and address the class from there.
- Students using lap top computers and cell phones can be particularly distracting. Faculty and instructors have different policies towards these behaviors. Decide ahead of time how you feel about them in your classroom, establish the expectation, and keep to it.
- For students who are chronically late: ask them privately why they are late for class. Tell them you need them on time, otherwise it disrupts the class for other students. (Always couch it in the interest of other students. Aside from that being the issue, they care more about what their peers think than what you think.) Occasionally, a student has a good reason for being late—if this is the case, let the whole class know why Luis shows up later than they do. Students care deeply about fairness.
- Showing up a few minutes early and starting a conversation with the class allows you to help set the tone before class begins.

Talk to your fellow instructors or faculty for ideas on how to defuse a bad situation in class. Don't be shy about doing this: the important thing is to prevent small problems from becoming big ones.

AND IF ALL ELSE FAILS . . .

Cases of extremely disruptive students are rare. If you're unlucky enough to find yourself in this situation, and all of your more subtle interventions fail, the Student Handbook outlines specific procedures for dealing with extremely disruptive students. The 3 steps are:

1. Give a clear verbal warning to the student(s) in private, NOT publicly during a class session.
2. If the behavior continues, give the student a written warning.
3. If the behavior continues, remove the student from the classroom.

Throughout this process, document student behaviors and your responses, keeping Dr. Middleton informed along the way.

VARYING TEACHING METHODS

CLASS DISCUSSION

Good discussions involve students in a dialogue not only with you, but also with each other and with the text or material at hand. Many of us find that discussions are more productive as students learn to speak to each other, rather than directing each response to the instructor. Ideally, discussions provide your students with an opportunity to test their thoughts on a diverse audience, which in turn gives them feedback. This aim is more than likely to be attained if all participants respect the necessity of speaking with clarity, specificity, and respect for others.

A. Preparing for Classroom Discussion

Both you and the students need to be prepared for a discussion. Your task lies mainly in thinking of good discussion questions and being an efficient moderator.

What, then, *is* a good question? Instructors quickly learn that broad questions leading to a yes or no answer are rarely productive. Some general suggestions:

1.) *Prepare.* If you are discussing a reading, start preparing your students for it the day before. Focus on what you want to discuss: create and hand out a reading guide for homework, or give them a writing prompt to respond to and bring in for credit. Give them class time to reread, think, write, and then discuss a question or passage.

Highlands instructors have found reading guides to be the best way to create an evidence- and text-based classroom discussion. For instructions on how to create a reading guide, ask Dr. Middleton for Harold Herber's *Teaching Reading in Content Areas*.

2.) *Anticipate student responses*. As you devise questions, anticipate likely student responses to them, and then think about how you can build on these responses to further the discussion.

3.) *Create focused questions*. Phrasing questions is something of an art. Short and specific questions that can be understood in a single hearing give students a better purchase on possible responses; questions that combine several concepts at once are hard to follow. If you habitually rephrase questions in class, chances are that students will become frustrated, so think carefully about how to formulate your questions in advance.

If a large-scale and complex question produces only faltering responses, break the question down into more manageable component parts, and then build the discussion back up to that original question, once students have become more comfortable with the concepts and the complexity.

4.) *Model how an experienced reader works*. Don't be dismayed if, in the first weeks of the semester, student responses display a general, scanty, or distant understanding of the

assigned readings. Few students, after all, will have had experience in reading the kinds of material we assign; few will recognize the value of taking notes as they read, or of rereading, unless we teach these practices. Many will be inclined to skip passages they don't immediately understand.

By featuring those passages, by inviting students to unpack complex ideas and demanding that they contend with the tough sentences, we do them a valuable service. Don't be afraid, then, to take time to examine a single paragraph or passage in detail. Time spent modeling the responses of an experienced reader or leading the class through collaborative paraphrase of difficult material will give students practice in college-level reading.

B. *Facilitating Classroom Discussion*

Use the following strategies to create vibrant and engaging discussions in your classroom:

1.) *Move around.* It is difficult to conduct an effective discussion while sitting, so you will want to get up and move around the classroom. By having your students follow you around with their eyes, you'll help them remain alert. Move toward your students as they speak to show that you are listening, rather than backing away from them. You can safeguard against privileging any particular block of students by remembering to move around the room. If space permits, consider walking to the back of the room on occasion—you and you students might enjoy the change in perspective.
2.) *Vary the seating arrangement.* If your room allows for it, consider asking your students to sit in a circle for discussion. In that way everyone can see everyone else, and no one can hide behind another person's back. More students are likely to contribute to discussion if arranged in a circle than when they are seated in rows. Further, circular seating fosters direct address among students.
3.) *Be even-tempered and consistent.* Try not to take what students do personally, and never lose your temper during a discussion. Don't be surprised if many of your students have not read the assignment the day before or after a break, or the day when a paper assignment is due. These can be good occasions for review of what has been accomplished, for forecast of what remains to be done, and for work on writing and revision.
4.) *Keep your sense of humor.* Humor makes you accessible to students and reminds them that you're human. It's important to realize that sarcasm does the opposite: given your power over students, they can easily feel hurt or humiliated by a sarcastic comment.
5.) *Foster collegiality.* Make it clear that you expect students to listen to each other without interrupting, and model that behavior by listening intently to them and responding to what they say. Repeat it so all can hear and, whenever possible, weave past student comments into discussion.
6.) *Get everyone involved.* If you have extremely quiet students, you can get them involved by appointing them the "reporters" in small-group work, or calling on them to read from an in-class writing assignment. Usually, quiet students are willing to participate if they just have a few minutes to think and prepare.
7.) *Model note taking.* Students understand the need to take notes during class lectures, but they may need some prompting before they take notes during discussion. Further, they may

need some instruction in how to take notes while speaking and listening to others. You can help them learn this skill by jotting responses on the blackboard as students speak and occasionally making connections between points (or, perhaps even better, asking students what connections or patterns they discern). You can help students recognize the value of this skill by occasionally asking them, at the end of discussion, to write a coherent paragraph-length synthesis of what was said.

C. *Inviting Students into Classroom Discussion*

Especially in the first weeks of the semester, students may be reluctant to speak up, and you may encounter a long silence in response to your first question or two. Tempting as it is to answer the question yourself, you will help yourself and your students by waiting the silence out. You can repeat the question, reassure them that you know they can answer the question, and offer verbal and facial cues of encouragement—but you can also refuse to bail them out of their increasing discomfort as the seconds pass. If two or three students dominate a discussion, you can gracefully acknowledge their contributions while bringing others into the discussion. As you call on students by name, shy and passive students gain a point of entry.

There are several ways to respond to student questions. Where possible, you may want to help students answer by asking them to work through what prompted their question, or by reminding them of what they have learned earlier.

As an alternative, you may want to turn a student's question over to the class. Doing so may help students realize that you are not the sole source of knowledge in the classroom, and may help foster a collaborative spirit of inquiry. This response, too, requires some tact, since you don't want students who ask questions to feel that their ignorance or lack of comprehension is on display.

Finally, you may choose to answer the question yourself. But if you are stumped, never fake an answer or avoid a question. Model intellectual curiosity: whether you possess a bit if factual information is much less important than your ability to show students how to retrieve such information for themselves. Depending on the complexity and content of the question, you might suggest how the student can find an answer, or come back to it at the beginning of the next class.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Teaching through small-group activities has several advantages. The students get to know each other, they are exposed to each other's ideas, and they learn to use analytical terms easily in conversation. Group work resembles revision workshops in terms of planning; we can't just walk into the classroom and expect students to form balanced little groups. Consider the dynamics of the classroom when you divide the class into small groups (place talkative students with quieter ones; move domineering students around). Generally, four to a group is plenty. When you make groups larger than that, it becomes too difficult for students to participate evenly.

Group activities should be focused: for example, you can have students answer a number of study questions, distributing the questions among the groups so that every group comes up with, and reports on, a different set of answers. This gives the students practice in communicating their answers to others. Define the task as specifically as possible: "Discuss the readings by Malcolm X and Benjamin Franklin" will make for unfocused responses, since students won't be sure exactly what you want them to do. You'll get more coherent answers with something like, "Select one book that Malcolm X mentions in this section from his autobiography, and explain how that specific book contributed to his development." To encourage students to keep at the task at hand, put a time limit on group work. Appoint a reporter in each group, a student who is responsible for recording the group's work in writing.

Often, instructors assign group work as an end in itself, because it's supposed to be good for students. But if groups don't do something with their work—if they don't have a goal—they won't really get going, and the groups won't pay attention to each other. The most effective kind of group work happens when groups have to do something with each other's work—evaluate it, guess at it, whatever. The more you can make the group activity into a game that other groups build on and respond to in steps, the more successful it will be.

Suggestions for Group Work:

- It seems counter-intuitive, but don't give them too much time. You want to end group work while energy is still high, not after everyone has wound down. It's okay if they don't finish.
- Appoint a reporter and clarify what each group will do at the end of their work together. Present to the class? Write a quick report to turn in for a grade? Group work has to have a concrete goal that is clear to students.
- If you can convert your question or objective into an activity that students can act out, or that becomes a game with their classmates, they will be much more motivated and more likely to remember it.
- Have other groups do something with the knowledge each group produces to make it interactive.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Self-assessment is a way that students learn deeply and can transfer their learning to other courses. It also demystifies grading criteria for them and creates a lot of good will in the classroom. Always tell students (in writing, if possible) how their writing or any other assignment will be evaluated. This is the first step. The problem is, students often don't know what you mean by "developed" and the other words we use to describe good academic writing. Anything you can do to help them recognize and internalize grading criteria will help them become better readers and revisers of their own work.

Mock writing is an excellent way to teach grading criteria. Create sample models of the writing assignment at different levels—a "D" paper, for example, a "B," and an "A"—and give them to students with the grading criteria. Have students grade the samples in pairs or small groups and

defend their grades to the class. Be sure to share where your criteria and theirs overlap and diverge.

It is important to create these yourself rather than to share examples of actual "bad" student writing. Never distribute student writing—even if the student is not in your class—as an example of what not to do, because it's humiliating. Your students do not want to think you would do that to any student.

WRITING TO LEARN

A. In-class Writing (the more, the better)

By making writing an essential component of every class, we help our students to become less anxious about (and more practiced in) writing. Not all writing needs to be graded; indeed, it helps to disassociate writing from grading. For short assignments and exercises that you glance over rather than analyze, a check/plus/minus is sufficient. You don't even have to read all student writing; often, other students constitute the best audience for generative, informal writing tasks. Ask your students to write as much and as often as possible, and ask them to read each other's writing. Frequent informal writing--in class and as homework—helps students see that reading and writing are interactive, recursive processes.

Writing-to-Learn Strategies

- *Minute papers*. For the last five minutes of class every day, have students write the down: the most important thing they learned, what was unclear, pose a question of their own, etc.
- *Summaries*. Have students summarize and write clarifying questions about their reading homework; begin class here.
- *Prior knowledge*. Before starting a new section, lecture, or concept, have students write about their current knowledge of and questions about the topic.
- *Question-generating*. In small groups, have students generate questions about the content and exchange their questions with other students to answer for them.

Exam questions. In groups, have students write essay exam questions.

B. Peer Reading and Revision Activities

The use of peer reading and revision groups or pairs helps students to become more conscious of the revision process, exposes them to their peers' writing, and teaches them to read carefully. It is essential that you give your students written instructions to guide their responses. Such activities should ask for more than correcting mechanical errors; students should be encouraged to focus on the elements of composition that you are working on at that particular time of the semester. Moreover, you will want to set up specific rules for the process. Peer reading should be focused—you might want to model responses that are humanely and respectfully critical, geared towards

particular outcomes built into the assignment, so that students understand what to aim for in their comments.

At first, students may be reluctant to criticize and revise their neighbor's work. Make it clear that their job is not to offer a teacherly evaluation of their partner's work, but rather to identify the partner's purpose and help the partner express that purpose as clearly as possible.

To send the message that peer revision is an activity to be taken seriously, you can collect the revision sheets along with the final draft of the paper, and then evaluate both the revised essay and the peer reviewer's suggestions.

DESIGNING EFFECTIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

GUIDELINES FOR MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS

1. *Be specific about requirements*. Always hand out your assignments in written form; specify due dates, length, format, background readings, grading criteria, and the purpose of the assignment.

2. *Write your assignments carefully*. Spend time drafting and revising your assignments. Make sure they connect to your objectives and what students have been doing in class, and try to anticipate all the ways students may misunderstand what you are writing. Limit your assignment sheets to one page.

3. *Write for the Writing Center tutors as well as your students*. Remember that tutors are another part of your audience and they have to understand your assignment requirements and objectives at a glance.

4. *Integrate your assignments*. Make sure there is a relationship between in-class work and out-of-class work; encourage your students to talk about (and write about) their assignments in class. Devote a part of class discussion to the purpose and the position of a particular assignment within the syllabus. Allow plenty of time for questions related to the assignment. Schedule some time to do prewriting exercises in class.

5. *Time your assignments well*. Do not overburden the students when you are working under heavy pressure. Don't ask your students to hand in Essay #2 if you still haven't returned Essay #1, graded and commented upon; they deserve to see what they did well, and not-so-well, in their last paper before they submit another one. Try to return regular essays within one week; two weeks is reasonable for longer papers. Delays in returning graded papers considerably weaken the impact of your feedback.

6. *Use varied and interesting topics*. Provide a choice of topics, or allow your students to create their own subtopics. Find out what the interests of your students are and use their

suggestions whenever practical. Take into account that your own cultural background may not be the same as your students'; avoid unreflectively ethnocentric topics.

7. *Prevent plagiarism*. When you borrow topics, tailor them to your own purposes; never use a borrowed assignment verbatim. Make students turn in their drafts, notes, and noted articles, and outlines with the final copy of the essay. Original thinking for topics, combined with sufficient guidance during the writing process, should diminish the possibility of plagiarism.

8. *Teach the writing process*. Model it, discuss it, and give students a chance to practice it in class, under your supervision and with feedback from their classmates.

9. *Schedule time for reflection.* Ask students to write a paragraph about the essay they're about to turn in, assessing its merits or describing their writing process; fostering metacognitive awareness helps students learn deeply.

10. *Expose students to their peers' writing*. Ask your students for permission to reproduce their papers for class discussion, or simply do it anonymously.

Announce your office hours often. Make sure your students know that they can make appointments for discussion of their work-in-progress. Use conferences or tutorial sessions to discuss drafts of essays.

AND, MORE ON WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

The fabulous Traci Gardner suggests that you begin with a consideration of your own rhetorical situation; that is, think about your goals for this writing, think about what your purpose is for this writing, and think about who your audience is.

Then, compose the assignment around these three central goals:

1. Define the writing task
    - Identify an authentic audience and purpose for the project
    - Position students as experts in their communication with that audience
    - Ask students to interact with (rather than restate) texts and knowledge
    - Give students choices in their work that support their ownership of the task
2. Explore the expectations for the task
    - Unpack the meaning of the assignment to create a shared understanding of the activity
    - Provide model responses and demonstrate how to read and compose example texts
    - Share rubrics, checklists, and other resources that highlight the requirements and goals for the assignment
3. Provide support and explanatory materials

- Provide organizational structures and material that scaffold the writing process
- Provide multiple opportunities to write for different purposes and audiences
- Help students gather and think through ideas
- Provide resources that address the standard conventions of finished and edited texts
- Create opportunities and support for peer reading and discussion as well as student-teacher conferencing

ONE-ON-ONE

STUDENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

Student-teacher conferences are another effective way to work individually with students on their writing. Freshman Composition conferences generally take one of two forms:

1. Two rounds of class-wide conferences during the semester, in which you will dismiss class and instead meet with each student for approximately 15-20 minutes (these conferences generally take place over a two- to three-day period).

2. The conference initiated by the individual student. In this situation, you need only respond to the student's particular concern. However, the same rules of conduct apply to all conferences.

EFFECTIVE CONFERENCING

Meet out of class. If you teach one section of composition, dismiss your class for one day (if you teach three sections or more, consider dismissing for two days). You may count a missed conference as one absence. Do not plan, however, to meet with all your students in one day; you can probably plan on meeting with about half of your students on the cancelled class day and the rest over surrounding days.

Schedule them well. Prepare a conference sign-up sheet of 20-minute meeting times, and circulate it among the students several times before the conferences. Insist that each student record the meeting time, and make sure everyone knows where your office is (remember that just knowing a room number in Douglas Hall does not mean students know how to find it!).

Make sure to schedule several breaks into your conference days, perhaps one for every four or five conferences. Not only will the break give you a chance to catch your breath (or grab a cup of coffee/something to eat), but it can also cushion your schedule if some of your conferences start to run a little too long, as they often do. Don't schedule breaks during the time your class would

normally meet, because these are slots during which you know your students will have no outside conflicts.

Meet with a purpose. Coordinate conferences with your syllabus. Always schedule the meetings with a specific purpose in mind. Make sure students bring with them the rough drafts and other materials necessary for the conference.

Stick to your schedule. Instructors and students alike should respect scheduled times. To encourage students to attend their conferences, if you have an attendance policy, count the missed conference as equivalent to one day absent. Better yet, set specific performance goals for the conference and grade students accordingly. Students who miss a conference would then receive a zero for the activity.

Let students do the talking. A conference, by definition, should encourage a two-way exchange of ideas; help students take the initiative in the process. Whenever possible, let them do the talking and then respond to their ideas. Resist the temptation to use the conference as a forum for delivering a private lecture to teach students individually.

RESPONDING IN WRITING

GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO STUDENT WRITING

Students need help and encouragement to work through the long process of interpreting an assignment and writing a comprehensive essay in response. Here are a few considerations to help students explore and articulate their ideas more fully.

First: make sure you are responding appropriately by distinguishing between formative and summative assessment:

> *Formative assessment* is always made with an eye toward what the student can do to revise. This is the kind of response you will give when revision is still expected.
>
> *Summative assessment* is evaluative. Here, the instructor will need to "sum up" the paper's strengths and weaknesses, acknowledge areas of improvement, and justify the final grade.

It's important that the kind of assessment you are making in your comments is appropriate to the stage in the writing process you are reading.

Collect and respond to prewriting, journal entries, and brainstorming exercises. Early in the writing process we should be helping students in their process of invention. Early feedback should drive their ideas forward, and encourage them to further explore, explain and illustrate their observations and analyses, and the connections between them.

Reread the writing assignment and grading criteria. Before commenting on rough drafts, reread the writing assignment. In order to comment effectively and provide direction for revision, you'll need to have a clear understanding of what you have asked them to do in their writing, as well as the criteria you will be using when you evaluate their final drafts.

Develop an understanding of the moves the writer is making in the rough draft. Your main goals in reading the rough draft are to get a handle on how the writer is approaching the assignment and to understand how the writer is developing his or her ideas. Understanding where the writer is coming from is a crucial step in developing some common ground for the comments you will make on the rough draft.

Attend to more global issues like focus and organization. An early rough draft is not the place to put a student paper under the microscope; unless you see a pattern of error, you might want to avoid spelling, grammar, and punctuation altogether. Students can refine these areas as they work through subsequent drafts. Use your comments on the rough draft as a way to encourage the writer to refine the focus and organization of the paper and to develop ideas that are emerging in the draft.

Praise. There has been significant research finding that students who received praise on their drafts scored better on their final drafts than students who only received constructive criticism. When students do something well, tell them. And be sure to identify concretely what they do well. Instead of writing, "I like this," write "I like the way you establish your credibility here by giving the background."

Connect the assignment sheet, the draft, and your grading criteria. Remind your students that these three documents are interconnected. Call their attention to how they have and have not addressed the assignment, and what you will be looking for when you evaluate the final draft.

A TAXONOMY FOR WRITTEN RESPONSE

In "The Components of Written Response: A Practical Synthesis of Current Views," Brooke Horvath identifies Elaine Lees's taxonomy for the seven components of formative written response. They are:

> *Correct*, supplying factual information but risking an undue, perhaps stifling emphasis on 'the importance on editorial tidiness';
>
> *Emote*, implying shared humanity but shifting the focus of attention from text to teacher . . .
>
> *Describe* textual features—how the paper is behaving—thus keeping attention focused on the text while supplying students with a set of critical terms . . .
>
> *Suggest* where changes might be made thereby addressing the writer's needs more directly than description alone permits . . .

Question, forcing students to rethink material, thus encouraging further discovery

Remind, relating the text to class discussions so that comments and class work reinforce each other; and

Assign, creating a new writing task . . . thereby setting goals and emphasizing both writing and writing improvement as developmental processes.[2]

According to Lees, the first three are teacher-centric and their effectiveness is limited; the next three mark improvement by shifting the work to the student, and the last one—*assign*—is the one most effective at improving student writing by "providing feedback on skills seen as in transition toward greater competence."[3]

This is not necessarily the case for every piece of writing. When a student writes about a traumatic event, for instance, the most appropriate response is to *emote*—and the most inappropriate is probably to *correct*. If you are trying to teach grading criteria and show students where their strengths lie, *describe* is a good action to take.

However, this taxonomy helps make us aware of what different types of responses to student writing actually *do*. Try to gauge what is most appropriate for helping your students respond accurately to the assignment and develop as writers.

GRADING

HANDLING THE PAPER LOAD

There is no ideal approach to grading papers; everyone you ask will give you different tips for handling the job. There are a number of fair and effective methods of grading: which of these you choose is less important than developing a stable and consistent approach. Here are a few basic grading considerations:

1. *Know your criteria*. Before you start grading papers, reread your assignment and grading criteria; think about what you taught and what students practiced in the classes leading up to the assignment.

2. *Read through all papers once quickly before you reread and comment*. This will enable you to get a sense of how students responded to the assignment as a class. This gives you important feedback on the assignment and your teaching.

[2] Horvath, "Components," in *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*, fourth edition. 244.

[3] Horvath, 244.

3. *Be selective*. Don't comment on every sentence or potential problem in an essay. Identify and comment on recurring problems or the problems you see as most serious. Too many comments will overload students.

4. *Don't spend too much time on each paper.* Try to limit yourself to no more than 20 minutes per short essay (3-5 pp.); later in your progress, you may get your time down to 10-15 minutes per short essay. We're not pushing you to set speed records with your grading, but you can't do it well if you're burned out from grading.

5. *Keep moving.* If you've completed your comments on a paper but can't decide between an A- and a B+, make a note to yourself and go back to that paper later and determine the final grade. Don't agonize over it for half an hour.

6. *Calibrate*. After you've read through an entire stack and tentatively penciled in grades, go back through the stack, separating the papers by grade (i.e., make an "A" pile, a "B" pile, etc.). Then, go through each pile and ask yourself whether all of your "A" papers (your "B" papers, etc.) seem to be of roughly the same quality. You will find yourself making minor adjustments, shifting one paper from the "B" pile to the "C" pile and so on.

7. *Never promise to deliver graded papers on a specific day*. If you name a date, and then something unforeseen prevents you from meeting that deadline, your students will be disappointed and angry, no matter how good your excuse is. As a rule, you should return papers to students *before* you require them to turn in the next paper. Allow them to apply the advice you've given them in your comments.

8. *Return papers at the end of class*. If you return them at the beginning, students will be distracted.

9. *Set a schedule*. Some like to organize their grading by a set amount of time, others by a set number of papers. You'll get a sense of what works for you.

10. *Don't put off your grading until the last possible minute*. Both you and your students suffer when you grade all papers in a last-ditch marathon.

REFLECTING ON YOUR TEACHING

The hallmark of good teaching is reflective practice, in which the instructor steps back from the class at the macro level (the course as a whole) and the micro level (a class activity) in an on-going process of self-assessment, revision, and improvement.

All instructors are urged to compile teaching portfolios, which document the activities of teaching and learning with a collection of primary documents (syllabi, assignments, student papers) and secondary documents (teaching observation, reflective letter, annotated syllabus.) Just as the writing process improves a written product, so reflecting on one's teaching practices constitutes an act of revision and improves one's competence in teaching.

The Highlands Composition Program requires graduate students to compile a teaching portfolio, and all instructors are invited to participate in this and other professional development activities. Dr. Middleton is happy to offer feedback on portfolio materials and to help create opportunities to generate them.

REPORTING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

For the past two decades or so, universities have been under intense pressure to demonstrate measurable results of student learning in the form of outcomes assessment. Some of this pressure comes from the skyrocketing costs of tuition during a time when job opportunities for those without a college degree are narrowing and lower-income students are entering universities. This makes the selection of the right university even more crucial to students and parents. Another aspect is the political climate against the public funding of higher education; instead, privatization and standardized testing are encouraged at every level.

This is the reality of the historical moment we are in, and our outcomes assessment data serves two important functions: it generates data that we at Highlands can use to assess our programs and improve them for students; and having these systems in place may protect us somewhat against standardized assessments that are profitable for testing companies but don't necessarily improve student learning.

Like many universities nationwide, Highlands has a formal process of generating outcomes assessment data on every student. One part of this process is Highlands' own system, and the other is mandated by the state of New Mexico.

At the end of the semester, all instructors enter data on each of their students into Banner, documenting the student's achievement of specific outcomes. The major assignments in the composition sequence can be easily correlated with outcomes; if you get a sense of what they are in your course early in the semester, reporting the data is a fairly straightforward process.

NEW MEXICO STATE COMPETENCIES

Area I Courses: Communication

There are 6 state competencies for all Freshman Composition courses in New Mexico. They are:

1. **Students will analyze and evaluate oral and written communication in terms of situation, audience, purpose, aesthetics, and diverse points of view.** Students should: understand, appreciate, and critically evaluate a variety of written and spoken messages in order to make informed decisions.

2. **Students will express a primary purpose in a compelling statement and order supporting points logically and convincingly.** Students should: organize their thinking to express their viewpoints clearly, concisely, and effectively.

3. **Students will use effective rhetorical strategies to persuade, inform, and engage.** Students should: select and use the best means to deliver a particular message to a particular audience. Rhetorical strategies include but are not limited to modes (such as narration, description, and persuasion), genres (essays, web pages, reports, proposals), media and technology (PowerPoint, electronic writing), and graphics (charts, diagrams, formats).

4. **Students will employ writing and/or speaking processes such as planning, collaborating, organizing, composing, revising, and editing to create presentations using correct diction, syntax, grammar, and mechanics.** Students should: use standard processes for generating documents or oral presentations independently and in groups.

5. **Students will integrate research correctly and ethically from credible sources to support the primary purpose of a communication.** Students should: gather legitimate information to support ideas without plagiarizing, misinforming or distorting.

6. **Students will engage in reasoned civic discourse while recognizing the distinctions among opinions, facts, and inferences.** Students should: negotiate civilly with others to accomplish goals and to function as responsible citizens.

REPORTING ON BANNER

The deadline for submitting final grades for fall is Monday, December 15th. Outcomes Assessment information can easily be done at the same time:

- Go to the NMHU homepage
- Click on the "Quick Links" drop-down menu
- Click on "Banner"
- Click on "Enter Secure Area"
- Log in with user name and password
- Click on "Faculty and Advisors"
- Scroll down to the bottom of the options and click on "Outcomes Assessment Reporting."

New Mexico Highlands University

Outcomes Assessment Worksheet

*This worksheet duplicates the outcomes assessment webpages in Banner. After you complete your final grades, use this worksheet as a guide to generate outcomes assessment data on each student regarding the NMHU core curriculum course outcomes and the New Mexico State Competencies established by the New Mexico Higher Education Department (NMHED).

Class _____ Instructor _____ Semester _____

Instructions:

In each section I and II below, describe the assessment(s) that you have used during the spring 2008 semester to determine achievement of the NMHU core outcomes and NMHED state competencies (e.g., term paper, multiple choice exam, essay exam, etc.). Please be specific, and if you use a particular item on an exam, or a section of an exam or another assessment to assess the NMHU outcomes or a particular NMHED state competency, please identify that item or section.

In section III below, rate each student's level of attainment of the NMHU core outcome(s) and *each* NMHED state competency using the following rubric:

4 = Yes, the student definitely mastered the outcome(s) or competency

3 = Yes, the student partially mastered the outcome(s) or competency

2 = No, the student failed to even partially master the outcome(s) or competency

1 = No, the student definitely failed to master the outcome(s) or competency

I. NMHU Core Curriculum Outcomes

Please check which of the following NMHU core curriculum outcomes your course addresses (you may check more than one outcome):

____ Mastery of communication skills

____ Mastery of critical thinking skills

____ Knowledge of basic information and basic intellectual procedures

____ Ability to access and manipulate data and other forms of communication

In the space below, describe the assessment(s) on which you are basing your judgments of student achievement of the core curriculum outcome(s) (e.g., paper, multiple-choice exam, essay exam, etc.). You can consider the NMHU core curriculum outcomes collectively – you do *not* need to list a separate assessment for each NMHU core outcome. Please be specific in your description.

_____

_____

II. NMHED State Competencies (See description of NM State Competencies 1-6 above.)

Describe the assessment, assessment item, or assessment section that you have used this semester to determine student attainment of *each* NMHED state competency (e.g., SC1, SC2, etc.) in your area I, II, III, IV or V. (NOTE to faculty – see NMHED Core Competencies Matrix. Section II will vary based on the area in which your course is categorized)

SC1. Description of assessment _____

_____

SC2. Description of assessment _____

_____

SC3. Description of assessment _____

_____

III. Student Attainment of NMHU Core Outcomes and NMHED State Competencies

Using the following rubric, rate the degree to which each student in your class has attained the NMHU core outcomes (NMHU – provide an overall rating, *not* one for each of the four NMHU core outcomes) AND *each* NMHED state competency (a separate rating for each competency).

4 = Yes, the student definitely mastered the outcome(s) or competency

3 = Yes, the student partially mastered the outcome(s) or competency

2 = No, the student failed to even partially master the outcome(s) or competency

1 = No, the student definitely failed to master the outcome(s) or competency

Student Name & "@ number"	NMHU	SC1	SC2	SC3	SC4	SC5
Student 1						
Student 2						
Student 3						
Etc.						

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Biggs, John. *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the Student Does*. Second edition. New York: The Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press, 2003.

Chickering, Arthur W. and Zelda F. Gamson. "Applying the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education." *New Directions for Teaching and Learning.* Vol. 47. San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 1991.

Gardner, Traci. *Designing Writing Assignments*. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.

Herber, Harold. *Teaching Reading in Content Areas*. Second edition. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1978.

Hillocks, George. *Teaching Writing as Reflective Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1995.

Horvath, Brooke. "The Components of Written Response: A Practical Synthesis of Current Views." *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*. Fourth edition. Edward Corbett, Nancy Myers, and Gary Tate, eds. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 243-57.