Introductory Workshop for new Teaching Assistants

Course Description

The summer workshop for new TAs offers a practical introduction to teaching college composition. Its general purpose is to familiarize you with the principles that guide the MSU Composition Program and to help you begin designing your 101 course for the fall. More specifically, English 621 is intended to:

Acquaint you with the common goals and teaching methods for English 101.

We will explore key terms from the 101 course description, list of course competencies, and composition textbook, paying particular attention to rhetorical and process-oriented concepts. We will discuss ways that these concepts can inform our writing assignments and classroom practices.

Provide you with information about and opportunities to practice effective instructional skills.

In our readings and discussions, we will examine topics such as designing a syllabus, crafting writing assignments, generating lesson plans, leading discussion, responding to student work, facilitating group interaction, and grading. We will then apply what we have learned to develop course materials and practice teaching techniques.

Alert you to campus resources that can support and enhance the teaching of 101.

Individuals who serve in a variety of capacities on the MSU campus will visit the summer workshop to discuss how their services can be used by composition teachers to improve writing instruction. Guided field trips to Memorial Library and the Center for Academic Success will also serve this purpose.

Help you establish formal and informal networks of support for yourself as a teacher.

During the summer workshop, the Composition Director will help you learn about the Composition Program and assist you in preparing your materials for the fall. Ideally, this interaction will lay the foundation for a growth-promoting professional relationship that will last throughout your teaching career at MSU. In addition to the Composition Director, four Mentors will lead the summer workshop. These experienced TAs have been formally selected to support your teaching throughout the year. During the workshop, they will be available to answer questions, discuss concerns, share resources, provide feedback, relate experiences and assist you
as a teacher in any way they can. Finally, other TAs enrolled in the workshop can be excellent resources for your teaching. The summer workshop will give you many opportunities to build supportive relationships with them and to benefit from their effort and knowledge.

Required Materials

How to Write Anything: A Guide and Reference
The St. Martin’s Guide to Teaching Writing
Paper for printing articles on electronic reserve and drafts of teaching documents

Course Requirements

Microteaching: This assignment requires you to develop an activity that you will use in your 101 classroom and to teach it to a small group of your peers. See the attached handout for a more detailed assignment description.

Midterm Portfolio: The midterm portfolio is a collection of materials that showcases your participation in the workshop and your preparatory efforts for the upcoming semester. At a minimum, the portfolio should include the pre-workshop assignment, lesson plans, an assignment sheet draft, a syllabus draft, and selected end-of-day reflective writing. See the attached handout for a more detailed assignment description.

Final Portfolio: The final portfolio is a revised and expanded version of your midterm portfolio displaying the learning you have done in the workshop and your preparation for the upcoming semester. Your portfolio materials will be prefaced by a reflective letter that discusses your experience in the workshop, your lingering concerns as a teacher, and your teaching goals for the fall. See the attached handout for a more detailed assignment description.

Grade Breakdown

Microteaching 20%
Midterm Portfolio 40%
Final Portfolio 40%

Classroom Policies

The success of the workshop depends on your engagement with assigned readings, in-class activities and take-home work. You are expected to complete all out-of-class assignments and actively participate in class discussions and group tasks. The level of your involvement in the workshop will impact your teaching development and your peers’ opportunities for learning.

Attendance and punctuality are expected. Any necessary absences or tardies should be discussed ahead of time with the Composition Director.
Turning in a portfolio late will result in a grade penalty of one half grade drop on the portfolio (A to A-, A- to B+) per day.

Day-by-day Schedule

**Monday, August 3rd**

In Class:  
Reflection on Writing and Teaching Histories  
Introduction to English 101 at MSU  
Guiding Concepts Presentations: Audience, Purpose, Genre, Style

Homework:  
After reading “Teaching Writing as a Process not Product,” respond in writing to the following questions: Which of Murray’s ideas did you find interesting or compelling? What questions or concerns did his article raise? Explain.

Reading:  
Chapter 1, *How to Write Anything*  
“Teaching Writing as a Process Not Product,” Electronic Reserve

**Tuesday, August 4th**

In Class:  
Lesson Plans  
Teaching Writing as a Process Part I: Invention and Revision

Homework:  
Develop learning objectives for the personal narrative unit. These objectives (which should include formal course competencies) will be the skill areas around which you shape lesson plans and evaluate student work for the first unit. In drafting your list of learning objectives, be as specific or as general as you feel you need to be.

Write up two new lesson plans, generating any materials you plan to distribute to students for these lessons.

Bring four copies of 1) your list of learning objectives and 2) a new lesson plan so that you can workshop them with peers on Wednesday.

Reading:  
“Designing a Course Syllabus,” Stephen Wilhoit, Electronic Reserve  
“Approaches to Productive Peer Review,” Fiona Paton, Electronic Reserve
**Wednesday, August 5th**

In Class: Presentation by Kate Voight, English department Administrative Assistant
Teaching Writing as a Process Part II: Revision continued
Designing Writing Assignments
Writing a Syllabus

Homework: Use your peers’ feedback to revise your learning objectives and lesson plan.
Prepare for microteaching.

Reading: None

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**Thursday, August 6th**

Meet in Memorial Library 94 (Basement)
Teaching and Technology Center

In Class: D2L Training
Classroom Technology
*Select permanent mentor groups

Homework: Finish preparations for microteaching.
Generate a first draft of your 101 syllabus, with a general day-by-day outline of class activities provided for the first three weeks.

Reading: None

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**Friday, August 7th**

In Class: Syllabi Workshop
Microteaching
*Turn in portfolios to mentors

Homework: Read through your peers’ comments on your syllabus draft and make changes/elaborations where appropriate.
Write up some questions that you want to ask your Mentor during Monday’s conference. These questions might have to do with your
sylabus, your microteaching presentation, or any other
teaching/composition program-related topics.

Complete your microteaching reflection.

Reading:
“Guidelines for Responding to Student Writing,” Richard Straub, Electronic Reserve
“Using Group Conferences to Respond to Essays in Progress,” Susan K. Miller, Electronic Reserve
“Why Student Conferences are Important,” Michael Stancliff, Electronic Reserve

**Monday, August 10th**

**In Class:** Facilitating Revision
Responding to Student Writing
Conferencing with Mentor

**Guest Speaker:** Nate LeBoutillier, Center for Academic Success

**Homework:** Using the rubric on p. 391 of “Developing Rubrics” as a model, brainstorm some categories you think would be important to use to evaluate students’ personal narrative assignments in your class. Generate as many categories as you want. Be prepared to share this brainstorming writing in class.

Respond to the following questions in writing:
What advice about grading did the readings provide that you found valuable? How might these articles shape how you grade in English 101?

Revise portfolio materials based on Mentor feedback.

**Reading:**
“Developing Rubrics for Instruction and Evaluation,” Chris Anson and Deanna Dannels, D2L
“Grading as a Teaching Strategy,” Derek Soles, D2L

**Tuesday, August 11th**
In Class: Approaches to Grading
          Online Resources for Teaching

Guest Speakers: Amy Mukamuri, English Language Institute
                Justine Martin, Instructional Librarian

Homework: Draft a course grading policy that you could
          include in your syllabus and criteria you could use
          to respond to/assess the personal narrative
          assignment.

          Consult the readings and your past classroom
          experiences to respond in writing to the following
          question: What key practices make a teacher
          effective at presenting material and/or leading class
          discussion?

Reading: “Presenting Material in Class,” Stephen Wilhoit,
         D2L
         “Classroom Presence,” D2L

Wednesday, August 12th

In Class: Using Reading in the Writing Classroom
          Facilitating Class Discussion

Guest Speaker: Mary Dowd, Office of Student Conduct

Homework: Develop a lesson plan based on one of the readings
          from the text. This should be a lesson you plan on
          using for the first unit. Generate a series of
          discussion questions and/or an in-class writing
          prompt that you will use in conjunction with the
          reading you select.

          Prepare for First Day presentation.

Reading: None

Thursday, August 13th

In Class: Plan B Lessons
          First Day presentations
          Mentor Group Time--Final Portfolio Preparation
Guest Speaker: Julie Snow, Director of the Office of Disability Services

Homework: Complete preparation for Final Portfolio.

Reading: “What you can do to Improve your Teaching,” Stephen Wilhoit, D2L

Friday, August 14th

In Class: Continuing your Development as a Teacher
Balancing Demands as a TA
TA Panel
*Turn in Final Portfolio

Final Portfolio Guidelines

Minimum Final Portfolio Contents:

Two response papers (homework: M/T)
Three lesson plans (including early-late drafts, if relevant), accompanied by supporting materials
Early draft (with mentor/peer comments) and subsequent revision of the personal narrative assignment sheet
Grading criteria for the personal narrative assignment
Early draft (with mentor/peer comments) and subsequent revision of the syllabus, with all daily activities sketched out for the first three weeks
Final Reflection

Your final portfolio grade will be based on the following criteria:

• Includes all materials identified above.

• Demonstrates engagement in the revision process through multiple drafts of (at least) the syllabus and the personal narrative assignment sheet.

• Demonstrates strong effort at reflective teaching through well-developed response papers and final reflection.

• Demonstrates strong effort at effective, purpose-driven teaching through lesson plans that connect to larger course goals and to grading criteria.
Final Reflection Prompt:

Reflect on where you were as a writing teacher when you began the workshop and where you are now. What has changed? What has stayed the same? Are there areas in which you feel more confident and prepared? What about areas that continue to concern you? What goals do you have for yourself as a teacher this semester? What do you plan to do to work toward these goals?