Writing Our Way into an Equitable, Inclusive, and Sustainable Post-Pandemic Future

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Who are our first year traditional students?

- 97% identify as female
- 65% students of color
- 52+% First Gen
- 63% working
- 79% high school GPA of 3.0 or higher (avg. 3.55)
- 47% bring TR credit
- 81% attending for career prep

(self-reported Student Success Navigator data, Fall 2020; 129 of 139 students responding)
Motivations for Writing Sequence Re-Design

● Declining engagement and connection in these courses
● Success of themed, discipline-focused ENG 102
● Moving to a hybrid format for increased COVID safety
● Deadly pandemic, widespread social unrest, and heightened psychosocial stress on students
● WISE 101 (first-year experience course) re-boot
We faced a daunting instructional challenge.
“Education is an excellent way of moving beyond trauma to a place of agency, confidence, control, community, care, activism, and contribution.”

Cathy Davidson
HASTAC Co-Founder & Founding Director of the Futures Initiative
Re-Design Goal

Reframe the first-year writing sequence to promote:

- Engagement with social and personal identity development (in self and others)
- Deep listening
- Passion for civic engagement and social justice
- Inclusive and anti-racist class climate
The resulting coursework has empowered our students to build their college reading and writing skills as a means of leaning into their opportunity to become change makers through their writing.
Design Moves
Cultivate Re-Design Connections & Co-Curricular HIP Opportunities

- Departmental faculty buy-in
- WISe 101 (first year experience course) Director/Designer
- Diversity and Inclusion Dialogues (DID)
- Lane Center for Service & Leadership
- Additional coursework opportunities
Engage Students Where They Are

- Intersectional identities and lived experiences
- Complexities of student identity development along multiple spectrums
- Transitioning to being their own learning managers
- Strengths- (versus deficit-) based strategies
Choose Topics, Assignments, & Resources that Resonate with Students

- Intersectional topics and voices (both popular and academic)
- Timely and urgent
- Relatable language and tone
- Connected to first-year seminar coursework
Don’t Shy Away from the Hard Stuff

- Help students cultivate skills to “grapple with ideas and experiences that challenge their existing values and assumptions” (Ambrose et al., 159).
- Make room for complex and uncomfortable topics.
- Problematize being a white (or otherwise privileged) faculty member.
Emphasize Student-Development Informed & Anti-Racist Teaching Practices

- Student learning outcomes
- Process over product
- Low-stakes practice and drafting
- Transparent assessment practices
- Routine reflection and sub-goal setting
- Class-generated learning climate guidelines
What does this look like in practice?
WRI 101 (Learning Support English) Equipping & Empowering Changemakers Lens:

Social & Personal Identity Development (self and others)
- Identity Wheels exercise
- Telling Our Name Stories forum
- Anonymous polling for areas of connection and difference
- Intersectional identities
- Core Value/Belief Narrative Essay

Listening to Understand vs. to Respond
- 10 Ways to Have a Conversation (Celeste Headlee, TedTalk)
- Listening in conversation vs. in writing
- Intent vs. impact
- Turning discord & tension into a learning opportunity (Ambrose et al., 186)

Understanding Our Everyday Privilege
- “Use Your Everyday Privilege to Help Others” by Dolly Chugh
- How privilege normalizes some identities over others (“Spectrum Activity”)
- Amplifying under- or unrepresented voices in academic discourse
- Connections between privilege, stereotyping, and bias

Negotiating the Language of Power
- Code switching (benefits, risks, and choices; articles by Deggans & Waring)
- Problematizing formal academic English
- Claiming a seat “at the table” to influence change

Agency & Activism in Writing
- Leaning into authentic voice, intersectional identity, and passion for subject matter
- Making targeted writing moves to join the conversation, connect with audience, and achieve overall writing goal
- Community Based Problem-Solution Research Project
ENG 101:

English Composition, Essays

- Continuing the work of WIS 101 and WRI 101 on identity development
- Building on the message that writing is a key component to students becoming change makers in their communities
- "Theming" sections to allow students some choice in topics
- Problem-Solution Research via a Disciplinary Lens Project
ENGL 101: Racial Justice

Setting the Tone to Frame Up Success Both for Students and Instructor

Day 1 Goals and Conversation:

- Own the issues with/challenges of privilege(s)
- Reposition instructor not as an authority figure but as a facilitator of, and contributor to, a semester-long discussion
- How we talk to each other and handle mistakes
Risks vs. Rewards: 

Is it worth it?
Risks

- Instructor fear and discomfort (so what?)
- Students’ fear and discomfort (mitigated through open, private communication and ability to choose sections?)
- Miscommunication and alienation
Rewards

- Student engagement and a more personal investment in their writing
- Fight compassion fade (Västfjäll, et al.)
- Reduce susceptibility to conspiracy thinking (Whitson, et al.)
- Follow up opportunities for students to use their research and writing are key here
Risks vs. Rewards:

Is it worth it? YES!
Looking Ahead

What will we be reading and thinking about as we prepare for our next first-year cohort?

- Adapting for Online Program
- More intentional, in-depth collaboration between faculty and Student Affairs educators
- Further study on Self-Authorship in Diverse Populations
- *Cultivating Genius: Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy* (Gholdy Muhammad, 2020)
- *Breakaway Learners: Strategies for Post-Secondary Success with At-Risk Students* (Karen Gross, 2017)


