

English Department Minutes
Monmouth College
Monday, September 24, 2007
3pm-4:15pm

Absent: None; Bruce and Belschner out at 4pm

1. Rob quickly reviewed the previous departmental meeting; there were no questions or comments. He established two goals for this meeting: ways to improve English 110 pedagogy/create a better class and ways to help students transition into better work in composition. The issues could include cultural problems as well as English 110 problems.
2. The following problems surrounding English 110 were identified by the department:
 - Students and faculty do not understand the “narrative” of the course
 - Students are not invested in the assignments of the course or the course itself; they are not investing enough time in the course, either
 - Students do not see written texts as “real” or meaningful; they are tied to oral communication more so than to written communication and its conventions
 - Students do not significantly revise writing
 - There is a problem with Monmouth College’s campus culture

The following comments were generated during the course of the meeting regarding the above issues:

- Narrative of Course: Craig Watson noted that a continuous reinforcement of the narrative of the course has been helpful this semester. He has included internal class reviews often and has begun using minutes in the course to remind students of the course’s requirements and content. Steve Price added that the narrative of the college needs to be examined, as well. Craig is seeking mastery of the skills as a goal in 110 so students can be “manipulators of language” in the larger narrative of the course.
- Investment in Course: Mark Willhardt noted that students do not see the correlation between classroom activities and reading and discussion and what to do outside of class due to, as Watson noted, atomistic experiences in education and the inability to fully invest themselves in a course. Willhardt also repeated, from the previous meeting, the inability of students to have extended concentration in writing. Erika Solberg noted that lack of appropriate time on task is a major problem for students and Craig Watson added that students have schedules (academic and otherwise) that are too full.

Steve Price introduced the concept of the rhetoric of writing versus the content of writing. If students are invested in their writing, they may see little need for revision. Solberg noted that students are not always invested in many things they do, whether it pertains to academics, sports,

or arts. Watson also noted that our students may not be receptive to arguing points in class or in their writing; students may engage in arguing, but not effectively. Students do not seem to be able to distinguish between academic arguments and petty squabbles; they often “fold” when pressed in an argument, as Willhardt noted.

- **Meaningful Written Text:** Marlo Belschner noted that students do not recognize the power of written texts. Rob Hale added that students often view texts/writing in terms of little pieces, not a larger, more tangible set of ideas. For them, writing is not a “real” process as opposed to a test, which they view as more important than writing in many cases. This issue can be tied to the orality of our culture. Students work with email, texting, and other devices which promote oral styles of wording; this can weaken student writing. Watson added that students are satisfied with “wildly approximate meanings” in their writing which stems from this oral culture and are incapable of seeing the value of something. Mary Bruce included the informality in writing which this culture also promotes. Students are often instructed in high school to simply fill a page with something and this stream of consciousness is often acceptable at that level.
- **Student Revision:** Inability to view appropriate time on task is partly to blame for poor revision skills, as is the orality of the culture, as is a lack of engagement in writing. Willhardt noted that students do not understand the process and purpose of revision resulting, for him, in a bifurcated class of good and bad editors. Craig Watson suggested that instructor modeling of revision may solve this problem by revising student drafts or using peer editing or group editing.
- **MC Campus Culture:** Reinforcement of writing skills is a problem across campus which leads to no internal coherence among classes; the issue of “atomistic” experiences was again addressed. Marlo also noted that new students need to renegotiate their relationship with college faculty as opposed to high school faculty in order to facilitate open discussion/argument.
- **Additional Comments:** Erika Solberg noted that classroom space and size can be prohibitive; smaller groups are more effective at argument. Craig Watson noted that students are ineffective note takers which can be connect with poor comprehension problems. Students do not know what is or is not important in discussion, reading, and writing. Rob Hale noted that study skills instruction on campus is improving to a degree, but it is difficult to say how effective it is.

3. Admissions Schedule

Rob handed out information to tenure-track faculty regarding assignments for admission days, open houses, and SOAR at the previous meeting. He will speak with everyone individually about signing up for these events.

Respectfully submitted by Kevin Roberts.