

English Department Minutes
Monmouth College
Tuesday, August 17, 2010
1pm-4:15pm

Absent: none

Introduction

The meeting was divided into English 110 aspects, then departmental issues for the remaining time. Rob Hale welcomed Marlo Belschner back from her sabbatical.

1. Review of 2009-2010 School Year

Rob Hale began the meeting by reviewing the previous school year, noting accomplishments and differences from previous years. The following list notes those items:

- On the whole, it was a busy, stressful school year due to various issues.
- CAC was not filled; Hale will be filling this position as interim CAC/Writing Center director.
- Since most department members are doing a lot of teaching outside of the department, not much seemed to be discussed departmentally and Hale wondered if this was acceptable or not, especially regarding the major and English 110. He also wondered if there was an initiative the department would like to explore and the following list was generated: a visiting writer series which could be across disciplines and of high visibility (Watson); a Shakespeare festival in the spring (Belschner); a literary festival with high school students/summer camp (Hale). Many of these initiatives could converge into a large event. The negative aspect of these possibilities is lack of time, lack of staff, a hesitation with the entrepreneurial model, though a portfolio project could probably be done quickly (Hale). These are items to think about this year; Hale does not have time to guide them if we decide to proceed with one of them.

2-6. English 110

Kevin Roberts reminded department members of the procedure for the call for fall, 2010, first-day diagnostic essays. The prompt was listed on the agenda and will not be altered. As usual, essays/rubrics for students 3, 7, and 15 should be copied and given to Roberts for assessment purposes within two weeks of the diagnostic session. It is important for Roberts to receive this data so an accurate record of the course can be maintained. Instructors were also reminded to submit a paragraph (or two) reflection on the course and the shared questions at the end of the semester; this is an important source of information, too, and must be done more uniformly.

The shared-question bank for the final exam was reviewed last spring by Roberts and Hale, then revised, and a final bank of shared questions has been generated.

The English 110 lexicon was reviewed last spring by Roberts and Hale, then revised, and the term “assertion” has been added to the list.

Jim Wyman (fall) and Mike Baumann (spring) have been added as adjuncts.

Department members then spent time reviewing strategies/activities/ideas from English 110 last year.

Details of “What Worked” or “What Did Not Work”

--*sourced essay*: Changes are needed. The department generally feels that the assignment is cumbersome and hard to manage. Based on these comments, Hale suggested the following: narrow the focus of the argument in the prompt (take a side on one issue) and/or individually experiment with the sourced essay within the established parameters of the assignment, record results, report to the department, and consider major improvements next year. Future issues with this essay to consider:

- Reduce number of sources (Hale) *Could lose complexity of assignment*
- Give students an opportunity for insertion in a controversy and manipulate sources (Willhardt) *Loses capital A argument concept*
- Do the Position Paper with two sources as a preview (Hale) *Many of us already use sources in earlier modes; could use same topic*
- Allow more time in class for analysis of the issue and sources (Hale)
- Write a thesis for them (Belschner)
- Burnout at end of the semester may be a contributing problem to poor performance on the paper (Cooper/Hale)
- Use a theme to help with the essay (Willhardt)

--*some bright notes*: Watson provided students with sample C-, B, and A papers which were evaluated in small groups and provided templates of good writing. This exercise, done periodically, seemed very beneficial for writers in English 110.

--*some dark notes*: Hale saw lack of good student work ethic as a continuing problem. Mary Bruce noted that students do not seem to be equipped to think or to read well. Lydia Cooper added that students seem unprepared and uncommitted to college work, suffering from clear motivational problems. Hale will send an “intelligence is inherent” article regarding this issue. Could a “code of expectations” improve this or should recruitment somehow focus on students who are willing to work or add current students who can attend admission events? Mark Willhardt stated that he had a sophomore-level student in his section last year and this can “shift” the class considerably. Craig Watson added that “student fit” at the college was a concern voiced by vice-presidential candidates in interviews with the college and Hale wondered what a good fit is for Monmouth College.

STRUGGLE: this “fit” issue may be a personnel issue with students and admission problems. There is a retention problem, so more students who are prone to remain in college should be admitted.

RESULT: Watson suggested that the department spends one semester tracking students who shouldn't be in English 110 on an anecdotal basis (Hale) and give a list of at-risk students to the new VP at the end of the semester. Hale suggested we back-date this to include all of last year and send the lists to Roberts for compilation. The department might also consider administering our own inventory/test as assessment of students at the beginning of the course.

STRUGGLE: Hale observed that the culture of students is influenced by government policy. Willhardt stated that this is a result of No Child Left Behind which has generated students who can't sustain lengthy written responses. They are used to using worksheets for most writing and this creates a “right and wrong to everything they write—the sense of confusion is gone” (Willhardt).

RESULT: In lieu of an expert, the department should spend the first two weeks on students' high school experiences and discuss why they did formulaic writing, then push on to college writing (Willhardt). In essence, we will connect the English 110 narrative to the students' personal narratives, moving them from theirs to ours (Hale). Also, Hale suggested that instructors emphasize revision earlier to help improve work ethos.

--*course text*: The department agreed to begin searching for a new text for the course. The process will occur during the 2010-2011 school year so department members will not feel rushed into choosing a text. Roberts will serve as the "clearing house" for the sample texts. Each instructor may examine a publisher, then a few texts from that publisher, and offer the best texts for departmental examination to Roberts who will check them out to members. This will require only one sample text per example. Hale also offered the possibility that the department package its own text for the course. Roberts requested that the text not be just a reader.

Watson asked for a review of the current text as a basis for change; the following points were discussed regarding Good Reasons:

- Essays contained few documentations (Willhardt)
- Selections of readings are not interesting/relevant to students (Hale)
- Arguments in essays are too generic (Hale)
- Essays are poor models for writing (Hale)
- Students need clearer examples of good writing (Willhardt)
- Too much information is contained in the essays (Watson)
- The text is not a useful rhetoric; little content on strategies in building paragraphs (Hale)

Course Revision

Hale has set a deadline of February 1, 2011, for major revisions in English 110 for Fall, 2011. The following was noted:

- Objectives of course: department agrees that these are fine
- Expository Writing: students are unable to differentiate between expository and argumentative writing, so a class discussion could be useful regarding the two types of writing. This could translate into an additional goal or lexicon term for the course.
- Argumentative course: department agrees that this should be kept in the course
- Modes: modes aren't practical (Belschner), but acceptable to others. Mary Bruce commented that for first-year students, the modal form is fine and Watson added that once he addressed warrant, the modes were fine, too and useful for dealing with "real world issues." Belschner suggested that 110 has shared objectives and reader/handbook, but drop modes in favor of in-depth analysis as used in upper-level courses. Hale suggested that a cultural studies model may work or use more writing from other disciplines. He added that modes add another dimension to conceptual analysis in college writing and that rhetorical strategies are also good for analysis. Willhardt suggested removing modes and going solely with the "building blocks" of analysis, rhetorical strategies; however, this could devolve into a series of exercises only with no prolonged essays which students need to experience. Willhardt also cited a Rutgers method of point/counterpoint as a possible substitution for modes.
- Summary of points (Hale): modes approach; cultural approach; thematic approach; expressivist concern; writing in disciplines angle; shared objectives, lexicon, and text only (a shared text will lead us into a shared direction); more research is needed

regarding our students in order to make an informed decision about the course (Willhardt has a book for student-run focus groups which could help with assessment of the students); the Writing Fellows could also be involved with this assessment.

AGREED: Hale and Roberts will generate some questions to have consistent information to think about for assessment of students.

--Kevin Roberts sent the prompt for the first-day diagnostic essay via email. Roberts has, as usual, put copies of the class text (Good Reasons) on reserve in the library for all sections.

7. CAC/Writing Center

--CAC: Hale told the department that the CAC search will be under way again and he will be providing "CAC Light" this year. Hale distributed a handout regarding CAC and its concepts. A lack of clear CAC knowledge is a campus problem. He will meet with INTG coordinators to push terms from the 110 lexicon that form the CAC narrative.

--Writing Center: Rob Hale will serve as interim director for the writing center with the usual programs/policies in place. Hale stressed that the center is not for proofreading, writers should not be required to go, and writers should expect to read their papers aloud in a session.

--Hale will set dates for two future department meetings: one for a sample survey and one for revision of English 110 based on an edited list of ideas from this meeting.

8. Rita Schwass

Rita Schwass is now the departmental secretary. There will be a student worker hired for the department later. If supplies are needed, give Rita a list; Belschner might go to Staples for some items.

9. Fall Events

Two possible fall, departmental events are an ice cream social (Belschner) and a reception for English alums during Homecoming (Hale). These will aid in student bonding, publicity for the major, and provide social opportunities. Willhardt suggested that a student exchange with Abersmith University in Wales might be a possibility from Bren Tooley.

10. Admission Event

Before signing up for any admission events noted on the agenda, the department would like to have conversations with admissions at the next departmental meeting, then schedule people for open houses.

11. Secondary Education English Majors

Rob Hale requested that all Secondary Education English majors be moved to Kevin Roberts for advising. This will allow Roberts to create and maintain contact with these students for the methods course and for other issues regarding teaching. Please switch them or refer them to Roberts as soon as possible.

12. QAC

Jo Eary sent Hale an email a few months ago regarding QAC; the options for courses in English are not very feasible. Hale will resend the email and the department needs to review the issue soon.

13. Focus Event

A focus event for Humanities and Social Sciences will be February 25-26, 2011 on campus. The college wants the department to commit to this, but the department would like a clear agenda before making the commitment. Willhardt stated that we have a good script for this already, but Hale noted that the college wants a “critical mass” for the event since department numbers were small. This may change with a new VP of Enrollment.

Respectfully submitted by Kevin Roberts.