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Teaching Philosophy - Composition 101

The art of teaching composition is a refining process, for the teacher, for the materials and for the students who come into the classroom. These students bring with them experiences that vary and that provide them with either positive attitudes towards writing or attitudes of apathy and fear. Often, it seems these fears (and not the inability to develop sentences, paragraphs, and papers) that hold students back from fully engaging and contributing. Not only is our role one of providing the knowledge of how to compose solid academic papers, but also to induct these young minds into a new and challenging discourse community. While the activities and outcomes may seem to these students as dissonant and disconnected to their career goals, it is up to us to strive and show them how appropriate developing and utilizing these skills comes to be. To become whole and well-rounded, as well as superbly educated citizens must learn and develop skills to analyze, evaluate, research and argue. Along these lines it is imperative that taking into consideration other points of view is as necessary as knowing where they stand on an issue.

Therefore, it is necessary first to equip students with the skills and tools to build a solid academic piece. My approach is to teach writing as a process, that always has the potential to develop into something that is beyond achieving course outcomes but can change the world around them. I build each paper off the previous one, starting with a personal piece in which they are allowed to incorporate and use their own language, for their own peer group. Then, we look at how an academic piece works by analyzing modes of rhetoric, including texts and films. In so doing, students are equipped with the vocabulary and devices other writers use. They are able to move into the research and argumentative papers with more confidence. Having learned what to look for and seeing how it works, they can bring this into their own writings. This comes by getting the idea on paper, finding the sources to support points and by peer review and feedback. By continually drafting, revising, rewriting and critiquing, students learn how to develop sound pieces that have purpose and appeal to the audience they are writing for. Through group workshop, they not only learn how to read closely and give critical feedback to their peers, but also develop skills for writing (and rewriting) their own piece.
As their instructor, I see myself as a guide, teaching them how to think for themselves and that the acquiring of knowledge is not static, but instead organic and constantly growing. It is up to them to learn how to know where to look, to find the answers outside the classroom. Throughout the semester I keep a steady correspondence with my students, incorporating a Socratic strategy by asking them questions, teaching them to think through the issues at hand. Keeping this correspondence I can encourage and offer suggestions.