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Creating “Clear, Effective Communicators” - Jen Liddell on Teaching English 301

Many of our club members have had the opportunity to teach English 101 (Beginning College Writing) and we love to share those experiences with our *CompTalk* readers. But we've wondered, how is teaching English 301 (the upper-division writing course) different? What is that class all about? Jen Liddell, a CSUF alum with nine years of teaching experience under her belt, will soon be leaving us for a full-time gig at LBCC (congrats!) but we asked her to share a little bit about teaching English 301 before she goes.

English 301 is the upper-division writing requirement for students who are not English majors and who do not have an upper-division writing class in their own department. The majority of my 301 students come from Criminal Justice, Kinesiology, Health Science, and Biology, with a few Geology and Physics majors thrown in just to keep things spicy. I have also had a few English majors who are taking 301 as an elective in order to get further experience with different writing contexts.

These students are, for the most part, seriously invested in their majors and are looking forward to internships, graduation, grad school, and/or starting their careers. What they have not necessarily been looking forward to is a writing class and many of them have put off this requirement until their last year of college.

That said, though, my 301 classes have been delightful:

filled with enthusiastic, hard-working students who know that whatever is next for them, they will need to be clear, effective communicators. One student said something to me last semester that I think sums up much of the 301 experience: “I knew this class was going to be a lot of work, that's why I put off taking it. But I didn't realize how

tive of the creative ways in which instructors have approached 301.

One of the approaches I use that my students find helpful is that I construct my essay assignments to allow my students to choose what they want to write about for each essay. I tell them that if they want to use each of the essays leading up to their research essay to help them look at their research topics from different perspectives, they are welcome to do so; if they want to treat each essay individually and write about completely different topics, they can do that instead.

Students get super-excited about this. Some of them are tired of writing for their major, so they welcome the opportunity to write about something new. Others are on a mission to deepen their understanding of their chosen fields, so they opt for that route. I had one student tell me that he is planning to use his 301 essays to help him create a strong, thorough cover letter for job and internship applications.

I get super-excited about this: students seeing the meaning that they are creating through their writing. And seeing their excitement is part of what makes teaching 301 such a wonderful experience.



much this work was going to help improve my writing.”

One of the reasons that English 301 is so helpful to students is that we focus our instruction on Writing in the Disciplines (WID). Education and encouragement for this approach has come largely from Leslie Bruce and the English 301 Committee, something I would recommend you check out if you are interested in teaching 301. There is also an English 301 Titanium Community, where instructors post their syllabi and assignments for collaboration and discussion. These assignments are representa-



The Students Talk

English 101 Students Tell Us: “Writing is Cool When...”

- “When you don't feel pressured to write about a specific topic. It is cool when you allow yourself to be fully immersed in your thoughts and you let yourself go.”
- “When we get to freewrite and put all of our thoughts together . . . I can go anywhere I want with it!”
- “When it's out of one's personal leisure time. When it's forced, for example writing a response to a prompt, I feel that takes away from the freedom of the writer.”
- “When I have to vent and let all my emotions out.”
- “When it is not assigned or graded, because then my writing has a humorous and more relatable style.”
- “When expressed on social networking sites and people I actually know will see it.”
- “When your imagination is not limited to the lines of a piece of paper.”
- “When you want to vent about something in a safe way...I mean, in comparison to angrily punching an ex, writing is much better!”
- “When you just *have* to share an idea, especially on the web, where it can be appreciated wherever and whenever.”
- “When you are interested in and educated on what you are writing about.”
- “When it helps you deliver your thoughts to people that are hard to talk to.”
- “When you want to think deeply.”
- “When it just comes to you”
- “When you get to use your imagination and be creative.”
- “When there's no time constraint.”
- “When it isn't graded.”
- “When it isn't judged”
- “When the teacher doesn't stress you out because when they do it's not cool anymore.”
- “When you get to choose the topic.”
- “When it is uncensored, when there are no limitations to what is allowed.”
- “When you can tell about something you're passionate about.”
- “When you can picture yourself in your own story.”
- “When you're doing it for yourself.”
- “When it has a purpose.”
- “When it's not forced.”
- “When the subject I am assigned to write about is something I have extreme passion for or great interest in.”
- “When your pen and paper pick up a rhythm and beat and the rest is just history.” (*this must be Bob's student*)

What We're Reading: *The Rhetoric of Cool* by Jeff Rice

“What’s Cooler than Being Cool?”

A Review by Bob Neis

Rice, Jeff. *The Rhetoric of Cool: Composition Studies and New Media*. Carbondale: Southern University Press. 2007.

“The rhetoric of *what?*”

“Am I in the wrong section?”

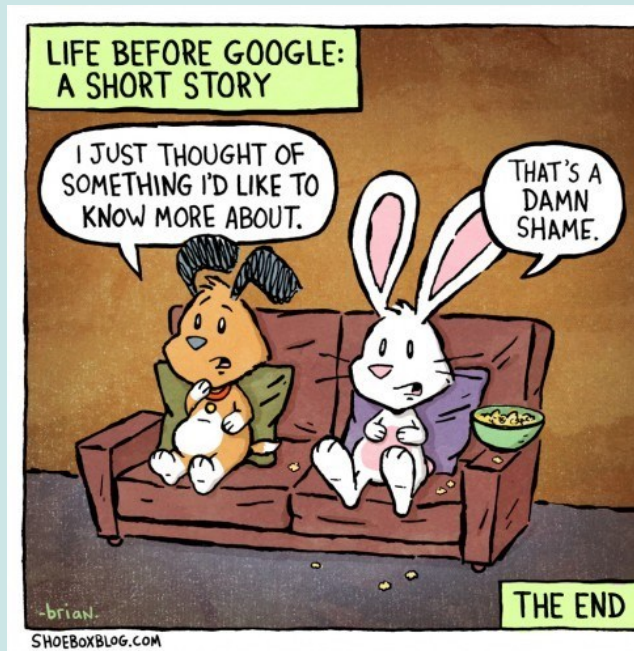
At first sight, it is unclear what the title potentially refers to: Miles Davis? Berets? Fonzie? The tag “cool” sparks an interest, traditionally serving an adversarial relation to educational institutions, and Rice uses this awareness of the term’s rhetorical magnetism as a starting point for discussion. In deconstructing the term “cool” as a societal obsession, Rice proposes an alternative way of thinking about the composition classroom characterized by new media and continuously evolving technologies which led his own classroom into uncharted territory with no established wisdom of how they might serve the hu-

manities. But rather than pinning himself to any particular technology (after all, the fluid nature of the internet yields a difficult pedagogical foundation), Rice suggests ways that instructors might adapt along with a rapidly changing technological landscape.

The Rhetoric of Cool fills a critical gap in English language studies. By rallying against the thought of new media in the classroom as a watering down of the discipline, or a concession to a culture of convenience, Rice rejects the assumption that mass culture slopes towards the lowest common denominator because they “want dumb

simple pleasures and big media companies want to give the masses what they want.” Instead, Rice suggests that with the rise in technology “the exact opposite is happening: the culture is getting more intellectually demanding, not less.” The author predicts that if the interest in the internet can translate into substantive academic activity, this could be a watershed moment for active learning. By providing a new rhetoric designed around the digital realm,

in addition to a theory of what needs to change in the composition field, Rice provides the elusive “how” – a new vernacular for the future classroom.



In The Know: Upcoming Events

“Ask A TA Night!”

Thursday, March 20th at 7:30 p.m. in UH 317

Join us for our regular meeting at 7:00 and stick around to get some inside information on how to get the TA job and how to do it well. Current TAs will be present for grilling so come prepared. We will also provide information on creating syllabi, course outlines, and other teaching materials.

Join us for pizza and good conversation!

Acacia Conference 2014: “Space and Place”

Friday, March 14th, and Saturday, March 15th

Come out and support the composition panels! Dr. Martha Webber and some of her graduate students will be presenting their literacy narratives and several other comp students will present their work in the field. Of course, you can attend the literary panels too. Admission is free!

Important Composition Conferences:

Watson Conference— Louisville, KY

<http://conferences.library.louisville.edu/ocs/index.php/watson/watson2014>

The conference will be held October 16-18 and will be a hotspot of discussion about composition and community engagement.

Western States Rhetoric and Literacy Conference—Reno, NV

<http://groups.unr.edu/rhetoric/wsr12014.html>

(If you're interested in collaborating on a panel submission for this conference, please contact the club at teachingwritingclub@gmail.com. Submissions are due by March 31st 2014)

Calls For Papers

“As faculty members, we try to empower our students and to encourage them to develop their own voices. We also want our students to hear the different voices of others in their classrooms and cities and in literature.” The Michigan College English Association is looking for papers from graduate students and faculty members for their **Voice and Empowerment** conference on October 24th and 25th of this year.

<http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/55613>

Queensborough Community College is accepting proposals for their 2015 **The Form(s) of Writing: Rhetorics, Genres, Media, Disciplines** conference. One of their particular interests for this conference is a discussion of the ways in which pedagogy and curriculum create or express values and understanding. Proposals of 250 words or less should be submitted by March 14th.

<http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/55598>

CSUF's *Pupil* 2014 is extending its submission deadline to March 15th. Submit your teaching materials and ideas to pupilcfp@gmail.com. <http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/55249>