

ENGL 1020 Notes/Observations

- **Anyone teaching 1020, especially younger faculty and TA's, should understand that their students are not English majors, and thus, shouldn't steer the course in this direction. I tell my students that no matter what discipline/major field he or she is going into that one has to be able to communicate ideas clearly and use data/quotes, either exact quotes or paraphrasing, to back his or her claim or position.**
- **That said, even at the 1020 level I get students who are still afraid to take an arguable position w/ most assignments in the class but especially the research paper. I find this is due to the student not being allow to express an opinion/position, that a lot of the research papers he or she may have written are usually fact-based only, but, more importantly, the student is afraid of a bad grade if he or she says the wrong thing or had the notion of expression beaten out of them, figuratively speaking. I tell my students it doesn't matter the position as long as can present both sides of the argument and take a position. This is harder for them than many realize.**
- **The three themes can be problematic. When I subbed for another instructor a year ago, she had the Cultural Expression class and the students were to have had a topic ready for approval. The instructor had told the class that to fit the theme he or she had to compare a cultural element between the US and another country. The students were frustrated because they presented good ideas but felt restricted w/ this approach. I've noticed younger faculty doing this, and I'm sure this is due to learning the ropes of teaching.**
- **In the Spring, I had a 1020 class that, due to a labeling snafu regarding the theme, was supposed to be Scientific but it was Cultural. I decided to do a mashup of sorts, meaning I allowed topics that could be the science of a cultural element (I had a great paper on the benefits of a plant-based diet and another on the SAT controversy that sprung from removing the essay, both using data and cultural observations to form their respective positions), or vice versa. It worked wonders, for it opened them up on how the students could approach a topic of interest w/out being entirely restricted.**
- **I'm okay w/ the themes per se, since it's easy to adapt for each of them, but I do think if the courses were "left open" w/ the professor setting the theme, perhaps based on the flow of the class, meaning if one is more attuned to science, say, it could work better.**
- **My first assignment, no matter the theme, is an analysis essay in which I show students to look at what the author is saying and how he or she is saying it. I use this also to show students how to integrate quotes to**

support how he or she views the essay. I approach this as a dry-run of how to look at sources, as well as how to glean information from and incorporate into an essay.

- Bar none, the best grades from the class come from the proposal. I still cannot put my finger on why this is the case. I do my proposal in three sections: The Proposal, The Review of Literature (reviewing and assessing the sources found in terms of how they skew on the topic and if there are gaps in the lit), and The Statement of Purpose (not, alas, relative to finding funding, the original manner in which this assignment was developed). I think breaking up the information helps pace out the ideas, but in my two sections of 1020 in the Spring, even the lesser writers did quite well w/ this assignment.
- That said, after having participated in the 1020 assessment the past four years, and particularly in the last two, the proposal assignment is wildly inconsistent. I read assignment sheets ranging from a letter to a member of congress to asking for funding for a project, not the purpose here. I do think a review of sources should be one of the main requirements for this assignment (or in some form in the course), for how do you know how to utilize sources if you don't read and assess them? And I make it clear that the student's essay is not the final word on the topic.
- Which leads to topics. I don't allow the ones ripe for plagiarism (abortion, death penalty, marijuana, and especially stem-cell research; in almost 10 years at ETSU, I've had four plagiarists, and four of those came from the latter topic), but I encourage students to find topics that he or she may have an interest in exploring, either tied to their majors or maybe something he or she hasn't had an opportunity to explore otherwise or in a class setting. I always get that one student who claims to not be interested in anything and won't pick a topic, but I think some of this is due to high school teachers not allowing a lot of freedom. However, if a student can demonstrate he or she is serious about one of the taboo topics, I will allow it. In Spring, a student approached me in the mashup class and asked if could do stem-cell research because his mother was going through that therapy due to cancer. I told him he could, as obviously he has a vested interest in it; ultimately, though, he wound up doing the psychology of sports fans, mainly because the situation w/ his mother was overwhelming and he was too close to the topic.
- Ultimately, I think there needs to be some consistency w/ the proposal assignment. Like other requirements in 1010 and 1020, have some hard requirements that everyone should follow but allow enough breathing room for the professor to develop the assignment in context w/ the way he or she

has developed his or her course. This assignment is a bit out of control, and this may be due to some not understanding the purpose of it, be it for getting funding or developing it as one would do an extended abstract for an academic conference. I think some guidelines would help bring about better results in the assessment.

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