

SUMMARY OF ENGLISH COMPOSITION CONSISTENCY PROJECT MEETING – April 25, 2013

The Consistency Project began with lunch and time for colleagues sharing tables to get to know each other.

The first part of the meeting was dedicated to going over SLOs, reviewing the rubric, and having faculty members grade two sample papers according to the rubric as either Pass/Fail. Faculty members then discussed their grades with their tablemates, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of each paper. One paper directly addressed the prompt but did not meet the minimum length requirements for the assignment; the other paper did meet the length requirements but was off-topic from the prompt. These papers spurred a great deal of discussion and debate among faculty members regarding the following issues:

- **If a paper does not meet the minimum requirements in some respect but is successful in every other respect, should it pass or should it automatically fail for not meeting the minimum requirements?**
- **What do we mean by minimum page numbers (or number of sources)?**
- **What do we do with a paper that does not address the prompt?**

Some faculty members felt that students must meet the minimum numbers in order to even qualify for evaluation; others felt that not meeting the minimum warranted a point deduction, but not failure. Faculty members had fairly strong viewpoints on this issue. While no consensus was reached, we were able to hear how a number of faculty members took different approaches to this circumstance in their classrooms. Of all the issues that were raised during the session, this one seemed to result in the greatest divide in opinion.

The failure versus deduction conversation led into a discussion about approaches to grading systems. Because some instructors adhere to a point system when grading papers while others grade holistically, attendees were able to hear potential strategies for both systems when evaluating a paper that did not meet the minimum requirements in some respect.

Faculty members seemed to be in agreement that papers that did not sufficiently address the prompt warranted automatic failure or a re-do. Professors also spent time discussing what we are looking for in papers overall.

The second portion of the workshop was dedicated to evaluating three sample papers from an instructor's class and assigning each one a grade of A, B, or C. Instructors then came together with the others at their tables to reach a table consensus on the paper grades, which were then reported back to the group at large. Faculty members were largely able to reach a consensus on the grades for the "C" paper but varied on the "A" and "B" papers. Because the papers had been composed for a professor who had provided a thesis template and a model structure for the paper and the students were all writing on the same book and had been exposed to the same sources on a class library tour, a discussion ensued about the difficulties of making distinctions between the papers. Issues that were explored during discussion included:

- **The strengths and weaknesses of offering templates and formulas for essays.**
- **Whether literature should be used as part of the research assignment or, more broadly, in English 1A at all.**

Again, instructors had varying opinions on these issues. Some professors shared their experiences working with templates and modeling thesis statements, explaining how they benefitted student work. Other instructors felt that a crucial part of mastering the course material in 1A was being able to invent and construct a thesis and efficiently organize the essay in accordance with that thesis.

Professors also debated the role of literature in the 1A curriculum. Many use literature as a centerpiece of their 1A curriculum and use it for their research papers; some participants suggested that the use of literature in the research paper was not in line with the rubric or SLOs. Participants seemed to be divided into three camps: those who thought using literature in 1A and in the research paper was acceptable, those who thought using literature in 1A was acceptable but not for the research paper, and those who did not think that literature has a place in the 1A curriculum.

The final portion of the meeting was dedicated to the groups at each table filling out a sample data collection sheet and completing focus questions that members of the English department will need to work together to answer at the June 21st SLO meeting. The data collection sheet filled out is the same one that will be filled out by instructors after assessing their 1A essays at the end of this semester. The results will then be collected and used to formulate department responses to SLO questions.