

Strategies for fostering student investment in 1303 and 1304

Students will be more invested if they feel part of a community within the class:

1. Encourage teacher-student connection

-Mandatory one-on-one conferences (students rarely come to office hours unless you suggest it individually)

- I schedule my conferences on the days when class is cancelled for group project work such as interviews, field research, and other group research
- I schedule 15 minutes/student (though 10 is sometimes enough) and like to hold these mid-semester
- I prefer to use the time to get to know the student as an individual and discuss the class generally as well as discuss what the student is struggling with, any questions they have, etc.

-Memorize and use the students' names

2. Encourage student-student connection

-Groupwork in class (new combinations of students each time)

-Group projects outside of class

Students will feel more invested if they are actively learning (writing, speaking, performing, etc.)

-Use the textbook sparingly during classtime

-Avoid lecturing (and if you lecture, ask questions and use humor)

-Experiment with different formats, activities, and assignments. Some experiments will fail of course, and some succeed and fail depending on the particular class.

These experiments are a large part of how I grow as a teacher and it makes teaching fun, a creative act.

Some activities and assignments I have used: Group interviews and presentations, field work/observations and reflections, debates, socratic circles.

Students are more invested if they are invested in the topic

-Consider theming your course

-Choose a topic(s) that is relevant to your students (and email students beforehand)

Students are more invested if they can see the bigger picture

-Make the case for why this stuff matters

-Make the work relate to the outside world (interviews, service learning, submitted proposals, etc.)

-Make each assignments connect to the other assignments

How to structure assignments across a semester:

Traditional structure: 3 major papers -- due weeks 4/8/12, or weeks 3/7/11 and then allow for revisions of papers (with some restrictions—see below).

Another way to structure:

4 minor papers, 2 major papers:

Minor 1: due week 2/3

Minor 2: due week 4/5

Draft Major 1: due week 6

Final Major 1: due week 7/8

Minor 3: due week 9/10

Minor 4: due week 11/12

Draft Major 2: due week 14

Final Draft Major 2: due week 15/16

Each minor essay is 2 pages. Major papers are 5 pages (though often students go to 6-7 pages). I encourage writing the minor papers in such a way that they can be integrated into the major papers. Same goes for homework assignments.

The minor papers I grade P/F. The major papers receive grades after workshops and revision. The first major paper may be revised for a new grade. For the major papers I require an outline and annotated sources (both assigned as homework).

Revision guidelines:

- Some instructors only allow revision for papers under a certain score (say, 70).
- Some instructors only allow revision for 1 or 2 of the total papers for the course.
- Some instructors require that a certain percentage of the revision be new material (I've seen a range of 40%-70%)
- Many instructors require a) a conference in which the student must present a detailed plan for revision and b) a revision afterthought attached to the revision, explaining why the student made the changes she did
- I always explain that a revision does not guarantee a new grade. Many students do not sufficiently revise. I also spend a class dedicated to discussing the revision process (though, in a sense, we are talking about it all semester).

Some common 1304 papers: rhetorical analysis, annotated bibliography, definitional argument, causal argument, proposal argument.

For my last 1304 class I assigned for minor papers: an interview write-up, a definitional argument, a field research reflection, and a personal narrative (usually assigned in 1303). The two major papers were persuasive research essays which resembled proposal arguments to some extent. I also had the students essentially write an annotated bibliography in installments for homework and a short rhetorical analysis early in the semester for homework. It is difficult to plagiarize the papers I assign due to the content/topic and the requirements for each paper.

Using Debate to Teach Rhetoric

I've effectively used debate to teach rhetoric in 1303 and 1304. I use the Lincoln-Douglas debate format because it's the one I'm most familiar with. Debates combine rhetoric, argument, research, writing, and analysis. And as one student put it: "it's always interesting to watch two people argue."

Students are paired and each writes a paper arguing in affirmation or negation of a "resolution." The resolution touches on a question related to the theme (or one of the themes) of the class. Student A first presents her paper to the class, Student B prepares and asks cross-examination questions which Student A responds to, Student B presents his paper, Student A asks cross-ex. questions, Student A prepares and presents a rebuttal, and Student B presents a rebuttal. The class takes notes as the debate proceeds and then we discuss the two students' performance in terms of successful and unsuccessful rhetoric.

Some benefits of using this format:

- engages students, emotionally involving for all, performance invites attention
- sidesteps issues of resistance or lack of motivation
- writing becomes dynamic, students feel more accountable for their papers
- makes the idea of "audience" more concrete
- encourages development of listening skills, note-taking skills, and critical thinking skills
- the necessity of strong, well integrated, research becomes obvious
- students are exposed to many different student papers and learn from the mistakes of their peers
- following each debate is a sort of "workshop" or review of the two students' papers and presentation in which the class rhetorically analyzes the debate
- lends itself to opportunities to discuss various aspects of composition, argument, rhetoric, research, etc.
- encourages open-mindedness and challenges students to see issues from multiple angles
- encourages the habits of mind discussed at orientation: curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition

Potential drawbacks:

- Debates are time-consuming. It's difficult to make time in the semester for each student to debate.
- The debates tend to be more challenging for ESL students