ABSTRACT

PLAYING WITH GENRE:
MULTIGENRE COMPOSITION AS RHETORICAL PEDAGOGY IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

by Alison Welch

This thesis seeks to examine how implementing a rhetorical genre pedagogy in the first-year composition classroom—one in which students actively question and experiment with established genres and conventions of multiple academic and nonacademic discourse communities—has the potential to contribute to students’ greater understanding of the rhetorical situations in which they write and speak, as well as to improve their ability to engage in productive, purposeful communication within and among these communities. Through a classroom-based research study that draws from student texts and interview responses, I explore the intersections between first-year composition students’ conceptions of genre and the ways in which they approach and manipulate the rhetorical situations they encounter, furthering the argument that by developing rhetorical texts within multiple genres, student writers can begin to recognize genre as rhetorical, social action and complicate their understanding of invention and revisionary practices.
PLAYING WITH GENRE:

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INTRODUCTION

“What we learn when we learn a genre is not just a pattern of forms or even a method of achieving our own ends. We learn, more importantly, what ends we may have.” –Carolyn Miller

I find myself drafting this introduction in the local coffee shop, the same place in which I have drafted much of the text you are preparing to read. And while the remainder of my text does not participate in any action that would suggest that the location in which I composed this text had any bearing on how I composed, I would argue that the coffee shop took on an integral role in my composing process. I watch a fellow coffee shop regular hesitate before deciding where to sit down and begin her work (or perhaps it’s play—I’m not sure). I smile at her, knowingly, having been in her position before, recognizing how one’s location and position within a space, and in relation to others in that space, can play a significant role in influencing her productivity.¹

I am indebted to the baristas, who have graciously put up with my constant presence, whose smiles and encouragement—and endless supply of caffeine—have kept me sane. Having recently learned about that “top secret” refill on iced black tea that they offer but don’t advertise, I have begun to feel that I belong. Observing a young boy happily playing Stratego with his father takes me back to my childhood; memories of playing the same game with my cousins in our grandparents’ basement help me recall that innocent joy I’ve had trouble letting myself experience while writing this text. Commiserating with a stranger about our searches for teaching jobs (after I unintentionally eavesdropped on his phone conversation on the subject) convinces me of our connectedness as human beings. And brief encounters with a colleague who has been experiencing similar writing struggles have comforted me, reminding me that I’m not alone; exchanging stories and words of support with her has kept me writing.

Frustrated that I’m writing a thesis about how playing with genres helps students understand composing tasks as social, rhetorical actions but am struggling to perceive my own work as rhetorical, I find that by focusing on the environment in which I write, on the people, the conversations, the genres I encounter in this space, I can begin to understand how, as a writer, I have—to some extent—developed relationships with the theorists and practitioners whose work I draw from in this text. I can begin to see how my text participates in social conversations, not

¹ Stephanie Weaver, in her M.A. thesis “Revisionary Rhetoric, Social Action, and the Ethics of the Personal Narrative; or, a Long Story about Being Southern,” discusses the use of personal narrative in the construction of rhetorical texts. Weaver’s work has significantly influenced my decision to employ personal narrative in this thesis, as well as to analyze student writers’ enactment of personal narrative in argumentative texts.
unlike those I have witnessed or participated in during the many hours I have passed in this coffee shop.

Carolyn Miller suggests that by developing genre knowledge, “we learn...what ends we may have” (165). We learn what actions we can perform; we learn the potential ways we can respond to the rhetorical situations in which we find ourselves. But how do I know if I have learned the thesis genre? I have not received any explicit instruction in how to compose with/in this genre, and yet the text I present here is meant to function as a demonstration of my learning, as proof that I am worthy of a master’s degree in Composition and Rhetoric. As I reread the first three paragraphs of this introduction, I worry that you will somehow perceive the play in which I have engaged here as somehow not academic enough, not as critical as it should be. Because of these worries, I wish to make my rhetorical purposes explicit. Julie Jung would argue that I shouldn’t let you know what I’m doing, that by disrupting your expectations, by confusing you, I’m engaging in productive, rhetorical action that can help both of us think differently about the subjects I address. But because I understand this text as positioned somewhere between “a means of achieving understanding” and “demonstration of understanding,” I am hesitant to play too much (Spellmeyer 270, qtd. in Lynch 292). In composing this introduction, as well as the interchapters I include between chapters, I have come to recognize how genre play—how manipulating genre(s) and “trying out” new approaches—has helped me think through ideas, arrive at new understandings, and determine new ways to present my arguments. While I confined my play to the portions of my text that seemed, to me, less important—those spaces before and between chapters (the “real” parts of the text)—I designed and implemented a rhetorical genre pedagogy in two sections of a first-year composition (FYC) course because I wanted students to understand the rhetorical value of play and become comfortable playing with their academic texts.³

As student writers, we often struggle to perceive our texts as entering into social conversations. We often fail to understand ourselves as rhetoricians, as actors who possess ideas worth sharing with others. In high school, many of our experiences with writing function merely

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²I use this construction (with/in) throughout my thesis to demonstrate how genres function as rhetorical acts, as well as sites of action. We compose with genres, in acts of collaboration, and we also compose in (within) genre sites. Genres are actions, and they enable actions.

³Perhaps my unwillingness to take risks with/in the chapters of my thesis makes me a hypocrite; I was asking students to embrace genre play in a way that I have failed to do myself. Nevertheless, recognizing my own hesitation helps me to better understand why students were sometimes hesitant to take risks with their texts.
as demonstrations of knowledge acquisition; only some of us are fortunate enough to take a course, such as journalism or creative writing, in which we experiment with alternate approaches to composition, or to have that English teacher who challenges us to play and try new things with our texts. Through this thesis (yes, I’m finally letting you in on what my thesis is about), I wish to argue that by employing a Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) pedagogy in the writing classroom, teachers can encourage play, while also supporting students as they develop more effective approaches to engaging with rhetorical situations and begin to recognize the rhetorical potential of their texts.

But why play, and what does that really mean in the context of the first-year composition course, a course that, excepting those students who “AP-out” or submit a highly satisfactory writing portfolio, every student must take (and pass) in order to graduate? Ideally, I would wish for my students to experience pleasure in the act of composing, but I also recognize that the context of the writing situation—an assigned project in a required course—necessarily functions as an opposing force to any efforts I may make to promote student enjoyment. When interviewing students for this study, for example, I asked them which composing project in our course they most enjoyed. After Kyle—the first student I interviewed—responded by stating, “It’s always hard to say that I enjoyed doing a project, but uh…,” I realized I needed to modify my question, and I interrupted him to add, “…or maybe that [project] you got the most out of—that might be a better way to say it” (Davidson, Interview). In every subsequent interview, I asked students which project they felt they benefitted from the most, or which project they found the most useful. And truthfully, it was unfair of me to assume that students enjoyed any of the projects they completed. I had figured that if my assignment design was meant to encourage students to play with their writing, pleasure and enjoyment would necessarily follow, but in many ways, the play that my assignments demanded from students may have prompted more pain than pleasure, more frustration than fun. To varying degrees, my assignment prompts invited students to question their assumptions and previously-acquired knowledge concerning academic writing and “the essay;” encouraged them to explore subjects of interest to them that affected their lives; forced them to experiment with different genres and approaches to composition; and scaffolded writing projects with the intention of prompting students to think differently about and perhaps revise their ideas concerning their writing processes, the rhetorical
situations with/in which they wrote, the subjects they chose to explore, and themselves as writers/rhetors.

My approach to play in the composition classroom, then, privileges the “trying out” of ideas, styles, and genres, along with the uneasiness and discomfort (and, sometimes, the thrill) that often accompany the act of trying something new or rejecting a comfortable, rehearsed position or approach in favor of a riskier, less familiar one. *Play*, in this context, does not occur separately from *work*. Rather, by approaching a writing task (e.g.: a public debate essay, a blog post, etc.) with such an attitude of play, the writer participates to some extent in what Herbert Marcuse refers to as “playful work,” an approach to action that “can flourish when material circumstances have been altered to allow play to merge with work” (Rouzie 31). Assigning more importance to praxis than to product, Marcuse’s conceptualization of “playful work” effectively “builds the bridge between work and play and makes up the transformative potential of work becoming play” (Volkwein 364, qtd. in Rouzie 31). When designing our course and major assignments, I knew I couldn’t hope to completely remove the element of work from the rhetorical situations with/in which students would compose, but I hoped that by encouraging them to engage in disruption, exploration, experimentation, and questioning, I could foster an environment in which students would feel comfortable playing with/in the texts they developed for our course.

Writing instructors could easily implement rhetorical genre pedagogies without emphasizing play, but I argue that by encouraging students to experiment with genres, by inviting them to “try out” multiple approaches, we can facilitate their development of rhetorical genre knowledge. Emphasizing learning, as opposed to mastery, we can help students understand the texts they create as engaging in social, rhetorical action, and we can attempt to “break” students from their reliance on “formulas” for writing, while also helping them recognize when adherence to these formulas can be rhetorically effective—such as in the context of a standardized test, when their audience is a trained reader who will look for topic sentences and thesis statements, rather than the unique presentation of ideas. This thesis therefore seeks to examine how a genre-centered pedagogical approach in the FYC classroom—one in which students actively question and experiment with established genres and conventions of multiple discourse communities—has the potential to contribute to students’ greater understanding of the rhetorical situations in which they write and speak, as well as improve their ability to engage in
productive, purposeful communication with/in and among these communities. Through a classroom-based research study, I intend to explore the intersections between FYC students’ conceptions of genre and the ways in which they approach and manipulate the rhetorical situations they encounter.

In *Writing Genres*, Amy Devitt argues that “genre should be redefined rhetorically according to the people who participate in genres and make the forms meaningful, a shift from genre as defined by literary critics or rhetoricians to genre as defined by its users” (3). Following Devitt’s assertion, I seek to explore how composition instructors might make genres more accessible to students—by encouraging students to play and experiment with/in genres as they create texts that enter into social conversations and participate in rhetorical action. By affording students such agency in the classroom, and by recognizing student writers’ multiple ways of using language, the multiplicity of their identities as writers, and their involvement in multiple and varied discourse communities, composition instructors can provide the opportunity for students to make their own rhetorical decisions. We can challenge students to think critically about the rhetorical action genres are themselves accomplishing, and to more critically consider the unique contexts and varied purposes of both the genres to which they are exposed, as well as those genres they compose as student writers, within and outside the academy. Rather than introducing students to genres as tools, or as strict formulas to follow, we can encourage students to view genres as possessing rhetorical agency, as capable of enacting change.

In Chapter 1, I provide a review of genre studies, detailing literary, linguistic, and rhetorical theories of genre and their connections to writing instruction. After elaborating upon why I chose to employ an RGS approach in the composition classroom, I present Inter-chapter 1, an analysis of the syllabus I developed for the two sections of FYC in which I implemented this pedagogical approach. Shifting to Chapter 2, I introduce a multigenre project my students completed, providing a rationale for why I assigned the project, addressing its connection to other course projects, and emphasizing how the multigenre text enabled students to engage with all five of the rhetorical canons. Then, in Inter-chapter 2, I analyze the assignment sheet for this multigenre project, ultimately suggesting that if I had composed this assignment prompt as a multigenre text, it may have been more rhetorically effective. Finally, Chapter 3 presents an extended analysis of a few students’ multigenre projects, focusing on multigenre composition’s potential for influencing writers’ revision of arguments, of rhetorical situations, and of texts.
produced in other composing situations. Whereas Chapters 1, 2, and 3 largely consist of my analysis of and response to others’ texts—those of theorists, as well as those texts my students created—the inter-chapters represent my desire to participate in self-critique, making inferences about how these genres I developed—genres my students then took up—shaped the texts students later created; I analyze how, as invitations to participate in the class community, as invitations to write, these texts engage students in particular rhetorical conversations, in particular ways. Rather than addressing successes and failures of my pedagogy through analysis of student texts alone, I attempt to consider how the rhetorical action in which I engaged in the syllabus and multigenre assignment sheet contributed to students’ rhetorical engagement with genres, as well as to the larger conversations taking place in our class community.

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While this introduction functions as a physical preface to my thesis text, I recognize that I “both preface a text and [am] prefaced by other texts, namely genres, in relation to which [I] write” and that “as such, the act of writing becomes a complex site for the enactment of prefaces, in which writers and texts preface each other, constantly inaugurating and deferring their own beginnings” (Bawarshi ix). Just as I physically position myself in the coffee shop in relation to others, just as I witness and participate in social conversations and interactions—those that provide welcome distraction, those that help me think through ideas, and, perhaps most importantly, those that remind me that I am a social being possessing an inherent need to reach out to and care for others—I also position my text in relation to others’ texts, seeking to participate (if only in a small way) in scholarly conversations concerning the presence of rhetorical genre pedagogy and multigenre composition in the FYC classroom.

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4 As I drafted this sentence, a friend also working on his master’s thesis walked past with an encouraging “thumbs up.”
CHAPTER 1
Towards an Understanding of Intersections between Genre Theory and Writing Pedagogy

In her influential essay “Genre as Social Action,” Carolyn Miller closes by explaining that “for the student, genres serve as keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of a community” (165). First-year university students, enrolled in courses across as many as six academic disciplines in one semester, must determine what it means to act within each of these classroom communities; knowledge of genres frequently employed in multiple, diverse contexts is thus essential for students’ entrance into communities and their growth as community members. As David Bartholomae would argue, students need to know how to “invent the university”—they must “learn to speak our language” and “learn to try on a variety of voices and interpretive schemes” (623). But upon entering the university, students may not be aware of the different communities and genres in which they will be expected write; depending on their secondary writing instruction, they may have been exposed to only one “correct” way to write—a formulaic approach that would help them respond to writing prompts on standardized tests. As a first-year composition instructor teaching students whose high school writing experiences widely varied, I hoped to familiarize students with several possible approaches to composition. By practicing with different genres, I thought, students could begin to make their own choices concerning the texts they developed, taking into consideration their audiences, purposes, and the discourse communities in/to which they were composing. With this genre knowledge, students could learn how to invent their arguments and themselves as writers in different ways, to fulfill different purposes and reach different audiences. In this chapter I will review different theorizations of genre, drawing from literary, linguistic, and rhetorical scholarship, examining the connections between these theories and genre-based pedagogies in the writing classroom.

When I first began developing a genre-focused FYC pedagogy, I struggled with how to refer to student writers’ relationships with genre, in part because I wasn’t altogether sure of how to define the concept of genre itself. Do writers use genres? Work with them? Interact with them? Operate within them? To what extent is play involved? Without having determined the approach to genre pedagogy I would adopt, I struggled to answer these questions. The metaphors for genre abound—genres have been referred to as categories, tools, sites, ecosystems, social institutions, social actions (Miller 1984; Bawarshi 2001; Bazerman 2009; Devitt 2008). In their overview of Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS), Bawarshi and Reiff offer yet another metaphor,
explaining that “genres can be understood as both habitations and habits: recognizable sites of rhetorical and social action as well as typified ways of rhetorically and socially acting. We inhabit genres (genre as noun) and we enact genres (genre as verb)” (59). With this view of genre as both an act and a site of action, writer and genre share responsibility for communication—the genre itself assumes agency (through its performance of action), and simultaneously, the genre lends the writer agency (by way of its presence as a site through/within which the writer acts). Rhetorical action thus becomes collaborative. And while this relationship between writer and genre is difficult—perhaps impossible—to represent linguistically, I attempt to communicate this connection by presenting writers as acting with/in genres—within genre sites and with genres’ ways of acting; similarly, I seek to demonstrate how genres act with and upon writers in response to rhetorical situations.

Relying primarily on such a rhetorical conceptualization of genre, the FYC pedagogy I wish to promote enables students to recognize how their writing functions as rhetorical action. But if I desire to fully address the presence of (and attitudes toward) genre in the composition classroom, I must briefly explore other approaches to genre study to demonstrate how rhetorical genre pedagogies have emerged in response to other theories and pedagogies. Further, an understanding of these other approaches can provide important insight into how FYC students define and describe genre; in general, students’ articulations of the genre knowledge they possessed before entering the composition course seem to suggest literary, rather than rhetorical understandings of genre. When I spoke with students about their perceptions of genre prior to our course⁵, they were quick to name literary genres and film genres, suggesting that their understanding of genre was largely confined to their readerly experiences with texts—as consumers, rather than as writers/producers. Kyle, for example, explained that his previous genre knowledge was based on an understanding of genres as “types” of texts. Reflecting on his familiarity with science fiction and historical fiction, two literary genres he enjoyed, Kyle said he “would think about [genres] as different styles within the media of movie-making or story-

⁵ While I asked students to reflect on how they perceived or defined genre prior to the FYC course, these interviews occurred the semester after students were enrolled in the course. Thus, students’ participation in a genre-centered composition course may have influenced their responses. Further, the fact that students neglected to discuss any rhetorical understanding of genres they possessed prior to the course does not mean that this understanding was not present.
writing,” but that he “wouldn’t have used [genre] to describe a use of media\(^6\), like a video, or a public service announcement, for instance” (Davidson, Interview, emphasis added). I find it interesting to note that Kyle did not perceive the novels he read as texts that used particular genres “to get their point across” (Davidson). Instead, he viewed science fiction (or historical fiction) as a category or “type” of literature, and he did not imagine the authors of these texts as active agents operating with/in the science fiction genre in order to fulfill unique communicative purposes (Davidson). He recognized genre as a style one can categorize, but not as a productive form. Similarly, Allison expressed that she never before considered herself a writer of multiple genres; as a reader, she felt comfortable and confident “reading and understanding different types of genres,” but she “never looked at [genre] as in the marketing perspective” (Norenberg, Interview). While I never referred to genres as marketing strategies in the context of our course, Allison’s distinction here is worth exploring. As an exercise science major who would like to someday open her own physical therapy practice, Allison viewed the genres she experimented with in our course as important for her future work as a physical therapist and business owner: “That [working with multiple genres] really helped me—helped anybody. In the future, we’re all going to have to do that at some point. I know for me, I want to go into physical therapy and at some point, maybe start my own business, and I’m going to need to be able to market using different genres” (Norenberg, Interview). Whereas her initial understanding of genre seems to have centered on her passive reception of texts, Allison’s work in our course allowed her to establish herself as an active producer of texts.

I do not intend to suggest that these students did not actively interact with/in genres prior to their participation in our FYC course; rather, I wish to argue that the nature of their experiences with genre may have prevented them from perceiving composition with/in genres as enabling rhetorical action. Lacking a comprehensive study of students’ previous interactions with/in genre—a academically and non-academically—my claim is a risky one to make. Nevertheless, the interview responses students shared seem to point towards an incongruity between the understandings of genre students bring to the classroom and those forwarded by rhetorical theories. In fact, students’ initial understandings of genre seem to have more in

\(^6\) Throughout his discussion of genre, Kyle seems to at times conflate genre and medium. Because I provided students a limited introduction to the rhetorical significance of these terms, this confusion can be expected. Here, Kyle seems to suggest that he perceived genres as different styles within a particular medium, whereas now, he understands genre as describing the way a medium is used to achieve a purpose.
common with early literary conceptualizations of genre that emphasize categorization. In its “pursuit of systematic and inclusive rules based on universal validity,” the neoclassical approach to genre, sometimes referred to as the “container model,” uses taxonomies “to classify and describe relations between literary texts” (Bawarshi and Reiff 16, 15). This approach is useful insofar as it serves to organize texts based on their relationships with one another, thus suggesting that “literary texts do not function as free standing entities, but exist in systematic, intertextual relation to one another within a literary universe” (17). Because most high school students’ literacy experiences tend to concentrate on literary and expository, rather than argumentative texts, it makes sense that their definitions of genre would be closely aligned with the neoclassical approach. Additionally, neoclassical taxonomies influenced the development of the “modes” approaches to writing instruction, approaches which, thanks to standardized testing, still drive much high school writing instruction (16). Robert Connors, in his 1981 essay “The Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse,” argues that instruction in “modes” failed to support students’ growth as writers because the approach lacked rhetorical emphasis:

The weakness of the modes of discourse as a practical tool in the writing class was that they did not really help students learn to write. When we look closely at the nature of modal distinctions, it is not hard to see why: the modes classify and emphasize the product of writing, having almost nothing to do with the purpose for which the writer sat down, pen in hand. (11)

Often divorcing writing tasks from context or situation, instruction in modes risks impeding knowledge transfer; students may learn to compose (chiefly through modeling) narrative, descriptive, persuasive, or expository texts—they may achieve a level of mastery required to successfully categorize others’ texts and compose their own when asked to do so—but without an understanding of how these approaches to composition can participate in their responses to real rhetorical situations, students will likely experience difficulty applying their genre knowledge outside the immediate contexts in which they learned these models.

Whereas neoclassical models of genre focus attention on taxonomic classification of texts into genre categories based on identifiable similarities, the structuralist model suggests that genres operate as “literary institutions” whose purpose it is to organize and shape texts and their contexts (Bawarshi and Reiff 18). Affording genres more agency, structuralism, according to Jonathan Culler, holds that writing “is made possible by the very existence of the genre, which
the writer can write against, certainly, whose conventions he may attempt to subvert, but which is none the less the context within which his activity takes place” (Culler, qtd. in Bawarshi and Reiff 18). This theorization of genre is somewhat analogous to the creative writer’s relationship with genre; providing the writer a context in which she acts, the genre also places demands on how she acts. A genre’s conventions mediate how the writer approaches character development, for example—a novel enables her to construct characters differently than she might in a piece of flash fiction. Further, expectations concerning character development vary among subgenres, resulting in a writer of popular fiction responding to a writing situation differently than a writer of literary fiction. At the same time, some creative writers choose to play with and subvert genres’ conventions; these writers intentionally “break the rules” and disrupt readers’ expectations in their efforts to most effectively communicate their ideas. Proponents of structuralism would argue that the structure of a genre shapes the production and the interpretation of a text, influencing both writer and reader: “the actors in the discourse embody particular actions, identifications, and representations in relation to one another within the structure of the genre” (Bawarshi and Reiff 19). Thus, the writer’s genre choices, including the decision to adhere to or break with conventions, are shaped by the genres he selects.

Where structuralist theories center on how genre shapes action and constructs particular identities and relationships among writers and readers, Mikhail Bakhtin’s linguistic theory of genre, articulated in his oft-cited essay “The Problem of Speech Genres,” focuses instead on how the “sphere of communication” in which a linguistic event occurs influences the generic form of the utterance (61, 79). Writing against Saussure’s theorization of utterance that he perceives as having “juxtaposed the utterance (la parole), as a purely individual act, to the system of language as a phenomenon that is purely social and mandatory for the individuum,” Bakhtin furthers a theory of genre that addresses the social nature of speech acts (81). Because the individual’s utterance “is preceded by the utterances of others” and “followed by the responsive utterances of others,” Bakhtin argues, “any speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree” and “any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances” (71, 69). Without referring to it as such, Bakhtin seems to situate speech genres within rhetorical situations: the content, style, and structure of utterances, he asserts, are “determined by the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication” and linked to “the whole of the utterance,” which influences and is influenced by the utterances of others (60). Thus, while
Bakhtin’s theorization of genre is not explicitly rhetorical, his conceptualization of utterances as participating in larger social conversations lends important insight to rhetorical genre pedagogies.

Other theories of genre that derive from the field of linguistics, including Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), have made significant contributions to genre pedagogy. Influenced by Michael Halliday’s theory of language as “social semiotic,” SFL operates from an understanding that “language is organized the way it is within a culture because such an organization serves a social purpose within that culture” (Bawarshi and Reiff 29). Halliday argues that as “a form of socialization,” language shapes how individuals act in “contexts of situation” that recur as “situation types,” and that it is through participation in these situation types that we “develop typified ways of linguistically interacting within them” (30). Halliday’s linguistic theory was first explicitly applied to genre studies and pedagogy with the emergence in the early 1980s of what has become known as the Sydney School. Recognizing a literacy gap among children in Australian elementary and secondary schools, Australian genre theorists (J.R. Martin, Frances Christie, and Joan Rothery, among others) sought to narrow this gap by providing marginalized children access to important genre knowledge (Bawarshi and Reiff 32). Taking a politicized stance against student-centered, process-based writing instruction that “privilege[s] the cultural aspirations of middle-class children from child-centered households,” the Sydney School contends that by not explicitly teaching genre, process approaches effectively “reproduce social inequality” (Cope and Kalantzis 6, qtd. in Bawarshi and Reiff 32; 32). Those students who have fewer literacy experiences outside the classroom are likely to have more difficulty thriving in environments in which they are encouraged to direct their own learning; often unprepared to recognize and act upon “contexts of situation” as recurring “situation types,” marginalized students (more so than students of the dominant culture) will struggle when forced to rely on implicit genre knowledge as they strive to respond to writing prompts and develop academic texts (30-33).

A writing pedagogy in which genre is explicitly taught can “counter such imbalance by revealing the relationship between text structures and social purposes in ways that enable all students to produce texts more effectively and critically” (Bawarshi and Reiff 32). Positing a “teaching-learning cycle,” the Sydney School forwards a pedagogical approach that emphasizes three stages: “modeling, joint negotiation of text, and independent construction of text” (34). As
a cycle, rather than a continuum, this model enables teachers and students to enter the process “at the stage most appropriate to students’ level of preparedness,” and simultaneously, it “[reflects] how students and teacher can keep rotating through the cycle as more and more complex genres are added” (34). By providing opportunity for both repetition and recursivity, this approach accounts for students’ diverse learning needs and constructs for the instructor a more directive role in students’ genre acquisition. Distinguishing itself from a process-based approach founded on expressivist ideals of the student writer as one who is writing to discover, writing to express a truth to which only he has access, this SFL approach to genre instruction privileges modeling, providing students with a familiar structure to follow and emphasizing a collaborative relationship between teacher and students.

Some theorists—among them members of the Australian school—have expressed their hesitations concerning the teaching-learning cycle’s effectiveness. Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis, for example, worry that the SFL view of genre privileges “transmission pedagogy,” that “the cycle imagery…belies the fact that the underlying pedagogical process is linear” (15). Such close attention to modeling, while perhaps contributing to a narrowing of achievement gaps and providing historically marginalized students access to discourses of “educational significance and social power,” tends to provide students with an “uncritical” introduction to genres of the academy (15). The strict delineation of teacher and student roles assumed by the teaching-learning cycle is also problematic; the “modeling” stage in particular suggests that the teacher must always provide students with the genre knowledge required to construct texts, leaving little opportunity for students to develop this knowledge on their own. But despite the many arguments in opposition to Sydney School approaches to genre instruction, it is important to recognize that these scholars’ research and the pedagogical changes that their studies influenced represent one of the first concerted efforts towards introducing genre theory to modern composition pedagogies; they set the scene for future genre scholars, including rhetorical genre theorists, to apply their theories to the writing classroom.

A scholar integral to the development of rhetorical genre theory, Carolyn Miller would argue that students’ acquisition of genre knowledge is socially constructed. One’s understanding of the genres at work in a community, according to RGS, involves more than simple recognition of common stylistic or linguistic features. This understanding of genre demonstrates a significant distinction between linguistic and RGS approaches to genre study. While SFL is expressly
concerned with students’ acquisition of genres as linguistic forms (to enable their participation in academic discourse communities), a rhetorical approach, conversely, presents genres as “forms of social action” that “enable their users to carry out situated symbolic actions rhetorically and linguistically, and in so doing, to perform social actions and relations, enact social roles, and frame social realities” (Bawarshi and Reiff 59). Though linguistic approaches do not ignore the transactional nature of writing, they tend to perceive students’ knowledge of genres as providing them access to academic communities—keys to unlock the doors—but not as actions in their own right. Drawing from Jamieson and Campbell, who argue that “rhetorical forms that establish genres are stylistic and substantive responses to perceived situational demands,” Miller suggests that genre “becomes more than a formal entity; it becomes pragmatic, fully rhetorical, a point of connection between intention and effect, an aspect of social action” (19, qtd. in Miller 153; Miller 153). Similar to Halliday’s “situation types” and Bakhtin’s “speech genres,” Miller advances a theory of typification that draws from phenomenology and its theorization of a public consciousness—a perception of the mind as external, communal, as acting “out in the open” (Miller 157; Bawarshi and Reiff 66; Sokolowski 216, qtd. in Bawarshi and Reiff 66). Following this notion, then, our responses to rhetorical situations influence and are influenced by others’ actions (as well as our own prior actions). When we select and perform genres, we rely, in part, on our knowledge of other individuals’ responses to similar rhetorical situations to determine how to proceed. For instance, when I develop an assignment sheet for a course, I turn to others’ assignments—those provided in a teacher’s guide our department publishes each year, as well as those I have received as a student. I analyze these texts’ rhetorical moves, and I seek to anticipate my students’ needs as readers who must take up the assignment sheet genre as they work to complete the project I have assigned. Additionally, I reflect upon the successes and failures of assignment sheets I have previously designed and presented to students, attempting to prevent problematic issues I have encountered in the past.

To fully understand Miller’s theories of typification and genre as social, rhetorical action, we must first turn to Lloyd Bitzer’s 1968 essay “The Rhetorical Situation,” a text Miller both draws upon and critiques. Miller gives a nod to Bitzer’s text when she asserts that it “points the way to genre study…in observing that situations recur,” but she also argues for a new understanding of exigence that departs from Bitzer’s theorization: “a reconceptualization of exigence is necessary if genre is to be understood as social action” (152, 156). Bitzer maintains
that theories of rhetoric (prior to his 1968 publication) most often “focus upon the orator’s method or upon the discourse itself, rather than upon the situation which invites the orator’s application of his method and the creation of discourse” (Bitzer 2). Because rhetorical situation invites and generates rhetoric, we must devote considerable attention to the role of situation in our theorization and analysis of rhetorical acts: “So controlling is situation,” Bitzer asserts, “that we should consider it the very ground of rhetorical activity” (5). Applying this focus on situation to rhetorical genre studies, we must possess rhetorical understanding of the situations that compel us to act in order to define and construct our relationships with genre; how we determine what genres we act with, as well as how we approach acting with/in genre sites, affects and is affected by the rhetorical situations in which we find ourselves. The situation, with the participation of its “constituents”—exigence, audience, and constraints—shapes our action (6).

Bitzer defines exigence as “an imperfection marked by urgency…a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be” (6). As an “organizing principle,” the exigence constructs the rhetorical situation and informs the rhetor of how to act—what change she must seek to enact and to whom her argument must appeal (7). If the exigence presents the rhetor with a purpose for acting, her interaction with genre(s) demonstrates her work towards fulfilling that purpose, towards enacting change.

As an example, following Bitzer’s understanding of exigence as “something waiting to be done,” this thesis could be perceived as an attempt to fill a gap in composition research (a response to a real exigence) by addressing the rhetorical potential of introducing rhetorical genre pedagogy and multigenre composition in the FYC classroom. My rhetorical audience, “those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change,” consists of other FYC instructors who might potentially consider implementing the type of genre-based pedagogy I advocate (Bitzer 8). Through my interaction with multiple genres—scholars’ theoretical texts, genre theorists’ conference presentations, student interview responses, student texts from the course I taught, assignment prompts developed for that course, students’ written responses to in-class activities, course syllabi—I work to invent a text that defines an exigence and offers a solution, appealing to my intended audience (composition instructors) through its participation in meaningful rhetorical action. But ultimately, my rhetorical situation is somewhat artificial. As mentioned previously, I direct my arguments toward an audience of composition instructors, some of whom I hope may take interest in my work, and—learning from
my pedagogical mistakes, as well as from my successes—may consider implementing rhetorical genre pedagogies in their own classrooms. But, just like any other student, I am incapable of completely ignoring the immediate rhetorical situation in which I must position my text and myself. Someday, I may have the opportunity to publish revised portions of this text in a scholarly journal or an edited collection, but for today, my primary audience consists of three Composition & Rhetoric scholars, whose responsibility it is to ensure that I fulfill departmental requirements for a master’s degree, and one RGS scholar who has expressed interest in reading my final text. To be fair, I cannot claim to know my readers’ motives or the attitudes with which they approach my text. After all, these scholars are themselves educators and composition instructors who may decide to make revisions to their composition pedagogies after reading my text; and therefore, I should not make assumptions about how they encounter my text or what motivations they bring with them as they sit down to read.

Choosing instead to follow Carolyn Miller’s understanding of genre as social action and rhetorical situation as social construct, however, I can more readily perceive my relationship with my immediate audience as a social conversation, a dialogue. By reconceiving my text’s exigence as “an understanding of social need in which I know how to take an interest, in which one can intend to participate,” I can begin to understand my text as the enactment of a social motive and my audience as potential collaborators with whom I can work to address that motive (Miller 158). As rhetorical actions, “taking an interest” and “intending to participate” in discussions about the position of rhetorical genre theory in the composition course seem less intimidating than overcoming an “obstacle” or trying to accomplish “something waiting to be done” (Bitzer 6). Further, Miller would argue that as writers, we create our exigences, rather than having an already existing exigence determined for us or forced upon us. As we strive to position our arguments in relation to those of others, attempting to locate moments in which to enter rhetorical conversations, we invent exigencies and determine the rhetorical situations in which we will compose. Our engagement with genres, then, is also implicated in this process. Bawarshi would argue that genres enable action: “As cultural artifacts, they embody exigencies, and in using genres we enact and reinforce these exigencies as recognizable, meaningful, consequential actions” (Bawarshi 41). Claiming that genre is inseparable from both exigence and invention, Bawarshi argues that genres operate as conventions that “mediate how we recognize exigencies as social motives to act” (40-41, 114). Functioning as sites—and acts—of
transformation, genres allow rhetors to take up our needs and desires to act by engaging in a process of invention. Bawarshi’s “genre-based approach to invention” suggests that “by locating invention within genred sites of action, we treat invention rhetorically, as a way of being and acting in the word in relation to others within certain circumstances” (150). And by theorizing invention practices in the FYC classroom as rhetorical, he argues, “we teach students how to locate themselves within and participate in the textured worlds that surround them” (150).

However, remaining cognizant of my own rhetorical struggles, I worry about the ability of FYC students to perceive their texts as responding to real exigencies—“social motives”—and engaging with real, public audiences. Bitzer discusses the importance of distinguishing “real” rhetorical situations from sophistic, spurious, fictive, and fantasy situations, defining fantasy as a situation “in which exigence, audience, and constraints may all be the imaginary objects of a mind at play” (11). Assuming Bitzer’s conceptualization of genuine rhetorical situations as those that recur, I question the extent to which the rhetorical situations FYC students respond to—through their interaction with/in genres in the composition classroom—could be construed as “fantasy” situations. One project most students complete in the FYC course requires them to enter into a public debate; and while this project takes different forms in different courses, generally, students select an issue and conduct research on that issue, examining multiple perspectives and eventually articulating their own position. When I assign the public debate project, I encourage students to determine an intended audience for their texts, taking into consideration their knowledge of who would best benefit from the information and ideas they intend to share, as well as who could most effectively influence change concerning the issue. But by not requiring students to present their texts to their intended audiences, am I furthering a “fantastical” (or fake) approach to rhetoric and preventing students from developing full understanding of rhetorical situation? The student writer’s rhetorical context is always at least somewhat artificial—even if I were to ask students to share their texts with their intended audiences, I could not hope to successfully eliminate the pressure students feel to “please the teacher” and get a good grade. As composition instructors, we have to admit that regardless of how much we emphasize to students the importance of directing their texts to specific, public audiences, the majority of our students are ultimately more concerned with their immediate audience: us.
Attempting to address this issue, I continuously verbalize my commitment to evaluating students’ projects from the perspective of their intended audiences, striving to alleviate at least some of the pressure to “do what the teacher wants” or complete the assignment “the right way.” I am not so naïve as to believe students’ conceptions of my desires and anticipations of my responses do not affect their rhetorical decisions, but I would like to think that by requiring students to respond to a diversity of rhetorical situations throughout the semester (and sometimes within the same project), my course helped students become more perceptive of the multiple contexts in which they compose and exigencies to which they respond. Emily seemed to suggest that by selecting a specific audience for each text she developed, she could approach course projects with more direction:

I think [selecting an audience] made it so much easier because if I was writing as a college student, then it was easier for me to write in my own language and base my decisions on talking to kids at [our university], or if I’m writing to a professor, I would try to be a little bit more professional. I liked that we kind of knew who we were trying to write to beforehand because then it made it easier to understand the language or what types of things you could put in there to relate yourself to who you’re writing with. I think it honestly just helped because then I knew why I was writing, what I could do to make it more intriguing, and just make it end up being better in the end. (Durbin, Interview)

While Emily’s response is not representative of all students’ experiences, I wish to argue that by providing students opportunities to create their rhetorical exigences and determine for themselves specific audiences, they can develop greater confidence in composing their texts and deeper rhetorical awareness of how their texts function as social acts. It seems, in my experience, that those students who are resistant to selecting an intended audience, as well as those who direct their texts to broad audiences (“anyone who is interested in _______”), tend to be less invested in the subjects they choose to address. If there is any truth to my hypothesis, I could potentially argue that by allowing students to draw from their individual interests, concerns, and

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7 I recognize, of course, that to validate such a hypothesis, I would likely need to develop a more extensive study in which I analyzed students’ writer’s memos (the texts in which I ask students to state their intended audience and provide a rationale that addresses why they have selected this audience), their texts themselves, as well as interview responses concerning their interest in the subjects their texts address, as well as their feelings regarding the requirement to direct their texts to specific audiences.
beliefs when determining the subjects or issues their texts will address, composition instructors can further facilitate students’ development of rhetorical knowledge.

Revisiting Bitzer’s definition of fantasy situations, I wish to reconsider his treatment of exigence, audience, and constraints as “the imaginary objects of a mind at play” (11, emphasis added). Though Bitzer’s articulation of fantasy situations suggests that these are not the situations to which rhetors should respond, Bitzer’s text also does not directly address the role of situation in the composition classroom. Perhaps the imaginative play that enables the construction of fantasy situations can be useful for FYC students who have only recently begun to navigate discourses of the academy and thus may not yet perceive their writing and speech as rhetorical, social action. If we encourage students to play, and if we reconceive the process of invention as the enactment of the mind-play through which the writer determines rhetorical situation, rather than as the determination of a response to an immediate exigence, we can turn Bitzer’s argument to privilege minds at play, rather than disparage them. Invention thus becomes a process of working (or playing, as it may be) to create a rhetorical exigence.

In his unpublished dissertation “A Study of the Element of Play in the Teaching of Composition,” Thomas A. Batt “provisionally” defines creativity as “a state characterized by feelings of excitement and interest accompanying an action one feels intrinsically motivated to initiate or continue” (8). Those composing acts in which we have the privilege to participate in moments of creativity and experience such “excitement and interest” tend to also be those in which we have opportunities to play, to experiment with the texts we create. For instance, I felt more “intrinsically motivated” to continue writing my introduction to this text—in which I reflected on my experiences composing this text in the coffee shop—than I am to continue writing and revising this paragraph. Play and creativity are also closely related to our participation in rhetorical invention; rather than inventing an argument in reaction to a problem, we “playfully” seek out a way to invent a problem we can solve. In the FYC classroom, when students determine the public debates they would like to explore and enter into, the choices they make often reflect personal values, concerns, or interests. When Allison decided to research and write about issues concerning prescribing antipsychotics to children with ADHD and Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), she did not arrive at this focus by thumbing through the newspaper or watching the local news; she instead drew upon her personal experiences with medication trials: “When I was on medications trials I went through countless numbers of side
effects, such as muscle cramps throughout my body, nausea, dizziness, etc. In the end, the medications did end up working; however, I went through a two-year period where I literally went through hell” (Norenberg, “Writer’s Memo: The Rollercoaster Ride of Antipsychotics” 2). While the play in which Allison participated as she composed a public debate essay and later a multigenre text concerning this issue may not have been fun in the way we usually understand the term, she was able to reflect on her experiences and compose two creative, unique, playful texts that sought to inform parents of the issues associated with medicating their children and provide multiple perspectives surrounding the debate. Reliving the physical and emotional pain she experienced was no doubt difficult for Allison, but she was committed to inserting her voice into this debate. The texts she created reflected her desire to secure and maintain her audience’s attention and encourage them to think differently and perhaps take action. In her public debate essay, for example, she includes an introduction that plays with/in the essay genre to disrupt expectations and provide personal insight into the effects of antipsychotics on young children:

“What’s your problem?” My older sister, Jennifer, asked accusingly. “She’s probably just PMS-ing,” my little sister, Courtney, stated as if she had things all figured out, knowing full well she was just pushing buttons.

“I am NOT PMS-ing,” I retorted, raging with clenched fists, “and NOTHING is wrong. It’s not my problem I can’t control myself.”

“Allison, you need to learn to control yourself, the medicine isn’t going to fix everything and, quite frankly you’re being a bitch,” Jennifer replied. And someone might as well have dropped an atomic bomb in my mom’s minivan.

“Jennifer, you have no fucking idea what I’m going through. How could you even say something like that? You are such a bitch,” I yelled back as I was leaning across Courtney, trying to get a good hit in. No one, not even my two sisters whom I’m extremely close with, understood what I was going through. (Norenberg, “The Rollercoaster Ride of Antipsychotics” 2).

Supporting implicit genre pedagogies, Aviva Freedman argues that “full genre knowledge (in all of its subtlety and complexity) only becomes available as a result of having written. First comes the achievement or performance, with the tacit knowledge implied, and then, through that, the meta-awareness which can flower into conscious reflexive knowledge” (205). While I more closely align myself with those who advocate interactive genre pedagogies that
tend to employ a combination of explicit and implicit instructional approaches, I appreciate Freedman’s urging instructors to foster learning environments in which students can play with genres, developing genre knowledge through a process of experimentation. While modeling can be a useful teaching strategy, providing students with too much structure and direction can prevent important moments of discovery; but with opportunities for play, students can develop the rhetorical savvy necessary for determining which genres, as well as what type of action with/in these genres, will help them most effectively fulfill their rhetorical purposes.

In her 2011 presentation at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (“Creating within Genres: How Genre Metaphors Shape Student Invention”), Amy Devitt challenged her audience to consider new metaphors for how we teach, talk, and write about genre. Her suggestion: Genre as playground. Employing this metaphor, she explained, would enable us to conceive of genre in ways that previous metaphors have not necessarily allowed. Arguing that existing genre metaphors “limit writers’ innovation and creativity,” Devitt suggested that as playgrounds, genres could provide “sites where writers play with possibilities, imaginings,” working with “existing equipment to perform their intentions, act out scenarios” (“Creating within Genres”). She went on to explain the metaphor’s social nature, how the “resulting performances” of one player effectively “construct new possibilities for other writers” (“Creating within Genres”). But she isn’t so much invested in “the playground” becoming the new metaphor for genre as she is in starting a conversation surrounding how we—as scholars and teachers—describe and understand our complex relationships with genre and, in turn, how we convey these relationships to our students.

And she definitely got people talking. Following the panelists’ presentations, one audience member—who self-identified as a grandmother and frequenter of playgrounds—began a discussion concerning the potential affordances and disadvantages of conceptualizing genre as playground. She addressed the common understanding that newcomers to the playground often must either watch others model “playground behavior” or receive instruction (from parents, guardians, or older/more experienced children) before approaching the playground equipment, thus preventing unrestricted experimentation and play. Another audience member expressed concern regarding the generic fixedness of the playground—players cannot physically move or change the equipment; they can alter their understandings of and relationships with each piece of playground equipment, but the structure always remains the same. While I neglected to
contribute to the immediate conversation, I wish to argue here that the metaphor’s potential benefits outweigh these potential problems. Take the monkey bars. Children often must observe others’ interactions with the monkey bars before approaching them themselves, but as they become increasingly familiar with the “genre,” they help shape other children’s relationships to the monkey bars—just as older children “construct new possibilities” for them, so do they “construct new possibilities” for those who observe their interaction with the genre. This genre play thus becomes social, both novice and experienced practitioners engaging in social conversations and interactions. But the monkey bars—as a piece of playground equipment they must master on their own—also function as a symbol of the child’s agency and autonomy: “There is a rule at my school: No lifting or helping children climb the monkey bars. We never place children in physically challenging situations they cannot get into on their own” (Burrington). While Burrington’s statement concerns educators’ interactions with preschool children, I would argue that a similar sentiment should be applied to composition instructors’ interactions with FYC students learning to work with/in new genres or to act in different ways with/in genres with which they are already familiar. I do not intend to suggest that instructors are not responsible for supporting students’ development of genre knowledge, but rather, that the “challenging situations” students face as they compose with/in genres are ones they can “get into on their own.” The composition instructor, like the concerned parent/guardian or preschool teacher supervising the playground, must be prepared to encourage students to keep trying, to “catch” them if they “fall,” and to offer suggestions when they become discouraged.

Mastering the monkey bars serves as a rite of passage for the average preschooler. Initially a formidable opponent and agent of the child’s repeated failure and continued frustration, the monkey bars—once defeated—offer the child new perspective, new possibilities for imaginative work, as well as a sense of belonging in a new community. But perhaps the infamous monkey bars are actually no opponent at all. Rather, the child develops a reciprocal relationship with the monkey bars, working with them in her quest to complete a task. The bars require risk-taking—one must forfeit complete control in order to move forward—but they also promise support: the evenly-spaced bars present the activity as less “frightening” and success as more easily attainable than perhaps originally conceptualized. With practice, the child becomes comfortable “interacting” with the monkey bars, swinging across, climbing atop, and hanging from the bars; she collaborates with the monkey bars as she engages in different types of play.
This relationship also offers potential for transformation and imagination. The monkey bars become a throne upon which kings and queens rest, surveying their kingdom and subjects on the playground below. They become a ship and the ground below a sea swarming with hungry crocodiles. Put differently, the child (with the help of his imagination) writes and is written by the monkey bars; he, often in conjunction with other writers (children at play), works with the genre (monkey bars) to develop a text (ship) in response to a rhetorical exigence (hungry crocodiles).

In her presentation, Devitt suggested that we reconceive composition as creative writing, “[taking] creativity back from creative writing” and perceiving student writers as “creators at play” (Devitt, “Creating with Genres”). Following the playground metaphor, student writers’ interactions with and through genres should resemble children’s interactions with and through playground equipment: students “play on genre equipment,” “play roles inspired by particular pieces of genre equipment,” “invent games and make the genre equipment fit the game,” and “play at multiple genre playgrounds” (Devitt, “Creating with Genres”). When designing the two sections of FYC I taught in the fall of 2010, I sought to develop a rhetorical genre pedagogy that would facilitate students’ experimentation with multiple genres and enable them to discover new approaches to engaging in rhetorical action. Unfortunately, I attended Devitt’s CCCC presentation long after the fall semester had ended, and thus I was not able to introduce students to Devitt’s theorization of genre as playground; in retrospect, I could have employed Devitt’s metaphor as a framing tool for the syllabus and assignments I designed for our course, as a way of familiarizing students with RGS and with our course focus. Play, of the sort Devitt promotes, became essential to the success of this pedagogical approach; my students and I quickly learned that in those moments in which we were hesitant to engage in play or unwilling to “try out” new or unfamiliar approaches—when composing texts, when reading others’ texts, and when interacting with each other in the classroom setting—our class dynamic suffered.

By playing with genres, student writers acquire and develop rhetorical knowledge that they can then apply to future composing situations—in the academy, as well as in their personal and professional lives. Without my intending it to do so, the rhetorical genre pedagogy I implemented in two sections of FYC provided students opportunities for engaging with each of the five rhetorical canons—invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. In particular, a multigenre project I asked students to complete sought to complicate students’ ideas concerning
the role of genre in rhetorical action. “Testing out” their arguments as they composed with/in different genres, students participated in processes of invention, inventing and reinventing their arguments and themselves as writers, in addition to the actual genres with/in which they chose to act. Each genre in which students composed provided them opportunities to present new perspectives on their issues or to direct their texts to new audiences. The project also required students to consider the arrangement of their texts in different ways than they might approach the arrangement of an essay or speech; because they were enacting their arguments through several genres, students had to make rhetorical decisions about what ideas or perspectives to present through which genres, as well as how to arrange their different genres in relation to each other as they strove to present compelling arguments to their intended audiences. Additionally, as students practiced and played with/in these multiple genres, they employed different approaches to style. To compose a brochure that possessed rhetorically effective style, students needed to present arguments that combined text, images, and graphics and reflected careful, rhetorical decisions concerning language, types of images, font, color, organization, etc. A series of Facebook status updates, in comparison, required a different orientation to style; through the act of composing these Facebook posts, students developed more personal, intimate relationships with their audiences—their tone and language tended to be more informal, more familiar. On occasion, students who composed Facebook posts (or Tweets, or blog posts) also included links to videos or news articles their audiences could access to learn more about their issues, thus indirectly engaging with other genres as well. In a general sense, the multigenre project facilitated students’ development of genre memory; by engaging with multiple genres, students developed genre repertoires. And while the project did not transform students into genre experts, they were exposed to genres with/in which they may not have had previous experience composing. Finally, because almost all students presented their multigenre texts in online spaces, they had to consider the delivery of their texts in ways they may not have in other writing situations; they needed to make rhetorical decisions about how audiences would navigate their texts—would they provide directions, or would they encourage their audiences to navigate their own way through their texts?

But before I provide any analysis of students’ genre acts in order to demonstrate how rhetorical genre pedagogy and multigenre composition can facilitate this type of rhetorical work-play among students in the FYC course, I wish to first analyze one of my rhetorical genre
“projects”: our course syllabus. In the interchapter that follows, I engage in a close analysis of the syllabus I developed for these two sections of FYC, recognizing that as one of the first genres students take up in a university course, the syllabus has important implications, setting the tone for the course and shaping classroom interactions. Functioning as a social, rhetorical act in which instructor and students participate, the syllabus serves as the first “official” communication among all members of the course community. In my analysis, then, I seek to devote careful attention to the rhetorical choices I made when creating this syllabus, studying the text’s language, style, organization, and overall design and making inferences concerning how my performative acts with/in the genre construct our course, my students, and me in particular ways. Additionally, I argue that by presenting the course syllabus as an interactive, multivocal text, instructors can involve students in the process of constructing course expectations and goals, thereby establishing the course as a community in which instructor and students engage in a shared negotiation of meaning and in which all participants’ ideas are equally valued.
Many students walk into the FYC course—or any course, for that matter—with little idea of what to expect. They may have talked about the course or the instructor with other students or instructors, they may have checked the instructor’s statistics on RateMyProfessors.com, or they may have received an e-mail from the instructor welcoming them to the course and providing them with information about required course materials. But when students first enter the classroom and attempt to read this new environment, they must rely on limited background knowledge when determining how to act.

The two sections of FYC I taught during the fall 2010 semester met at 8 a.m. and 9:05 a.m., Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. With the exception of a few upperclassmen who were transfer students, that first Monday morning class meeting would be the first or second course of most of my students’ college careers. I thus felt a certain pressure to ensure that my students’ first experience was a positive one. After all, it wasn’t long ago that I first began my undergraduate studies, and I can easily recall my hesitation as I attempted to navigate the new, multiple discourse communities of my college experience. Before the first week of classes, I did a “practice run” to make sure I wouldn’t get lost walking to any of my classes; I memorized the campus map because I didn’t want to get caught carrying it, an action that would immediately implicate me as a newcomer, as someone who didn’t “fit in.” I wanted so desperately to look like I knew what I was doing—but I didn’t really know what that looked like.

Inviting students into the classroom community, the syllabus functions as an introductory text that provides an “orientation” to the course. In their FYC textbook *Scenes of Writing: Strategies for Composing within Genres*, Devitt, Reiff, and Bawarshi present the syllabus as a text that helps “set the scene of the course” and provides students with “early and important access to the ‘script’ of the course” (59). Because this genre is among the first students encounter within the context of a course, instructors must consider potential implications of their genre decisions. But before the syllabus reaches students’ hands (or their computer screens), this text supports the instructor, creating the impetus for rhetorical action and providing a context in which she designs a course that reflects her pedagogical values, explains and justifies course policies and procedures, and communicates to students the type of community and interpersonal relationships she wishes to promote.
As an instructor preparing to introduce rhetorical genre pedagogy in two sections of FYC I would teach in the fall semester, I knew I needed to devote considerable attention to developing my course syllabus. I found myself confronting a new rhetorical situation: determined to implement this new approach in the composition classroom, I needed to defend my pedagogical decisions—to myself, to the Director of Composition, and most importantly, to my students. Functioning as my initial response to this rhetorical situation, the syllabus provided an invention space in which I could—for the first time—share my ideas concerning my pedagogical focus with an audience other than myself. As I participated in a continuous process of drafting and revising this text, I strove to anticipate students’ potential responses, as well as their needs as student writers (many of whom would encounter my syllabus during the first week of their undergraduate studies).

Bawarshi analyzes the syllabus genre from a rhetorical genre studies perspective, asserting that course syllabi enable instructors’ focused invention: “Teachers invent their classes, themselves, as well as their students by locating themselves within the situated topoi of the syllabus, which functions both as the rhetorical instrument and the conceptual realm in which the FYW course is recognized and enacted” (126). A genre that operates as a site of invention and also actively participates in the instructor’s invention processes, the syllabus is more complex than we might initially perceive it; as students, we have become conditioned to obediently receive and read our course syllabi as texts that contain course schedules and important deadlines; details about course projects; information concerning course goals, expectations, and policies; etc. Influenced by the instructor’s linguistic, stylistic, organizational, and design decisions, the syllabus is important in shaping the classroom environment and negotiating relationships among members of the classroom community: “the syllabus plays a major role in establishing the ideological and discursive environment of the course, generating and enforcing the subsequent relations, subject positions, and practices teacher and students will perform during the course” (Bawarshi 119). The point of view and tone the instructor employs, for example, makes a statement about how he positions himself in relation to his students and can determine whether he intends for course participants to perceive themselves as belonging to a “community” of learners. Employing the third-person perspective when addressing students (“Students will…”) creates a distance—and, arguably, a hierarchy—between instructor and students; using the second-person pronoun “you” and/or the first-person plural “we” suggests
familiarity and, particularly concerning the use of “we,” constructs the classroom community as supportive and relationships between instructor and students as collaborative. Further, use of the first-person “I” demonstrates the instructor’s willingness to take responsibility for her rhetorical actions, establishing herself as the syllabus’s author and thus the designer of course projects and developer of course expectations and goals.

As a genre, the syllabus mediates relationships between teacher and student, student and student, student and course, and, perhaps to a lesser extent, student and the academy. Ultimately, the instructor composes the course syllabus, but larger institutional forces influence her decisions within this genre. Grading scales and academic honesty policies, for example, are developed at the university level and enforced at the course level; the instructor must make students aware of these and other university policies, and while she may have the freedom to determine how her syllabus will address these concerns, the syllabus—and the course itself—operates within ideologies established by the academy. Similarly, each course “belongs to” a particular disciplinary community (sometimes multiple communities) and must satisfy the unique desires (and policies) of the communities in which it is situated. All sections of FYC, a course often “belonging to” the English department but sometimes situated within individual disciplines (in WAC or WID models), must follow a common curriculum that determines types of projects assigned and outcomes for student learning, in addition to other course policies and requirements. In the syllabus, then, we hear the voices of instructor, academic discipline, and university, but student voices are relatively absent; student engagement with this genre is often characterized by passive reception, rather than active participation. By creating spaces that provide students opportunities to “speak” with/in the syllabus, instructors can legitimize student knowledge and perspectives and transform their syllabi into co-constructed, multivocal texts.

The final syllabus I distributed to students was a product of my acting (and playing) with/in the syllabus genre in order to respond to a specific rhetorical exigence; through my approach to discussing course content and objectives, defining student and teacher roles and responsibilities, and introducing students to rhetorical genre pedagogy—without naming it as such—I sought to enact rhetorical genre study through the course syllabus. If I intended to ask students to consider how their genre work functioned as effective rhetorical action, I knew I needed to take responsibility for my own rhetorical acts and engage in critical analysis of the texts I was producing for our course. Applying an RGS approach to the course syllabus, then,
enabled me to examine, at least from the position of instructor, the syllabus’s effectiveness in reaching my intended audience and fulfilling my rhetorical purposes.

In my attempt to privilege student voices and promote students’ active engagement with our course syllabus, while also providing students with an introduction to genre study, I took a few “creative liberties” when designing my FYC syllabus. With the exception of a few moments, my use of italics in the syllabus text introduces a second voice, arguably more playful and informal, that simultaneously serves to make my rhetorical decisions and genre choices explicit for students. This voice alerts students to my inclusion of the textboxes: “So, in case you haven’t noticed, this is an interactive syllabus...” (Welch, “English 111 Syllabus” 2) and attempts to demonstrate my active participation in the type of genre play I advocate for students: “…other times, you’ll ‘play with’ genres selected for you, manipulating them to fit your own purposes (as I’m attempting to do with the syllabus genre here) (Welch, “English 111 Syllabus” 2). Additionally, following the obligatory description of the course provided to me by the departmental curriculum, I include a passage in italics that seeks to establish a dialogue with students and provide a rationale for my decision to supplement this initial description with a more detailed discussion of our course: “While the description above provides a good overview of our course, I think it’s important that you know what exactly we’ll be doing throughout the semester. Writing, of course, is a given. But our course will involve much more than me assigning papers and you handing them in” (1). This passage marks the first moment in which I directly speak to students, using first- and second- person pronouns (I, we, and you).

By including textboxes that required students to respond to the syllabus and/or reflect on their own knowledge and experiences, I constructed an interactive text that encouraged active participation. I positioned these textboxes in such a way that the writing I was asking students to do corresponded directly with information preceding or following each textbox: After providing the composition curriculum’s description of the FYC course, for example, I included a textbox in which I asked students to “jot down your expectations for/thoughts about this course” (1). I chose to insert this textbox before my more detailed description of our course in hopes that students would compose their responses before reading my description—I didn’t want their responses to be clouded by what they thought I “wanted” them to expect or think. At the same time, I hoped the act of responding to this writing prompt would encourage students to critically
explore the English department’s objectives for student learning, as well as its expectations of them as FYC students.

Directly following my discussion of how “our class definition of writing will be flexible” and how “we’ll talk about how our individual definitions of writing are similar to or conflict with the definition(s) the whole class develops,” a second textbox asks students to compose their own definitions of writing and develop five criteria for “good writing” based on their ideas and experiences. By emphasizing that there are “no wrong answers” to the question, this prompt eliminates the possibility of failure and reassures students that this is a low-stakes writing situation (2). Additionally, I hoped that by discussing with students their responses to this question, I could learn something about their previous experiences with writing.

Keeping with the course focus on genre, another textbox asks students to provide their personal definitions of genre, encouraging them to “think about the situations in which you’ve encountered the word genre or what genres you’re familiar with” (2). This textbox follows my discussion of how we will address genre in our course and affords students a space in which they can both respond to this discussion and reflect on the genre knowledge they already possess, thus activating their prior knowledge. The fourth and final textbox asks students to develop three personal goals they hope to achieve through their work in the FYC course; within the syllabus text, I introduce students to the curriculum’s goals for student learning, but this textbox allows students to consider how they might personally benefit from this course the university requires that they take. The process of articulating their goals also forces students to reflect on their needs as writers and determine what they need to focus on in order to improve their writing abilities.

After having students “fill in” their responses to the “writing prompts” provided through the syllabus’s textboxes for homework, I facilitated a whole-class discussion with students during our second class meeting. Selecting course goals, definitions of writing (and “good writing”), and definitions of genre, I asked students to select a response to one of these three categories to write on the board. We then discussed students’ responses and had an informal conversation about students’ experiences with writing prior to the FYC course. Following that conversation (and a very brief discussion about the play in which I attempted to engage in our course syllabus), I asked students to work in pairs to analyze syllabi from other courses.
CHAPTER 2
Discovery through Disruption: Expressivism, Rhetoric, and Multigenre Texts

―Tired of having his head crammed with other people’s words, and tired of the strict formalism he had been taught, Montaigne sought a way to write that was informal, skeptical, and unsure.”
–Paul Lynch

At the end of Chapter 1, I explained that my decision to implement an RGS approach in the FYC course was based on my hope that by exploring (and gaining recognition of) different genres’ rhetorical potential, students could more easily transfer the knowledge and skills they developed in our course to other composing situations in which they would participate. If students could perceive their completion of major projects and other composing tasks as representative of their active, rhetorical engagement with multiple genres, I thought, they could begin to understand the FYC course as not just a hurdle to jump, not just a requirement they must fulfill in order to continue their studies, but also a foundation, an environment that affords them opportunities to “try out” different approaches to composition by interacting with genres they may not have always had access to in previous composing situations.

What’s your definition of writing? Below, write a concise definition of writing. Then, write at least five criteria for “good writing,” based on your own ideas and experiences. (No wrong answers here.)

As I discussed in Inter-chapter 1, by including the above textbox in our course syllabus, I hoped to encourage students to closely consider their personal views about writing. This “writing prompt” followed a segment of the course description through which I attempted to address the difficulty of arriving at one, all-encompassing definition of writing with which everyone agrees. I explained that “our class definition of writing will be flexible, and we will make changes to it throughout the semester as we engage in different types of writing” (Welch, “English 111 Syllabus” 2). While I neglected to elaborate upon what I meant by “different types of writing,” I hoped—like any composition instructor invested in her students’ growth as writers—that through their participation in this genre-centered composition course, students would question, complicate and revise their definitions of writing.
“You never know when writing can determine your future.” –Allison Norenberg

Allison attributed her presence at our university—and thus in our classroom—to the writing she composed for an audience of women’s soccer coaches. In her “This I Believe about Writing” essay—a brief, 300-500-word text my students composed the first week of class—Allison discussed her experience “selling [her]self” to university soccer programs: “I went into this thinking that my playing style would sell me to the school, not the way I wrote” (Norenberg, Interview; Norenberg, “This I Believe about Writing”). My interview with Allison gave me the opportunity to learn more about her process of getting recruited and establishing communication with coaches. Allison, a student athlete and arguably one of the strongest writers in my class, detailed the extensive writing and revision in which she engaged as a high school senior—all for the purpose of putting herself in the running for an athletic scholarship. Once she narrowed her search to ten schools for whom she was interested in playing, Allison began the process of contacting coaches. Her initial e-mail to each coach expressed her interest in the university’s soccer program, informed the coach of her current academic standing, and discussed her soccer statistics. She then collaborated with her father to make a video that showcased her soccer abilities; she also developed a player profile (similar to a résumé) to share with coaches. As she designed and submitted texts to fulfill the expectations of university coaches, Allison was, unknowingly, completing a multigenre project. Reflecting on the experience during our interview, she recognized similarities between her soccer “project” and the multigenre project she completed in our course and, with the rhetorical knowledge she now possesses, could identify the rhetorical appeals present in her communications with university soccer coaches (Norenberg, Interview).

As I designed our composition course, I attempted to create an environment in which students could, like Allison did, see their texts as rhetorical and themselves as rhetoricians, as individuals capable of participating in social, rhetorical action. And I believed an explicit focus on genre would help students perceive the texts they produced (in our course and in other contexts) as rhetorical acts and sites of action, rather than as the results of their efforts to follow a

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8 Following the genre of NPR’s “This I Believe” project, I asked students to “reflect on a specific belief you have about writing, drawing from personal experience(s) as you question why/how you have come to hold this belief (Welch, “Inquiry 1: Self Inquiry/Reflection,” emphasis in original). Focusing on a specific text or communication experience, students wrote about how correspondences with pen pals, course assignments, a letter written to a mother after an ugly fight, journal entries, Facebook message exchanges, the sending and receiving of supportive e-mails with a friend after the loss of a loved one shaped their understandings of and attitudes toward writing.
formula or fill a container. While my students’ prior literacy experiences were varied, I learned through a brief whole-class discussion at the beginning of the semester that the genre knowledge most students brought to our course was similar to that Kyle and Allison expressed (7-8, in this text)—primarily literary and based on an understanding of texts they encountered as readers, as opposed to those they created as writers. In an effort to complicate this shared understanding, I sought to introduce students to a diversity of genres; each of the five major projects in our course provided students with opportunities to practice and play with/in a different genre (or—in the case of the multigenre project—with/in multiple genres). Anticipating that students would experience more difficulty perceiving as rhetorical those genres with which they considered themselves familiar, I was perhaps most committed to challenging students’ understanding of the “academic essay.”

While expectations for the essay genre differ across academic disciplines and other discourse communities, I assigned an “academic essay” in the FYC course because I thought if I could help students recognize their essays as meaningful acts of rhetoric—as texts participating in a conversation and responding to a socially-constructed rhetorical exigence—they could develop greater confidence composing with/in this genre and learn to manipulate the essay to fulfill their rhetorical purposes and effectively address the rhetorical situations established through different assignment prompts and other genres student writers take up. In our course, the public debate essay—the academic essay students composed—was the third major writing project of the semester. This project, according to our English department’s FYC curriculum, requires students to conduct primary and secondary research and articulate an original, rhetorical argument concerning a current public issue affecting them and/or the communities with which they associate themselves. Individual instructors determine the genre and form each project will take, often allowing for student choice. I chose to present the public debate project as a “traditional” academic essay but was careful to emphasize that the academic essay is not a static genre, that expectations differ across disciplines, and that there is no one “right way” to compose with/in the genre. In the assignment sheet students received, I provided a rationale for asking them to engage with the academic essay, explaining that “this is a genre you’ll encounter across academic disciplines, albeit in different ways” (Welch, “Inquiry 3: Issue Inquiry/Public

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9 I am somewhat hesitant to name the “academic essay” as a genre; recognizing disciplinary differences in definitions of and expectations for the “essay,” perhaps we could consider the “essay” as a “genre umbrella” that encompasses several discipline- and context-specific genres.
Persuasion‖). Further, I informed students that our treatment of the academic essay would likely complicate—and perhaps challenge—their previous understanding of academic writing in important ways.

My approach to complicating student perceptions of academic writing centered on students’ engagement with genres they might not readily identify as “academic.” Relying on the unfamiliar in order to alter students’ understanding of the familiar, I assigned a multigenre remediation project through which students addressed the same public issues they explored in their public debate essays. This project, I hoped, would allow students to practice and play with/in several genres simultaneously and force them to make conscious, rhetorical decisions concerning each genre’s unique contributions to a larger rhetorical argument. As the fourth project of the semester, this unit of study—Media Inquiry/Remediation—asks students to “remediate” a text they have already created (often for the FYC course), playing with the rhetorical situations in which they compose and working with/in new genres and/or media to present their ideas in new ways, to new audiences. The project also requires students to reflect on their rhetorical decision-making by justifying the choices they made in composing these texts. Thus, to present successful multigenre texts, students would need to think critically about the rhetorical situations in which they positioned their texts, as well as how their rhetorical action with/in individual genres could respond to these new situations in different ways. But rather than asking students to complete the public debate and multigenre remediation projects “in order,” I disrupted the course’s linear flow by asking students to begin the multigenre project after completing only one draft of the public debate essay—they would return to their drafts after having completed their multigenre texts. I intended for this “rearrangement” to allow students more opportunities to play with the construction and presentation of their arguments before finalizing their public debate essays, as well as to help them more critically consider the rhetorical situations in which they compose.

Reflecting on the project, Allison explained how she saw the two projects—the public debate essay and the multigenre project—working, as she put it, “hand-in-hand”:

I personally liked [the order in which the two projects were completed] because the paper helped me organize my thoughts…just having that being a draft and then going into Inquiry 4 [the multigenre project] and doing more research on the topic, having that time, and getting to think about the different genres and the
different perspectives I was looking at—it just helped me go back to my paper. It was almost kind of like a checklist, just to make sure that I was covering… This [the multigenre project] helped me realize that I was covering every point that I wanted to, from every perspective. (Norenberg, Interview)

Allison provided much-needed reassurance that my decision to ask students to interrupt their writing processes was at least not completely irrational. Further, her reference to the multigenre project as a “checklist” seems to suggest she perceived this assignment as a type of invention or revision for the public debate essay. By explaining that the project “helped [her] realize that [she] was covering every point that [she] wanted to, from every perspective,” Allison seems to suggest that without the multigenre project, she may not have felt as confident about the arguments she presented in her public debate essay; perhaps this “checklist” provided her a means by which she could evaluate her essay’s effectiveness. Allison’s emphasis on time is also interesting. In addition to the research she conducted and the new genres and perspectives with which she experimented, Allison found the time she spent completing the project useful in terms of how it influenced her thinking about the issue she was studying. When designing the project, I had not considered the value of its creating opportunities for reflection, for providing students time “to think,” as Allison explains. But perhaps the process(es) of remediating their arguments afforded students participation in productive, less restricting composing environments in which they could actively reflect on their ideas—and the articulation of those ideas—that they may not have experienced had they completed the public debate project prior to beginning work on their multigenre texts. Allison’s response seems to suggest that the insertion of the multigenre project between the first and final drafts of the public debate essay offered students more opportunities to research, to develop and reframe their arguments, to invent, to revise, and perhaps most importantly, to think.

The academic essay does not always encourage us to engage in the type of thinking Allison discusses. The linearity and structure we often associate with the school essay can feel confining, and we tend to perceive the genre as forcing us to succinctly articulate our arguments before we’ve had the chance to fully explore them. And despite the urgings of instructors, many of us—myself included—are hesitant to “just start with the body of your essay and return to the introduction later.” Yet this process shift is precisely what the multigenre project requires of writers. The nature of multigenre composition encourages writers to “[delay] clarification of
meaning” to explore a subject or issue before (and sometimes instead of) reaching a definitive conclusion (Jung 3, emphasis in original). For those FYC students who have been taught to always be sure of themselves and “clear” in their expression of ideas, abandoning certainty in favor of delaying meaning is no easy task.

The blankness of a new page never fails to intrigue and terrify me. Sometimes, in fact, I think my habit of writing on long yellow sheets comes from an atavistic fear of the writer’s stereotypic ‘blank white page.’ At least when I begin writing, my page has a wash of color on it, even if the absence of words must finally be faced on a yellow sheet as much as on a blank white one. We all have our ways of whistling in the dark.” –Patricia Hampl

Recently, my students turned in the first draft of a writing project. Before class began, I overheard one student complain to another: “I just stared at the screen for hours last night!” I could sympathize. I used to—and sometimes still do—draft on graph paper. The blank computer screen has always defeated me, and lined white paper feels too bounded. The graph paper provides me the lines if I want to use them, without forcing the issue.

Multigenre composition, I would argue, eliminates that ever-taunting cursor on the blank page, blinking back at us as we try to begin. Of course, multigenre does not equate abandonment of alphabetic texts, but it does free writers from a linear writing process, from that dreaded introductory paragraph, that arduous task of beginning “at the beginning,” when our thoughts are usually jumbled somewhere “in the middle.” We have trouble remembering that blank page—the one we find so intimidating—is a mere construction. Because of its physical blankness, it is “mythologized as an unmarked space waiting to be marked” (Bawarshi 3). Alone and abandoned in the immediate writing situation, we often struggle to perceive ourselves as entering into dialogue: the “blankness” suggested by the new Word document or fresh sheet of paper “[masks] the fact of its specification in discursive and ideological conventions, including genres, which already situate it, mark it” (3). While multigenre work does not free us from the initial blankness of a not-yet-begun project, it enables us to select our own position from which to begin, and it helps us understand our genre actions as rhetorical in ways that the academic essay may not.
Because the multigenre project, as a nonlinear text, more readily accommodates creative play and invention, our engagement with the project—and with multiple genres—heightens our awareness of the social conversations within which we situation our texts: “Positing genre in addition to the writer as the locus of invention suggests that invention is not only a process of introspection but also a process of socialization, a process of positioning oneself within and managing one’s way through a set of relations, commitments, practices, and subjectivities” (Bawarshi 76). In order to support students’ acts of positioning, I suggested they view the multigenre project as a “campaign,” a collection of materials they would develop for the purpose of convincing audience(s) to support their cause or think differently about their issue. Providing students opportunities to revise the arguments they presented in their public debate essays, the multigenre project required students to develop five genres: for the first genre, students developed a commercial or PSA (either audio or video); for the second genre, they composed a brochure or a flyer advertising an event related to their issue; for the third genre, students wrote a letter, either to someone with authority to influence change concerning the issue or to the editor of a newspaper or magazine whose readership might include their intended audience; for the fourth genre, students chose to compose a series of Facebook status updates, Tweets, or blog posts concerning their issue. The final genre, “create-a-genre,” provided students an opportunity to actually create a new genre or select a different genre that was “doing something that [their] other genres [weren’t] able to do”10 (Welch, “Inquiry 4: Media Inquiry/Remediation”). The assignment sheet provided students a rationale:

This project will give you the opportunity to apply your ideas from your Inquiry 3 public debate essay to address ‘real’ audiences, challenging you to think about how arguments must be presented in different ways to meet the needs of different audiences. You’ll practice using elements of rhetoric we studied during the Inquiry 2 unit on rhetorical analysis, thinking critically about how various genres can perform rhetorical action. (Welch, “Inquiry 4: Media Inquiry/Remediation”)

My use of the verb practice suggests that students’ rhetorical engagement with genre is more important than their mastery of any single genre. I designed the project not with the intention of

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10 Initially, I wanted students to develop “a genre we haven’t seen before” by “[drawing] from the different writing styles and Englishes you possess, as well as your knowledge of various already-existing genres” (Welch, “Inquiry 4: Media Inquiry/Remediation”). However, many students were very resistant to and confused by this idea of creating a genre, and I thus felt pressure to revise this portion of the assignment and instead present the fifth genre as “select-a-genre.”
producing student writers who count themselves experts in composing with/in multiple genres, but rather, with a goal of students developing a more complex understanding of how to engage with multiple audiences, sort through multiple perspectives on an issue, and gain a more thorough understanding of the various rhetorical situations in which they communicate. I encouraged students to draw from their diverse strengths and interests to complete the project, and to step outside the familiarity of the academic essay. I wanted them to think about genre differently than they may have prior to the course. I wanted them to understand they could be producers of these texts just as easily as they could be consumers.

My project design reflects three major concerns: 1.) I wanted to encourage students to consider multiple perspectives surrounding the issues they chose to research and write about, rather than focusing on two predominant points of view and presenting one as “right” and one as “wrong”; 2.) I wanted to introduce students to new approaches for conceptualizing and engaging in revision; and 3.) I wanted to “free” students from their reliance on formulaic approaches to writing, without making them feel as if the way they were taught to write in high school (whether the five-paragraph essay or a different approach) was “wrong.” We tend to hold on to that which we know and understand—in telling students to disregard this “formula,” then, we might as well be prying it from their hands. Because of its reification and standardization through testing, the essay—a genre incoming university students would most quickly identify as “belonging” in the writing classroom—is perceived by students as a set of rules to follow, but rarely as a genre that enables them to address real rhetorical situations and enact change. And for most students, the genre never becomes more than a course assignment or the written portion of an exam. As students, we have become somewhat conditioned to understand essays as texts we compose in order to demonstrate (to instructors) our understanding of a subject or, particularly in the context of standardized tests, to prove our ability to effectively articulate our ideas by employing a predefined form. And while I knew most of my FYC students would walk into my class with this understanding of the essay and perhaps just as many would walk out at the end of the semester with the same understanding; nevertheless, I wanted to at least attempt to show students that essays can be dynamic and interesting, that they don’t have to be static and boring. Attempting. Isn’t that what the FYC course is about, anyway?

It was in a French literature course that I was first introduced to Montaigne’s *Essais* and finally—after seven years of studying French—understood the connection between the English
word essay and the French verb essayer, meaning “to try” or “to attempt.” As a class, we read and analyzed a few of Montaigne’s essays, addressing his treatment of the subject of education, as well as discussing the unique qualities of his texts and the significant differences between his approach to essay-writing and the ways we had been taught to write. Lynch, in his essay “The Sixth Paragraph: A Re-vision of the Essay,” argues that Montaigne referred to his texts as essais “because he knew he was simply testing out ideas” (291). If Montaigne, whom we might hail as the inventor of the essay (or at least the Westerner who coined the term), “was naming more of an action than a thing” and perceived his writing as attempts, trials, experiments, then why, I wondered, don’t teachers continue to teach the essay this way? (Lynch 293).

By emphasizing the recursivity of the writing process and encouraging student writers to devote attention to deep, significant revision, we can begin to approach the wandering exploration and discovery that seem to characterize Montaigne’s texts. As writing teachers, we can—in small ways—work against those definitions of and approaches to writing furthered by standardized testing and provide students access to composing situations in which they feel “safe” experimenting with their ideas and their texts. Like the essai for Montaigne, the multigenre project in our composition course established for students such a “safe” space in which they could “test out” different arguments, different approaches to writing, different genres.

Viewing multigenre texts as sites in which writers invent, we might understand the writer’s act of creating a multigenre text as a process of “finding something to say.” Just as Montaigne’s essais do not possess clear, concise thesis statements, multigenre texts resist definitive conclusions and instead privilege the exploration of possibilities that can lead to discovery. As a first-year undergraduate student completing a multigenre project, I consulted Tom Romano’s Blending Genre, Altering Style: Writing Multigenre Papers, at the suggestion of my FYC instructor. I’m no longer able to recall why she loaned me this text, but my perfectionist leanings (at least as far as writing is concerned), coupled with an obsession with approaching tasks the “right” way and a tendency to ask a few too many questions (likely byproducts of that perfectionism) may have contributed. And five years later, when I decided to implement a multigenre project in my own FYC classes, I turned to this text once again. A strong advocate of multigenre composition, Romano provides a useful definition of multigenre, one he also shares with students:
A multigenre paper arises from research, experience, and imagination. It is not an uninterrupted, expository monolog nor a seamless narrative nor a collection of poems. A multigenre paper is composed of many genres and subgenres, each piece self-contained, making a point of its own, yet connected by theme or topic and sometimes by language, images, and content. In addition to many genres, a multigenre paper may also contain many voices, not just the author’s. The trick is to make such a paper hang together. (x-xi)

This potential for interruption, for seams, for multivocality is what led me to assign a multigenre project in my FYC classes. I hoped students would recognize that writers do not always need to engage with traditionally “academic” discourses to present strong, compelling arguments; that in some situations, a lack of “flow” can be productive; and that writers possess and draw from multiple voices and styles when composing texts, not just one. Additionally, I hoped that through this process of engaging with alternative discourses, disrupting linear composition, and manipulating a variety of writer personas, students would develop new strategies for approaching academic essays.

In many respects, then, I advocate multigenre composition for the same reasons that Romano developed the multigenre pedagogy he continues to share—through both teaching and scholarship—with students and teachers alike. Following Romano, I recognize that the act of composing multigenre texts encourages students to practice with approaches to writing they may not initially conceive of as “appropriate” for academic contexts. The multigenre project provides a context in which the student can explore a subject of interest through participation in primary and secondary research and subsequently chronicle that exploration through engagement with multiple genres. By emphasizing both play and risk-taking, Romano’s approach pushes students out of their comfort zones and forces them to experiment with unfamiliar genres, but it also affords students a learning environment in which they can draw from their unique strengths and interests as they navigate—and construct—“new” approaches to composition.

My rationale for assigning a multigenre project departs from Romano’s definition somewhat by assuming a primarily rhetorical, rather than aesthetic focus. While Romano’s theory recognizes that different genres are “driven by different purposes” and are “doing different rhetorical work,” his theoretical lens is largely expressivist (21). Emphasizing the importance of students’ self-expression and experimentation with multiple voices and writing
styles, Romano tends to view student engagement with genres as acts of discovery. Ideally, through the creation of multigenre texts, students discover themselves—as writers with unique, individual voices, capable of composing with/in new and unfamiliar genres; they discover (and present) multiple perspectives and new knowledge concerning a research subject they have selected; and they discover that the act of composing can inspire not only feelings of pain, but also those of pleasure. While my approach to multigenre is more explicitly rhetorical than expressivist, I do not intend to contest Romano’s arguments; rather, I wish to argue that by assuming a rhetorical understanding of multigenre, we as writing teachers can encourage students to engage in acts of self-expression and discovery as they seek to become involved in important social conversations and participate in rhetorical action. In other words, when students choose to engage in expressivist writing, they learn to do so in ways that are deliberately rhetorical; their use of multiple voices, of personal narratives, of autobiographical writing thus becomes rhetorical moves in the multigenre text.

As the teacher testimonies in *Blending Genre, Altering Style* attest, Romano’s model of multigenre writing, among other objectives, seeks to instill (or perhaps in some cases, to rekindle) in students a love for writing. And just as Romano is concerned with students’ enjoyment of the writing process, it seems that because his approach is concerned with the aesthetic value of multigenre texts, the audience’s level of enjoyment with the text is equally important. When he discusses the challenge of making a multigenre paper “hang together”—of achieving unity within the text—Romano seems to place more emphasis on the reader’s ease of comprehension than on the rhetorical action in which the text is engaged. Successful multigenre texts, according to Romano, must possess “unifying elements,” such as repeated images or narratives that carry from one genre to others and help the writer present a single, unified text (“Multigenre Research Paper” 2). Viewing “an absence of unity” as “the major problem” in students’ multigenre texts, Romano encourages students to incorporate such recurring elements “because [multigenre papers] can be so demanding to read and because they lack traditional transitions found in regular research papers” (*Blending Genre* 149). He explains that “multigenre papers defy most readers’ expectations. Multigenre writers, therefore, must be doubly careful to orient readers quickly and supply information that will help them build meaning the further they read” (Romano, *Blending Genre* 33). Romano presents the multigenre project as an alternative to the “regular research paper,” but he also argues that writers of multigenre texts must continue to
cater to the expectations of the “research paper reader” by providing cues that demonstrate for this reader the interconnections among the text’s multiple genres. Further, in the assignment description for a multigenre project given to students in an advanced-level education course, Romano seems to suggest that the writer must establish an emotional connection with his audience through the multigenre text: “I want to read your paper and be informed, but even more, I want to be moved” (“Multigenre Research Paper,” original emphasis). What does it mean to move a reader? Aren’t different audiences moved in different ways, through different means? What moves Tom Romano, the students’ immediate audience, may or may not move other audiences who might more practically benefit from the texts students create. While such an approach could be useful, particularly when teaching pathetic appeals, my assignment design reflects a desire for students to take their texts one step further by constructing rhetorical arguments that not only appeal to their audiences, but also prompt these audiences—move them—to engage in rhetorical action and/or revise their opinions concerning the issue at hand.

Thus far, I have argued that by allowing writers to present multiple perspectives on an issue and address their arguments to different audiences, multigenre texts create new possibilities for writers’ invention and subsequent rhetorical action. Following Julie Jung’s “rhetorical-cultural” theorization of revision, which holds that “revision is a process of delaying consensus so that conflicts can be sustained, analyzed, and understood” and understands the primary goal of revision as “[understanding] the differences that exist between writers and readers” and “[exploring] the roots of disagreement,” I wish to also explore how multigenre composition can function as a strategy for revision (9). Similar to Romano, Jung advocates multigenre writing as an alternative to more traditional approaches to composition, but rather than focusing on multigenre’s potential for promoting discovery, expression, and knowledge acquisition (“writing to learn”) she is more concerned with the possibilities multigenre offers for revision, presenting the multigenre text “as an example of an inherently disruptive and therefore potentially revisionary written form” (xiii). Whereas Romano’s theory emphasizes moving one’s reader, Jung proposes an approach that hinges on disorienting the reader. Multigenre texts, asserts Jung, “prevent traditionally coherent readings because their juxtaposed genres eschew linear

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11I should note that Romano himself does not explicitly argue that the multigenre project should replace the research paper; rather, he seems to present the multigenre text as a potential alternative approach to the traditional academic essay—a different type of composing situation that allows students to practice different types of writing and explore ideas with/in different genre sites.
transitions. By encountering texts that are not obviously whole and unified, readers are asked to confront their confusions by reading more fully and contextually” (34). For Jung, multigenre composition places new, different demands on actors; the effectiveness of a multigenre text depends upon a rhetorical understanding of the relationship between writer and reader and necessitates a re-visioning of these actors’ roles in the rhetorical situation. Because the reader is expected to assume an active role in the construction of meaning, the writer does not possess sole responsibility for ensuring the reader’s comprehension. In fact, Jung would argue that any attempt to “ensure comprehension” would be at odds with multigenre texts’ potential to generate confusion; rather than viewing reader confusion as something to be prevented through careful revision of one’s text, Jung presents confusion as productive insofar as it requires readers to assume more responsibility and creates opportunities for active response, in turn demanding deeper revision from writers (3).

On its own, the academic essay affords writers few opportunities to create the sort of disruption Jung advocates; the genre is adaptable, of course, but it also demands “clarity” and “logical” organization—it often requires topic sentences and transitions that spell out the writer’s thought processes. Writers traditionally possess most of the responsibility for communication and must construct their texts in ways that support audience understanding. Jung’s theory breaks from this notion, highlighting multigenre texts’ potential for promoting what Krista Radcliffe terms “rhetorical listening”: “By refusing to ‘fit in’ to the conventions of any one genre or subfield, and yet by building alliances with several different genres at once, multigenre texts demand new and better kinds of listening” (Jung xiii). In addition to the possibilities it offers for revision, this quality of multigenre texts as “not belonging” to any one genre also defies our expectations concerning the text’s arrangement and delivery.

The instructions I provided students for composing the writer’s memo for their multigenre project included this final sentence: “This will serve as a guide to your audience as they navigate through your multigenre project” (Welch, “Inquiry 4: MedialInquiry/Remediation”). By suggesting that audiences must receive “maps” in order to successfully make their way through students’ multigenre texts, was I underestimating students’ ability to construct texts that readers/viewers can easily understand? Romano would assert that in the context of the classroom environment, such a guide is necessary for ensuring readers’ comprehension. Jung, however, would argue that because the multigenre text demands
audiences’ active participation in the construction of meaning—and because it is often through the reader’s confusion that meaning is generated—readers, not writers, possess responsibility for determining how they will approach and interact with the text. But the multigenre texts students composed in my course differed from those that Romano and Jung discuss. My students did not place their multiple genres within the frame of linear essays; rather, I asked students to select a single “overarching genre” (not an essay) that could serve as a “site” through which their audience could access all their genres simultaneously. Most students chose to use WordPress blogs, a few used Facebook organization pages, and two students designed their multigenre projects as scrapbooks.¹²

For those students who decided to present their texts in online spaces, navigation became an important rhetorical consideration, influencing both arrangement and delivery. During an in-class introduction to creating and using WordPress blogs, I demonstrated some possible approaches students could take when organizing their genres within the blog space, urging them to consider their rhetorical situations and the needs of their intended audiences when making decisions concerning the delivery of their multigenre texts. But because I did not set aside enough course time for this project, I was not able to address the rhetorical significance of students’ overarching genres as thoroughly as I would have liked. And thus, for some students, blog spaces and Facebook pages functioned as “containers” in which they placed their genres—seemingly at the last minute—rather than as sites of rhetorical action. However, regardless of how students perceived their overarching genres, when grading students’ projects, I found myself navigating their multigenre texts in different ways based on their organizational and design choices.

Each student who used a Facebook page as her overarching genre manipulated the genre differently. Some students, like Gabby, invited their classmates and other friends to join their Facebook groups and then encouraged these group members to engage in discussions about the issue in this online space; others provided suggestions for how group members could take action concerning the issue and reminded them to invite their friends to join the cause. Because students often asked (or, in some cases, demanded) that their friends comment on their wall posts, these online conversations were anything but organic; posting because they felt obligated to rather than

¹² The project assignment sheet presents blogs and Facebook pages as examples of possible “overarching genres” but does not limit students to these two options. However, students were hesitant to “try out” other approaches to organizing their genres.
because they wanted to, group members’ responses often seemed somewhat forced. Ryan created a Facebook group titled “Nurses: For or Against Health Reform,” and while she did not invite friends to join the group, she established an interactive space in which potential users could become more knowledgeable about the issue and voice their concerns. Ryan also went beyond the assignment expectations by providing her audience links to online news articles and videos, in addition to information about an event being held on our university’s campus. Rather than trying to convince Facebook users to take a strong stance concerning the healthcare debate based on her own opinions or on general research she conducted, Ryan—a nursing student—relied on nurses’ perspectives to frame her multigenre text. The delivery of her argument thus became multivocal; she inserted her own ideas into the text, but she also incorporated nurses’ voices in her multigenre text.

My decision to interrupt their work on the public debate project forced students to examine their issues from several perspectives and points of view; complicate their arguments; employ diverse styles and voices; make creative, rhetorical choices; and anticipate audience responses through their development and presentation of multigenre texts. But I also created chaos: students struggled to understand why I wanted them to start working on a new project when they hadn’t yet finished the previous project, and as I reflect upon my rhetorical decisions, I wish I had been more explicit about why I was asking students to put aside their public debate essays and begin composing multigenre texts. First, if I could have demonstrated to students how the multigenre project could help them revise and complicate the ideas they were presenting in their academic essays, they may have decided to work on these two projects simultaneously. They may have become more conscious of the relationship between the public debate essay and the multigenre text, and they may have attempted to apply rhetorical actions, stylistic moves, or other unique approaches from their multigenre texts to their public debate essays. The following
Inter-chapter provides a stylistic analysis of my multigenre project assignment sheet, drawing from the perspectives of student, writing center consultant, and instructor in its critique of the assignment prompt. Ultimately, I seek to offer a redesign of the assignment, reflecting on the changes I would make to the assignment were I to teach the multigenre project again.
INTER-CHAPTER 2
Not Just for Decoration: Style as Integral to the First-Year Composition Assignment

“If we want students to produce meaningful writing, we must design meaningful assignments, tasks that encourage students to use writing to act.” – Erika Lindemann

Scene 1: What I—Your Student—Think about this Multigenre Project

For this project, you’ll “remediate” your Inquiry 3 project into a multigenre/multimodal text.

Multigenre? Multimodal? “Remediate?” Umm...I’ve never heard these words before—USE ENGLISH! I mean, what exactly do you want me to do? You seemed so excited when you told us about this project in class... Clearly, I’m missing something. [Sigh.]

This project will give you the opportunity to...

Opportunity? Seriously? Is that the best you’ve got? PUH-LEEZE [eye roll], it’s more like you’re forcing me to do it. Spare me the sugarcoating. I’ll decide for myself if I think this is an opportunity.

...apply your ideas from your Inquiry 3 public debate essay to address “real” audiences, challenging you to think about how arguments must be presented in different ways to meet the needs of different audiences...

Wait, why is this important? If you’re the one grading my project, why should I try to “meet the needs” [air quotes] of audiences who probably won’t ever even see my project? P.S.: Your quotation marks around real make me think you might feel the same. Am I right?

You’ll practice using elements of rhetoric we studied during the Inquiry 2 unit on rhetorical analysis, thinking critically about how various genres can perform rhetorical action...

Okay, but who cares? How is this project useful to me? I get how it connects to other projects in this class, but will I ever actually need to know how to do this stuff in “real” [air quotes] situations?

[ Silence. ]

Scene 2: “Do You Have Your Assignment Sheet?”

Narrator: One student locates a few notes scribbled on a sheet of notebook paper, the only remaining proof that her assignment actually exists. She explains that her instructor gave the class verbal directions but never presented them with an assignment sheet. At the next table, a student fishes to the bottom of his backpack to “reel in” the assignment sheet that has made its
home there. At still another table, a student retrieves a three-page, long-winded, academese-riddled Word document detailing project parameters.

My critical interrogation of assignment prompts began when I became an undergraduate writing center consultant. Of course, I do not intend to suggest that as a student writer I have never encountered poorly designed, perplexing assignments (or, at the other end of the spectrum, those I could easily identify as well-designed). Rather, my role as a consultant—an individual who, among other responsibilities assumed, functions as a mediator between student and assignment—brought about my realization that an assignment sheet is not simply a document. Assignment sheets participate in the construction of teachers, of students, and of their relationships with one another; further, they are integral to the writing process, influencing student writers’ inventive work and helping them comprehend the rhetorical situations in which their instructors ask them to compose. By collaborating with students as a peer, rather than as an instructor, and observing their uptake of the assignment prompt genre as they invent, draft, and revise their own texts, I can discern flaws in assignment design I may not recognize were I in the position of instructor or student.

As instructors, we all define the assignment genre differently—a contract between teacher and student, an invitation to join a discourse community or “try out” an approach to composition, a set of directions to follow, a recommendation for how one might proceed, a checklist, a timeline. First-year university students, who are simultaneously enrolled in courses across as many as six disciplinary areas, regularly experience a diversity of assignment designs and must “make sense” of what we’re asking them to do. Reminding us that student texts operate as individual responses to a composing situation we write into existence, Erika Lindemann encourages composition instructors to stop and critically examine our assignment design before blaming/punishing students for what we perceive as errors in their uptake of an assignment: “Because each composition represents a response to a specific ‘invitation’ to write, the problems in many papers may be the fault, not of the writer, but of the assignment” (Lindemann 207).

When we design an assignment and present it to our students, we initiate a particular dialogue—we commence a conversation with our students that then influences the entire writing process. In an ideal situation, instructor and students interact as equal participants in this conversation, sharing responsibility for communication and shifting between the roles of reader and writer. Reflecting on my own instruction, however, I question how often I actually achieve this ideal,
dialogic relationship with my students. I worry that as composition instructors, we—or at least I—do not place enough importance on an assignment’s capacity to shape teacher-student relationships.

The dialogue presented earlier thus represents an attempt to imagine potential (albeit exaggerated) student responses to a previously assigned writing project and, in doing so, identify problems inherent in my assignment design, problems that may have affected student understanding and interest, problems that may have compromised student agency, as well as the reciprocal, collaborative teacher-student relationship I sought to establish. The act of constructing (and now performing) this conversation reminds me to hold myself accountable for my stylistic choices and interrogate their implications. For instance, what does my word choice suggest about my relationship to the assignment and how I think students should perceive their relationship to the assignment? What does my use of should in that last sentence say about how I perceive my relationship to students? How does the text’s organization affect student understanding? What prior knowledge do I assume that perhaps I should not? Do I construct the writing situation in such a way that students will find the act of composing a worthwhile endeavor?

I recognize that my approach to this assignment analysis is a bit “backward”—I am critically analyzing the assignment after students have already completed their texts, rather than prior to my sharing the assignment with students. My hope, however, is that through this analysis, I will determine how to better present the assignment to future students. As I seek to improve my assignment design, I must wear all three hats simultaneously—student, writing center consultant, and instructor—and consider how these different subject positions affect how I approach and respond to assignments.

From the perspective of instructor/writer, my primary concern is whether I successfully communicate the writing situation to students. But because this successful communication depends on several factors—document design/organization, linguistic choices, attention to genre, etc.—it might be more productive to start with the student perspective. (I’ll try to not exaggerate so much this time.) I should offer a few caveats, though: My instructor, student, and writing center consultant selves never exist in complete isolation from each other, as will soon be abundantly clear—I sometimes cannot determine which “self” is delivering the criticism. Further, I constructed the student conversation that follows for the purpose of this text, and thus
my desire to imagine student responses competes with my interest in entertaining you, as well as with my need to communicate certain arguments.

**Scene 3: Coffee Shop—Students Commiserating over Multigenre Assignment**

Hey, for homework tonight, we’re supposed to read the Inquiry 4 assignment sheet and bring any questions to class, right?

Yeah, I think that’s all we have…it’s sort of weird though that we’re starting this project in the middle of the other one—I know she said something about why we’re doing this in class, but I can’t remember now. Have you looked at the assignment sheet yet?

Yeah, and I already have a lot of questions. I know…this out-of-order thing is a little confusing. I guess I’m kind of glad to be doing something new for a while, though—essays aren’t really my thing.

I’m not sure I’m with you on that last point; I think I’d rather do something I already understand.

[Sigh.] This project even *looks* boring. I mean, the public debate assignment sheet at least had a picture of two guys debating in the corner.

[Laughter.] Okay, so I’m having some trouble figuring out exactly what she wants us to do. I get that we’re focusing on the same issue we’re studying for the public debate project, but how are we putting it into new genres?

Well, let’s look back at the assignment sheet. I mean, if our eyes can handle it! You know, I’m in a journalism class right now, and we’re learning about all these different theories about how readers encounter a page. Some say that it’s like our eyes follow the shape of a backwards “6.” Like this. [Project assignment sheet with “6” in background.] Others say it’s the shape of a “Z.” [Project assignment sheet with “Z” in background.] Either way, this assignment sheet is not “visually pleasing” [funny accent & air quotes], as my professor would say. Ah, sorry…I’m *so* getting us off track. I just studied all that stuff for my test, so it’s fresh in my mind.

Nah, I totally understand. I mean, I’m no journalism expert, but this assignment sheet is definitely really overwhelming. And the page just looks *boring*. Okay, so…it says, “You will develop **five genres** that will work together as a **campaign** to convince a particular audience to support your position on the issue you’ve selected.”

That seems pretty straightforward. Makes me think of a political campaign—candidates usually promote their platforms via commercials, Websites, campaign trail events, etc. Obama even had a Facebook page and a Twitter feed, I think.
Oh, okay. Your example is really helpful—I wish she had given us an example like that on the assignment sheet.

I’m happy to help! You know, I’m kind of excited that we’re making PSAs. I’ve done some work with iMovie before, and I have some cool ideas already.

Yeah…I’m not so great with technology—I can do Word and PowerPoint, but that’s about it. And I’m really not sure how useful this project will be for me. I’m a math major, and I don’t really see myself creating videos or brochures in the future.

Yeah, that’s rough. I can help you with the technology, but yeah…I’m not sure how you could apply it to your major.

Oh, well. I suppose I have to do the project anyway if I want a good grade in the class.

Yep. Okay…I think I’m going to get started on my proposal—this project looks like it will be time-consuming. Five genres seems like a lot, considering we’ve only written one “genre” for each of our other projects so far.

I was thinking the same thing. But…I don’t know where to begin. Are we just putting the same information in all of the genres? That seems redundant. I also sort of wish we could select our own genres, but I guess we have to work with what we have for now. Maybe I’ll go to the writing center tomorrow—it might help to talk through my ideas, and maybe they can help me put together a “plan of attack.”

While these two fictional students devoted significant time and energy to understanding an assignment they knew their instructor would be discussing in class the following day, I cannot expect all students to be so ambitious. Additionally, for the sake of this argument, I operate under the assumption that students would struggle to “make sense” of my assignment, even though I know from prior experience that some students could, if necessary, weave their way through my “mess” with ease. But they shouldn’t have to—I should claim responsibility for “cleaning up.”

From the beginning, the two students express confusion at the fact that the assignment asks them to put aside their in-process Inquiry 3 essays. My intention was that completing this remediation project would allow students to practice revision by working with a diversity of genres and new rhetorical situations, but that it could also serve as an inventional space in which students could develop ideas for their more “traditional” public debate essays (for which the
rhetorical situation is often difficult to create); but these intentions are well-kept secrets—the assignment sheet never explicitly mentions how the remediation could contribute to students’ public debate essays.

Their next complaint concerns the assignment’s physical design. I learned the “backwards 6” theory in a high school journalism class, and I just recently spoke about the “Z” theory with a friend employed as a designer at the Louisville Courier-Journal. The assignment’s arrangement of information is disconcerting, to say the least. Sixes and Z’s aside, the assignment does not successfully forefront the most important information. As a whole, the text reads as a list—items to “check-off” as I work to complete the project; the bullet points help with organization, but I experience difficulty locating information and am therefore tempted to follow the assignment’s linear progression in my response to its invitation to write. The project title in large, bold letters at the top-left corner does not reflect the specific project I will engage with—“Inquiry 4: Media Inquiry/Remediation” is the curriculum’s title for this project, not the instructor’s. Including “Multigenre Campaign” as a subheading could provide a more effective introduction to the project. Further, the amount of text (and space) devoted to the writer’s memo and the proposal is nearly equivalent to the material addressing the actual multigenre text, suggesting that all “components” of the text are of equal weight and importance. This lack of detail concerning the process of composing a multigenre campaign, along with the absence of any models or examples, makes it difficult for me to conceptualize my own approach to the project.

**Scene 4: Writing Center Consultation—Understanding the Assignment**

So, what are we working on today?

I have this multigenre project for my first-year comp. class, but I’m not sure where to begin. I need to write my proposal, but I need to work on understanding the assignment first.

Okay, we can talk through your ideas and try to develop an outline for your proposal. Could you tell me a bit about your project?

Well, we have to develop a multigenre campaign about an issue we’re already studying—to convince people to join our cause. I chose the issue of prescribing antipsychotics to children because I practically went through hell as a child while doctors tried to figure out what drugs worked best for my ADHD.
It sounds like you found an issue you really care about—that always makes writing easier. Did you bring your assignment sheet with you?

Yeah, I have it right here.

Okay, let’s see…

[Consultant and Student both silently read assignment sheet.]

Consultant’s [Exaggerated] Inner Monologue:

**Wow!** This language really makes it seem like the instructor is hesitant to trust her students. Her use of italics borders on demeaning: “Your intended audience must be *specific,*” “You’ll do this *last* this time,” “You’ll come back to the Inquiry 3 essay *after* you’ve finished Inquiry 4.” I understand that she uses italics for emphasis, but it’s almost to the point of overuse—just like her use of *should.*

And let’s not forget the “Look Here!” following the “Format/Guidelines for Submission” heading? I’d venture a guess that students made mistakes formatting or submitting their projects last time, but is this really necessary? It lends a degree of importance to something that really isn’t that important.

The “Create-a-Genre” category *finally* seems to promise students some freedom before stripping it away from them again. “No boundaries with this one” makes me think they can do whatever they want with this genre, but then the assignment provides some rules that writers need to follow: “—you just need to make sure it’s a genre we haven’t seen before, and that it’s rhetorically effective (and doing something that your other genres aren’t able to do).” That doesn’t seem too unreasonable, but the juxtaposition of “No boundaries” with, well, boundaries is somewhat irresponsible, I think.

Okay, I need to focus. This student needs help determining how to approach the project, but the assignment sheet doesn’t give us much to work with…

I have often found myself in this position, trying to help a student who is working with an assignment sheet that more readily generates confusion than ideas. Writing center scholarship—not to mention propriety—teaches us to keep our criticisms of assignment sheets, of instructors to ourselves and to encourage students to ask their instructors to clarify any guidelines, directions, expectations that baffle us. But this consultant’s monologue—the thought process she refrains from sharing with the student writer—presents some important arguments. After providing very little detail about what students must do to complete the project, the assignment sheet underestimates students’ ability to select a specific audience and follow general guidelines, while simultaneously affording students little agency—the one genre they “create” for themselves must adhere to particular expectations.
My objective for this project was to establish a space in which students would feel comfortable playing with their ideas and working with different genres to construct and present arguments in new ways, to new audiences. I wanted students to seriously consider the possibility of making their texts public, of using these texts to promote change. I hoped they would find the multigenre project useful and, dare I say, fun. However, in addition to employing language that might preclude student understanding, my assignment sheet neither alludes to nor exemplifies the experimentation and play I intended to promote. In fact, the assignment leaves little room for play—its requirements restrict students, encouraging them to maintain focus on “what the teacher wants” rather than suggesting they have the freedom to “make it their own.”

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If I were to revise this assignment sheet, the first move I would make would be to remediate it as a multigenre text. If I am asking my students to engage in multigenre composition, I feel an obligation to do the same. Situating the assignment prompt on a WordPress blog, I could present a PSA that provides a rhetorical argument for why writers should participate in multigenre texts. I could reflect upon my own experiences with composing a multigenre text via blog posts, a process that would allow me to better anticipate students’ struggles, as well as reassure students that they are not alone in their frustrations. Through the blog interface, I could provide students with a nonlinear introduction to the assignment, taking them on a “choose-your-own-adventure” in which they answer questions based on their personal needs and concerns regarding the project and are then directed to materials that can support them at whatever stage of the writing process they happen to find themselves.

Additionally, I wish that I hadn’t constructed the multigenre assignment as so confining. Perhaps I was trying to protect my students; I knew many of them were accustomed to structure, direction—perhaps I wanted to make the transition to multigenre composition easier. But I regret that I didn’t allow students enough space. While the assignment permitted choice, its required categories likely stifled student creativity. Further, the categorizations themselves appear somewhat conflated—they suggest relationships among genres and media that do not exist in all contexts. If students have the option of composing a series of Tweets, Facebook status updates, or blog posts to fulfill the expectations for one “genre,” they may immediately assume the texts they create with/in any one of these three media necessarily accomplish the same work. I originally created these categories because I wanted students to gain experience with several
types of texts, and I thought they needed this direction. If I were to assign the multigenre project again, my redesign would resist categorization. It would provide suggestions for—and examples of—possible genres, but it would not require students to fulfill specific categories. I might require that at least one genre engage with digital technology in some way, recognizing that twenty-first century students will likely encounter academic situations in which they will be asked to compose digital texts. But by encouraging students to make their own decisions about what types of texts are most effective in reaching their audience(s), I could facilitate further disruption of expectations (my students’, their audiences’, and mine) and enable students to “construct complex and often contradictory identity formations” (Jung xi, 2). With more freedom to design their own texts, students could also assume more responsibility for rhetorical decision-making.
CHAPTER 3
Multigenre as Revision: Rethinking Arguments, Rhetorical Situations, and Texts

“I learned that different genres can make people look at and feel differently about one topic.”
—Allison Norenberg

Multigenre work seems to lend itself to those “steps” that, when following the process model of composition, are often positioned at the beginning and end of the writing process: invention and revision. And it places these “steps” somewhere in the middle of things. With multigenre, invention becomes more complex than brainstorming, outlining, and prewriting; revision becomes more than an afterthought, a task undergone to improve clarity and cohesion. Employing an RGS approach to composition, invention occurs through writers’ work with/in genres, as they discover new approaches to conveying their arguments or develop new arguments altogether. This is not to say that the same type of invention cannot occur when writers compose with/in only one genre, but among writers in the FYC classroom, explicit awareness of genres’ rhetorical function seems more easily achieved and maintained through work with/in multiple genres, particularly those genres students do not traditionally associate with the writing classroom.

I thought the multigenre project could help students recognize there were more than two “sides” to the public debates they were in the process of entering. In my experience teaching the public debate essay, I have found that some students tend to cling to binaries—good/bad, right/wrong, what I think/what they think—and in doing so, they neglect to take notice of other perspectives and thus fail to fully comprehend the complexity of the issues they have chosen to study. To come closer to achieving this comprehension, writers must first disorient themselves, must focus less on establishing a clear, direct argument and more on identifying moments of confusion and waywardness. I would argue that by conceptualizing multigenre writing as an act of revision, composition instructors can provide student writers with a site through which they can participate in this disorientation. I borrow this understanding of writerly disorientation from Nancy Welch, who, following Julia Kristeva’s notion of the “critical ‘exile’ in writing,” suggests that “when we view revision as reading the multiple and conflicting social conversations that compose our texts, we can create practices of exile that make it possible for writers to dis-orient themselves from social arenas and imagine ways to make sense of and speak back to those arenas” (10). While Welch does not offer a theory of multigenre composition, she engages
with/in multiple genre and styles through the presentation of her text, and she positions herself within multiple discourse communities.

Multigenre writing can be a useful way for student writers to encounter these “multiple and conflicting social conversations” and understand revision as more than a simple process of making corrections to one’s text. I wish to demonstrate, through analysis of student texts, how multigenre—itself a rhetorical genre—facilitates and participates in acts of play and, simultaneously, functions as a playground, a site with/in which actors can experiment with different approaches to entering rhetorical conversations and engage in a greater degree of play than they might be willing to attempt in an alphabetic essay, a genre students often conceive of as more “academic.” As a rhetorical playground, the multigenre project also carries potential for transference; the rhetorical, genre, and stylistic experimentation in which students participate in the context of the multigenre text has the potential to influence their encounters with/in other genres, other playgrounds. Regardless of whether students will ever need to present arguments through these specific genres in future academic or career-related composing situations, the act of creating a multigenre text, I argue, enables student writers to develop deeper rhetorical understanding than afforded them by a single-genre text.

When he first began designing his multigenre text, Tim, along with a few other students, asked me if all his genres needed to communicate the same perspective on the issue he was studying. Rather than forcing one position on his readers, he wished to make them aware of the diversity of arguments both in favor of and against repealing Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell legislation. While I explained in the assignment sheet that students’ genres would “work together as a ‘campaign’ to convince a particular audience to support your position on the issue you’ve selected,” I did not establish any guidelines for how the genres should work together or require that each genre contribute an argument fully in support of the writer’s position (Welch, “Inquiry 4: Media Inquiry/Remediation”). Because I wanted students to take ownership of their multigenre texts, I encouraged Tim to approach the project the way he felt was best for his rhetorical purposes.

I tried to steer students away from selecting issues that were prominent in the national media during the semester our class met (and those issues that never cease to be “hot topics” in the media), encouraging them to instead focus on local or “smaller” issues that had not received

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13Tim’s entire multigenre project can be found at the following URL: [http://mangoldtim.wordpress.com/](http://mangoldtim.wordpress.com/)
as much attention. Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell was one of the issues. When Tim selected DADT as the issue he wanted to study, I knew he would be in the process of composing his public debate essay and multigenre project as debates only intensified over the proposed repeal. But Tim was insistent. As a member of our university’s chapter of ROTC, he was personally invested in the DADT debate and believed he could localize the issue by drawing from his own experiences and directing his text to fellow ROTC members.

I can recall how much Tim struggled with this project; it seemed as if nearly every class meeting during the multigenre unit, he came to class frustrated with the project, with himself, occasionally with me.14 He wasn’t sure which genre should convey which argument or how he would communicate his own perspective without devaluing the other perspectives he wished to share with his audience. (And, at this point in the process, I’m not sure that Tim himself could identify his own perspective.) Tim was not alone in his frustration with the multigenre project—in fact, most, if not all, students experienced some degree of frustration with this approach to composition that they had not encountered in the past—but Tim seemed to take a more active approach to dealing with this frustration; by remaining open to ideas that were sometimes in direct conflict with his original arguments, Tim was able to benefit from the generative, productive disruption and disorientation that Jung and Welch advocate. As he became increasingly involved in the drafting process, Tim began to shift focus, eventually composing a multigenre text largely in support of repealing DADT legislation. As this blog post and the links to other “recent entries” suggest, Tim not only shifted his campaign from being neutral to being in favor of the DADT repeal, but he also became enthusiastic in his desire to keep his audience up-to-date on the issue. He never told me why he altered his perspective, and aside from a faint

14 When Tim was in my class, I was aware that he was competing with all other first-year ROTC cadets for a very competitive academic scholarship. Receiving a high grade in my class was thus a priority for him and likely contributed to his frustrations.
memory of a class meeting during which Tim asked me if I would permit him to make this shift, I cannot identify when or how the change occurred.

What was perhaps most interesting about Tim’s text, though, was that it didn’t seem to be as concerned with shutting down the opposition as it was with encouraging university students and young members of the military (particularly ROTC cadets) to make themselves aware of existing perspectives and actively take part in the debate. The approach Tim takes with his writer’s memo also seems to reflect this concern, perhaps suggesting he did not desire to alienate those members of his audience he knew might not be in favor of the DADT repeal, particularly since his audience included individuals whose careers in military service could potentially be directly affected by any decision made concerning DADT.

Discussing a flyer he developed that advertises a fictional event at the student center, a rally at which students could learn more about Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell and sign a petition, Tim explains that “this piece was intended for students of [our university] who may or may not be familiar with the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell Policy. It is also intended to provide information and urge the students to take action and become involved in the debate” (Tim, “Inquiry 4 Writer’s Memo”). With a letter to the editor he directed towards readers of a local newspaper, Tim hoped he could “reach members of the community who actively read the newspapers and might be interested in a reader’s point of view” (“Inquiry 4 Writer’s Memo”). But ultimately, he “stepped away from the newspaper article because I felt it wasn’t doing what I wanted” and decided to revise the letter to direct it to a more specific audience: his congressman (“Inquiry 4 Writer’s Memo”). He found that the letter to his congressman “was much more rhetorically filling, asking our congressman to take action” (“Inquiry 4 Writer’s Memo”). I find it interesting to note that Tim seems more comfortable making a direct, rhetorical argument in opposition to Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell when he is somewhat removed from his audience—writing a letter to his congressman—than when he is seeking to involve his ROTC peers in conversations about the issue.

In his first draft of the public debate essay, Tim presents an argument largely against repealing the DADT legislation, but after completing the multigenre project, he returns to his essay and in his final draft, develops a new argument largely in favor of repealing DADT (though neither of these arguments was completely one-sided). Among forty-five students enrolled in my two sections of FYC, Tim was the only student to make such significant revision
to his perspective, though several students made smaller revisions to their arguments. Tim titled
the first draft of his public debate essay “In Defense of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and gave his final
draft the title: “Don’t Ask, Just Tell?”—the titles themselves reflect his change in perspective.
Like his multigenre text, Tim’s final essay draft leans towards being in favor of repealing
DADT, but as a whole, his text does not provide readers with a definitive argument. His thesis
statement, presented in the first paragraph of his essay, seems to suggest that he has no
reservations concerning the repeal of DADT: “After exploring the issue, and looking at the
grounds for each side’s argument, I believe that homosexuals should be allowed to serve
[openly] in the military, serving the country that has helped them excel and live in peace” (Tim,
“Don’t Ask, Just Tell?” 1). In addition to the fact that it fails to state why Tim feels the way he
does, Tim’s thesis assumes that there exist only two “sides” to this debate; politically speaking,
there were only two ways members of the Senate could vote—for or against the repeal—but
Tim’s essay actually presents several perspectives on the DADT debate (from politicians,
members of the military, and average citizens), finally arriving at an argument that seeks to
achieve compromise. I learned later, in Tim’s reflective essay in which he analyzes the rhetorical
action in which he engaged in his public debate essay, that he found writing this essay “rather
difficult because I was worried about how it would come off to the reader. I feared that it would
seem like I was taking too strongly of a side and gave little attention to the elements of the other”
(“Inquiry 5: Reflective Essay” 2). Tim closes the first draft of his essay with the following
statement: “But one thing is for certain, while men and women in the military are fighting
overseas in two wars, it is ridiculous for us to be changing policy that could hinder our ability to
win these wars” (“In Defense of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” 4). Feeling strongly that then—late
October 2010—was not a time to consider repealing the DADT legislation, Tim employs a tone
that leaves little room for dissent; by referring to his argument as “certain,” he suggests that any
views to the contrary are ambiguous. His use of “ridiculous”—at a moment when descriptors like
“impractical” or “ill-conceived” might more effectively communicate a logical argument—
further disparages those in favor of DADT being repealed while the United States was at war. In
contrast, the last section of his final draft expresses more openness, takes a more personal (and
concerned) tone, and reflects on Tim’s own experiences as an ROTC cadet:
I have seen firsthand the way that military members are brought together in a
short period of time. During pain and strife, you reach out to your fellow members
for support and motivation. Regardless of race, sexuality, or gender, we are soldiers fighting for our country. We will overcome this barrier, and once we do, I believe that it will only make us stronger. If we can win the war amongst ourselves, we can certainly tackle any other obstacle that gets in our way. (Tim, “Don’t Ask, Just Tell?” 6)

Though Tim does not go so far as to discuss specific instances in which his participation in ROTC influenced his beliefs, he presents himself to his audience—university students and ROTC cadets—as a credible speaker, as someone who understands the importance of and has personally benefitted from the supportive community and camaraderie present among members of a military organization. As a whole, Tim’s final draft effectively establishes his ethos; he conveys to readers why this issue is important to him, and he encourages his audience to become involved in the debate as well. Conversely, his first draft of the essay neglects to capitalize on his ROTC involvement, thus distancing him from readers and making it difficult for any audience to seriously consider his position.

Because I did not have the opportunity to interview Tim and speak with him further about his revisions, I am unable to argue with any certainty that his work on the multigenre project brought about (or even contributed to) his change in focus and perspective in the public debate essay. I know, for example, that my feedback on Tim’s essay influenced his decision to narrow his focus and address a specific audience: throughout the drafting process, many of my comments on Tim’s writing tended to center around how he was positioning himself in relation to his subject and audience, as well as how—based on this position—he could direct his argument to an audience that would be receptive to his ideas and could potentially take social action, however small, concerning the issue. In an e-mail I sent to Tim towards the end of the revision process, I summarized my in-text comments in response to his questions about his draft:

The changes you made definitely reflect a more specific audience, though you could go a bit further with this. I'm wondering if it might be useful to direct this text at fellow ROTC members, for example. Their perspective might be particularly important, and then, in the paragraph where you suggest what "we" could do, you could talk to your audience about the experiences you've had with them that demonstrate your acceptance of each other/of others, your collaboration, the different qualities your group possesses that you think are integral to the
future of the military. (This is just *one* idea about how you could get more specific—you don’t need to go along with it if you don’t like it.)

After Tim and I exchanged e-mails, he completed a final revision of his essay, which included adding the first two lines of the quotation included above (“I have seen firsthand the way that military members are brought together in a short period of time. During pain and strife, you reach out to your fellow members for support and motivation”) (Tim, “Don’t Ask, Just Tell?” 6). During the semester in which Tim was in my course, one of his fellow first-year ROTC cadets passed away, and I witnessed his emotional struggles following this tragic event. Again, while I wasn’t able to interview Tim, I wonder whether his revisions to the essay and to his larger argument may have been affected by his response to his peer’s passing.

Even while I recognize these other influences on Tim’s revisions, I remain committed to my argument that by virtue of engaging with multiple genres and composing styles, as well as simply spending more time researching and directly engaging with multiple arguments surrounding DADT legislation, Tim was able to take advantage of opportunities to complicate his understanding of the issue and consider alternative perspectives. As mentioned previously, the multigenre text seemed to function as a site through which Tim revised his ideas; I would argue that individual genres presented Tim with opportunities to “try out” different approaches to the DADT issue. For example, Tim constructed an interview between a reporter and a former army lieutenant who was discharged from the military after his superiors learned he had come out to his fellow soldiers. In his writer’s memo, Tim explains that he decided to present his ideas through this genre in order to “[provide] a new position that hasn’t really been discussed” (“Inquiry 4 Writer’s Memo”). Tim had not encountered many stories about specific individuals whose lives had been affected by the legislation, and he thus felt his text could fill an important gap:

In this approach, I felt that it would be much more rhetorically effective, using two personas that I could exploit to get the overall point across. This article was meant to reach people who had a familiarity in the debate over Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, and provided a new position that hasn’t really been discussed. When researching I found that there weren’t many cases and examples of the stories of people who have been effected. This in turn led to my decision to change the piece and make it an interview. Now I feel that it is much more affective and draw
more interest from the reader. If I had a little more time I think I would have tried to make a video that went along with it of an actual interview, so I could connect the reader with a face for the debate. In the end this piece came out just as I had hoped and is one of my favorite for the project.

Tim’s decision to place emphasis on the personal, giving voice to an individual whose life has been directly affected by this legislation, contributes to the overall rhetorical effectiveness of his multigenre text. Tim recognizes that he could have done more with this genre, and indeed, he could have provided more detail concerning the soldier’s life and experiences, giving his audience the opportunity to become acquainted with him; and if he had more time to devote to this project, he might have sought out an actual soldier who had been discharged because of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell legislation. But regardless, as discussed above, we can observe this attention to the personal in his final draft of his public debate essay. Tim also recognizes that the other projects he completed in our course influenced his approach to writing and revising the public debate essay. In his reflective essay analyzing his public debate project, Tim explains how he relied upon skills he developed through other projects: “When I went out to write the Inquiry 3 essay, I looked back at all the other projects that we had done and tried to pick out elements of each that could be brought into the paper as well. Many of these included the style, as well as the information that was available about the subject” (“Inquiry 5: Reflective Essay”).

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Kyle15 took a unique approach to the multigenre project; in order to localize his issue, he essentially created a fictional rhetorical situation, complete with a fictional bill (Proposition 437), a fictional opponent (Joseph R. McPherson, a university administrator who developed Proposition 437), and a fictional student organization opposing the bill (Student Organization Against Proposition 437—SOAP-437). Interested in exploring debates concerning the psychological effects of violent video games on teens and young adults but unsure of how to enter into these conversations, Kyle decided to create a campaign he would launch were our university to decide to ban violent video games:

I presented inquiry four as though Joseph McPherson based his proposed bill, Proposition 437, on out-of-date studies. So, I attempted to sway Joseph

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15Kyle’s entire multigenre project can be found at the following URL:
McPherson using studies published in a current and up-to-date academic journal, the *Review of General Psychology*. These journals allowed me to not only appeal to him with my subjective thoughts but with concrete, objective evidence that proves he is wrong. This of course made appealing to him a much simpler task, as I was able to create the evidence and proof necessary to be able to truly sway such an authority figure as Joseph McPherson. However, I didn’t create the proof. I simply created his opinion surrounding factual studies done in reality that prove such an opinion wrong. (Davidson, “Inquiry 5”)

When Kyle first spoke with me about this idea, I was a bit apprehensive about how his project would turn out. I was concerned that in “creating” McPherson’s argument and “creating proof,” he would effectively place constraints on his own arguments, preventing himself from trying out new arguments or participating in rhetorical genre play. Would my allowing him to situate his text in relation to a “fake” rhetorical exigence result in Kyle not developing the knowledge and skills necessary for engaging in rhetorical, social action? Would he be able to address multiple perspectives when operating from such a narrowly-defined rhetorical situation?

As one of few students who truly framed his text as a campaign, Kyle established a greater sense of unity among his text’s multiple genres than most students were able to achieve. And such unity would likely be productive if the WordPress blog that houses Kyle’s multiple genres were a real campaign Web site that needed to be easily navigable. But I question to what extent Kyle’s strict adherence to the assignment guidelines may have or limited his opportunities for engaging in multiple discourses, employing a diversity of voices, or considering the issue from multiple perspectives. I worry that by allowing Kyle to develop such a narrowly-focused campaign, I was preventing him from benefitting from multigenre composition’s potential to both promote discovery and create disruption. Unlike other students’ multigenre texts, which required audiences to assume a more active role in constructing meaning and establishing connections among genres, Kyle’s text made these connections explicit, demanding little from readers/viewers. Additionally, those genres Kyle developed were somewhat dependent on each other for their individual rhetorical successes. Whereas other students created several individual arguments that they then attempted to put in conversation with each other, Kyle created one unified rhetorical argument. Designing and presenting a petition students could sign to express their opposition to the proposed video game ban, Kyle invites students to pay “special attention”
to the petition “because it…will be sent along with an open letter (see “Letter” post) to Joseph R. McPherson in an attempt to let Miami administrators know that we do not need to be ‘protected from the aggressive and violent behaviors that are caused by playing violent video games’” (Davidson, “Petition and Information on Proposition 437”). Through this introductory text, Kyle makes a logical appeal to his audience, conveying the centrality of the petition to the campaign and emphasizing its role in supporting the letter’s rhetorical action. And the letter to McPherson also makes reference to the petition, explaining that it “will attempt to garner the support of as many people possible, and each one of their signatures will equate to someone speaking out against Proposition 437” (Davidson, “Letter”). Kyle also provides a forum (“YOUR Opinion Here!”) in which visitors can voice their ideas concerning the proposed video game ban. This text seems promising, but for all its efforts to achieve multivocality, Kyle’s interaction with this genre seems to privilege his argument and does not allow for dissenting opinions. For instance, in this text, Kyle seems to construct respondents who oppose the video game ban as more intelligent than others who support the ban or present themselves as indifferent. Two of the three longest posts were posted by a single opponent of the ban, likely the voice with which Kyle most closely identifies.
When I initially read and evaluated Kyle’s multigenre text, I perceived it as rhetorically effective, but in returning to his text, I now question the extent to which his text participates in productive rhetorical action. He has constructed for himself a fantasy situation, having created his exigence and audience through creative play and invention, an approach that is not itself problematic. However, despite the unity of Kyle’s text and the ease with which his text can be navigated, his overall argument, by focusing primarily on three texts—the bill his campaign seeks to protest, the out-dated study upon which he accuses McPherson of relying, and a more current study upon which he and his “staff” base their arguments—is limited and does not fully explore multiple perspectives. Kyle inadvertently forces himself to return to the same argument with each individual genre.

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While the multigenre project seemed to contribute to students’ rhetorical knowledge in ways that the academic essay was incapable, and while their engagement with multiple genres led many students to develop deeper, more thorough understanding of the issues they were studying, the play present in students’ multigenre texts was rarely present in their academic essays. I had hoped that their completion of a multigenre project would encourage students to more readily take risks when composing other texts, particularly those texts they composed for our course. Like Tim, several students revised or expanded upon the arguments presented in their academic essays after developing their multigenre texts; traces of the new perspectives and content knowledge students gained through multigenre composition were observable in their academic essays. But the different styles, voices, media students employed in their multigenre texts seldom appeared in their public debate essays; when students did visibly play with the
essay genre, they tended to confine this play to their essays’ introductions and, in a few cases, their conclusions. After students in both classes participated in an in-class activity in which they revised their essay introductions (after having completed their multigenre texts), I began to encounter a prevalence of introduction paragraphs that were multivocal, that shared personal anecdotes relevant to their arguments, that engaged in creative writing, that experimented with dialogue, etc. Just as I confined my play to mainly my introduction and my inter-chapters, most students tended to play at moments in their essays they considered “safe.”

A few students played with genre as they composed the final project of the semester. A reflective text in which students completed a close, rhetorical analysis of either their public debate essay or one genre of their multigenre text, I originally planned for students to “try out” the lab report genre after reading and reflecting upon excerpts from Bazerman’s *Shaping Written Knowledge: the Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science*.\(^{16}\) However, because I decided to give students an extension on their public debate essays, we did not have time to read and discuss Bazerman’s text, and I did not wish to provide students with an “uncritical” introduction to the lab report and thus ill-prepare them for their future science courses (Cope and Kalantzis 15). Revising the final project assignment, I explained that students could continue with the lab report genre if they found it a helpful genre with/in which to explore their ideas, but I also encouraged them to experiment with other genres in composing this text. The final drafts students submitted varied widely. Many students enthusiastically adopted the lab report genre, narrating their composing experiences as if they were science experiments. Other students chose to compose reflective essays. A select few chose to compose texts drawing from genres we may not immediately associate with self-reflexive writing in the composition classroom.

Gabby, for instance, analyzed a brochure she composed (for the multigenre remediation project) by developing a “Recipe for the Best Brochure” that indirectly comments on her successes and struggles in its instructions for future brochure designers (Sprockel, “Recipe for the Best Brochure for Inquiry 4”—see Appendix). A student who often expressed frustration with her writing in my course, Gabby allowed herself to play with this final project and try something different, presenting a creative, unique text directed toward a public audience. In fact,

\(^{16}\) I knew before the semester began that I would have several sciences majors across my two sections of the FYC course; the lab report thus seemed like a useful genre to introduce. I hoped to demonstrate to students that even though they might find the lab report impersonal or dull, their actions with/in this genre still possess rhetorical significance.
her text is one of few that attempts to engage with an audience other than self or instructor. Appealing to a future student who may have questions about how to design a rhetorically effective brochure, Gabby provides a step-by-step guide to composing with/in this genre. In her “Before you start” section of the recipe, Gabby explains that determining “the type of audience you will want to attract before you start making the brochure” can be helpful for gathering information and designing the brochure (Sprockel, “Recipe for the Best Brochure for Inquiry 4”). Her “INGREDIENTS AND ‘HOW TO’S’” section discusses the process of completing the brochure—the end result of following the recipe. (It’s interesting to note that she emphasizes—in a parenthetical comment—that this part of the recipe “can be done in any order,” suggesting the recursivity of the writing process). The ingredients include “information found through different sources,” rhetorical appeals (“Ethos, Pathos, and Logos”), “alternative choices” for resolving the issue at hand, and a “catchy format” (Sprockel). Gabby also provides her audience with detailed instructions and advice for using each of these ingredients in their recipes, drawing from her own brochure for examples of effective and ineffective approaches. In her “PURPOSE” section, she addresses the rhetorical action achieved through her brochure and encourages her audience to make conscious choices that will contribute to the effectiveness of their brochures (e.g.: “Catchy titles and the information in the brochure will make the audience more vulnerable to the idea that you, being the author, are trying to persuade”) (Sprockel). The “KEEP IN MIND” section addresses one weakness Gabby perceived in her own text—that her brochure posed several questions to her audience but did not effectively address them—and stresses the importance of providing one’s audience with “enough information and the right information” (Sprockel). The final component of the recipe discusses an award the recipe received: “Awarded by the ‘College Composition at Miami’ the Best Recipe of 2010” (Sprockel). I required that students analyze the effectiveness of their texts in demonstrating their understanding of at least three learning outcomes of our university’s FYC curriculum; in this section, Gabby addresses how her experience of creating the brochure contributed to her development of important rhetorical skills, indirectly encouraging her readers’ development of these same skills.

Recognizing, of course, that the recipe genre is somewhat problematic when applied to composing situations—in its suggesting that by using specified ingredients and carefully following directions, the user can achieve a desired outcome, regardless of context-specific factors—I nevertheless appreciate Gabby’s approach to taking up this assignment because it
demonstrates her critical engagement with a text she has previously composed, as well as anticipates others’ potential uptakes of her current text. Rhetorically, Gabby’s recipe is organized and presented in such a way to effectively reach her audience; this genre may be well-suited to a reader who feels overwhelmed by the task of designing a brochure. However, because her primary focus seems to be on her readers’ composing processes (and on their texts), rather than on her own process, Gabby’s reflection lacks depth. She provides a thorough explanation of what to do, and she begins to address how to accomplish the “blending” of ingredients she includes, but the text is somewhat limited in its capacity to participate in introspection—Gabby addresses her own rhetorical decisions in passing and does not elaborate upon the specifics of her experience. In her effort to present a general recipe that readers could use to design brochures for a variety of purposes, Gabby employs examples from her own text only in reference to the finished product; while she provides her audience with steps to follow, she does not thoroughly discuss her unique experiences with those steps.17

CONCLUSION

In designing a recipe for the purpose of reflecting on the process of composing with/in the brochure genre, Gabby, to some extent, validates Anne Freadman’s critique of the “recipe theory” of genre (46). Freadman reminds her audience that “we have known for many years that a very wide range of ‘texts’…fail to be usefully described as conforming with a generic recipe,” that a follow-the-rules approach to genre acquisition is not adequate (46). While a recipe or a set of rules can function as a helpful introduction to composing with/in a genre, such an approach can falsely suggest that there exists only one “right” way of composing with/in that genre. Instead likening discursive interaction to “the playing of shots” in a tennis match and furthering a revised metaphor of genre as game-playing, Freadman argues that “it will be more useful to think of [genre] as consisting, minimally, of two texts, in some sort of dialogical relation” (48). Because the texts we compose interact with those that both precede and follow them, we—readers and writers of texts—might benefit from a conceptualization of genre as a conversation, a social interaction, an exchange of shots.

17 In retrospect, I wish I had asked students to complete brief analyses of their reflective texts, in which they could discuss the affordances and disadvantages of engaging in reflection with/in the genres they selected. Then, I might possess greater understanding of Gabby’s (and others’) intentions for and attitudes towards their texts.
Bawarshi, as I discussed earlier, explores this understanding of genre in the context of assignment design and, more generally, in terms of those texts that participate in the construction of relationships among students and teacher in the composition classroom. While I would argue that I made a conscious effort to design our course syllabus and assignment prompts in ways that would 1.) reflect the rhetorical genre pedagogy I espouse, 2.) model genre play, and 3.) (productively) disrupt students’ expectations, I recognize that I fell short. I failed to make explicit the dialogical relationship between assignment prompts and students’ texts (and between their texts and my feedback), and I failed to allow students the agency they needed to fully participate in the “playful work” I was encouraging. In Inter-Chapter 2, I voiced my frustrations regarding my assignment sheet for the multigenre remediation project, particularly concerning its failure to model multigenre composition. Neglecting to successfully invite students into a dialogue surrounding multigenre writing, I was not holding up my end of the conversation; because I did not present a strong assignment prompt, I could not expect students to present strong texts in response to the prompt (though I would argue that some students developed rhetorically successful texts in spite of the assignment sheet I provided). As Freadman explains, “Each shot is formally determined by the rules of the game, and materially determined by the skill of the players, and each return shot is determined by the shot to which it is a response” (44).

If we hope for students to understand their interactions with genres as participating in a dialogue, we must reconsider how our contributions to the conversation affect students’ contributions. Thus, I theorize a rhetorical genre pedagogy that relies on the sort of dialogue that Freadman advocates. The ideal composition curriculum would emphasize instruction in rhetorical analysis, public argument, revision/remediation, and reflection, but for each major writing project, students would experiment with genres and select for themselves the genre(s) they believed would help them to most effectively present their arguments to their intended audiences. By selecting the genres with/in which they will compose, students actively participate in social, rhetorical action and begin to understand how their rhetorical choices affect their communication of ideas. In the absence of a longitudinal study of students’ composing experiences, I cannot state with complete confidence that a composition pedagogy pairing rhetorical genre theory and multigenre composition (and play, to taste) is successful in preparing students for the rhetorical situations they will encounter in academia and in other contexts; however, I do hold that such an approach to composition challenges students to revise their
definitions of *writing* and *genre* as they begin to perceive themselves as rhetors participating in rhetorical, social action. Playing with/in genres, student writers peel back the layers of academic discourse communities to discover places and moments in which they can enter into important social conversations and influence change.

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Like Freadman, I present my text as “a move in a game,” a move that “expects an uptake” (63). At this stage, I have not arrived at any definitive conclusions, nor have I conducted enough research to confidently suggest any major, large-scale revisions to first-year composition instruction. Rather, this text represents my entrance into and positioning with/in larger dialogues concerning the role of genre in the composition classroom; the qualitative data I analyze in this teacher-research study provides important insight concerning the influence of rhetorical genre pedagogies on student writers’ composing processes, insight that others might build from as they join the conversation themselves. I have carefully calculated my “shots” in this game, and I eagerly anticipate other players’ return shots. Let’s keep the ball in play.
APPENDIX

Note: Some of the materials included here have been slightly reformatted in order to adhere to the constraints of this document.
English 111
College Composition

Section AB: MWF (8:00-8:50 a.m.), 235 Upham Hall
Section CB: MWF (9:05-9:55 a.m.), 343 Upham Hall

Alison Welch
welcham2@muohio.edu
Office Hours: Wednesday, 10:30 – 12:30

Required Materials/Texts

- College Composition, Vol. 63
- This I Believe II (Miami's Summer Reading text)
  o You should have received this at orientation
- Course Reader (Rhetorical Inquiry for College Composition)
  o This reader is an online text that you will have access to through our course Blackboard site; you will not need to purchase this text. However, I will occasionally ask that you print readings and bring them to class.
- Laptop Computer
  o Battery must be charged when you come to class
  o Laptop must have wireless connectivity & Microsoft Office software (not Open Office)
- Course Notebook, Folder, or Binder (something you can use to take and keep notes in)

Course Description

ENG 111, College Composition, is a writing course focused on principles and practices of rhetoric and composition useful for producing writing that is effective for its purpose, audience, and context. ENG 111 focuses especially on helping students learn and apply rhetorical knowledge, methods, and strategies; analyze and construct arguments using rhetorical inquiry; understand, refine, and improve their composing practices; and develop the intellectual and analytical skills necessary to produce effective writing at the college level. The course emphasizes rhetorical invention: planning, analysis, research, and development of ideas for a particular academic or public audience. It also teaches principles of effective organization and style and strategies for revision, editing, and proofreading. A key purpose of the course is to teach students to deliver writing in a variety of contexts, including digitally networked environments.

While the description above provides a good overview of our course, I think it’s important that you know what exactly we’ll be doing throughout the semester. Writing, of course, is a given. But our course will involve much more than me assigning papers and you handing them in.

Before you continue reading the syllabus, jot down your expectations for/thoughts about this course here. (I won’t be reading these, but I may ask you in class to talk about what you wrote.)
**Course Description**

Our class definition of writing will be flexible, and we’ll make changes to it throughout the semester as we engage in different types of writing. We’ll talk about how our individual definitions of writing are similar to or conflict with the definition(s) the whole class develops. We’ll question what it means for writing to be considered “good” and we’ll talk about who gets to decide what counts as “good writing” in different communities of writers, including our own classroom community.

_So, in case you haven’t noticed, this is an interactive syllabus…_

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**What’s your definition of writing?** Below, write a concise definition of writing. Then, write at least five criteria for “good writing,” based on your own ideas and experiences. (No wrong answers here.)

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We all have had different experiences with writing (both positive and negative) that have contributed to our attitudes towards writing, as well as how we perceive ourselves as writers and how we represent ourselves in our writing. We’ve developed unique styles and approaches to writing that are reflected in the writing we do, even if we might not always be able to clearly articulate exactly what it is that makes our style our own. And we all participate in some form of composing every day, whether we’re writing essays or completing other written work for courses, typing text messages, sending e-mails, making grocery lists or to-do lists, writing notes on neighbors’ whiteboards in the dorm hallway, authoring or leaving comments on blogs, filming and posting YouTube videos with friends, communicating with others via Facebook, etc. When we compose in these different situations and for different audiences, we make conscious shifts in the genre, content, style, organization, and tone of our writing in order to reach our audiences. **My point:** Composing is about more than just putting words on a page; it’s a process that involves several decisions that really require us to think critically about what we’re doing.

It’s also important to recognize that the composing we do outside of class—the genres we use (Facebook messages, text messages, blogs, etc.) and how we compose within and through them—isn’t any less “legitimate” than the composing we do for our classes. Different purposes, situations, and audiences call for different types of texts and different ways of composing (and that’s something we’ll be talking about a lot this semester). This course will push you to try new things with your writing and break rules you might have been cautioned to follow in previous writing courses. You’ll often have the chance to determine for yourself the genres you’ll compose in; other times, you’ll “play with” genres selected for you, manipulating them to fit your own purposes (as I’m attempting to do with the syllabus genre here).

During the semester, we’ll explore and increase our understanding of genre—how we define genre, how we describe the different genres we use, how genres develop, how we act within genres, how genres themselves perform action, etc. Additionally, we’ll closely examine different genres (including Facebook, the lab report, and the research paper), taking into consideration the users and uses of these genres, as well as how these genres differ across disciplines and contexts. Finally, we’ll develop texts that challenge traditional understandings of genre, and we’ll experiment with mixed-genre or multi-genre texts.

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You probably saw this one coming… **What’s your definition of genre?** (You might think about the situations in which you’ve encountered the word genre or what genres you’re familiar with.)
In designing our section of English 111, I’ve tried to be attentive to your needs as a student writer and have developed activities and assignments that would be most beneficial to the writing you will complete outside this course—whether that’s for other courses at Miami, for your own purposes outside academia, or for a future career. You will have multiple opportunities to approach your writing projects in ways that incorporate your interests and goals, rather than mine (or those of the university). While I have already created the skeletons for these projects, you will determine your unique focus and approach; you’ll also work with your classmates and with me to develop the criteria for how each project will be evaluated. You’ll have a lot of freedom in terms of the work you complete for this course, and at times, you might find this freedom frustrating. I’ll work with you as you try to determine your focus and approach for a project, but I won’t ever tell you what I’m “looking for”—not because I don’t want you to do well in this course (because I do), but because what I’m looking for is your increased ability to make your own writerly decisions for your own purposes.

You will complete five individual inquiry projects and one ongoing group project this semester*:

- Inquiry 1: Self Inquiry/Initial Reflection
- Inquiry 2: Textual Inquiry/Rhetorical Analysis
- Inquiry 3: Issue Inquiry/Public Persuasion
- Inquiry 4: Media Inquiry/Remediation
- Inquiry 5: Self Inquiry/Final Reflection

- **Group Project: Exploring Academic Disciplines.** For this project, you’ll work with peers (in our class or in my other section of ENG 111) who are planning to pursue the same major field as you are. You will conduct primary and secondary research on the writing in that field, develop a handout or brochure for writers entering that academic discipline, and eventually present your findings to the class.

*The five inquiries are described more fully in CCM (p. 7-9), and you’ll receive detailed instructions about these projects when we begin each inquiry.

Because this course takes place in a digital classroom, we can expand our study of writing and rhetoric to include a variety of texts—traditional, digital, and multimodal. This context also allows for writing instruction and practice that is collaborative in nature: we will participate in online spaces and work together to use and analyze several different writing contexts. As a member of this writing community, you will engage in online discussions, work with peers to develop projects that incorporate multiple technologies, and consider the ways that digital writing contributes to the work you’re doing in this course. Unfortunately, you will not have the opportunity to catch up with friends on Facebook, check the sports scores from last night, play games online, etc. while our class is in session. (I know, I love Facebook too, but we can all make it 50 minutes without it—I just know it!)

**Course Goals**

**By the time you complete English 111, you should be able to:**

- Apply principles of rhetoric and composition when writing for specific audiences, purposes, and contexts
- Demonstrate ability to write with awareness of multiple audiences and of differences among audiences
- Develop and conduct research-based inquiries into academic/disciplinary questions and public issues
- Locate, evaluate, integrate, and cite sources effectively and ethically
- Analyze and evaluate your own and others’ writing and uses of rhetoric
- Compose, share, and publish texts using a variety of genres, modalities, and technologies
- Make strategic rhetorical choices about organization and style
- Revise and edit your own writing according to audience, purpose, and context
- Articulate and reflect critically on your own composing practices and rhetorical decision-making, including your decisions about the production and delivery of writing
What goals do you have for this course? (Write three below…oh, and “getting an ‘A’” doesn’t count 😊.)

**Course Resources**

- **Each Other:** Your classmates are an excellent resource. Rely on each other and seek help from your peers when you are having trouble understanding a reading, a concept, a writing assignment, etc. This is a collaborative learning community, and you each make unique contributions to the group as a whole.
- **Me:** Please feel free to e-mail me or meet with me during my office hours at any time during the semester. I want to do everything I can to help you succeed in this course.
- **Blackboard:** We will be using our course Blackboard site often, both in and out of class. It will be an online space where you will post drafts of writing projects; communicate and collaborate with peers through discussion boards, group pages, and online chats; access an up-to-date course schedule, important course documents, and readings; and receive announcements related to class. Please plan to check the Blackboard site frequently, and let me know if you ever have trouble accessing this site.

**Other Resources**

- **IT Support Desk:** The support desk (http://www.units.muohio.edu/mcs/suppctr/suppdesk/) is the main point of contact for technology questions at Miami.
- **CIM Lab at King Library** (Center for Information Management): A great resource for multimedia and multimodal projects, computer lab with staff assistance, several software programs, printing services for posters, etc. (http://www.lib.muohio.edu/computing/cim.php)
- **King Library Equipment Checkout:** You can check out digital cameras, video cameras, audio recorders, laptops, microphones, and portable DVD players at the library circulation desk.
- **Disabilities:** If you have a learning disability, please speak with me during the first week of class. If for any reason you feel that you may need additional support or adaptations throughout the course, please do not hesitate to discuss this with me at any time. I am always willing to work with you to develop a plan to help you meet the goals of this course. The Learning Assistance Center provides academic services, including a Learning Disabilities program. For more information, contact the Office of Learning Assistance (513-529-8741) or Disability Resources (513-529-1541).
- **Counseling:** The Student Counseling Service is located in the Health Services Center and provides a wide range of counseling services. For more information, call 513-529-4634.
- **Writing Center:** The Howe Center for Writing Excellence is a great resource for all writers at Miami. Located on the first floor of King Library, the writing center offers free help with any writing project you are working on, regardless of the stage of the writing process. It is not an editing service, however. At the writing center, you will work with trained peer consultants in one-on-one sessions about your writing. I highly recommend taking your work to the writing center at least once during the semester.

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<tr>
<th>Writing Center Hours</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Monday - Thursday</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Friday</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sunday</strong></td>
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**Website:**
http://www.units.muohio.edu/writingcenter/
Evaluation
Your grade for this course will be determined based on your active participation in the course writing community (see description below), as well as your quality/completion of all required writing projects. There is a total of 1000 possible points in this course; therefore, if an assignment is 20% of your grade, it’s worth 200 points (15% is 150 points, etc.). I will provide you with specific grading criteria for each project during that particular unit. If at any time you have a question about your grade in the course, please make an appointment with me so we can discuss the issue.

Participation in Writing Community (see Active Participation below) 20%

Short Writing Assignments (5 total—1 per inquiry, 1% each) 5%

Inquiry 1: Self Inquiry/Initial Reflection 10%
Inquiry 2: Textual Inquiry/Rhetorical Analysis 15%
Inquiry 3: Issue Inquiry/Public Persuasion 20%
Inquiry 4: Media Inquiry/Remediation 15%
Inquiry 5: Self Inquiry/Final Reflection 10%

Group Project: Exploring Academic Disciplines 5%

Miami University Grading Scale:

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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>A:</td>
<td>100-94%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-:</td>
<td>93-90%</td>
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<td>B+:</td>
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<td>63-60%</td>
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<td>F:</td>
<td>59% and below</td>
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Policies
Course Writings: You will have a personal digital folder, located on our class Blackboard site. All drafts of your writing projects will be saved in this folder, so that you and I can view them. For drafts one and two of each writing project, I will comment on your writing electronically. You will post your final draft of each project in your Blackboard folder, but you will also physically turn in the final drafts. You will sometimes need to bring paper copies of your drafts to class for peer workshop—see the Course Schedule for this. I will do my best to remind you of these procedures during each unit of the course.

Naming Drafts:
lastnamefirstname_inquiry#_draft#
(lastnamefirstname_inquiry#_drafttwo)
 lastnamefirstname_inquiry#_final
(lastnamefirstname_inquiry#_final)

Facebook Posts: These posts should be at least 150 words long and are due before class, rather than in class. These are graded for completion, not for grammar, punctuation, capitalization, etc. They should
The course schedule explains when posts are due, but you can also follow the chart below:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day Assigned</th>
<th>Day/Time Due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Tuesday, 8 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Thursday, 8 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>Saturday, 11:59 p.m. (end of day)</td>
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</tbody>
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**Attendance:** Your presence in class is crucial to your participation in the writing community, particularly in terms of discussing and sharing writing with your classmates. Attending class regularly is to your advantage; if you frequently miss class, you will fall behind. I understand, however, that you may become sick during the semester or need to attend to personal matters. Therefore, you have three unexcused absences*—please use these wisely. Additionally, three tardies (arriving to class after 8 a.m.) equal one absence. If you have any further questions about absences, please consult the Student Handbook (p. 22-23).

*It is your responsibility to contact a classmate to find out what you missed in class. See “Make-up Work” below for more information.

**Active Participation:** As noted above, participation accounts for 20% of your final grade; this includes preparedness for class, participation in class, quality and completion of in-class work, participation in online discussions, participation in conferences, and quality and completion of out-of-class work (100 points possible for in-class participation; 100 points possible for out-of-class participation). You are expected to regularly participate in the class writing community by contributing to discussions (both in class and online), collaborating with your classmates in small group activities and peer workshop sessions, and sharing your ideas. **It is also important to remember that this is a collaborative environment, in which all participants are expected to be attentive to, engaged with, and respectful of everyone in class.**

**Late Work:** Assignments are due at the start of class, unless otherwise noted in the course schedule. (Facebook posts are the exception to this rule—they will be due at specified time before the class meeting; see above for details. Any work submitted after the stated deadline will be considered late and will be docked 10% per day past the due date (e.g., if an assignment is due in class Monday, and you turn it in Wednesday, the highest grade you can receive is a 70%; if you turn it in later in the day on Monday, the highest grade you can receive is a 90%).

**Make-up Work:** If you will be missing class, you need to make arrangements prior to your absence for make-up work. Keep in mind that if your absence causes you to miss a collaborative activity or peer workshop day, you will not have the opportunity to make up this work (and will thus lose points). If you are involved in school activities or participate in religious observances, please bring me a list of the dates you will miss class at the beginning of the semester.

**Conferences:** During the semester, you will participate in periodical face-to-face writing conferences with me. These informal conferences will give you the opportunity to discuss with me any questions or concerns you have regarding a particular writing project or the course as a whole. They will also help me to observe your progress in the course, as well as to assess the effectiveness of my instruction.

**Academic Honesty:** As university students, I expect you to make informed, ethical decisions regarding your writing and participation in this course. In English 111, you will gain experience conducting
primary and secondary research, and the projects you create will likely incorporate a variety of media. As you develop your writing projects, it is important that you are careful to give credit where it's due. Plagiarism is the representation of another's images, words, or ideas as one's own: it includes the unacknowledged word-for-word use and/or paraphrasing of another person's work and/or the inappropriate, unacknowledged use of another person's ideas. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please let me know. This is a serious issue, and we will discuss it in more detail in class.

**Dropping/Withdrawing:** Before choosing to drop or withdraw from a course, a student should meet with his/her instructor and advisor. Sept. 13 is the last day to drop this course without a grade; Oct. 29 is the last day to withdraw with a “W.” For more information, see the Student Handbook section on “Registration Procedures.”

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**A final note~**

Yes, I’m your instructor, and ultimately, that means I’m the person who determines your grade in this course. But I’m also a real person with a real life (I know…crazy, right?), who would like to get to know you—as a real person with a real life. I’m not here to bestow upon you all the skills necessary for writing success. Rather, I’m here to provide support as you experiment with different genres and writing styles and grow as both a writer and an individual. That said, I also plan to pay close attention to what you tell me you need help with, and I’ll work with you as you strive to master those skills you feel are most important in strengthening your writing. If you ever have any questions or concerns about the course or your writing projects, feel free to set up a time to meet with me. (And if you’re not able to meet during my office hours, we can arrange another time to meet.)

I look forward to working with you and learning from you this semester!

**Questions?** Jot down any questions you have about this course after reading this syllabus. We’ll address everyone’s questions in class on Wednesday.
Examining Syllabi: What is the genre doing?

Okay, so the first genre we'll be “navigating” this semester is the syllabus. In many cases, it’s the first genre you encounter in an academic course. Today we’ll study this genre to develop a theory regarding what social action the syllabus genre is performing.

1. Pair up with someone near you who has a syllabus from a different discipline.

2. Examine each of the two syllabi. Below, include a summary of the contents of each syllabus (headings, what is included under each heading, etc.).

   **Syllabus 1** (insert course title here):

   **Syllabus 2** (insert course title here):

3. What differences do you immediately notice between the two syllabi?

4. Based on your work with these two syllabi (and other syllabi you've read), what would you say are the requirements for a text to “fit” in the syllabus genre? What must it include? What should it do?

5. Pick one of the two syllabi that you’d like to focus on in greater depth: Insert course title here.

6. What sort of language does the syllabus employ? (What point of view is being used? What pronouns/nouns are used to refer to the reader? Does the syllabus use language that is difficult to understand?) Why do you think this language is used?
7. How is the syllabus organized? Do you feel that this organization is logical? Why/why not?

8. What does the syllabus suggest about the relationship between instructor and students in this course?

9. Rewrite a portion of this syllabus (maybe the course description) to reach the intended audience in a different way. (Your revision might be more effective than the original, or it might just be different—appealing to the audience in a different way.)

10. Explain what decisions you made when rewriting this portion of the syllabus. (What changes did you make? Why? What did you keep the same, if anything? What was your goal with this revision? What did you do to reach your audience? Did your changes have more to do with content, or with form? If you were your audience, how would you react differently to this revised syllabus than you reacted to the original?—Try to answer as many of these questions as possible.)

11. Why did you do this activity?
Inquiry 3: Issue Inquiry/Public Persuasion

Written Components
For this project, you will compose an academic essay in which you insert your voice in a localized public debate. The debate should concern an issue you’re interested in (and one you have some stake in).

- **Project Proposal** (200-300 words)
  We will workshop project proposals in class on 10/11. Your proposal should include your open-ended research question, as well as an explanation of how you will approach your project: How will you conduct research? Who will you interview? How will you organize your ideas?

- **Inquiry 3 Final Project** (1,500-2,000 words)
  Your essay will take the form of a more “traditional” academic essay—this is a genre you’ll encounter across academic disciplines, albeit in different ways. You will seek to provide a unique answer to the debate you’re addressing, responding to a research question you pose, through a thesis-driven essay.

  **Source Material**: Your essay should draw from 4-6 credible secondary sources—at least one of these sources needs to be an academic journal article. You will also draw from one credible primary source; the easiest way to do this would be to interview or survey individuals directly involved in the debate. (Parents and friends are off-limits as primary sources.)

- **Writer’s Memo (200-300 words)**
  Refer to the PowerPoint posted on Blackboard if you’re not sure what to include in your Writer’s Memo.

- **Project Reflection** (500-800 words)
  More details to come—reflection will make use of the lab report genre. We’ll examine examples in class.

Format/Guidelines for Submission (LOOK HERE!)
Drafts should be full length and will be posted to your personal Group Page on Blackboard, unless otherwise noted. Final draft will be a paper copy, but will also be posted to your group page. Formatting should follow MLA Style.

**Deadlines**
10/11: Proposal due
10/20: Draft 1 due, with Writer’s Memo

**[Inquiry 4 Work]**
11/22: Draft 2 due, with Writer’s Memo (revisions based on peer feedback from Inquiry 2 presentations)
11/29: Final Draft due, with Writer’s Memo
11/29: Reflection on Inquiry 3 AND Inquiry 4 due (on Group Page)
Inquiry 4: Media Inquiry/Remediation

Written Components
For this project, you’ll “remediate” your Inquiry 3 project into a multigenre/multimodal text. Right now, you have a preliminary draft of your Inquiry 3 essay. You’ll come back to the Inquiry 3 essay after you’ve finished Inquiry 4.

- **Project Proposal** (200-300 words)
  We’ll workshop project proposals in class on 10/25. Your proposal should address your approach to the project, including what your overarching genre will be. It should also include your initial thoughts about how you will approach the six individual genres. (This is just to get you thinking about your work on the project—and about how you will tie the genres together.

- **Writer’s Memo** (200-300 words)
  You’ll do this last this time. You won’t need to turn it in until your final draft. Refer to the PowerPoint posted on Blackboard if you’re not sure what to include in your Writer’s Memo. This will serve as a guide to your audience as they navigate through your multigenre project.

- **Inquiry 4 Final Project** (2,500 words, or the equivalent)
  For Inquiry 4, you will develop six genres that will work together as a “campaign” to convince a particular audience to support your position on the issue you’ve selected. You’ll have an overarching genre that will contain these six genres—you might choose a blog, a Facebook group page, or something else, depending on your intended audience. **(NOTE 1: Your intended audience must be specific; “people who might be interested in learning more about this issue” is not specific enough. **NOTE 2: Your different genres may be geared to specific audiences within your larger audience.)

- **Required Genres**
  1. Commercial/PSA (either audio or video)
  2. Informational Brochure or Handout (MS Word templates are off-limits)
  3. Letter (to someone with authority to influence this issue) or Letter to the Editor (think about what newspaper you would write to, examine past letters submitted to this newspaper)
  4. Blog Post or Series of Facebook Status Updates or Series of Tweets (could create a fake profile for these and link them to your overarching genre)

- **Create-a-Genre**
  For this final genre, you will create a “new genre” by employing code meshing/mixing. You’ll draw from the different writing styles and Englishes you possess, as well as your knowledge of various already-existing genres. No boundaries with this one—you just need to make sure it’s a genre we haven’t seen before, and that it’s rhetorically effective (and doing something that your other genres aren’t able to do).

Format/Guidelines for Submission (LOOK HERE!)
Since this will be an online text for most of you, you’ll submit this project (and all drafts) via a link posted to your Group Page. You will also present your project, in a five-minute presentation to the class.

**Deadlines**
- 10/25: Proposal due
- 11/3: Draft 1 due
- 11/8: Draft 2 due
- 11/15: Final Draft due
Recipe for the Best Brochure for Inquiry 4

Creator: Gabby Sprockel

Produced for: Ms. Welch

Eng 111 CB

12/11/10
What it all about?

This recipe will prepare you to make the best inquiry 4: Brochure that you have ever made. It will be a great tool to attract people to read the information you are presenting about having exams being taken out of school curriculum. One thing to keep in mind is that you will need all the necessary materials to make sure that it is a ‘well-done’ brochure; if you don’t then your project might turn out to be a disaster. This recipe will be able to give you a walkthrough of what must be done to make this brochure the best that it can be. By taking a social action towards its audience and making a brochure, you are then able to use your creativeness to the best of your ability. By following this recipe it will allow you attract your audience better than other recipes this way you will be able to stand out using organized information, pictures, and most important, creativeness. Since, brochures can be found almost anywhere this will allow you to draw in a bigger audience.

Before you start  Think of the type of audience you will want to attract before you actually start making the brochure, this will then help when gathering information. In this case, the author wanted to attract the professors around campus; therefore, the information is directed towards professors. Also, by the author addressing professors instead of other group’s means that she will have to make the information and writing about mostly what students are thinking about the situation.

INGREDIENTS AND ‘HOW TO’S’: (can be done in any order)

ADD: ½ a cup of “Information found through different sources”

What to do with this? Internet, Databases, people, and background history should be the main part of your brochure. Brochures are made to inform their readers of a certain issue. In this case, by collecting different information from different areas the paper will be more creditable and be more interesting for the reader to read.

ADD: ¼ cup of “Ethos, Pathos, and Logos”

What to do with this? Make sure that there is just enough information that is presented and can be categorized in these rhetorical areas. When making a brochure it is probably most important that you use all of these in your brochure. For example, “Most of the time students push their bodies to unexplainable measures to study for a test, which in return can make then perform poorly, for example: pulling all-nighters, caffeine, and drugs.” This is a perfect example of logos because this is information that was acquired while researching, which makes the brochure credible towards the reader.

ADD: 1/8 cup of “Alternative choices? Where do you want to see change?”

What to do with this? It is crucial when writing/making a brochure that you give the reader an alternative choice to the problem that you are trying to address. If you give just information, then you are just informing the reader and they could become very confused. Pick a side of the problem that you feel very strong about and build your idea around that, including the information and the alternative choices you want to see take place. “Offering alternatives such
as: projects, presentations, speeches, etc, allows students to be able to put something together that they end up using a wide variety of skills they have acquired throughout the course.” By saying this and then following it with a person saying that they would want to see this also would make the reader more willing to believe what you have to say because it is not as if you are the only one that thinks this, but others do too.

ADD: 1/8 cup of “Catchy format”

What to do with this? Make sure that all your information is put in a well organized manner. Spread out and add images because this will make your brochure very catchy and creative towards people that pick it up. As you can tell by Gabby’s brochure it has a catchy name on the front, “Exams, what’s the point?” This will make people think when they read it, and by wondering what it is about will then make the person pick it up and start reading it. The author hopes that when they open the brochure they then will see the pictures of people studying, this will then cause the readers to think “is this really what students are going through?” and continue to read.

DO NOT ADD: 0 cups of “Too Much Information”

Why? Brochures are made to be a very concise, to-the-point, piece of writing, which are easy and fast to read. By adding too much information would cause the reader to most likely put down your brochure, and not even read what you had to say about the topic. For example in Gabby’s brochure, she put a lot of information in the middle section. Not only is the middle section overloaded with information but it is in small font which might cause the reader to not want to read the whole thing and that’s not the purpose of the brochure. Also, by spreading out your information and adding images to the piece can make your brochure interesting and fun, but if this is ignored and you just have words all over, it could become very boring.

MIX & STIR, then BAKE!

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this recipe will hopefully be that you will be able to attract the designated audience of your choice. In this case because the authors intended audience was professors of the campus she thinks that with some information using the rhetorical appeals will make her brochure credible, useful, and informative, all of which will make a brochure amazing (or in other words, DELICIOUS).

What makes the brochure-recipe effective is the titles and information put in the brochure. Catchy titles and the information in the brochure will make the audience more vulnerable to the idea that you, being the author, are trying to persuade. “I use Adderall because I can get it easily and with the stress that I have to get good grades I feel like it’s the only thing that can guarantee that I do well on
the test, or thing that I need it for.” Using this information for example will make the audience think, “wow, this is what students are actually doing, well we should do something different so students are not hurting their bodies for a test.”

**KEEP IN MIND:** In the brochure, as an example, the author asked many questions in hopes that it will make the reader think more about the situation and how important it is. It is critical that you do not make your whole brochure just questions and not even address them. The author tended to use too many questions and then in return might have made the reader confused because she addressed something, but never backed it up with credible information that would then back up the author with what she was saying. “Are exams as effective as you think them to be?” (Sprockel; Gabby. “Exams, what’s the Point?” November 22, 2010. Web). Though this is a great way to make the reader think about the idea of exams it never is actually addressed if they are effective or not. Instead the author uses other information, like how students go about studying and cramming which she tends to just use her own knowledge about the situation. It is important that you have enough information and the right information to fill your brochure.

*Awarded by the “College Composition at Miami” the Best Recipe of 2010*

- Developed and conducted research-based inquiries into academic/disciplinary questions and public issues.

- Make strategic rhetorical choices about organization and style.

This brochure recipe used these characteristics the best! Making sure to have ‘developed and conducted research-based inquiries into academic/disciplinary questions and public issues” shows that she was able to make a brochure that addresses a certain issue and back it up with information that has been acquired from different sources. As well as “making strategic rhetorical choices about organization and style.” Having an equal amount of ethos, pathos, and logos can make the brochure very effective. You are then able to address the audience using different techniques. For example, “most of the time students push their bodies to unexplainable measures to study for a test” (Sprockel; Gabby. “Exams, what’s the Point?” November 22, 2010. Web), is a great use of logos and pathos. Organizing the information in a clear, logical way can cause the brochure to be more effective.

**ONE FINAL NOTE!**

What you should take away from this is that, a brochure can be made up about anything, but it is important that yours is the best! By knowing how to address certain audiences and knowing what information to put in a brochure, will hopefully make the process easy and fast. The use of ethos, pathos, and logos will always be used in the writings (or recipes) that you will write (or bake) in the future because that means you will know how to address your audience in the most appropriate and specific way. These skills can be used outside the university in multiple ways, so it is important to follow recipes like these to make the best ones.

*All in all, have fun while making it.*
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