



## **Beyond First-Year Composition: Academic English Instructional Support for International Transfer Students**

While many US colleges and universities offer specialized writing courses for multilingual students entering as freshmen, including international students, there is typically little instructional support for the academic English needs of international transfer students. This article describes the development and implementation of a writing course at a four-year university intended for upper-division multilingual transfer students, with focus on international students. Starting with the proposal stage, it summarizes consultations with administrators and faculty to procure funding, identify a target population, and seek input for defining course objectives. Description of course implementation includes syllabi, student profiles, and student feedback from course evaluations and writing portfolio introductions on the most helpful and most challenging aspects of the course. Student feedback offers suggestions for writing instruction in lower-division courses. In conclusion, this article recommends further development of specialized writing courses for upper-division international multilingual writers.

**A**s in higher education institutions throughout the US, the University of California (UC) system during the last decade has experienced a tremendous increase in international undergraduate students. Many of these students enter as freshmen at UC campuses; however, in addition, large numbers of international students enrolled in UC undergraduate programs have transferred to UCs after completing their first two years of college work at two-year community colleges. At the beginning of the 2014-2015 academic

year, UC campuses welcomed more than 2,000 international transfer students whose first language was other than English, approximately 12% of the total transfer population of 17,021 students.<sup>1</sup>

Entering international freshmen, like all freshmen, are required to fulfill the University of California's Entry Level Writing Requirement through one of several writing assessment measures, including its own Analytical Placement Writing Exam as well as standardized tests, or through course work either in UC writing programs or programs for multilingual students. In contrast to this system of assessing the readiness of freshmen for university-level writing, the readiness of transfer students for upper-division work, regardless of home language, is generally considered met by their successful completion of transferable English courses from the institutions they attended for lower-division course work. As a result, aside from campus tutorial programs, scant academic English support exists for multilingual writers at the upper-division level.

The need for English language support for transfer students whose first language is other than English has long been a concern of the UC systemwide English for Multilingual Students (formerly English as a Second Language) Advisory Group. Members of the EMS Advisory Group, a subcommittee of the UC Committee on Preparatory Education (UCOPE), include administrators and instructors from writing programs and programs for multilingual students on the nine UC campuses that have undergraduate programs.<sup>2</sup> In a data-based report, *ESL Transfer Student Issues*, approved by UCOPE in 2008 and sent to the UC Academic Senate, the ESL Advisory Committee stated that many ESL transfer students, despite their successful completion of lower-division courses, are, "upon entering the UC system, ... often underprepared for the rigorous reading, writing and oral communication demands of upper-division courses" (p. 1). The report urged each campus to investigate the needs of ESL transfer students for English language support and to develop campus plans to address these needs.

While the recommendations of the 2008 *ESL Transfer Student Issues* report were endorsed by the UC Academic Senate, systemwide budget constraints at that time were not conducive to the development of elective upper-division course offerings for multilingual transfer students. However, more recently, with the increase of the international student population, the academic English needs of multilingual students, including transfer students, have received more attention on many UC campuses. The Academic English Program at UC Irvine, for example, has offered several sections of its upper-division writing course targeted toward transfer students, including international stu-

dents, to help this population further develop language, reading, and research skills (Levin & Scarcella, 2014).

This article describes the development and implementation of an upper-division writing course for multilingual students, with a focus on international transfer students, at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), through collaboration between the Writing Program and the English for Multilingual Students (EMS) Program.

### **Proposing a Writing Course for International Transfer Students: Campus Conversations**

With evidence of the academic English challenges for international, multilingual transfer students in upper-division writing courses and in heavily impacted majors, particularly Economics, the director of UCSB's Writing Program and I, as director of the EMS Program, approached the dean of Undergraduate Education about proposing a writing course for multilingual transfer students. With strong encouragement from the dean, we decided to focus the course on academic writing assistance for international transfer students intending to major in Economics. The overall goal of our proposed writing course was to help this student population further develop general writing proficiency, not solely to write in the discipline of Economics, though emphasis would be given to topics in the economics field.

This more general focus on upper-division academic writing was desirable for several reasons:

1. Some students are, in the end, unable to major in Economics because of unsatisfactory performance in the Intermediate Microeconomic Theory course and will change majors;<sup>3</sup>
2. Most of the students entering as transfer students need to satisfy general education requirements in other disciplines with writing components, such as Global Studies, Geography, and History. Some of these are lower-division courses;
3. Many of the undergraduate Economics courses do not require extended writing, both because of their technical and mathematical nature and because of high course enrollments.

This last assumption was supported by a Chinese graduating senior, who wrote during the first week of the course the second year it was offered:

I haven't faced any difficulties writing essay answers in Economic

courses. But I did have some problem in writing English short answers for Chinese 101B. It was so hard to translate something I know in my native language into a second language.

As for which program should offer the course, the existence of a “Special Topics” upper-division course, Writing 125, in the Writing Program provided a way to schedule the course without needing to submit a formal proposal through the Master Course Approval system. We titled this special topics course Writing for Multilingual Students With Economics Emphasis. The course description stated that it was designed “especially for upper division transfer students who are majoring (or intending to major) in Economics”; we worked with undergraduate advisers in the Economics Department to enroll international transfer students. At the same time, we decided not to restrict the course to enroll only international transfer students in case other upper-division multilingual students thought they needed specialized instruction in academic writing. The Economics Department also agreed to accept the course as one of those fulfilling its upper-division writing requirement. Once administrative approval was given to develop the writing course, it was proposed for special funding through the annual Writing Program curriculum plan.

### **Course Development**

After consultation with the dean of Undergraduate Education, as the developer and initial instructor for this course, I met with several Economics professors who often teach Intermediate Microeconomic Theory, a lower-division course required for transfer students who enter UCSB wishing to declare a major in Economics, either in theory or accounting tracks. Students must complete this course with a satisfactory grade of B- or above. Thus, a high percentage of the entering international transfer students in Economics take this lecture course, each section enrolling approximately 150 students, during their first quarter. My objective in meeting with the Economics professors was to discuss the writing demands of the course and the areas in which they thought multilingual writers needed the most assistance. Both professors informed me that the writing for the course mainly involved short answers on homework and exams. Both of them stressed the need for writing clear definitions and explanations. One of the professors shared samples of exam answers that multilingual students had written, typically a few sentences interpreting graphic data or explaining results of data analysis related to economic principles. From these meetings, some of the important writing demands for undergraduate Economics students that emerged included the following:

1. The ability to describe increases, decreases, and other changes of state;
2. The ability to explain causes and/or effects of data or situations;
3. The ability to summarize key points in textual information clearly and concisely; and
4. The ability to interpret as well as to summarize graphic data.

Given this information from the Economics professors, along with a copy of the hefty Microeconomics textbook, and the more general goals of the course, I developed a syllabus for a 10-week, 25-hour course. The major assignments concerned rhetorical strategies needed for writing in economics but useful for many other fields as well: extended definition, data commentary, summary writing, writing about causal relationships, and comparing information from texts or graphic data. As such, the course outline was similar to those of many graduate writing courses for multilingual students that use Swales and Feak (2012) as a model if not a primary text. Most of the writing assignments offered choices of topics related to economics as well as other topics, including individual choices (see the Appendix for sample assignments). The only exception was the extended-definition assignment, for which students were asked to define a term in economics for a general, educated audience. One other assignment involved writing a résumé and cover letter for either a job or graduate school application. Instruction for this assignment included a guest presentation from a staff member of UCSB's Career Services.

At the end of the quarter, students were required to turn in a writing portfolio of their work, including all drafts and the final versions along with a reflective essay discussing their accomplishments and challenges. First drafts submitted were graded, with typed comments and suggestions for revision; these grades counted for a variable percentage of the final grade for each assignment. After the first drafts, students were encouraged to consult and revise if they wished; however, revisions were optional, not required. That is, while few did so because first draft grades tended to be B or below, students could choose to count their first graded draft of an assignment for the entire assignment grade. For the majority, who worked on at least one revision of the first draft, grades for the final versions turned in with the portfolio counted for a higher percentage of the assignment grade. Individual conferencing outside of class was strongly encouraged; the syllabus required all students to participate in two half-hour conferences with the instructor during the 10 weeks of the course.

Approximately one-third of the class sessions were scheduled in a

computer lab in which students would explore resources for academic language development, such as *The Corpus of Contemporary American English* (Davies, 2008) and the *Oxford Collocations Dictionary*, and work on exercises for developing academic vocabulary and lexicogrammatical structures in the areas previously mentioned (change of state, cause/effect) as well as those for expressing writer stance, creating cohesion, and reporting information from sources.

### **Student Demographics and Backgrounds**

During the first offering of this course in the fall of 2012, 12 male and 7 female students enrolled (the course had a cap of 20), all of them new international transfer students intending to major in Economics. The majority, nine students, were originally from China. Four students were natives of Hong Kong, two were from Taiwan, and one each were from Korea, Japan, Thailand, and Sweden. All of the students had transferred from American colleges or universities, the great majority (16 of the 19) from the California Community College system. Only one had transferred from another UC campus and only two had attended college in another state. In subsequent offerings during the winter quarters, many of the students had completed at least one quarter of transfer work at UCSB and some were seniors planning to graduate with an Economics major.

As new students at UCSB, most students in the first offering of the Writing 125 class during the fall quarter were excited about their new life at a research university, very highly motivated to succeed in their course work, and diligent about assignments. At the same time, many of them, with only a few exceptions, had significant problems with both fluency and accuracy in their academic written English. Some had little confidence about their writing abilities and were fearful of a course that demanded so much writing. In a first-day in-class writing assignment that asked students to reflect on their backgrounds in first and second language reading and writing, one student wrote:

When I was in China, my English was very good in our school, because we concentrate on grammar but not on writing. I was proud of my English when I was in China, but when I came to America, I feel I don't know how to write.

In general, students who enrolled in Writing 125 as new transfer students thought that they had received ample instruction in writing five-paragraph essays in their lower-division work and most had at least one course that focused on research paper writing. However, as the course progressed, most of them commented at some point ei-

ther in writing or in conferences that they had not before experienced writing the kinds of assignments required in this course, such as data commentaries or extended definitions of terms in economics. Nor had they focused much in prior writing course work on vocabulary development outside of that focused on in specific readings.

Subsequent offerings of this course, taught by my colleague Randall Rightmire as well as by me, included a mix of new transfer students and students who had completed more than one quarter of upper-division work at the university. However, for the most part, enrolled students who had done previous course work at UCSB had not taken any other upper-division writing courses.

### **Student Feedback on Course Work**

This section summarizes information gleaned from students' in-class writings, portfolio introductions, and a final written course summary I solicited for the two sections I taught of the course. It discusses what students considered the most helpful course work, the most challenging assignments, and their suggestions for how the course might be improved for future students.

#### ***Most Helpful Course Work***

As would be expected, individual students differed as to what they deemed most helpful. Nevertheless, some topics were repeatedly noted, ones that typically were unfamiliar to them or for which they had had few prior opportunities for productive practice.

Students who were highly motivated to write about topics in economics found that some assignments, such as extended definitions, served as valuable writing-to-learn activities. For explanations and examples of extended definitions, I used information from a variety of Internet sources, often ones concerned with technical communication (e.g., <https://www.prismnet.com/~hcexres/textbook/def.html>). The *Oxford Dictionary of Business English* proved a good source of examples of formal definitions of terms. For an example of an extended definition of an economics term for analysis, I used the World Bank Organization's definition of *corruption* (The World Bank, 1997). Also useful for discussion of contrastive extended definitions and language for connecting contrastive terms was Swales and Feak's (2012) example of the differences between patents and copyrights.

In commenting about her learning experience while researching information for her extended definition, one student wrote in her portfolio introduction: "It was not only the extended definition of 'utility' that I learned but I also better understood the whole chapter in the economics textbook that talks about utility." Another wrote about

the extended-definition assignment: “My first paper (defining ‘preference’) helped me a lot in my Econ 10A course. I now know not only the meaning of ‘preference’ but also other terms like ‘utility’ and ‘demand’ because they are connected with each other.” Students gained a heightened awareness of the specialized vocabulary of their chosen field. As one student introduced his extended definition: “Choice, how simple a word it is, but in Economics it has great significance.”

Given the strongly career-oriented goals of most of the enrolled students, the opportunity to write and get intensive feedback on résumés and employment or school-application cover letters was a popular activity. Both from the résumé drafts and written comments of students, it was clear that some were not aware of the different expectations for résumés submitted for positions in the US in comparison to Asian countries. One student wrote in an end-of-course evaluation: “The style is totally different in China.” Another commented: “Without this assignment, I might have put my birth date and hobbies and all kinds of things that would make my resume look not professional.” Because most of the students had no job experience in the US, they needed to be quite creative in translating other kinds of experience, such as participation in college organizations or volunteer activities, into assets. They were strongly encouraged to take their résumé drafts to the career center staff for additional feedback.

A number of students mentioned that they found it quite valuable learning more about the linguistic and rhetorical features of different registers in written English through text-analysis exercises and then practicing ways to transform less formal phrasing into prose more commonly found in academic writing. One area of emphasis was the ways in which academic writers pack information that may have been previously expressed as sentences into nominal structures; for example, *the labor share is declining* becomes rephrased as *the declining labor share*. Students observed how nominal structures commonly served not only to achieve conciseness in academic texts but also in creating cohesion with prior text, often in explanations of economic principles in phrases beginning with a preposition logical connector (e.g., *despite*, *due to*, *given*) and including a reference pronoun such as *the*, *this*, or *these*, as in the following examples from the Microeconomics course textbook (Varian, 2010):

*Given the indifference curves*, we want to find a function that is constant ... (p. 61)

*Despite this difference in definition*, it turns out that the Hicks substitution effect gives the consumer just enough money to get back to his old indifference curve. (p. 154)



The Microeconomics course textbook also served as a source for noticing common linguistic structures used for explanations and examples, such as factual *if*-clauses and imperative introductory phrases such as *Let's now consider ...* , *Let's think about ...* . Like many contemporary textbooks, this text frequently used a number of “reader engagement” linguistic features, including the introductory phrases just listed.<sup>4</sup> Students noted the ubiquitous use of third-person plural *we* in mathematical explanations, just as in oral explanations, rather than passive voice, for example, “If *we* cancel *tx*’ from each side of the equation, we have ...” (p. 150). Second-person *you* was another marker of reader engagement: “If *you* think about it, most goods are like chocolate cake ...” (p. 44) Students observed that questions, another engagement strategy of less formal written English, were frequently used in their textbook to introduce topics as well as to encourage reflective thinking before the text provided answers.

*What can we say about the amount of consumption of gasoline?*  
(p. 151)

*What would be an example of a technology that had increasing returns to scale?* (p. 342)

*Should a company provide its own cafeteria? Janitorial services? Photocopying services? Travel assistance? Many factors enter into such decisions.* (p. 349)

And even exclamation points could occasionally be found to emphasize surprising results of changes in conditions, a feature not seen in more formal academic prose such as research papers:

In fact, the equilibrium price of apartments will remain unchanged! (p. 11)

Because the bulk of the reading that undergraduate students do for many Economics courses is textbook material and PowerPoint slides, it was important for them to be aware that the textbook register differs from that of more formal research writing they might be required to produce, especially for those students intending to enter graduate programs. Many students noted their work on ways to craft effective and clear cohesion as very helpful to building their academic proficiency, recognizing that they often tended to rely on one-word cohesive devices such as the linking adverbials *however* or *therefore*.

Another vocabulary-building topic that students found quite useful was the ways in which academic writers use stance markers when writing from source materials. Lancaster (2011), in a close analysis

of stancetaking in undergraduate Economics argument papers written by English L1 and L2 writers, has described how highly rated L1 papers successfully used stance markers to create dialogic space that acknowledged other perspectives as well as the writer's stance in ways that the L2 writers, who often made monologic assertions, did not. While this class touched on only some of the linguistic types of stance markers, including probability adverbs and adjectives (e.g., *likely*, *probably*; *possible*, *probable*), quantifiers (e.g., *many*, *most*), modals (e.g., *may*, *could*), and verbs (e.g., *appears*, *tends*), the notion of stance in commenting on assertions was unfamiliar to most students.

To my surprise, some students claimed never to have revised papers in their lower-division work and commented on how helpful they realized it was to revise their papers! One student said, "I used to not revise my paper and just read through the paper two times for checking my grammar mistakes however ... I discovered many benefits of revising paper." "At my previous college," wrote another, "I didn't have a chance to revise my papers." In the latter case, we would assume that "not having a chance" meant not submitting a paper for feedback; in general, students found it difficult to attempt revisions without directives and explicit feedback. We hoped that students took away some revising strategies from the course that they could use without the need for instructor feedback. Both the end-of-course written evaluations, which included self-evaluation, and the portfolio-introduction assignment encouraged students to reflect on their processes and accomplishments and to express what they hoped to transfer, both knowledge and strategies, to their future work. For the portfolio introduction, students were given a list of questions to prompt their reflection, including questions asking them to describe specifically what they had chosen to focus on in revisions, how those revisions had improved their final versions, what areas of grammar and vocabulary use they had tried to improve, and what strategies they had developed either to edit for common errors or to further develop their academic vocabulary knowledge.

The computer lab component of this course incorporated a number of vocabulary-development activities involving *The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)* (Davies, 2008), especially in helping students gain awareness of common collocations of academic vocabulary such as change-of-state words (e.g., finding common direct objects of verbs such as *augment*, *modify*, or *reduce*) or lexicogrammatical combinations of field-specific language (e.g., *promote/stimulate/hinder/undermine economic recovery*). Several students in final course evaluations mentioned COCA as a valuable resource for future work, such as this writer: "I like the COCA website, whenever

there is a vocabulary that I am not familiar with, I will check it out on COCA to see what words it uses with and what prepositions can be used.”

### ***Most Challenging Assignments***

Learning how to write about graphic data, whether in economics or other fields, was a topic often cited as not only very useful but very challenging. Several students in their portfolio discussions described their difficult first attempts even though a PowerPoint presentation in class, later posted on the class website, had provided guidelines for selecting information, organizing, and writing data commentaries. One student said: “When I first wrote this paper, I had no idea what I wanted to write, and I decided to write everything that a table said.” Another wrote: “I have to say the graph or the table looked very clear, but it was not easy to analyze at all ... it was very tricky to decide which pair of data I should pick.” Even students who later took the course as transfer students with several quarters at UCSB wrote that they had written about data only as short-answer responses on exams. To write data commentaries extending beyond a few sentences, students needed to start out with clear, focused summary statements that stated the purpose of the data, to identify the most significant findings, and to leave out less important details, in short, to apply the principles of any good summary. In both their summaries and discussions of the commentary, they needed to accurately interpret graphic symbols and describe categorical variables (variables identified by a word or phrase rather than by a number) and to use appropriate language to describe trends across time, patterns of data, and comparisons of variables, both similarities and differences. Finally, they were asked to make inferences and draw conclusions that could be supported by the data and to evaluate the strengths of those conclusions.

From my analysis of the difficulties students encountered in their data-commentary drafts, I identified a number of common problem areas that would inform future course materials offering explicit instruction and practice. Some writers needed practice in writing introductory summary statements of different types (see Swales & Feak, 2012 for discussion of indicative vs. informative summary statements). Writers sometimes interpreted graphs in terms of shapes or directions of lines rather than the events/variables that the lines represented, for example, describing several curves as “like waves,” or in reference to a chart, stating that the “blue line was higher than the orange line.” Variables expressed by words rather than numbers were particularly hard for writers to describe. For example, in a chart describing the wage changes through time of groups with different edu-

cational levels, one label, *high school dropout*, could be incorporated without change into the commentaries, but other labels in the chart, such as *some college* and *graduate school*, did not refer as clearly to people and had to be recast using phrases such as “those with some college” or “workers who completed graduate school.” Other problems noted included inferences about causes presented as facts rather than possible causes, hedging vocabulary used inappropriately, unclear relationships between inferences and data, and unreasonable/invalid references regarding causes/implications. (For sample materials suggested to address some of these areas, see Frodesen, 2014).

Writing summaries turned out to be one of the most difficult assignments for many students. For this class, students were given the source material to summarize (for the first offering of the course, an article of approximately 850 words to summarize in 250 words) so that I could look closely at how students summarized and paraphrased key ideas in the original piece. In commenting about this assignment, one student wrote:

The hardest assignment for me was writing the summary. To be honest, I think summary is one of the easiest academic assignments. ... However, I really had no idea how to do a summary. I usually have patchwork copying on my summary.

Since summary of some sort is a common type of writing assignment in freshman composition, it is likely that most students had some sort of instruction in summary. However, it is also possible that the summary tasks many students experienced were literature based. As Du (2014) has discussed in her study of international students' experience in disciplinary summary writing, summary writing in ESL courses frequently involves readings not related to students' academic backgrounds. One student in my class noted in his portfolio reflection that the only summaries he had written before this class were of a Harry Potter book and a romance novel written by his instructor. In addition, most students had not previously had their summaries evaluated for a grade on specific criteria, as their summary for this course was. (See the Appendix for “Summary Assignment: Evaluation Criteria,” which was later used as a scoring rubric with points). Some of the criteria awarded point credit for following rather basic instructional guidelines, such as acknowledging the original source, providing a summary statement at the beginning, and using appropriate reporting verbs (e.g., *describes*, *questions*) and classifier words (e.g., *reasons*, *examples*); here writers were often successful. However, other criteria involved more complex skills, such as presenting ideas in a balanced

way, using cohesive devices effectively, and paraphrasing accurately and appropriately. Such careful evaluation of what writers do or do not do well is not possible if the source text is not familiar to the instructor and not reasonably limited in length. While recognizing that summary forms and purposes vary widely in larger pieces of writing, I thought that this more guided assignment helped students to identify rhetorical and linguistic challenges and provided opportunities for focused revision in their individual conferences, often involving work on clarity in paraphrasing, creating more effective cohesion, or, in some cases, correcting their misreading of the text.

### ***Student Suggestions for Course Improvement***

In final informal course evaluations (i.e., other than formal course evaluations administered campuswide), students in the first offering of the course proposed the following changes:

- More brief in-class writing because this kind of writing is so frequently required in Economics exams;
- One longer paper to replace some of the shorter assignments;
- More business-related assignments, such as email correspondence with employers or a business-writing project;
- Additional vocabulary and grammar exercises of the kind worked on in the lab sessions (e.g., change-of-state vocabulary, cohesion, hedging, reporting verbs, paraphrasing practice) posted on the website for further practice along with an answer key.

### **Course Revisions**

After the first offering of the Writing 125 course, some revisions were made in the writing assignments based on student feedback and my own evaluations of the course as well as some project ideas created by a colleague.

The syllabus for the second course offering included a six- to seven-page research paper assignment in which students were asked to investigate the economic causes and/or effects of a topic of their choice. Preparation for this assignment included a computer lab session with one of the campus librarians whose area of specialization included economics indexes. Students wrote on topics such as changes in the one-child policy in China, economic effects of electric vehicles, the higher education bubble, smog in Beijing, and benefits of immigration for the US economy. Several students focused on issues related to the large numbers of Chinese students being educated in the US and included interviews with fellow students as part of their research data.

In several subsequent course offerings, writing assignments involving PowerPoint presentations to the class were included; these presentations served different purposes, such as defining a technical term in Economics for a general audience or reporting on research of a company for a potential internship. One of the courses taught by colleague Randall Rightmire followed more of a business communication model and included a multimedia project that combined oral and written tasks outside of class (see “Writing as an Interviewer” in the Appendix).

### **Summary and Pedagogical Implications**

Judging from the formal course evaluations as well as student-written informal evaluations, this course developed for international transfer students majoring (or hoping to major) in Economics was quite successful.<sup>5</sup> Students overall thought that the areas of writing instruction, including rhetorical tasks as well as academic language focus, had not repeated what they had learned from their lower-division courses. In written evaluation comments, students stated that they thought that the writing strategies they had practiced and their newly gained knowledge of online resources for further language development would help them both academically and professionally.

Writing from sources was clearly a very challenging area for almost all students, whether they were using their Microeconomics course textbook, materials given in class, or those attained through their own research. However, at least when I was familiar with the sources, that is, having assigned them or being able to find them in the Economics textbook, I could discuss with individual students ways to more effectively refer to these sources in their own writing. In retrospect, I thought that devoting only several weeks of the 10-week quarter to a research paper requiring multiple sources was not sufficient time and that a research writing course linked to a disciplinary course would probably be more successful. Our Writing Program offers a number of these courses, though none of them targets multilingual writers, much less international transfer students and their special academic English challenges. For the longer research paper I assigned the second time I taught this course, inappropriate textual borrowing (aka “plagiarism”) became a significant problem I had not encountered in the first offering of the course. In addition, even though I arranged a special computer lab session with a reference librarian to show students how to access information from economics indexes, few students used these resources for finding information for their papers. Again, it seems that though some of the students were very

engaged in their longer research papers on topics they had selected, more time was needed for most students to further develop their research writing skills in all areas.

While most students had positive things to say about their lower-division writing instruction, mostly in the community college system, they also pointed out they were unfamiliar with writing about graphic data. Even those enrolled in the winter of 2014 as second-year transfer students, having completed upper-division Economics courses, said that they had received no explicit instruction on how to write data commentaries, though they had been required to interpret and comment on data in their Economics exams. Trends in first-year composition, as evidenced by writing textbooks, have included expanding the kinds of texts students respond to, involving not only different academic and professional genres but multimedia as well. Thus, perhaps freshman writing assignments will increasingly offer students practice in writing about graphic data and integrating graphic commentaries into larger texts.

Writing on topics within their disciplines and with relevance to professional goals was a strong motivator for many students in the course. In some cases, their interest in the topic increased the challenge. As one student, who researched the reasons so many Chinese students now study abroad, commented in his portfolio introduction:

I did some research papers before. They were about ... things that don't interest me. It was easier to do research paper about them though. Because I don't really care so I have no opinions. This time is different because I am interesting in the topic I chose. It became harder since I had some judgments and opinions, which make it worse, you know?

While upper-division writing programs in four-year colleges and universities frequently offer business writing courses that are of high interest to the population served in the writing course for international transfer students described here, such courses typically assume levels of academic language proficiency beyond that possessed by many international multilingual students entering from community colleges. Instructors of such courses have neither the time nor often the expertise to address the special academic language needs of these writers. Thus, specialized courses can provide much-needed academic support for international multilingual writers in building their knowledge, experience, and confidence in academic English for upper-division course work and professional goals.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Data from University of California Office of the President, Students Affairs, Undergraduate Admissions. University of California.

<sup>2</sup>A 10th campus, UC San Francisco, enrolls only graduate and professional students in the medical and health sciences.

<sup>3</sup>Approximately 25% of the students enrolled in the first offering of the course ended up majoring in a discipline other than Economics for various reasons.

<sup>4</sup>For more information about this topic, see Hyland (2001).

<sup>5</sup>79% of students gave the course the highest possible rating in Fall 2012 and 93% the highest rating in Winter 2014.

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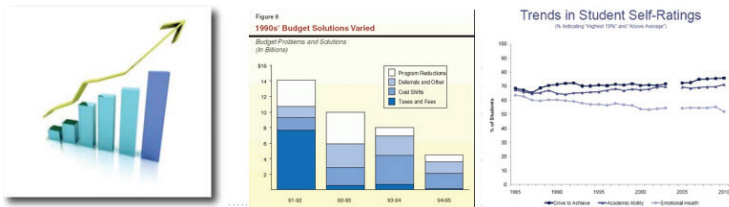
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## Appendix

### Sample Assignments and Rubrics

Writing 125—Winter 2012  
Instructor: Jan Frodesen

#### Writing Assignment: Data Commentary



**Goals:** To develop your ability to write well-organized, clear and informative description and commentary for graphic data  
**Length:** 300-400 words, typed, double spaced

Summarize and interpret 1-3 graphs, tables or figures that involve some sort of change over time. More is not necessarily better—it just

depends on how much information there is in the data and whether it might be more interesting to use two either on the same topic or from the same source. I am posting a number of possibilities you could use; they include economic charts as well as survey information from some of the nationwide student surveys completed by college freshmen and seniors.

If you choose your own graph(s), table(s), or figure(s) (not ones I have posted), be sure to include it/them in your paper with the source. That is, tell me where it/they came from.

In your data commentary:

- Use a summary statement to introduce the purpose of the data.
- Use highlighting statements to describe trends.
- Use locator statements where relevant.
- Use a variety of verbs, nouns and modifiers to describe changes; refer to the lab session on change-of-state vocabulary.
- Use hedging vocabulary where appropriate.

Refer to the posted PowerPoint slides on Data Commentary for examples and other guidelines.

Remember: All writing must be yours. If you wish, you can look up other information that might help you interpret the data but then be sure to include references to any other sources.

Please see the syllabus for other format information.

### **Paper: Exploring Economic Causes and/or Effects**

**Length:** 6-7 pages (about 1,750 words-2,100 words)

**Assignment:**

For your last paper, your assignment is to research and write about economic causes and/or economic effects of an issue that would be of interest to you for personal or professional purposes.

The issue you choose can relate to any sphere of public or private life. It could be a social issue (e.g., the decline in marriage rates as exemplified in the sample paper; rising crime rates in a city or country; migration of populations from rural to urban areas; unemployment). The issue could involve political legislation with social implications (e.g., changes in the one-child policy for families in China; state laws allowing same-sex marriage in the US; changes in minimum wage laws for workers; changes related to health insurance; changes in military spending; child labor laws). You could research a health issue (e.g., the economic causes and/or effects of rising rates of obesity or diabetes in some countries), an environmental issue or problem (e.g., increasing pollution levels from industry/automobiles; deforestation in a specific part of the world; global warming trends; effects of a natural disaster such as a tsunami or earthquake). Another broad area would be education (e.g., the rising cost of higher education, the development of MOOCs and other online courses in higher education). And, as the *Atlantic Monthly* article about workers and machines described in its section on “superstars,” the continued development of digital technology has had far-reaching effects on many areas of life related to the distribution of economic wealth, including commercial music and professional athletics to name just a few.

In short, just about anything you could think of might be a potential topic to research economic cause and/or effects. But because this is a short paper, you will need to focus your topic on something that is manageable within the length limits. Our session on library research on (Phelps Lab) should be very helpful in this regard.

## Writing as an Interviewer

### Goals for this Project:

**1. Explore the interview as a medium for communication.** Now that we have looked at several different forms of communication in writing—summaries, emails, cover letters, résumés, and a mock job interview—it is a good time to go deeper into the interview as a form of professional and academic communication. That's because an interview is basically a conversation. Even though a lot of business, technical, and academic writing consists of reports and presentations, you will ultimately find that conversations are the number one way we exchange information. What's unique about conversations is the level of interaction. The question/answer format is an ideal way to exchange knowledge, and it is different—sometimes more complex!—than an essay or term paper.

**2. Learn about your field.** This project is your opportunity to reach out to a professional in your field of study or your career field and learn from his or her experience. You could interview a professor or a working professional. (Let's make sure that no two students from our class are going to choose the same potential interviewee. If one person feels beset by two or more students at the same time, that will be too much to ask. And remember and apply all the forms for polite and well-written emails that we practiced a few weeks ago. Finally, make it clear when you reach out that you are sensitive to their busy schedule and your demands will be very light. You should specify the amount of time you need—fifteen minutes might be enough. And if you want to audio- or video-record the interview you'll need to mention that in your inquiry.)

**3. Develop your writing skills.** As I said, you'll have to compose good questions in advance for your interviewee. What do you want to learn about your field? What expertise does your subject have that you are especially interested in? Put these questions into your proposal so that we can work on them together. If you audio- or video-record, I'll expect you to transcribe your subject's answers. This transcript will make up the rough draft.

**4. Explore alternative media.** So much communication in business and academia happens beyond ink and paper. There are presentations, slideshows, webpages, and more. For the final presentation, I'll expect you to put the interview into a newer media form and present it to the

class. You'll have several options, described below. You'll also have the chance to talk to the class about what you created; each of you will get about twenty minutes to show and discuss what you've done.

**Deadlines:**

- **Proposal:** Write 8-10 questions. Tell me who you've contacted, what their affiliation is, and whether they've agreed to the interview. If possible, tell me when and where your interview will take place.
- **Draft:** Write an intro of 1-3 paragraphs. (See the sample interviews on our webpage to get some ideas.) Then, write your questions and your subject's answers.
- **Final Presentation:** Rewrite your transcript to take care of any editing issues that appeared in the rough draft. Then, package it in some alternative medium. You'll have several options; choose an option that best fits your interests and academic or career goals.

Option 1: Video of an interview with captions. For ideas, take a glance at some of these samples:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gb-hKfnnsRE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kD5SuT0tbls> (make sure to turn captions on)

[http://blog.ted.com/2009/09/08/ted\\_and\\_reddit\\_2/](http://blog.ted.com/2009/09/08/ted_and_reddit_2/)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOP2V\\_np2c0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOP2V_np2c0)

Option 2: Webpage or blog. For ideas, take a glance at some of these samples:

<http://hksadmissionblog.tumblr.com/post/43130728202/student-video-interview-mpa-id-mehmet-seflek>

<http://eliotrausch.tumblr.com/post/5347678341/my-interview-with-carson-daly>

Option 3: Edited audio or video in a PowerPoint-type slideshow.

[http://crusselliddportfolio.weebly.com/uploads/9/9/1/0/991047/edit\\_6100\\_dr\\_harmon.ppt](http://crusselliddportfolio.weebly.com/uploads/9/9/1/0/991047/edit_6100_dr_harmon.ppt)

Option 4: A PowerPoint that you've converted to video (and optionally, embedded into your webpage or blog.) If you'd like lessons on how to turn a PPT into a video, try this tutorial:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTlzpWFFvLE>

### Summary Assignment: Evaluation Criteria

Here is a checklist you can use for your summary drafts:

The summary:	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>acknowledges the original source (e.g., In “What’s the Secret to Learning a Second Language?” Bonnie Tsui examines ...)</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides a summary statement at the beginning so the reader knows the main purpose of the article (e.g., ... Bonnie Tsui examines the role of recall in language learning and its use in language teaching programs.)</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>uses reporting verbs (e.g., <i>states</i>, <i>argues</i>, <i>lists</i>, <i>questions</i>, <i>describes</i>) and classifier words where appropriate (e.g., <i>gives reasons</i>, <i>provides examples</i>, <i>describes systems</i>) to summarize what the author is saying and doing</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>focuses on the main ideas of the article and presents them in a balanced way</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>avoids unnecessary details, such as long summaries of examples</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>presents information neutrally—avoids critique of the author’s views, style or tone</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>connects ideas well with transitions and cohesive devices so that the writing flows and the reader can easily understand how the different points connect</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>uses your own words to express ideas accurately—no copying of long phrases or sentences without quotes, and quotations are few if any</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is relatively free of grammatical, vocabulary and mechanical errors</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>meets the length requirement (at least 250 words—up to 25 more words okay)</li> </ul>	