

English 1900: A Writing (and Writing Program) Laboratory

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Course Description

In many ways, “English 1900: Advanced Strategies of Rhetoric and Research” is a familiar first year writing course designed for the familiar curricular purpose, which White, Eliot, and Peckham have memorably named “inoculation” (17). The Saint Louis University course catalog description promises students will study “complex structures of language including its logical and persuasive possibilities” (“Spring 2019 Course Descriptions”). In the College of Arts and Sciences, where English 1900 meets the “Foundations of Discourse” requirement, the course is said to lead students “to express ideas coherently, to work with a variety of research methods, and to construct effective arguments using appropriate evidence” (Saint Louis University, “Arts and Sciences”). Despite this boilerplate, the Writing Program (WP) has striven to create a course that draws on a richer, disciplinary understanding of writing and rhetoric. The standard course structure, from which instructors are asked to fashion their own syllabi, asks students to pursue a scaffolded semester-long project. In that project, students produce the following: 1) several short, research-engaged writing assignments; 2) a major exploratory research assignment; 3) a statement of purpose that addresses (or invokes) an authentic rhetorical situation; 4) a multimodal argument that responds to that situation (accompanied by an analysis and explanation of the student’s rhetorical choices); and 5) a final reflection on the student’s work in the course. As they pursue these assignments, which result in 20-25 pages of writing, students continually rethink and revise their projects and the position(s) they might take. They are encouraged not just to learn but also to change their minds.

Our innovation in these assignments comes from reconceiving writing as the laboratory in which thinking occurs rather than the delivery system of the results of thinking (i.e., the familiar argumentative product). Our approach grew as a response to a complex set of expectations, including the local curricular expectations (described above), current disciplinary expectations (described later in our theoretical rationale), and departmental staffing changes (namely, the entrance of literature faculty into the writing course rotation). Because managing these expectations presented challenges for both the WP administrator (WPA) and instructors, this essay is written from the dual perspective of both: Paul (WPA) and Laura (the graduate instructor whose course is the essay’s ultimate focus). Laura also will discuss how her approach to the course

implemented and expanded upon the course's innovations in order to respond to 1) programmatic assessment, 2) feedback from her colleagues across the WP, and 3) her own experiences teaching two sections of English 1900 in the 2017-2018 academic year.

Institutional Context

The current iteration of English 1900 stems from three levels of institutional context: the university, the WP, and the Department of English. All three played a role in shaping the course innovations we report in this essay.

In most ways, Saint Louis University (SLU) is a typical modern university. Classified as a “high research activity” institution by Carnegie, it has 13,000 students, including 8,000 undergraduates. SLU features twelve colleges and schools, each with a distinct undergraduate core (although the university is currently working toward a universal core, set to be piloted in academic year 2021-22). English 1900 is one of the few courses that traverses those curricula, and to meet that need, the WP offers 45-50 sections of English 1900 per year, capped at 20 students.

At a Jesuit university like SLU, the fact that English 1900 is the only universally required writing course should be surprising, even shocking.¹ When the Jesuits founded their first school in Messina, Italy, in 1548, their original pedagogy was steeped in Renaissance humanism and its classical antecedents. The goal of their entire introductory curriculum—which might last several years—was expressed by the phrase “*eloquentia perfecta*,” or perfect eloquence. Today, like so many schools, SLU crams what was once an entire *paideia* into a single course, which can often be satisfied by transfer or dual-credit enrollment.² Nevertheless, the WP had been doing its part to make sure students received significant writing practice. Until academic year 2016-17, the standard syllabus included two major research-driven writing assignments: 1) the “*dissoi logoi*” assignment, which, in familiar and traditional rhetorical fashion, required students to seek out research that contradicted the positions they were considering; 2) the “advocacy” assignment, which asked students to produce an argument directed, as much as possible, toward an authentic purpose, audience, and context. These assignments would then be followed by a major multimodal project that fit the rhetorical situation they had identified in their writing (which also included several shorter assignments). Through all this work, we were trying to create the rich rhetorical, multimodal curriculum that had been the hallmark of traditional Jesuit education.

Yet informal feedback from both instructors and students suggested that our two major research assignments—coupled with the major multimodal assignment—made for an overstuffed syllabus. Instructors felt like they had to rush some projects, and they very often found themselves jettisoning assign-

ments that the program thought important (for example, the final reflection). In retrospect, it seems that we were essentially trying to pack two courses into one, with the effect of short-changing everything.³ Something had to give, but what? The *dissoi logoi* encouraged seeing a problem from multiple perspectives. The advocacy assignment encouraged research, argumentation, and sensitivity to rhetorical situation. The multimodal assignment helped prepare students to write in 21st century contexts. The numerous smaller assignments facilitated revision and reflection. Everything seemed important.

Before the WPA could address these concerns, the WP faced a significant material change. Traditionally, most sections of English 1900 had been taught by graduate instructors or adjunct faculty. However, raised course caps in our two required literature courses in academic year 2016-17 meant that tenured literature faculty would begin taking a section of English 1900 as part of their regular teaching schedule.

At this point, Paul, as WPA, was faced with a potentially complicated situation. Given the literature faculty's extensive teaching experience, it would have seemed presumptuous simply to direct them to follow the standard syllabus. However, few had much experience teaching first year writing. This moment therefore seemed like a *kairotic* opportunity to invite literature faculty—in the spirit of Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin (1995)—into a conversation about current best practices in writing instruction. Contrary to what might be expected, nine of the department's twenty-five faculty immediately volunteered to join an ad hoc committee to consider revisions to the syllabus and to teach a section of 1900. The committee spent a semester examining the curriculum, enjoying a rare opportunity to talk about “what it is that we as professors do for at least half of our living: teach” (Kameen 176). The rich discussion that emerged allowed Paul and the department's other rhetoric and composition specialists to discuss best practices and identify places where faculty were already engaging in them in their literature courses. Our 2019 Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) external review from Chris Anson and Deborah Holdstein endorsed this approach, observing that “we rarely see this extent of cooperation and support for writing in most traditional English departments” (2).

Most importantly, the ad hoc committee recommended a consequential revision to the sequence of assignments: cut the advocacy assignment and make the *dissoi logoi* the course's major research project. The hope was that an expanded *dissoi logoi* would not only free up time and space for more writing and thought but also allow us the opportunity to move the assignment away from a basic (and sometimes crude) “both sides” structure. The new version would encourage student writing to be far more tentative, exploratory, and messy. In the following section, we make a theoretical case for our embrace of a

more hesitant rhetoric. In the “Critical Reflection,” Laura reports on how this hesitant rhetoric allowed more time for research, exploration, and creativity.

Theoretical Rationale

Jettisoning the advocacy project allowed us to look more critically and with renewed interest at the practice of *dissoi logoi*, particularly where we could take it from its historical roots. Since the beginnings of rhetorical training in the west, arguing on “both sides” of the case has ancient precedent (“*Dissoi Logoi*” in Bizzell and Herzberg 47-55; Mendelson 1-72), Renaissance antecedents (Sloane 80-130), and contemporary endorsement (Elbow 147-191; Krause). Yet we wanted to do more than simply follow what Patricia Bizzell called “the already familiar recommendation to ask students to read several essays that take opposing views on a controversial issue and then to develop their own argumentative positions” (159). Early versions of the assignment often produced nothing more than a point-counterpoint pairing of 5-paragraph essays, in which anemic counterarguments would reveal students’ inability to genuinely engage contrasting opinions. In our revision of the assignment, therefore, we hoped to address three issues: 1) the persistence of simplistic habits of argument, 2) a related aversion to argument or any social engagement that might proceed agonistically, and 3) ineffective research habits, marked by the superficial hunt for the golden quotable.

We turned to the disciplinary literature in order to think through these problems. In *A New Writing Classroom*, for example, Patrick Sullivan observes that, whatever advances we may have made in our theories of argumentation, “simplistic argumentative writing is alive and well in writing classrooms in the United States” (17). Citing a number of studies on the traditional argument, Sullivan argues that “much commonly-assigned argumentative writing traps students in lower order cognitive orientations and serves to support routine, automatic, and largely unexamined ways of looking at the world and engaging complex problems” (1). Sullivan is hardly the first scholar in rhetoric and composition to observe this problem (Bizzell; Corder; Elbow; Foss and Griffin; Haynes; Jarratt; Lynch, George, and Cooper; Muckelbauer). Yet Sullivan’s research (1-23), along with that of Robert Yagelski (9-38), is a good reminder that carelessness in teaching argument can encourage reactive habits of mind. In *Writing as a Way of Being*, Yagelski lays these “routine, automatic, unexamined” practices at the feet of what he calls a “Cartesian ontology.” This ontology encourages an unhealthy dualism between subject and object, a split that undermines the idea that “meaning-making and truth-seeking are not only social but necessarily collaborative,” along with any “acknowledgement that others’ interests are as valid as his or her own” (95). Indeed, this unhealthy

dualism was a feature of our first attempt at *dissoi logoi*, which asked students to argue one side of a case and then another.

Following the recommendations of the department ad hoc committee to make the *dissoi logoi* the focus of the course, Paul redesigned the assignment to encourage students to look at *logoi* without the obligation to argue them. In this, we were following what Michael Gagarin has described as sophistic practice, which was interested less in traditional argument and more in inventing novel possibilities (285). The department's revised and more exploratory *dissoi logoi* assignment was designed to encourage students to move away from "managing" their projects around preconceived conclusions and instead to dwell more on the contexts and the people involved in those arguments. This change paved the way for the innovations that Laura discusses in the final "Critical Reflection" section of this essay.

The other great problem of dualistic argumentation is that it also invites ineffective research. In their study of citation practices, Rebecca Moore Howard and Sandra Jamieson find alarming trends: 46% of cited material came from just the first page of the source, 77% of cited material came from within only the first three pages, 56% of cited sources were used just once, and 76% of cited sources were used only twice (234)—findings which do not take into consideration all of the material used by students without citation at all. These statistics indicate that students are likely not fully or genuinely engaging in the research they conduct. Instead, they start "the research process with a thesis statement", with the claim and defenses already formulated (Howard and Jamieson 231). Not surprisingly, when students do research only to support said claim, they "frequently simplify or partially misrepresent the source to make it fit their arguments" (Howard and Jamieson 234). Our pedagogical questions focused on how we might counter these habits. (The WP had already begun to do this by arranging the courses around themes—such as "Gender and Identity" and "Faith and Doubt"—which would deliberately present students opportunities to immerse themselves in a particular subject.)

But still, the problem remained: how to construct an assignment that went beyond the "already familiar recommendation" of examining opposing sides? How, in other words, could we move toward what John Muckelbauer has called a "generative rhetoric" (as opposed to managerial rhetoric), in which the work of rhetoric is not somehow prior and therefore supplemental to a proposition, but rather becomes the means by which and the context in which any proposition is articulated (20-21)? The answer seemed to lie in doing the first part of what Bizzell describes (i.e., asking students to read several essays on an issue) but refraining from the second part (i.e., asking students to develop their own positions, at least not in prose writing). The *dissoi logoi* would become an as-

signment reserved entirely for invention, and we would delay more conscious focus on purpose, audience, and context until the multimodal project.

In making this change, we hoped to make prose writing what Bruno Latour has called “the functional equivalent of a laboratory. It’s a place for trials, experiments, and simulations” (149). By engaging in *dissoi logoi* without any irritable reaching after claim or thesis, we make writing both the means and medium for knowledge, which “is always *common* but also always *provisional*” (Cooper 185). In effect, we are not asking students to make arguments but to construct the laboratory in which arguments will be made. We take the defamiliarization even further by asking students to engage in writing, as Latour puts it, as a “means to learn how to become sensitive to the contrary requirements, to the exigencies, to the pressures of conflicting agencies where none of them is really in command” (qtd. in Cooper 191). Ultimately, our desire was to lead students away from preemptive certainty in order to invite a more generative rhetoric.

Critical Reflection

With these institutional and disciplinary contexts shaping our first year writing curriculum, we turn now to the course in action. During academic year 2017-18, Laura taught two sections of English 1900, both themed Technology and Media. Prior to the semester’s start, she attended the yearly WP orientation, where many colleagues reported that, despite programmatic changes, students were still struggling to avoid reductive two-sided argument in the *dissoi logoi*. Laura also suspected that both the *dissoi logoi* and multimodal assignments were likely to be unfamiliar to most students, perhaps uncomfortably so (as she herself was unfamiliar with these assignments prior to orientation). With these concerns in mind, Laura decided to make two significant changes in her fall semester planning. The first was to add what she called the Rhetorical Project Overview, and the second was to ask students to consider stakeholders in each assignment. Introducing stakeholders to the assignments would (Laura hoped) incline students to think about their issues less in terms of “sides” and more in terms of the people and agents (human or otherwise) working within their issues. In making these changes, Laura wanted to strategically position students to see their issues as needing something other than simplistic argumentation; they would be unable to tackle writing in this course in the ways they may have done successfully in the past.

For most of Laura’s students—who were primarily freshmen and largely from STEM fields—the first challenge was to write about an issue without furthering a thesis. In fact, Laura’s students not only made it abundantly clear they preferred to write the traditional argumentative research paper, they also repeatedly attempted to do so despite instructions to the contrary. In her fall

section of the course, over half of Laura's students (14 out of 19) who submitted an early brainstorming assignment presented their idea in the form of a statement or claim instead of the requested question. So, rather than asking, "who has a stake in the problem of food scarcity in our city?" the students preferred to jump to claims about the causes of food scarcity (or the benefits of recycling, or the effects of technology in the classroom, etc.).

Laura's Rhetorical Project Overview was designed to help students resist this impulse to assert and to manage the uncertainty of not yet having the "right" answer. Incorporated into the syllabus, the overview briefly explained the intentions and interconnectedness of the semester's assignments. For example, the course began with preliminary research in the form of short writing assignments (such as a digital version of Ann Berthoff's dialectical notebook, or double-entry journal). That research is then used in the *dissoi logoi*, where students would engage with *but not assert* their issue. Such a claim would come later, with the multimodal project.

Most importantly, however, this overview was not simply offered to students to peruse on their own or crammed into syllabus review day. Because orientation prepared Laura for some of the common challenges English 1900 students faced, she knew that they would need more time to process what the class was asking of them. Therefore, in the second week of the semester, Laura devoted an entire class period to discussing the Rhetorical Project Overview. This session allowed students to ask fundamental questions, such "You mean you *really* don't want a thesis in the research project?" or "But all my *other* instructors told me you could never write without a thesis statement!" or "How do you even *write* without a thesis?" Eventually, with a lot of reassurance and encouragement, the students came to see that Laura's ultimate desire was that they deeply involve themselves in an issue where the most important questions were more complex than, "Am I for it or against it?" By introducing the assignments and opening the door to talking about them and their potential sticking points, Laura hoped that students would be able to focus more on the challenging work at hand and less on making sure it was delivered in 'standardized' forms.

Positioning students to tackle the semester's early assignments, specifically the *dissoi logoi*, without asserting a premature thesis provided a challenge that was both frustrating (in their opinion) yet oftentimes productive (in Laura's). In a composition class where students were expecting the standard composition essay, the *dissoi logoi* was unfamiliar in that it asked students to explore other viewpoints and write about them in ways they hadn't before. Even with the introduction of the overview, the preliminary work many of Laura's students turned in (topic proposals, early drafts) included tendencies toward asserting a specific viewpoint. Responding to student work meant reminding those

students—sometimes repeatedly—not to close off their analysis preemptively, which at times meant inviting students to extra conference meetings to work through alternative ways to express their ideas.

However, by referring to the Rhetorical Project Overview and assignment prompts, students slowly began to understand what they were being asked to do, and when they arrived at the *dissoi logoi* deadline, no one submitted a set of simplistic, dual 5-paragraph essays. Even when students presented two main “sides,” they worked through their arguments in ways that showed more complexity of thought. For example, one student’s *dissoi logoi* began by asking questions about recycling: Was society recycling enough? Was it a waste of other resources and costs? While these questions might have stemmed from an early unspoken bias in favor of recycling, the student’s *dissoi logoi* concluded with the realization that what matters most is not—as a popular meme would have it—to recycle “*all* the things”; instead, it’s about recycling the *right* materials. To help students come to recognize these moments of complexity earlier in the course, Laura emphasized the overview more frequently in the following semester, at which point only 6 of 19 students framed their initial brainstorming as a claim. This suggests that the overview was having the desired effect on disrupting students’ tendency toward pre-emptive claims.

Like all interventions, the Rhetorical Project Overview occasioned other challenges. Because Laura had so emphasized the scaffolded arrangement of the assignments, students sometimes struggled to see the purpose of each assignment other than as a component of the next.⁴ Put another way, the process orientation of the course challenged their expectation that a writing course is about making products. To allay these concerns, Laura would later add two things to her assignments: 1) a purpose statement that provided the pedagogical rationale for each assignment and 2) a list of the course objectives the assignment was intended to meet. With the adjustments to the assignment sheets, students in the spring semester seemed better able to see how Laura envisioned the way in which staying with the process would lead to meeting the learning objectives and acquiring the appropriate rhetorical habits of mind.

These habits of mind include taking stakeholders into consideration in any rhetorical situation. So, throughout the course, Laura used various pedagogical strategies to emphasize the significance of stakeholders and to have students practice awareness of positions outside their own. This work began with course readings that offered differing perspectives on key issues, which were then the subject of class discussion. When students began considering their topics for the rhetorical projects, they were asked to complete the low-stakes assignments that were setting them up for the *dissoi logoi* (topic proposals, brainstorming, double-entry journals, etc.). But in order to make stakeholders as visible as possible, Laura assigned the Stakeholder Analysis (Appendix

A), where students were asked to describe and visualize a minimum of three stakeholders. Students were also asked to conduct an interview with at least one stakeholder. Some students spoke with friends or family members who had only minimally relevant experiences with the topic; the student exploring recycling, for instance, interviewed her Resident Assistant. Others took the initiative to reach beyond their familiar circles and approach professionals, volunteers, and entrepreneurs in the community. The student researching food scarcity spoke with an employee with a mobile grocery store (and got a tour of the bus as well!). Overall, continuous attention to stakeholders gave students the opportunity to not only read and think about what others say about those affected by their issues but also to get a firsthand account of what those stakeholders value and believe.

As a result of these changes, the first half of the semester became an extensive tour of thinking through an issue and its stakeholders before positing an opinion. The idea was to describe as richly as possible who and what was at work and at stake before even trying to consider a position or purpose. The changes Laura made at the start of the academic year clearly had the intended effect regarding stakeholders, a concept to which most of her students easily adapted. The students' papers were not always neat and tidy, but they were definitely more diversified. For example, one student took the safe but satisfactory route of examining students', teachers', and parents' views on the issue of fidget devices in the classroom. Another student, however, took a Latourian approach by examining GMOs from the perspectives of farmers, consumers, and plants, addressing not only the wellbeing of the human agents tending and eating the food but also the health and nature of nonhuman agents, illustrating a deeper understanding of agency and actors at work in the world around us. The emphasis on stakeholders proved quite successful throughout both of Laura's sections, as nearly all of her students submitted work that attempted—at the very least—to invite to the *agon* a wider range of actors, both human and nonhuman. While some students still gravitated to a simplistic view of their issue, the emphasis on multiple stakeholders and new vantage points invited them to see the issue outside of the traditional or predictable binary, and students demonstrated greater critical awareness of those involved in their issues as well as how to ask questions and seek answers about what others see and believe.

In addition to the Stakeholder Analysis, Laura also made corresponding changes to her prompt for the *dissoi logoi* to help students follow through on the work they had been doing in the beginning of the semester. Laura felt that, while the language of the program assignment sheet hinted at the possibility of multiple perspectives, it still left too much room for pro-con analysis. This became an opportunity to adjust the framework for the assignment to allow

students to continue their pursuit of stakeholders and expand their agonistic imaginations. Laura revised the assignment sheet so that any references to “two” sides, perspectives, or sections were phrased explicitly as “multiple” or “various” (see Appendix B). She also developed rubrics for the *dissoi logoi* brainstorming and rough draft stages and modified the WP-designed rubric so that each phase of the project explicitly included “stakeholder” language in the assessment criteria. Ideally, by building stakeholders more directly into the course assessment, Laura could create additional opportunities for students to move away from groups of “twos” and instead allow students to describe more robustly the arguments at play.

The changes Laura made to the course resulted in clear improvements to the ways that students thought about the issues in the world around them as well as how to see those issues *in* the world around them. After the *dissoi logoi* and in preparation for the multimodal projects at the end of the course, Laura had students create advertisements for a technological innovation (selected from any of the pre-1970 items on *The Atlantic’s* “The 50 Greatest Breakthroughs Since the Wheel”). In doing so, students needed to consider their innovation through the eyes (and time) of its creation, not to see it how they see and know it today. With clever ads about the safety and health benefits of anesthetic ether and refrigeration, many of Laura’s students showed considerably greater thoughtfulness and awareness of context than they had with their initial *dissoi logoi* brainstorming. For example, one student used crumpled, tea-stained paper to simulate a vintage ad for pasteurization, with a line drawing of a wine bottle and half-filled glass above the caption “Sauver votre vin. Sauver votre vie.” (“Save your wine. Save your life.”). In the student’s reflection, she describes why she wrote the ad in French and why she selected wine—not the more commonly associated milk—as the focus (because not only does it go through the process of pasteurization but it is also the most common beverage enjoyed by French men and women of all classes, according to her research, of course).

To continue facilitating students’ awareness of writing as a tool for working through issues and perspectives, Laura’s future sections of English 1900 will include additional opportunities for students to explicitly identify and reflect on stakeholders. For example, the double-entry journal students complete for their research will contain sections to name and summarize the various stakeholders discussed implicitly or alluded to in each source. Additionally, Laura will prompt students in the *dissoi logoi’s* concluding section to reflect more actively on their initial beliefs about their issue and how those beliefs have changed as a result of their research, to encourage them to understand and accept the value of adapting to new information.

The types of changes that Laura has implemented in the course have also begun to make a difference on a programmatic level. Starting in academic

year 2019-20, the WP began work on an in-house English 1900 textbook, *Eloquentia Perfecta*. The book will include a version of the Rhetorical Project Overview to serve as an introduction to the curriculum. Additionally, each assignment will be accompanied by a list of the relevant course objectives to serve as a reminder that even when assignments may not feel “finished,” they are still propelling students through important processes of composition and revision. Other changes that could not yet be implemented in the textbook will still be made available to all WP instructors via Google Drive.

Toward Pedagogical Flourishing

In his recent *Provocations of Virtue*, John Duffy reminds his readers of composition’s unique reach within the American academy. Offering a rough calculation based on numbers from the National Center of Education Statistics, Duffy estimates that perhaps 5 million students a year take a freshman writing course. He asks, “Who is better positioned, then, intellectually and structurally, to influence the future of public argument in the United States than teachers of college writing?” (21). That culture, as we know, is marked by a tendency to assume that the “other side” is simply not worth listening to. The English 1900 curriculum tries to respond to this assumption by asking students to engage—and linger—in the unfamiliar. Even though the individual steps and requirements within each assignment might be commonplace (doing research, citing sources, etc.), students are constantly exploring, discovering, and composing in ways that resist foreclosure and stagnation. Our purpose is of course not to endorse “both sides.” Indeed, one of the effects of thorough research is the discovery that one opinion is far more persuasive than another. At those points, students—and all of us—need to be comfortable with the thought of changing our minds. Moreover, “openness,” a value instantiated in the 2011 CWPA *Framework for Postsecondary Writing*, is not cultivated by simply leaving one’s mind unlocked. It is cultivated by considering contrary opinions.

Writing therefore must become the laboratory in which students perform and learn from their “experiments” rather than just report on their results, unchanged from who they were before. And when students in English 1900 do decide on a stance as they are eventually required to do, they present their claims within the unfamiliar waters of composing in a new key (i.e., non-prose media). Some students take the more familiar route of addressing established audiences, such as a school board; others, however, pursue riskier projects, such as planning a GMO food party or devising a protest against abusive mining practices. These students did not rest on the habitual but simultaneously considered message and medium, always poised for “opening again to a richer invention” (Corder 29).

As we must be. In his own upper-division teaching, Paul has moved away from traditional argument in favor of papers that richly describe various positions and what might be at stake in deciding among them. This pedagogical evolution is also reflected in his colleagues' statements about their teaching. As the 2019 CWPA report suggested, "Tenure-track faculty who have taught [English 1900] were uniformly excited about their experience, *in some cases testifying that it changed the way they teach all of their courses*" (Anson and Holdstein 2; emphasis in original). The renewal of interest in the first year course also animated the department's advocacy for enriched writing instruction in the new university-wide core curriculum. The recently adopted curriculum features a four-course, 12-credit sequence of writing and communication instruction known, in true Jesuit fashion, as the *Eloquentia Perfecta* requirement. These outcomes suggest the ways in which a writing program (WPA, faculty, graduate instructors, and, crucially, our students) can contribute to a flourishing pedagogical ecology in which individual innovation, tested and confirmed by classroom experience, can change not only writing programs, but entire universities.

Notes

1. Saint Louis University's 2017 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) results suggest that SLU students do less writing than their peers at similar Jesuit and private schools (Brickhouse). Though SLU's full NSSE results are not available online, a summary from the then-provost Nancy Brickhouse notes that SLU students scored 12% below similar private schools in answer to this question: "This year, have you been assigned more than 50 pages total of writing (for papers, reports, or other writing tasks)?" Granted, the NSSE relies on self-reporting. Nevertheless, the writing scores were alarming enough that Brickhouse invited Paul, in his role as WPA, to a meeting to discuss how the university might encourage more writing.

2. For more on Jesuit rhetoric in both its historical and contemporary expression, see Cinthia Gannett and John Brereton's *Traditions of Eloquence* (Fordham UP, 2016). See also *The Ratio Studiorum* (translated by Claude Pavur, S.J., Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2005).

3. This sense was confirmed by Saint Louis University's 2019 Council of Writing Program Administrators [CWPA] Consultant-Evaluator report, which recommended a second semester of writing (Anson and Holdstein 3).

4. Laura received this feedback from a Small-Group Instructional Feedback Session offered by Saint Louis University's faculty development center, the Reinert Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning.

Appendix A: Stakeholder Analysis Assignment Description

Part of being an effective rhetorician and writer is to understand the range of people (or other agents) involved in your issue: who is affected, to whom are you writing, *how* might you speak to them? For example, though my topic might deeply involve chiropractors, my actual audience (to whom I will eventually direct my point) might in reality be tattoo artists, a group with serious physical occupational hazards. In pursuit of discovering the nature of your issue and your audience, you are being asked to conduct two main forms of case analysis and outreach, discussed below, in order to discover your key stakeholders (those most affected by your issue)

Purpose Statement (or “Why Am I Doing This?”):

Knowing the key agents involved in your issue—and what is important to those agents—is an essential part of understanding rhetorical contexts and audiences. You need to know who is involved, how they’re involved, and how you can connect to those stakeholders in order to compose effectively. This two-part assignment is about exploring and expanding your understanding of who/what is at stake in your issue.

STAKEHOLDER DESCRIPTIONS:

Identify at least three stakeholders in your issue. Write a brief description or summary of each one. Then, find (or draw, if you’re so inclined) several pictures of each stakeholder. (You can take pictures, but make sure you’re not violating someone’s rights or privacy if you do.) Select pictures that you feel highlight different aspects of each stakeholder’s potential position or identity.

Note: since these pictures are not going to be used in formal academic work, I will not ask for citations, but be sure to keep notes about what you found and where. If you plan on using any of those pictures later, for the multimodal project perhaps, you should also check the usage permissions.

Once you have your pictures, expand on your descriptions by answering a series of questions about those stakeholders. Here are some examples of the types of questions you’ll want to consider: what key features or characteristics match or conflict with your initial descriptions? What characteristics aren’t shown? What characteristics might be potentially useful in your future assignments? Which might be obstacles (instead of useful)? In what ways and by what texts do you think the stakeholder might be affected/influenced? Overall, see *Changing Writing* page 42 for a list of questions about audience. Mark down

any important discoveries, beliefs, or ideas that you think will help you address those stakeholders more effectively.

Bring your pictures and developing analysis to class in either print or digital form for class and small-group discussions on Feb. 28 and Mar. 2.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW:

This component of your analysis will be submitted in early April, but here's what you need to know to plan for it. By Apr. 9, you will need to have conducted an interview with one of your major stakeholders, *ideally* the target audience for your multimodal project (though it can just be an affected stakeholder). This stakeholder must be someone outside your typical bubble—don't just interview your roommate or your mom because it's convenient. Pick someone you have to stretch a little to reach—examples and past interviews have been of community leaders, business owners/entrepreneurs, experts in a field, etc. If you're unsure of the appropriateness of your stakeholder, please ask!

This interview can be conducted in any format (in person, via video conference, phone, e-mail, chat, etc.) as long as you discuss with an actual person the needs and interests relative to that person and/or your topic. The questions you ask and the topics you discuss are up to you, but I want you to 1) pre-plan your questions (aim for about 10) and 2) direct at least some of those questions to what issues are most important to your interviewees and what texts resonate with them most—do they pay attention to bus stop signs? Billboards? Facebook ads? What information is important to them and how can it reach them? Note: you may not get to all ten questions, and that's okay; be sure you've *planned* ten questions and include them in your notes. You should also make it clear to your interviewees that they don't have to answer a question if they don't wish to, no explanation needed.

Pro-tip: as you are developing your questions, be cautious of making assumptions about your interviewees and their beliefs. Phrase and frame your questions to allow your interviewees to speak for themselves. I also recommend marking which questions you most want to cover; if you can't get to all 10 questions, be prepared to switch gears so you at least cover the ones you marked as important.

Once the interview is conducted, convert your notes and all of your questions (even ones you didn't get to) to a format appropriate for submission to Blackboard. This will be a lead up to your Statement of Purpose assignment (coming later).

Lastly, don't procrastinate! Arranging and conducting an interview takes more time than you think it will (hence the early warning).

Course Outcomes in Progress

1. (Start to) *design* persuasive messages for specific purposes, audiences, and contexts.
2. *Analyze* messages and arguments using a sophisticated rhetorical vocabulary.
3. *Summarize, paraphrase, and quote* appropriate research sources accurately and fairly.

Appendix B: *Dissoi Logoi* Assignment Description

WARNING: this assignment description is long because it's attempting to articulate an unusual, unfamiliar project. This is not your traditional argumentative research paper, so bear with me.

Over the last several weeks, you've been reading, writing, and talking about technology and the topics you've chosen to explore. Through these activities, you (should) have come to identify key issues, questions, and arguments concerning technology and your issues. You're becoming involved in a conversation and have gotten practice with the basic academic moves of summarizing, capturing ideas, and citing different kinds of texts via the double-entry journal. Next, you'll be exploring how to take those elements and use them in a researched exploration of what's at stake, who's involved, and what matters in regards to your topic.

Purpose Statement (or "Why Am I Doing This?")

In your discussion (the *dissoi logoi*) you will be exercising the ability of writing as *a way of thinking through a difficult problem*, as writing isn't simply a matter of reporting ideas so that someone else can read them. Rather, writing is the means by which you formulate your own ideas and opinions—often, you only know what you really want to say once you've written it, right? By writing through a topic and its nuances, you can prepare yourselves to eventually (not now, but later) arrive at a fully informed point or thesis about it.

The *dissoi logoi* asks you to think through a question in a systematic way. Before I explain precisely what I mean by "dissoi logoi," though, I want to explain what this assignment is NOT. It is not a standard argument paper for which you formulate a thesis (e.g., abortion should be legal, vegetarianism should be mandated by government, etc.) nor is this assignment asking you to support such a thesis with three main points. In fact, you will lose points if you produce a main thesis statement or claim. The idea of this assignment is not to come to a conclusion, but to think through various possible stake-

holders and arguments as rigorously as possible. The aim is to set aside our preconceptions (as much as possible) and to fully explore all avenues of the problem, to lay out the information so that you can form opinions only after you've assessed the scope of the issue, particularly the perspectives you don't naturally gravitate toward or 'believe.'

So, how do we do this? Our chosen method is the *dissoi logoi*, an ancient Greek phrase meaning basically "contrasting arguments." This process is based on the belief that rhetoric employs the ability to see an issue, question, or problem from many sides (examples from the first Greek *dissoi logoi*: it's bad for you if your shoe falls apart, but it's good for the cobbler; death is bad for the one who dies, but good for the undertaker). Students of rhetoric—not unlike yourselves—were regularly asked to think along divergent lines, which (hopefully) helps you recognize that there are different valid responses for most points—it's all just in how you see the problem. Students are asked to do this for a few reasons.

Arguing different sides makes you learn your own arguments better. If you can anticipate objections to your ideas, you might figure out ways to articulate your ideas more persuasively. Perhaps you've had an argument like this: "I want to borrow the car. I know last time I did, I didn't return it for two days. But here's why you should give me another chance . . ." If you've had an argument like this, you've practiced a kind of *dissoi logoi*. You know what your own arguments are, but you're also imagining what other arguments might be and planning for them. The idea here is that looking at many sides makes you a better rhetor. Arguing *dissoi logoi* allows you to observe your own ideas from the perspective of others who have their own ideas about what's important and plan potential rebuttals accordingly.

Practicing *dissoi logoi* also acknowledges that there *are* different arguments or perspectives in the first place: other opinions are valid (they may be 'wrong' or misguided but still valid). In today's public climate in particular, one side often completely ignores or dismisses the other without any consideration, a habit in which *you* should not engage. People of intelligence and goodwill can (and often do) disagree on many matters, and they can all marshal evidence and claims to support their positions. Thus, we might call this a matter of "uncertainty," meaning that, however we answer the question, we cannot be absolutely right. One side or another *approaches* certainty but never fully reaches it. These matters don't allow us to go to Google and click our way to the right response. Given these conditions of uncertainty, it makes a lot of sense to think through a question from as many perspectives as possible before forming an opinion.

Finally, another reason, which seems more important than ever: thinking through multiple sides develops your moral and rhetorical imagination. It

develops your ability to see an issue from another perspective, even when—especially when—it’s a position with which you disagree. You become better (in general) if you can imagine, give serious consideration to, and react to/with someone who might not share the same stance as you. Be open. In doing so, you might be surprised by what you find.

Bottom line: the point of this assignment is to dwell in uncertainty, to embrace the idea that there’s not a right stance or opinion or solution, to explore the nuances of an issue to become more well-informed about its many aspects and stakeholders. Welcome and live with the likelihood of diverse responses to a complex issue, all of which can be argued with vigor.

The Stages (or “What Will I Be Doing?”)

Building on your initial question proposal, improve/revise a question to ask about your issue in order to become well-informed and understand the full scope of it.

Once you have a question, (re)examine any applicable class readings and research as needed to evaluate the varying stakeholders surrounding the question you’ve asked.

Brainstorming

Once you’ve thought about your question and collected research, you will conduct a brainstorming assignment. This assignment asks you to put down your current thoughts about your topic/question and to begin forming a possible structure for your analysis. The way in which you brainstorm is up to you. In your diagnostic essays, many of you mentioned outlining; others might prefer charts, diagrams, concept maps, etc. For this stage of your assignment, you do you: what is your preferred way to prepare yourself for drafting? The only requirement I have here is that your brainstorming clearly communicates your question and shows a range of stakeholders.

Drafting

After brainstorming, formulate an essay-like (minus thesis or concluding claim) examination of your question utilizing the research you’ve acquired and your own critical thinking and analysis of the issue. Though the *dissoi logoi* won’t do the usual things in terms of thesis, its format is not entirely new:

Set up the issue: In an introduction (1-3 paragraphs), present the central question you are asking in response to the reading you’ve been doing. Articulate the question, explain how you came to it or what prompted it, discuss its importance, etc. Unlike the introduction of a traditional essay, this one should not conclude in a thesis statement. Remember, the goal is to look openly at the

topic and not yet claim a stance, but the reader should be able to see clearly what question you're trying to answer.

Body: The content of the paper can be approached in a couple of different ways, but the key is to present the major stakeholders without bias (as much as that's possible, anyway); all stakeholders are treated as valid and examined with equal vigor, detail, and research. Of course, it is not required, nor would it be practical in many cases, to present every possible stance on your question. However, you must present at least three key stakeholders. You might write several mini-essays, one for each stakeholder, perspective, or potential action. Perhaps you want to write a single body that toggles back and forth between stakeholders. [Note: The original wording of this section, as described in the critical reflection, read, "This section can be approached in a couple of different ways. Perhaps you want to write (at least) two sections, one that takes at one side on a given question and then a second that takes some other perspective that challenges the one that you just took. Perhaps you want to write a single essay that toggles back and forth between 2 perspectives, without finally endorsing either. Perhaps neither of these will work because you feel that the simple pro-con structure is too simple for what you're trying to do."] Overall, though, remember: to earn highest marks on this assignment, I should not be able to tell which stakeholders you 'favor' or agree with, if you do favor any (ideally, you haven't formulated a full opinion, yet!). You should be able to coherently discuss the breadth of the case, with equal detail and eloquence, which includes having balanced research. Don't tip your hand toward any side/answer.

Conclusion: Finally, in a page or a couple of paragraphs, discuss what you still need to know, reflect upon, and investigate to help you finally answer the question you're asking. The idea here is to ask yourself what further research you need to do. What gaps in information did you discover as you wrote the body? What questions are still unanswered? You can also offer here a tentative answer to your question, but I'm more interested in hearing how your understanding of your topic has changed since you first started the project. Has your mind changed or opened in any ways?

Peer Evaluations

A rough draft of your *dissoi logoi* (1,000+ words) is due after the brainstorming stage. Include in-text and end citations for the ideas and sources you've used at this stage—*never leave citation until the final draft*.

Final Draft

After peer evals, you'll continue drafting and revising to reach the 2,000+ word count (as always, the citation list doesn't count). Be sure that your draft formatting, in-text citations, and end citations conform to your chosen

style guide (MLA 8th edition Works Cited or APA 6th edition cover page and References).

Course Outcomes in Progress

1. *Analyze* messages and arguments using a sophisticated rhetorical vocabulary.
2. *Summarize*, *paraphrase*, and *quote* appropriate research sources accurately and fairly.
3. Follow conventions (formatting, citation, etc.) of the chosen style (APA or MLA).

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