**Sample FARRS Reports**

*Section F: Comments on Teaching*

**Example #1**: I believe that I was largely successful in meeting both my personal and the departmental goals for 1310 in the fall semester, most notably the students’ ability to formulate a clear, argumentative thesis statement; to develop the thesis with detailed and on-topic supporting paragraphs; and to enhance their critical reading skills and apply these to their own and their classmates’ writing. Some goals that I have identified for re-assessment and improvement are to foster classroom conversations that feature more ubiquitous participation and to develop more hands-on activities that take student writing samples as their material.  
  
I used Rereading America as the course reader, and I found its division into units based around American myths and tied to contemporary cultural issues very successful. It encouraged active engagement from the students in reading and discussing the readings in the class, encouraging disparate viewpoints on issues that often raised questions more than provided simple answers. This had the additional benefit of transitioning well into paper topics that were relevant to the readings and the in-class discussion without being redundant or a simple restatement of the issues as discussed in class.   
  
Although the discussions generally resulted in in-depth examinations of the issues and arguments in the text and from one student to another, there were times when a small selection of students would dominate the conversation. In the future I will be more proactive in calling on students who fail to get involved in the discussion on their own. If students know early on in the semester that they could be called on at any moment, I will have fully established the course norm that active participation is not an optional but an essential component of the course.  
  
I also intend to devote more class periods to detailed writing instruction on the level of the sentence and the paragraph, using excerpts of student work. In my activities on writing instruction, I did not make regular use of samples of actual student work. Doing so in the future will result in two distinct but related improvements: By taking the time to walk students through the revision process step by step on a smaller scale with work that is familiar to them, students will be able to identify the sample’s strengths and weaknesses with more confidence and authority. Additionally, by having their classmates’ work available for analysis, they will be able to internalize in a more concrete manner the expectations of the grading rubric, which can be abstract for many freshman writers.  
  
I believe that implementing these changes into the existing structure of the course will result in future 1310 classes being more capable of translating their acuity for the types of discussion Rereading America elicits into essays that achieve similar levels of passion and insight. If I am able to get a larger percentage of students to be more active presences in the class on a daily basis from the start, their increased involvement should result in a greater sense of personal responsibility and fulfillment in the course and its writing assignments as a whole.

**Example #2:**  
Learning Objective: Rhetoric  
This semester I structured each English 1310 paper around an analysis of ethos, pathos or logos. We began each unit by evaluating the way in which a specific author employed one of the rhetorical modes. We then discussed how students could develop their own rhetoric to effectively persuade a specific audience. The course culminated in an assignment requiring students to employ a blend of ethos, pathos and logos.   
  
This method was a success for the following reasons:  
  
• By the end of the semester, students were able to write to a specific audience, and use appropriate tone while employing a blend of rhetorical approaches.  
  
• Students engaged with texts that they might have otherwise refused to read as an act of political protest. Both tea party and green party sympathizers actively considered the effectiveness of Obama’s pathos or Gloria Anzaldua’s ethos without arriving at a political stalemate. This approach allowed students of all political persuasions to engage with texts in a more open way while cultivating critical thinking.  
  
• By focusing on ethos early in the term, students began to think critically about their own background early on. By asking students to develop their own authority in sharing their personal experiences, students were able to learn from one another and began to think critically about the diversity of experience amongst their classmates and in the world.   
  
Challenge  
Learning Objective: Appropriate vocabulary   
By the end of the semester, students were able to write organized essays with cohesive paragraphs. However, on the sentence level, most students still struggled with clarity, focus and wordiness.   
  
This problem was due to limited vocabulary; without the right word, students resorted to a clumsy string of several words to convey the same message. During student conferences, many of my more advanced students asked how they could improve their sentences and their vocabulary. I realized that this repeated question was pointing to a hole in my teaching; by focusing on global revisions early in the semester and slowly working towards sentence level revisions, I had neglected to address the importance of individual words. Also, because my teaching demeanor is so informal and approachable, I don’t always model challenging vocabulary for my students.   
  
Next semester, in a somewhat experimental, yet certainly entertaining, attempt to develop my students’ vocabulary, as well as my own, I’ll be incorporating a vocabulary lesson into roll taking. At the start of each class, instead of responding “here” during roll call, students will answer with a word, ideally a great word, a juicy word, a word I’ve never heard before. In the first five minutes of each class, we will be bombarded with twenty words, some old, some new, some academic, some slang. I will challenge students to come to class with a word that is exciting, fun or memorable. In addition to jump starting the class, breaking the ice and waking the sleeping, I hope that this exercise will help students to develop their vocabularies, appreciate the power of words, and write more concise and focused sentences.

**Example #3:** Last year, I significantly revised my ENG 1320 course after asking the simple question, “What would my ideal 1320 class look like?” This year vindicated my belief that allowing for more intellectual freedom would elicit greater student enjoyment and achievement of course goals. It also gave me the opportunity to refine and tweak the course to better serve my students.  
  
My major goal this year was to collect and create extraordinary teaching materials. During last year’s FARRS, I noted a student who’d said that I “… could have been more focused on things to do than what not to do.” This owed largely to me not feeling comfortable using sample essays that had become less relevant after the course revision. On review days that spring, I began to show examples of the very best writing in the class, which made my expectations more concrete and thus surmountable. Since I’d only recently included a unit on the short answer essay form, I was also able to gather quality student examples, which I used to the benefit of my Fall 2013 students.  
  
I’m most proud of the new teaching materials I developed this year as a result of asking tough questions. When I first taught annotated bibliographies, leading up to the big research essay, I struggled in communicating to my students that a very credible source could be biased. In the media-glutted world we navigate and must contribute to, facts are used to support any side of an issue. Do ice core samples from Antarctica prove that global warming is a naturally recurring phenomena or manmade? Thanks to spin factor, it depends on what news program one watches. But I refused to accept that the age of shared knowledge based on empirical observation is dead and to allow my students to acritically plug in otherwise academically sound research to support their arguments. Instead I took the course’s goal of promoting “critical literacy” quite seriously and developed a few new guides to help them see the values and agenda of a text behind its facts.  
  
My favorite resource that I created is my “Bias 101” guide. It provides students with simple definitions of critical terms, questions to ask when encountering texts, and instructions for characterizing bias in their annotated bibliographies. After introducing the guide to my students mid-semester, their annotated bibliography grades jumped from a C to a B average—a major success. Instead of only investigating the credibility of their source, they began to perceive that scholars and media makers take distinct positions on issues, which often reveals more about a person’s values and understanding of the world, than a robotic display of The Facts. In turn, my students were able to reflect on their own opinions and their underpinning values.  
  
I’ve left 2013 feeling successful in creating not only an engaging class crucial to any college curriculum, but also a transformative experience—provoking students to ask questions about their world and self, to being critical and competent researchers, and to being able to communicate their point of view appropriately and effectively.

**Example #4:** In terms of big-picture goals, my first-year English classes are designed to help students become more confident and analytical writers and thinkers. Frequent in-class writing assignments allow students to deepen their own ideas, build on their previously established writing-foundation, and engage in a fruitful, academic “conversation” with sophisticated readings and other students’ ideas. The writing, group work, and discussions from each individual class serve to directly assist students in thinking more critically and writing more skillfully in response to the semester’s five essay assignments and final exam. From the highlighted prompt, the listed writing expectations, and the particular peer review activities, students are given clear guidelines that emphasize the development of a strong thesis statement and clear and powerful body paragraphs. My out-of-class assignments are carefully chosen and crafted so as to encourage inspired thought, self-reflection, and a more in-depth understanding of significant contemporary issues.  
  
In my 1310 classes last fall I selected *Reading Culture* from the list of Department-approved textbooks. Although all of these readers have unique merits, I thought the readings and thematic units in Reading Culture would do a particularly good job of unlocking college students’ most profound thoughts and experiences. During the semester I assigned essays on the topics of schooling, technology, storytelling, and spirituality. Given the immediacy of these different realms in their everyday lives, discussions, brainstorming sessions, and free-writing activities rarely seemed to stall, as students could always reflect on their varied experiences as a way to begin accessing the texts and making key points about the larger debates in question. As an instructor, I encourage students to always keep digging until they’ve discovered something fresh and interesting. With the aid of specific in-class writing questions that I prepare for them, students’ intelligent scrutiny of their applicable experiences and the assigned texts engenders the kind of “writing to learn” that the English Department celebrates.   
  
In the past I have received positive feedback on the peer review dimension of my first-Year English classes. In some cases, students have asked for more peer review sessions. In both my 1310 and 1320 classes this past academic year, I had students respond to their classmates' writing on non-peer review days a bit more frequently than I previously had. In advance of peer review days, when their whole drafts would be commented on by multiple peers, I often will guide students through the steps of writing a dynamic body paragraph before letting them exchange work with their classroom-neighbors for some instant feedback that’s in keeping with the expectations and specific writing goals I’ve established. This in-class activity allows students to test out their ideas and see if they will yield body paragraphs that other readers will find clear and effective.

*Section G: Comments on Student Evaluations*

**Example #1:** Overall, students loved class discussions and peer reviews. Formerly, students complained about peer review, stating they would rather learn from me than from each other. In 2013, I changed peer review instruction, clarifying and emphasizing its long-term purpose. Additionally, I modified peer review methods slightly each time to renew student interest. These comments praising peer review demonstrate the effectiveness of these new practices. Students wrote that they loved learning from each other in our class discussions. For the first time, students mentioned their peers as the best aspect of the course, rather than me. I view this shift positively and believe it was caused by a student-centered environment and led to more critical thinking, accountability, collaboration, and leadership.   
  
In every class, students mentioned the difficulty level. It mostly inspired them to try harder and develop passion for the subject. Most students paired their comments on difficulty-level with comments on my accessibility, compassion, and obvious desire for them to succeed. This combination of challenging and supporting the students allowed them to develop confidence in both literature and writing and spurred many of them to develop interest in topics they previously thought too difficult or irrelevant. However, students in my Fall 1310 classes wrote more negatively than positively about the difficulty level. While I was initially surprised to see these comments (as they defied the general trends in my students’ evaluations), they have encouraged me to rethink the balance between challenge and support for these beginning writers. In the upcoming semester, I will work to provide them with more opportunities for success so that they do not get disheartened during the learning process.   
  
Students’ comments on learning:   
• On grading: “Very strict but fair grader. You get what you give. Your grade will reflect your input.”  
• “I would say keep doing what you’re doing because you’re changing lives like you did mine. Thank you.”  
• She believes in growth, which I like, so if you aren’t the best writer, you can still learn and eventually get a good grade because you grew as a writer.”  
• On activities: “Ms. XXX used all of the above. I’m not typically a sharer of my work, and Ms. XXX opened me up to working with others.”  
• “This course gave me a better understanding of how to research proficiently and how to write essays with more of my voice and ideas.”  
  
Finally, the most common suggestion from students was to implement an online grade book. While students did have access to both their grades and the grade distribution (and could therefore calculate their averages independently), many expressed anxiety, feeling unsure where they stood throughout the semester. Likewise, they wanted grades back sooner. Beginning in 2014, I am implementing an online grade book through TRACS to satisfy to this student desire. Furthermore, I will be returning student essays with track changes and comments through Microsoft Word to streamline my grading process. Finally, I will include a mid-term grade report to ease their anxiety and keep them focused on pushing forward.

**Example #2**: ENG 1310: In composition classes, it's always a challenge to find ways to make comments on papers useful to students. Research and my own experience have shown that students tend not to read comments, and to combat that I continue to tweak my rubric and commenting style, which students seemed to appreciate:   
• “I could follow the rubric on my previous essays to see what I needed to make sure I had an A.”  
• “Kind of a tough grader but made me work hard to earn a grade”  
  
Students also remarked on the teaching strategy of breaking essays (both the assigned readings and the writing assignments) down into their technical components:  
• “The most useful part of the class was the step by step process Mr. XXX used to help us construct our papers.”  
• “I was able to improve my skills and break out of that high school way of composing a paper.”  
  
Students seemed to appreciate the challenging nature of the course, especially the focus on critical thinking and argument development:  
• “Especially challenging when I thought 'against the grain' and was told to defend it.”  
• “This was my favorite class. My grade in this class was below my other ones, but the fact that it was still my favorite really shows something.”  
  
ENG 1320: Students echoed the comments of their peers in ENG 1310 about the “step-by-step process” of writing and revision. They also mentioned their positive impression of the textbook, Argument, and the templates from They Say/I Say. Several students wrote that the class’s focus on thesis and argument was beneficial:  
• “The most helpful part was making us define our argument more clearly.”  
• “The best part was having a different way to write essays and going away from the 3-part thesis.”  
  
The students also appreciated the research articles that I provided and the class discussion of those articles. Though the FYE Syllabus requires that only one paper include documentation of "several print and/or online sources," I require this for every paper. Perhaps as a result, the students noted that they improved in their ability to cite quotes and sources:  
• “We had to cite correctly in every paper.”  
• “My grammar and punctuation have increased as well as creating multiple works cited from diverse texts.”  
  
In both ENG 1310 and ENG 1320, students gave very little critical feedback except that some find peer review helpful and others do not. Because of this difference in preference, I’ve tried to vary my instructional methods to meet the needs of all students. Several students commented on that variety:  
• “Mr. XXX has a vast amount of teaching methods.”  
• “You would ask us every class if we were having trouble and you would help.”

**Example #3:** Both my 1310 and 1300 students gave mainly positive, enthusiastic feedback. They maintained that the course was challenging and improved their writing skills, used a variety of class activities, and promoted critical thinking. Students especially seemed to enjoy our class discussions and the different perspectives of their classmates. For these reasons, I’d like to continue using Rereading America for 1310, as the readings in the text were interesting, culturally relevant, and enabled me to incorporate outside articles, videos, and films for further conversation.  
  
Students also appreciated being introduced to the writing center; one student even recommended that students be required to visit two to three times over the course of the semester, since it proved to be so helpful to her. While I don’t believe I’ll require students to visit the writing center, I will continue to promote it and take my students there at the beginning of the semester.  
  
Some of my more positive feedback included the following comments:  
  
“I loved the readings and activities, especially discussions. It’s cool to hear other people’s points.”  
  
“She used small groups, peer review, thesis workshop, in-class writing days. It was very helpful!”  
  
“[The course] helps you explore different topics you would not otherwise do in a class setting.”  
  
“[One of the best features of this course was] the family feel due to the size of the class.”  
  
While positive feedback is always nice and reaffirmed my decision to use Rereading America, the more critical feedback will help me to rethink my pedagogy for future classes. Students commented on my need to provide clearer grading standards, their dissatisfaction with peer review, and the lack of focus on grammar and organization. They also expressed a desire for more one-on-one time and a lighter reading load. I chose not to hold conferences due to time constraints, but I do feel that it would be helpful to speak with students individually about their work if possible. I also agree that I overloaded the syllabus with readings and ended up having to cut out a few at the end of the semester. This was a result of not being familiar with the text; next time I will know which ones were most effective and will be able to tailor my course calendar accordingly.  
  
Some of my more critical feedback included the following comments:  
  
“I do not know how she grades.”  
“I would make it to where there could be some one on one time for everyone sometime in class.”  
“I would like there to be more focus on grammar and structure.”  
“I wish we could have gone over issues to get better grades on papers.”  
  
While I purposefully try not to teach toward obtaining a specific grade and opt instead for a more process-oriented pedagogy, I think it would also be more beneficial to more clearly define my grading standards for students. I use the rubric provided in the FYE syllabus and included it in my 1320 syllabus this semester so it is more readily accessible to students.

**Example #4:** My student evaluations were overwhelmingly positive this year. Students repeatedly wrote that the variety of class activities and essay topics made the class “fun,” “unique,” and “easier to understand.” One student even said that she “never learned so much in [her] life.” Additionally, many students emphasized that the course helped them practice “critical thinking” and also gave them “room to be creative.” Early in the semester, a significant number of students told me that peer review was their least favorite part of an English class, so I was particularly proud to see that many listed peer review as one of the course’s greatest strengths. One wrote, “The peer review was wonderful to do. It really helped.”  
  
In my spring evaluations of 2013, a few students thought that the course needed a more diverse selection of authors, so I altered some in-class readings and added a few TED Talks in the fall semester. In my fall evaluations, several students mentioned these additions specifically when complimenting the diversity of writers and texts introduced in the course. One student even wrote that she had “never felt more cultured (except for my geography classes).” Another stated that the best features of the course included “opening minds to diversity and critical analysis.”  
  
I also used student evaluations to help me improve my grading system this year. In my evaluations from 2012, some of my students requested that I clarify my grading standards. In response, I developed a new grading rubric and began grading papers online. In my evaluations from the following spring, the majority of my students expressed satisfaction with the new grading system, but some noted that the online feedback was difficult to locate and to interpret. Therefore, in the fall semester of 2013, I decided to give students a grade sheet recording their scores for individual components of their papers, with my comments highlighting areas for future improvement. In my fall evaluations, my students were almost unanimous in their approval. One student wrote that the grading standards were “very clear and easy to understand,” and another wrote that the grading sheet “worked perfectly!” Even though very few students disagreed with this consensus, I think that, based on feedback from students during the course of the fall semester, I can still improve my grading rubric by spending more time explaining each section in class. In 2014, I also plan to assign writing assessments for each graded essay to check whether or not students understand my comments on their strengths and weaknesses.

FARRS, Sections F & G

**Example #1:**

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| F. Comments on Teaching |
| In English 1310, thesis statement development and essay structure continued to be the primary focus. I used an assignment sequence that emphasized global concerns before shifting focus to grammar, punctuation, and style. In the first unit, students developed specific, arguable thesis statements by arguing whether or not particular audiences should see films of the students’ choosing. These movie reviews allowed students to choose topics of personal interest while learning classroom vocabulary (claim, support, PIE). Students learned to map support in their own theses by pulling claims and points of support from online reviews, thereby applying critical reading skills. Reading skills were further developed in the second unit; students located and responded to rhetorical appeals in “Letter from Birmingham City Jail” and the film The Great Debaters. Examining personal reactions to both written and visual texts taught students to reflect on various types of texts and contributed to variety in class activities. In a debate over civil disobedience in contemporary settings, students thought critically to apply historical texts to the present while practicing effective communication and teamwork. In the third unit, students furthered these skills during a debate over a potential, congressionally enacted, English language law. This unit also asked students to think critically about how various Englishes (Chicano, Black, etc.) relate to conflicting grammatical viewpoints (descriptivism and prescriptivism), thereby emphasizing social responsibility. Anzaldúa’s “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” and Morrison’s “Nobel Lecture” served as supplementary readings. In the final unit, students taught each other grammatical rules while working on a revision. To learn transitions, students wrote plays that included a transition between two acts; these plays encouraged creativity and further emphasized teamwork.  In English 1320, thesis statements and PIE were reviewed before discussing issues of summarization, synthesis, textual analysis, research, and citation. To learn summarization, groups of students read op-eds and paraphrased the claims and support therein while integrating names of authors and articles. Essay Two asked that students summarize and synthesize articles related to texting’s impact on language/personal relationships or the links between intelligence and watching TV. Paper Three had students argue whether or not visual arguments (commercials, political cartoons, etc.) were effective in making particular arguments to intended audiences based on visual elements; students applied critical reading and thinking skills to multimodal texts while using appropriate vocabulary to identify visual elements. Students learned to research by composing annotated bibliographies on researchable topics of their choice. At least half of the sources needed to come from library databases. The final paper had students define The American Dream within the current economic climate by synthesizing and summarizing up to four textbook readings. Proper works cited page entries and in-text citation were emphasized in every essay. To learn to compose works cited entries, groups of students were asked to look up how to cite texts (pamphlets, online reviews, print ads, journal articles, etc.) using tables in The Bedford Handbook; this activity stressed teamwork and critical thinking, as some texts were not explicitly mentioned in the textbook.  In English 1300, thesis statement development and mechanical rules were heavily emphasized in the composition of every essay. A literacy narrative had students argue whether or not past experiences with written or spoken language would affect their academic literacy in a college setting. Students learned to make arguable claims through writing op-eds on topics of their choice. Other topics included visual argument analysis, arguing which of two competitors chosen by students would win in a particular competition of their own devising, and a revision paper. During each unit, students would work in groups to teach each other (in a creative ways without the use of jargon) a mechanical rule that was subsequently taken into consideration on the next paper. Topics included commas, comma splices, colons, semicolons, point of view, pronoun-antecedent agreement, apostrophes, quotation marks, etc. Written exercises supplemented student presentations.  I continued to comment on essays variously in order to appeal to different types of learners. Students received typed pages of notes and handwritten feedback. A change I made this past semester was reviewing the First Year English Syllabus rubric with students after each paper was returned. Highlighting this rubric caused students to better understand the reasoning behind grades (see Comments on Student Evaluations). |
| G. Comments on Student Evaluations |
| Feedback from my students this past year continued to be encouraging. As was the case last year, the variety of in-class activities seemed to contribute substantially to student interest and motivation:  -The instructor “is a great teacher. He uses many different methods and mediums, such as writings, essays, videos, comics, and so on.”  -The instructor used “skits and debates and group work, and always peer reviewed. These are all helpful and an easier way to learn.”  -“We had discussion days, independent work days, group peer reviews, class peer reviews, and more! The instructor switched things up and kept it interesting.”  -“We did something different almost every class and it was very engaging.”   It has also been helpful to incorporate variety into the way I comment on essays. I begin the semester by responding to each essay with a full typed page of personalized notes that addresses global writing concerns and move into handwritten notes for later essays. I find that students sometimes prefer one method over another, but appreciate both:   -The best features of the course are “the mix of typed comments and written comments.”  -The best features of the course are “the handwritten comments that he left.”  -“I preferred when the professor used a separate page of typed feedback as opposed to handwritten notes.”   The extent of these comments made grading standards clear to most students:  -“Responses written on my essays were long and detailed. I knew without a doubt the professor read my paper thoroughly and graded fairly. Comments implied that the professor’s goal was to see me improve. This was encouraging.”   Last year, however, some students expressed concerns over the clarity of grading standards. To remedy these concerns, one change I made this year was giving greater focus to the rubric in the First Year English Syllabus, which students reviewed after papers were returned. This focus seemed to lend itself to a greater level of transparency that many students appreciated:   -“His grading standard was always fair and complied with the English department.”  -“He showed us the rubric almost every time we wrote a new paper.”  -“He talked about the standards almost weekly. He always asked if we knew them as well.”   While this new focus on a rubric was appreciated by many, the standards remained aloof to a few students:   -The instructor “made very clear that he grades by the department standards in the [First Year English Syllabus]. The department standards are a tad opinionated and unclear.”  -“I wouldn’t say that the grading standards were clear. We got the basic outline of what was going to be graded, but I found myself struggling to find exactly what he was looking for.”  -“The rubric mentioned mistakes and grammar errors would result in a lower grade. The instructor did not grade for grammar.”   In order to more fully respond to such concerns, my plan for the coming year is to create a more comprehensive rubric tailored explicitly to what will be graded and implement it for at least one essay per class. The rubric will be printed, highlighted, and returned with student essays. I am looking forward to knowing how students will respond to such a rubric. |

**Example #2:**

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| F. Comments on Teaching |
| In the spring semester, I began using \_Everything’s an Argument\_ as the textbook for ENG 1320. Early in the spring and fall semesters, the students read chapters on academic argument and rhetorical analysis, which spurred conversations about how writing differs by situation and audience. As the semester progressed, classroom discussions were focused on analyzing the rhetoric of assigned readings and students’ own writing. Throughout the semester, students were encouraged to analyze the tone, use of sources, and purpose of texts to develop their critical reading skills. This consistent focus addressed a past issue of students failing to use credible and varied sources in their essays.  Students demonstrated their understanding of argument and their ability to analyze and synthesize texts in the second essay where they used quotes from readings in the textbook to support their points. In the third writing assignment, a research proposal, students proposed the argument for their research paper and detailed how they would utilize rhetorical tools like structure, ethos, logos, pathos, and tone to write an essay that effectively addressed their chosen audience’s attitudes and knowledge. With this assignment, students improved their understanding of how to use rhetoric to improve their writing.   I met with students individually to discuss their research projects, and counterargument was one element of writing that was frequently discussed. Concrete examples related to students’ topics helped improve their understanding of rebuttal. Since incorporating the research proposal into the progression of writing assignments, I have observed improved quality in students’ research papers. The fifth essay was a satire written on the topic of the students’ research papers, which further developed their understanding of counterargument, audience, and rhetorical appeals.   As students developed their research projects, I elaborated on standard procedures of MLA through readings, quizzes, and games. For example, we played a game that reviewed standard practices for using sources and citations, which assessed students’ knowledge and provided feedback on their facility with the information before they completed the research paper. To address a common issue with paraphrasing from the spring semester, I added an activity from \_Teaching with Hacker Handbooks\_ that had students identify effective paraphrases and correct ineffective paraphrases.   Over the summer of 2013, I completed a Technology Integration Workshop where I worked on a project on peer review sessions to improve student attitudes, the quality of peer feedback, and the number of peer comments used in revision. I piloted the project in the fall semester. I added a unit on peer review prior to the first peer review session and had students read Richard Straub’s “Responding--Really Responding” to achieve the first two goals. To achieve the third goal, I added a reflection that students completed after submitting each essay. In these reflections, they identified two comments from the peer review sheet and explained how they addressed the comments by elaborating on the resources used for revision and what they learned. This step increased the number of students who made use of peer review comments in their revisions from past semesters, which improved the quality of their final essays.   Additional changes in the fall semester included the addition of a rubric for peer review participation and a rubric for out of class essays. Both rubrics helped students better understand expectations and grading standards. Furthermore, they were listed as items that made grading standards clear by a number of students on course evaluations. |
| G. Comments on Student Evaluations |
| Student evaluations for both semesters were largely positive. Students commented that I was helpful, “always available,” and interested in their success and improvement as writers.  While on my last report I noted that some students were unhappy with peer review, this year many students noted that peer review was a main contributor to their improvement as a reader and writer. They listed peer review as one of their favorite aspects of the course and as a tool that helped them better understand audience. The project plan I implemented from the Technology Integration Workshop and incorporating more questions related to peer review on my midterm evaluations are the main contributors to this improvement.   One section of 1320 from the fall semester differed from the others in their responses regarding clarity of grading considerations. While students in three sections mentioned the rubric used for essays and the grading considerations we reviewed in the First Year English syllabus as examples of clear grading standards, these items were rarely mentioned in this section. Students in this section remarked that it was hard to know what the teacher wanted in the essays, which means they failed to understand that the rubric identifies and describes the qualities of different levels of writing. To improve student understanding of the rubric and to help them utilize the rubric more effectively, I plan to spend additional class time reiterating the purpose of the rubric and how students can use the rubric to improve their essays before they are submitted for grading. In addition, after the first essay is returned I will spend class time explaining how the rubric can be used to help students determine where to focus their attention on the next writing assignment. These additional reviews should improve understanding and retention of information regarding the use of rubrics.   Some students listed the forums as an area needing improvement in the course. I agree with their assessment, and I removed several forum assignments in the second half of the semester due to student difficulties navigating the forums and a lack of participation. I followed the recommendations for effective use of forums from the Technology Integration Workshop by setting deadlines, specifying point values for each forum post, and responding to every third or fifth post, but these recommendations did not address all of the problems I encountered. I have removed Forum assignments from my sections of English 1320 until I can complete additional research into improving the issues of participation and facility with the Forums tool. I have determined that one possible cause of student frustration may be that I assumed students were more familiar with the TRACS tools than they actually were. As a result of my overestimation of their ability to navigate the tools, I didn’t use class time to point students to the demo videos available on TRACS. To limit my students’ frustration with various tools on TRACS, I will include the links to these videos to make them easier to find. I have also inquired about the installation of Camtasia Relay on my office computer, so it can be used to create additional instructive videos specific to the class. The additional guidance regarding TRACS should ease student frustration and improve their attitudes towards TRACS as a tool for learning. |