

Monterey Peninsula College
Dept. of English: English 1A: Composition/Analytical Reading Faculty
Feb. 18, 2009

We opened the meeting by reviewing the English 1A SLOs developed by English 1A faculty in 2008 and agreed that the SLOs as stated are relevant and appropriate to our course design and delivery. We focused briefly on the SLOs relating to “visual persuasion” and a variety of ways to introduce interpretation/analysis of visual materials within the English 1A curriculum (ads, images, documentaries, etc.).

While our approaches to English 1A differ, we all base our major assessment of student learning on five or more major essays, self-reflective and reading response writing assignments, and summary skills. Summary is typically incorporated into longer writing projects but some faculty use separate, stand-alone summary assignments too. We discussed the value of summary skills in demonstrating the students’ ability to distinguish between fact and opinion, and how important that critical thinking skill is when evaluating and selecting research sources.

We shared concerns about the reading skill levels of incoming students, and noted that many students were challenged by the college-level reading requirements in English 1A. We discussed the reading placement process and accuracy in placement. The possibility that students are passing, minimally, through the sequence courses or ESL courses to qualify for English 1A could also be a factor in students arriving in English 1A with only marginal reading/comprehension skills. More dialogue about expectations and criteria in English 301 and English 111 may be helpful to be sure students are college-level at entry to English 1A. These concerns were echoed later in the meeting when we discussed grammar skills, prerequisites and English 1A.

The SLO relating to “multiple factors” was our next subject; we exchanged ideas about how we understood the “factors” we wanted students to recognize and consider such as complexity of written works, sophisticated style issues, context, and use of synthesis in writing assignments. We also discussed the many factors involved in developing the argument project – audience, variable viewpoints, and sources. We moved next to more discussion of concepts we focus on when teaching the Argument component of the course. Some priorities included students developing an objective stance, understanding the pros/cons of a controversial issue, recognizing how and why people are open to persuasion, identifying bias, and having skills in using a variety of research sources as evidence in an argument. We all require a range of sources and a substantial number of sources for the research-based paper.

Discussing research led us to shared observations about students’ library/research skills, and we agreed that most students need a thorough review, even if coming directly to English 1A from other composition classes, and all typically benefit from the formal library orientation. Students also typically need some technical/grammar support, but generally those concerns are handled individually or through referral to the ESSC. If there is a need for course review, some instructors use a workshop model; others have students prepare a “grammar lesson” and teach the class about a common concern or problem.

We agreed that our focus on student learning and meeting students' needs means that we are constantly revising and reviewing our teaching patterns in "an effort to offer the best possible instruction, an activity that has nothing to do with mandated SLO's and in fact that has been going on long before SLO's became the latest thing" (Joplin).

Faculty in Attendance: Zimmerman, D. Joplin, Van Dam, Harray, Osburg, Johnson

Please note: Allston James, while not able to attend the meeting, did add a note emphasizing that "assuming completion of all writing assignments and assuming consistent attendance and classroom participation, students, upon the completion of the course, should understand that academic performance is ultimately their full responsibility."