

Review of Performance: Expos I, EN 120B, Spring 2013; number of students: 28 in two classes.

Submitted by: **Monty Vierra**

Program SLO#2. Students should be able to articulate and understand their experiences through effective writing, reading, speaking, and various modes of artistic expression.

General SLO 1. Investigate research topics in a variety of disciplines.

Student Learning Outcomes	I,D,M	Comments/Reflections
1.1 Locate and select appropriate sources.	I, D	<p>Students were asked to use the library as their main source of reliable information. Almost all students attended a library presentation on locating and requesting sources, but they had trouble with using EBSCO to find sources they could read. Most students took part in two, in-class follow-up demonstrations of how to use EBSCO, yet they still had difficulty.</p> <p>For their first project, many students conducted informal interviews about cultural traditions and local practices. Their questions and summaries were not assessed. Will do so in future.</p> <p>No one used visuals of any kind.</p>
1.2 Distinguish primary and secondary sources.	I	<p>Introduced briefly. Not demonstrated clearly. Not assessed. Will assess in future.</p>
1.3 Discriminate facts from opinions.	I, D	<p>Despite a class discussion on the topic, many students could not discriminate facts from opinions, especially if something was “published” on the web. One student insisted that “logic” alone should suffice in a paper, not outside sources. I will spend more time on this in future.</p>
1.4 Conduct preliminary research to narrow a broad subject to a specific assignment topic.	I, D	<p>Students were asked to submit a “proposal” using the model in the course textbook. Most students did so. For each project, one or two students chose not to submit a proposal. Students were also asked to compile annotated bibliographies, but most of them could not read the sources they found and were unable to make adequate notes, so many simply copied the abstracts they found.</p>

General SLO 2. Write research-supported papers in the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences.

Student Learning Outcomes	I,D,M	Comments/Reflections
2.1 Demonstrate note-taking strategies to compile information from a variety of sources.	I, D	<p>This was assessed through in-class reading of articles, but most students could not see the difference between major points and minor points in the articles.</p> <p>In addition, on other tasks such as learning about library resources, only a few students took systematic notes. Most took no notes unless directly instructed to do so. In short, students did not have any strategy for taking even in-class notes.</p>
2.2 Prepare outlines and/or utilize similar planning tools.	I	<p>Some students made mind-maps or general outlines. Some students made lists. These were not sufficient.</p> <p>These were not formally assessed. Will assess in future.</p>
2.3 Develop research thesis and/or hypothesis.	I	<p>Students submitted the thesis as part of a project proposal.</p> <p>The assessment was global, not specific.</p> <p>I will assess this more closely in future.</p>
2.4 Define plagiarism and take the steps necessary to avoid it.	I, D	<p>Most students understood how to avoid plagiarism, but several took the chance to copy part or all of their papers. (It may be that other students they knew successfully plagiarized and thus they felt emboldened to try.)</p>
2.5 Summarize source texts.	I, D	<p>Summarizing texts, either texts given them in class or ones they were working with as part of their projects, proved exceedingly difficult for most students. They had trouble finding the main points of what they were reading.</p>
2.6 Paraphrase source texts.	I, D	<p>Paraphrasing was equally difficult. Most students believed that if they put in the first available synonym and switched a few words around that they had successfully paraphrased.</p>
2.7 Synthesize ideas gleaned from a variety of sources, along with their own opinions, into cogent prose.	I, D	<p>Most students could not do so. Many preferred stating their own opinions or quoting websites with opinions they shared.</p>

Student Learning Outcomes	I,D,M	Comments/Reflections
2.8 Format formal papers utilizing the MLA style.	I, D	Many students had difficulty in using MLA formats. Small group and one-to-one talks sitting at a PC with MS Word worked with only about half of the students—mainly those who passed.
2.9 Utilize the MLA documentation style to formally acknowledge sources. This will consist of brief parenthetical citations within the text that are keyed to an alphabetical list of works that appear at the end of the paper.	I, D	<p>The majority of students had trouble grasping how to cite an article and how to make a works cited page in MLA format. Repeated in-class exercises and working with small groups and one-to-one at a PC did not resolve this issue. For example, many did not understand what was meant by “alphabetical order by last name,” and they confused first and last names. Several students who figured out how to invert names for the works cited page then used the same way—names inverted—to make citations in their texts.</p> <p>When asked to find citations in the model essay in the course textbook, only a few students could do this on the first pass. When a student did find a citation, I asked everyone to highlight it in their books. Only one or two students did so. It took two more reviews at different times in the course—preceding each major paper—for the majority of students to “see” the sources in the parentheses.</p>
2.10 Write samples of a wide variety of rhetorical patterns.	(I)	I did not directly assess this. Students chose their own patterns. I will assess this directly in future.
2.11 Revise as necessary to produce written work predominately free from grammatical and mechanical errors.	I, D	<p>When peer review sessions were scheduled, about a third of the students did not attend class or they came 20 or 30 minutes late, after the peer review task was complete.</p> <p>Instead of a separate argument paper (3.1, below), I asked students to revise their research papers based on extensive feedback & rubrics. Most students who passed used this option, and instead learned more about how to revise papers.</p>
2.12 Produce three substantive research papers that demonstrate the skills identified in outcomes 2.1-2.11....	I, D	Most of the papers were superficial, not substantive. The best papers used quotes supported by occasional paraphrases. Only a few papers included any analysis. (See comments in 2.11 above.)

General SLO 3. Establish and defend a position in an argumentative research paper.

Student Learning Outcomes	I,D,M	Comments/Reflections
3.1 Engage in concession and refutation of specific ideas to develop a thoughtful response to controversial material.	(I)	This task—dealing with concession and refutation—was not assessed. Students were asked to consider different viewpoints in their research papers, but only a couple did. Most ignored views that disagreed with theirs. However, students who passed did present an “argument” about their topic in the form of a presentation to the class.
[...] Present their ideas in a brief talk to the class.	I,D	<p>In lieu of a final exam, students were asked to give a five-minute talk about one of their papers. A couple students used PowerPoint or small posters. Several students took this opportunity to further revise their “favorite” paper.</p> <p>This kind of public “outcome” of their written work suggests that some students will work harder on a paper that they have to present to everyone; in other words, having a larger audience may be a spur to students to make a better effort on their papers.</p>

Additional observations:

A. Most students apparently had not taken 120A (Expos I) for some time. One student told me that he had Expos I *four years* ago. I did not ask students about their previous experience at the start of the class, but from now on, I will assess that on the first day. Perhaps as a result of the break in study, most students’ basic skills were rusty. In fact, the research papers that most students did would have been acceptable as Expos I papers.

Recommendation 1.

- (a) Require students to complete the 120A/B sequence within one year. C. Ross Perkins tells me he has proposed this.
- (b) Require students to complete all 100-level courses in sequence, i.e., 100, 110, 120, etc., before progressing to any 200-level course in this division—as is required in Chinese and Japanese.
- (c) Require students to have a dictionary and thesaurus for use in class.

B. For the first assignment (humanities), 7 of 28 did not turn in a completed project. For the second topic (natural science), 4 of 28—but not the same students—did not turn in a completed project; however, 2 students plagiarized all or part of their papers. For the third assignment (social sciences), similar results occurred. Part of the problem may have been that I allowed students to turn in papers after the due date (but with a 50% off penalty).

In future, I will tighten up the submission requirements and post warnings of poor performance earlier in the course.

C. Although students claimed to have an interest in a specific topic within each discipline, most relied on personal opinion (“as everyone knows”) to support their topics. Most had not done any prior library research. They also had difficulty formulating thesis statements.

In future, I will address this at the start of each project.

D. One of the difficulties I encountered with students doing research had to do with the differences between the ways I as a teacher and they as students “see” our library website. For example, when I showed them how to narrow their search using a department laptop I brought to class, I did not realize—and no one told me until 12 weeks into the course—that they did not have the same program in the computer lab or apparently in the library.

Recommendation 2.

(a) Our division’s computer lab, our division’s writing center, and perhaps all other PCs should be upgraded to allow students to see what we see on the library website.

(b) All MS Word programs on campus should be equal to what the teachers have. Moreover, all MS Word programs should be set to include the “grammar & style” checker, instead of making it an option. In this way, students would have more opportunities to see their work the way their teachers see it.

The person in charge of the Lang/Lit Division computer lab, Dave, tells me that he knows how to make these changes, and an IT technician confirmed to me that Dave could easily make these changes during the school year. This would save everyone time in the end and be of service to students and teachers alike.*

* While working with this form, for instance, I tried repeatedly to make the settings “Times New Roman 12 pt,” but the computer has some glitch whereby it is difficult or impossible to make new “default” settings stick.

Special comments:

Grade	28 students
A	1
B	2
C	4
D	5
F	8
I	8

Institution Learning Outcomes:

COM-FSM graduates will demonstrate that they can:

a. communicate effectively

b. employ critical thinking [*& problem solving*]

c. possess specific knowledge and skills in a major discipline or professional program of study

d. take responsibility and develop skills for learning

e. interact responsibly with people, cultures, and their environment

Signature: _____

Date: May 21, 2013

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