Elizabeth L. Angeli | Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy is grounded in my undergraduate experience at a Jesuit institution. Following the university's mission, the professors exemplified *cura personalis* or "care for the whole person." Today, as a professor, I teach writing with the whole person—the student—in mind.

The teaching of writing is a holistic endeavor. Writing plays an instrumental role in many areas of students' lives, and students must develop skills to communicate in these areas. To help prepare students to communicate in a variety of situations, I teach them the fundamental skills they will need to adapt to situations. To that end, I uphold three pedagogical principles: to assign rhetorically-situated projects, to draw on students' discipline-specific knowledge, and to transfer students' writing skills to other situations. In turn, I hope that students will utilize the skills they learn to communicate effectively and rhetorically in all situations.

Students Complete Rhetorically-Situated Projects

To enact *cura personalis*, I create projects that are applicable to students' future and current workplace, professional, and personal experiences. I intend for students to connect the work they complete in my courses to their work in other situations. I believe that students can better connect these situations when writing for a specific rhetorical situation. In these situations, students compose for and work with audience members outside of the classroom.

Before beginning a project, my students complete an audience analysis chart. By completing this chart, students understand their primary, secondary, and tertiary audiences and their needs, values, and attitudes toward a document, such as a recruitment brochure. My purpose in assigning this chart is two fold: to illustrate the many audience members to whom students will be writing and to highlight the effects students' rhetorical choices may have on these audiences.

My undergraduate business writing students compose for audiences outside the classroom all semester. These classes end with the capstone Business Communication Firm project. As a capstone project, students develop a business communication firm in groups and compete for bids for to develop materials for a local organization. In Spring and Fall 2013, students developed recruitment material for local high schools. Students conducted research to learn how to best meet their audience's needs. They interviewed community members, conducted site visits, and interacted with high school students. As a result of this research, students could better see how their composing practices extended beyond the classroom and into the community.

My professional writing graduate students create projects that respond to specific workplace and community needs. In Technical Writing and Information Design, students complete a capstone project in which they compose material at a workplace's or community partner's request. In Spring 2014, students worked with a community partner to create handbooks that informed middle school guidance counselors about a local high school. In other semesters, students redesign informational pamphlets distributed at their workplace and software instructions for churches and school communities. To improve their documents' effectiveness, all students conduct informal readability and usability tests on their documents. As such, students apply the theory and research methods we discuss during the semester to specific rhetorical situations.

Students Utilize Discipline-Specific Knowledge

I ask students to draw from their own areas of expertise to complete projects. In doing so, I acknowledge that students bring specific areas of expertise from these communities that could benefit the class.

To divide group work in my undergraduate writing courses, I require groups to determine each individual's role in the project. After discussing strengths and weakness, students assign the following roles: coordinator, researcher, designer, and editor. With this approach, I allow students to recognize their skills and discuss how they can use their skills in the project. Many of my students major in business administration and want to own a business. Determining these roles allows them to exercise their leadership skills and to listen to their group mates about their skills.

I also ask students to complete a rhetorical analysis of a document they are working on in another course. I have two purposes for this assignment: to gain insight into the types of writing students are completing in other courses and to increase students' awareness of the type of writing in which they engage. I ask students to explain the document's rhetorical situation, to list the various audience members for whom the document is intended, and to discuss how they address those members in the document. With these questions, I aim for students to understand that all of their writing is rhetorical. This assignment also allows students to view their discipline-specific writing in a context in which they can transfer knowledge gained in one class to another.

Students Gain Transferable Skills

To further "care for the whole person," I teach students skills that they can use outside of my classroom. These skills build on students' completion of rhetorically-situated projects and discipline-specific knowledge.

When teaching technology and writing, I create opportunities for students to develop skills needed to learn technology rather than specific skills for one program. In my Creating Online Help graduate course, students use Instructables.com, a website containing user-generated instructions, and MadCap Flare, an industry-standard single-source authoring program. MadCap Flare can overwhelm students with little technological experience. To build students' confidence, I require them to create instructions first for Instructables.com. Students employ best practices of online help, including user-centered design, by writing these documents for the site's users. Later in the semester, students compose the same project with MadCap Flare to build on the skills they develop with Instructables. Students then create effective projects in MadCap Flare because they have honed their technical skills and interacted with audience members to learn how to improve their documents.

To further encourage knowledge transfer, I assign a reflective memo in which students discuss the skills they learned during the project and how they can transfer these skills to situations. This reflection provides students with an opportunity to reflect on their project and to understand how the skills they gained informed their composing process. Students often note their pleasant surprise at how useful and transferrable these skills are; students mention that they might write instructions for a client or design readable emails for a busy boss in the future.