

# TEACHING PORTFOLIO REBECCA DEVERS, PH.D.

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## Teaching Responsibilities and Course Syllabi

I began my career at City Tech in Fall 2010, after earning my Ph.D. in English at the University of Connecticut in May 2010. As an Assistant Professor of English at New York City College of Technology, I am responsible for teaching various courses as needed by the department, which offers a variety of literature and composition courses. While there are certainly exceptions, most of my students take English courses because they are required parts of their degree programs, rather than because they plan to become English majors or because they enjoy reading and writing. This affords me the opportunity to generate new and sometimes unconventional assignments and activities in efforts to reach my students where they are, and to do so with the same enthusiasm that brought me to this field in the first place.

Within the department, I teach different types of courses. The composition courses (1101, 1121) use department-generated grading rubrics and final exams; the course content of these classes is the academic writing process. The department's writing-intensive literature courses (I've taught 2000, 2001, 2150, 3401, and 3402) expect the professor to generate the methods of evaluation and assessment; in these classes, the course content is the literature of the relevant genre(s) or period(s), and writing is used not only as a means of evaluation, but also as a pedagogical tool to supplement students' engagement with the material. In all classes, I generate my syllabus, grading policy, course calendar, reading list, and assignments in order to create a learning environment conducive to my students' development of proficiency in the course outcomes identified by the department.

### Courses taught:

**ENG 1101, English Composition I** (click on course number and name for sample syllabus)

3 credits, 25 students. *Catalog description: "A course in effective essay writing and basic research techniques including use of the library. Demanding readings assigned for classroom discussion and as a basis for essay writing."*

In this course, I assign several challenging non-fiction readings that we discuss in class. Students are assigned formal papers, many of which are in response to the shared readings and one is the culmination of a scaffolded research project. Individual class meetings might focus on any one of a variety of topics, from discussing a reading, to preparing for and participating in a debate, to working on a specific writing skill (like quotation usage), to in-class writing and workshops. I may use a lecture style of delivery to communicate necessary information (like how to format according to MLA), but I often use discussion to engage students in the topic. I also use group work regularly.

I've taught several sections of 1101 that were part of First Year Learning Communities. These sections will feature readings and assignments that focus on the shared theme of the Learning Community. For example, in a Learning Community with Communication Design, I teach a section of 1101 in which students focus on issues related to food, food accessibility, nutrition, and health; in conjunction with their introductory course in COMD, students design and produce visual texts that communicate key themes or information. In Fall 2016, this section is working on a book that encourages fifth graders to develop healthy habits early.

**ENG 1121, English Composition II**

3 credits, 27 students. *Catalog description: “An advanced course in expository essay writing that requires a library paper. Further development of research and documentation skills (MLA style). Assigned literary and expository readings.”*

This course resembles 1101 above, in that the “course content” is composition strategies; it differs from 1101 in that the assigned readings include literary texts and students are expected to master more advanced strategies of composition.

**ENG 2000, Perspectives in Literature**

3 credits, 30 students. *Catalog description: “Readings in and writings about literature across genres, eras and locales. Themes include family, the individual and society, good and evil, gender, faith and ‘the human heart in conflict with itself.’ Essays and exams based on readings.”*

In this course I strive to meet the department’s objectives through assigned readings that represent as many genres of literature as possible (novel, short story, play, poetry, graphic novel). Students learn how to read literature carefully and analytically, and they demonstrate these abilities through three formal papers (5 pages each), a midterm exam, a final exam, and unannounced reading quizzes. I design and develop these assignments and assessment tools; they are not provided by the department or by a text book. Readings represent a breadth of literary styles but also address several common themes, which lets the class discuss different “perspectives” on specific ideas or topics.

**ENG 2001, Introduction to Literature I—Fiction**

3 credits, 30 students. *Catalog description: “Analysis and critical understanding of selected fiction. Exams and essays based on readings.”*

In this class, students are first expected to master a conventional definition of fiction, using the six elements of fiction as defined by Ann Charters (setting, point of view, plot, character, theme, style). They read several short stories and a novel, and are expected to demonstrate their ability to use these terms accurately in class discussion, quizzes, and formal paper assignments. I design and develop these assignments and assessment tools; they are not provided by the department or by a text book. As the semester progresses, they read texts that challenge these conventional definitions (a graphic novel and a fictionalized memoir), and must work to revise and challenge (or justify) those conventions that they mastered weeks before. Students write three formal papers (5 pages each), take quizzes, and there is a midterm and a final exam.

**ENG 2150, Introduction to Women Writers**

3 credits, 30 students. *Catalog description: “Introduction to the writings of selected women writers, both major authors and less well-known women writers. A variety of genres including essays, fiction, poems and plays will be explored.”*

The reading list for this class includes texts in several genres (a novel, short stories, fiction, drama, nonfiction, and a graphic novel) which were written by women and which contribute to a

more nuanced understanding of themes related to women's rights, revolution, family, race, and identity. Students are expected to use the terms of literary criticism accurately in class discussion, quizzes, and formal paper assignments. I design and develop these assignments and assessment tools; they are not provided by the department or by a text book. Students write three formal papers (5 pages each), take quizzes, and there is a midterm and a final exam.

### **ENG 3401, Law through Literature**

3 credits, 30 students. *Catalog description: "An exploration of concepts of justice, higher law, customary law and written law expressed through works of fiction and non-fiction. The course seeks to enhance the student's sensitivity to issues of ethics, gender bias and class consciousness as they affect the administration of justice. Readings improve communication skills and strengthen legal skills of identifying, articulating and locating problems in the context of underlying legal issues. Written assignments emphasize expository writing skills."*

In this class students read and listen to texts that present themes associated with justice, innocence, investigation, oppression, identity, and the role of literature in society. Students learn to use the six elements of fiction to discuss and write about assigned texts, and they demonstrate their facility with these terms on quizzes, in two formal papers, a midterm exam, and a final exam. Students also perform research to write a paper and present in class on a topic relevant to the legal issues discussed in the texts. I design and develop these assignments and assessment tools; they are not provided by the department or by a text book.

### **ENG 3402, Topics in Literature: The Graphic Novel (Fall 2012)**

3 credits, 30 students. *Catalog description: "Specific critical and thematic approaches to selected works in literature written in English. Selected works are studied in relation to a special theme, technique, theoretical issue, or cultural consideration. Possible topics: the geographical journey as a metaphor for maturation; stream of consciousness as a literary technique for heightening reality; the role of Shakespeare as a Tudor propagandist; the issue of how culture shapes identity, as depicted in diverse works of fiction."*

Course description for my proposed topic: "This course is designed to introduce students to the genre of graphic novels. Required readings represent both Eastern and Western comics traditions, and range in publication dates from around 1930 through the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Looking at these primary texts alongside an important critical work (*Understanding Comics*), students will learn to identify the key components of graphic narrative—including technical aspects of visual storytelling as well as more traditional elements of prose narrative—and how they work together to form a graphic narrative. Students will also be asked to identify the major themes addressed by the genre over time, and to evaluate the ways in which those themes, and the ways they are addressed, have changed."

## Description of Teaching Philosophy

Because I learned to be a professor as I learned to be a researcher, I find it challenging (and perhaps disingenuous) to compartmentalize my roles as teacher and scholar. The questions I ask my students are the same ones I ask myself. This provides my students with a model of academic inquiry; in addition, I try to demonstrate that such inquiry is, as I felt when I was in college, fun. I think the classroom can be a space in which curiosity is welcomed, so my approach to teaching is as a facilitator of critical thought.

My teaching philosophy can be best summarized as a collection of core beliefs, and because I cannot think of myself as a professor without thinking about my students, I'll begin with my set of core beliefs about them.

### Core beliefs about my students:

1. **My students deserve the chance to succeed, both academically and professionally, and will rise to meet high standards when they are given the tools necessary to meet those standards.**

I recognize that many of my students at City Tech may not be as confident in English and literature as I was as a college student, and this motivates me to try more unconventional methods. I believe my students can be successful in my classes, and that this success will serve them well when they leave my class. My literature courses give students the opportunity to experience worlds beyond their own experience, and to develop empathy, imagination, and flexible thinking; my composition courses establish habits that will help them succeed in their academic and professional careers. The ability to communicate clearly and effectively will serve them well in any career that involves interaction with clients, patients, supervisors, or employees.

While it is important for me to establish a comfortable, collegial environment in the classroom, it is equally important for me not to let this friendly atmosphere equate with lax standards. I expect my students to turn in work that represents their best effort on any particular assignment, and my evaluation methods hold students to difficult, exacting standards; I do this because I know I've given the students the tools they need to achieve those standards.

2. **My students can be more successful, both academically and professionally, when they can write thoughtful, well organized, argument-driven, original papers.**

I believe that clear communication and the ability to analyze and discuss literature have real value. I believe that when a student succeeds in my course, it is because she has demonstrated skills that will benefit her in other courses and in her daily activities: critical thinking, creative problem-solving, effective and responsible use of source materials, clear communication with an awareness of an audience's expectations and needs, and logical explanations of her ideas and arguments. Because I consider these skills to be part of my "course material," I approach all my courses with the belief that they are essential foundations of any degree program or career path.

**3. My students learn best when they are engaged in unexpected activities that help them discover connections.**

I try to keep my students engaged in course material by presenting that material in ways they may not have encountered before; this is especially important since many of my students may not feel confident with English (either as a subject of study or as a language they are still learning), and because some students may have felt alienated or frustrated by traditional approaches to writing instruction and literature. By demonstrating that lessons and material can be learned through active, enjoyable participation, my classes invite students to become contributors to the course itself. It is my hope that they will see the course not only as a required part of their degree program but also as a space in which their ideas and questions hold value. Furthermore, if I succeed at connecting the activities in my class with events in the world beyond the classroom, I've succeeded at encouraging students to become active, engaged contributors to the worlds they live in.

I also subscribe to a set of core beliefs about my responsibilities as a professor:

**1. Effective educators are organized and on time, and provide models of professionalism and respect.**

I make every effort to plan my classes so that necessary activities and assignments have the time they need. I emphasize punctuality and address students by name. I incorporate a transparency into my classes, explaining to students how to navigate their college experience and, when necessary, how to advocate for themselves.

**2. Effective educators demonstrate and expect from their students sensitivity toward different cultures and lifestyles.**

I believe that my classroom should be a safe place for academic inquiry and creative engagement. Students should feel comfortable expressing their ideas honestly. I assign texts by authors that represent different cultures and lifestyles, and I welcome all contributions to class discussion. I hope to be a model of tolerance and acceptance for my students.

**3. Effective educators relate their course materials and lessons to students' various learning styles and to their lives beyond the classroom.**

Students learn in different ways, and I try to accommodate as many of those learning styles as I can. I use games and activities that require students to perform various combinations of different activities, from working independently to locate and record meaningful quotations in a text, to working in a group to create and follow through on a competitive strategy; from navigating the classroom to learn about a specific term to working in a group to teach that term to the rest of the class. I use materials like multi-colored signs and index cards, and I also use the chalk board (or white board) and computer projector (if available).

In addition to working to forge connections within the classroom, I encourage students to see the value of our class work beyond it. I believe that understanding the significant role of language in our lives and cultures leads to more communicative, successful adults.

**4. Effective educators use appropriate and current technology when it helps achieve course objectives.**

I believe it is important for professors to demonstrate the connections between their fields of study and current technology. As a result, I believe that technology can be used in the English classroom; I've used the computer and projector to show students how to look up MLA citation requirements and how to format a Microsoft Word document according to MLA guidelines. I've also projected web sites so the class can refer to them during discussion. At times I've encouraged students to use their web-enabled phones to access the internet during class in order to look up definitions of words used in assigned readings or to participate in real-time, interactive polls that foster discussion.

The internet has made information available easily, widely, and quickly. Because my students are accustomed to such availability, I believe it is my duty to teach them how to evaluate and respond to this information effectively and without plagiarizing.

**5. Effective educators teach students not what to remember, but how to think.**

I do not believe a successful professor of English teaches with a multiple choice exam in mind. I don't think processes like critical thinking, creative problem solving, active reading, argumentation, and supporting one's own original argument can be memorized. These abilities must be learned and practiced through discussion and challenging written assignments. Therefore, I see written assignments in my classes not as opportunities for students to repeat to me what they've read or heard, but as opportunities for them to practice new thought processes and strategies. This makes for challenging writing assignments that demand original ideas rather than repetitions of either me, of class discussion, or of the assigned readings.

## Description of Teaching Methodology, with Sample Assignments and Activities

I try to enact my teaching philosophy by incorporating different types of activities and teaching methods in each class. I try to infuse every classroom activity with significance and meaning, often by connecting it to ongoing projects. Every class period should stimulate interest, challenge the student, and propel the class toward successful completion of course objectives. As evident in the sample assignments and activities below, I often ask students to perform metacognitive activities that require them to learn about the education process itself, such as the role of literature in a well-rounded education, or the writing strategies that work (or may not work) for them. Such reflection supports the learning process, helping students become aware of and intentional in their scholastic efforts.

My core teaching methods, which I describe below, arise from my understanding that my discipline may not be easily accessible for all my students. I provide my students with the tools they need to achieve high standards, and I do so in a safe, collaborative, active classroom.

### Core methods:

#### **A. Embodying Professionalism and Mutual Respect**

As part of my belief that I should be a model of tolerance and acceptance for my students, I treat every student with respect. I encourage and acknowledge contributions from students. I dress professionally for each class meeting and address students by name whenever I can.

#### **B. Incorporating games and unconventional classroom activities to address students' multiple learning styles and to help them discover connections**

Because I believe that successful teaching addresses multiple individual learning styles while challenging students to approach course material from what may be unanticipated angles, I use activities and games to supplement lecture and discussion in the classroom. Some examples of this method are explained below.

### *Meet-match-teach* (click on the title of each assignment or activity to view it)

I like to use this activity on the second day of the semester, because it helps students become familiar with their peers even as they become experts in a specific area of knowledge and assume the responsibility for teaching that information to the rest of the class.

For this lesson, students come to class having already read an assigned essay by Ann Charters on the elements of fiction (plot, theme, point of view, characters, style, and setting). At the start of class, students receive two cards or signs; one has a term from Charters's essay, and the other has a definition. Each student's term and definition will not match. By walking around the room and engaging other students, they must find the correct definition for their term, and the correct term for their definition, leaving each student with two cards at the end: a matching term and definition.



Cards are color coded, so when students have found the matching term and definition, they can create groups based on the color of their cards; there are six groups, each one focused on a single element of fiction. These groups work together to determine the best way to teach their element to the rest of the class, using as an example a text they think most of the class will know. Each group affixes the signs to the wall with Bluestick.

This activity was very successful; students learned the terms quickly and were able to apply them to the assigned readings. Students also became comfortable with one another more quickly, engaging with one another during class discussion, rather than simply responding to my questions alone. Later in the semester, I may use these cards again to demonstrate that these definitions can change as we read different texts; when we discuss a graphic novel, for instance, students may work together to revise the definitions we had been working with all semester to accommodate a new genre. They can then put these new revised definitions on the wall next to the original definition and the term.

### Frankenstein Bingo

Because the elevated style of Mary Shelley's novel can be difficult for some students to understand, I find that games can help to reduce the stress and to provide areas of access where the students can gain footholds. I use a bingo game to help students identify important themes and how they relate to other elements of fiction (like setting, style, characterization, and point of view), which helps them to gain a level of familiarity with this difficult text.

To play the game, students begin by selecting one sentence to write on an index card I distribute. There is an alphanumeric code at the top of each card which corresponds to a specific chapter of the text. Students must select their quotation according to this general direction. They submit their cards to me (I often ask them to generate more than one), and I draw from them at random. Students then work in teams to determine if any particular quotation can fill a spot on their bingo card. In order to do this, a quotation must represent an intersection between the specific theme across the top of the card, and the element of fiction listed in the column on the left. When a team has a line completed, they yell "BINGO!" and must defend their readings of each quotation to the rest of the class.

This activity gets students working in groups to understand individual sentences of a difficult text. The focus on a single sentence isolates it for the students, who can then begin to put it into the context of concepts they already know. Having to defend their readings also develops their argumentation skills, and teaches them how to analyze quotations in ways that support their overall purpose. Of course, this latter skill is incredibly important when writing formal papers.

### Jeopardy

I use a template I found online, and create Jeopardy games to use for review. Students work in teams to answer questions (or, technically, to answer in the form of a question). The template

allows for five categories of increasingly difficult questions. I populate the template with questions and answers based on the purpose of the review.

### Henry James Scavenger Hunt

Similar to *Frankenstein* Bingo, this activity adds a competitive element and the isolation of a brief excerpt to help students understand a difficult text. Students write sentences from Henry James's "The Figure in the Carpet" on index cards. The cards are then redistributed at random. Students then navigate the classroom and negotiate with others to acquire cards with specific types of sentences as listed on the scorecard. For example, a simple sentence (rather rare in James's work) is worth five points; a sentence that describes a static character is worth two points, and so forth. Students have to collect cards that add up to a specific number. This activity helps students identify specific stylistic strategies at the sentence level, in an environment that prioritizes discovery over right-and-wrong.

### **C. Designing unconventional projects to foster student engagement with challenging texts or ideas.**

To support my belief that writing assignments should be spaces for students to practice and hone new strategies of analysis and problem solving, I generate original and unconventional challenges for my students. Especially in my literature classes, I encourage students to break away from restrictive forms of writing (like the five paragraph essay), and instead to choose for themselves which structures and organization strategies will work best for their intended purpose. The following examples demonstrate my method of using formal writing assignments to foster critical thinking, creative problem solving, and flexible thinking even while assessing literary analysis, reading comprehension, and communication.

### Oppression Journals/Explications

In 3401, Law through Literature, students read Margaret Atwood's dystopic novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. This is a first person narrative about a society in which women's social role is determined by their reproductive abilities. The book raises themes of oppression, corruption, and rebellion, and it does so through the powerful lens of a narrator who is experiencing those themes herself. To help students engage with this text, I assign a two-part formal project. In the first part, students write their own Oppression Journal. I ask them to imitate Atwood's strategies by writing in the first person about an oppressive situation in today's society. Among other topics, students have written about immigration, policing, domestic abuse, and Syrian refugees. They post their texts to our Open Lab site. In the second part of the project, students perform literary analysis via an annotation and explication of a classmate's oppression journal. In their explication, they must comparatively analyze Atwood's text and the classmate's journal. Then they post their explication as a comment on the student's journal on Open Lab.

This assignment lets students develop the close reading and analytical skills necessary in an upper-level literature class while at the same time developing the empathy that the appreciation of literature demands. The assignment allows students the opportunity to understand the structures of power that can oppress populations, and it allows them to realize that authors must make a series of decisions when they try to portray such situations. Finally, it scaffolds the process of literary analysis, allowing them to analyze Atwood's novel through the familiarity of writing and responding to peer-generated texts in the same genre.

Podcast transcript

In 3401, Law through Literature, students listen to the podcast *Serial*, a twelve-episode study of the case of Adnan Syed. Syed was convicted of killing his ex-girlfriend in Baltimore and had served 15 years of a life sentence when Sarah Koenig, the podcast journalist, began investigating the case and his conviction. She uncovered problems with the investigation and with Syed's defense. Because of the podcast, Syed has been granted a new trial.

Students really enjoy this text and come to class eager to discuss it; the text we read after it – Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* – gets a far more chilly reception. To help students recognize the shared themes between the texts, such as investigation, corruption, power, innocence, and the power of narrative itself, I ask students to write a transcript of a podcast in which they take on Koenig's role as investigative journalist and travel back to 17<sup>th</sup>-century Salem to find out what really happened. The assignment brings students into the text and encourages them to try to understand characters' motives.

2000 Assignment: Literature and Your Major

Because it's important to me that my students see the work of our class in the context of their entire education (and, honestly, their lives in general), I ask them to identify and write about one of those connections. This assignment asks students to write about the ways in which a science fiction text (Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles*) could be used to teach an aspect of their major or career. The assignment is intended to help students understand that literature contains more substance than what is most visible in the plot.

1101 Ali Research Assignment: Metacognition and Educational Literacy

Students in an Ali-focused section designed projects that used Muhammad Ali to teach content, such as a punching bag experiment to teach physics, or using Ali to learn about Parkinson's disease in a medical course. Students learned about the educational process itself, including pedagogical strategies and learning outcomes.

**D. Teaching complicated ideas through compartmentalization and scaffolding**

Writing a paper can be fraught with anxiety and frustration. The blank white screen (which was once the blank white page) can paralyze a writer who doesn't know what she wants to say or isn't sure how to say it. In my classes, I try to break the reading and writing process into small, manageable tasks that students can easily learn and practice. Though not intended to be a formula, these methods help me explain how students can develop their critical thinking, communication, and analytical skills. A few examples are explained below.

IQIAA

When I was in graduate school, I developed this process as a way to discuss quotation usage in papers. While at City Tech, I've developed an activity that engages students in this process

physically, visually, and aurally. It was a City Tech student who suggested the acronym IQIAA be pronounced like the furniture store IKEA, so I now call it the IQIAA method.

The acronym stands for Introduce, Quote, Interpret, Analyze, and Apply. Pointing out that all five words are verbs, I present it as a tool box of actions an author can take with any quotation. I've used a handout to teach the method, and a puzzle activity to give students the chance to practice it.

### Debates

In my composition courses and in my literature courses, I use debates to provide a structure for argumentation. I choose a polarizing question, assign students to a team, and give them time to prepare their statements. The debates encourage team work, careful reading, making connections among various readings or different elements of fiction, and effective quotation usage, and they introduce the idea of addressing one's opponents when defending one's own argument. Students may only be responsible for one round of a debate, so their work is focused on just one part of the whole, but they are part of a team that they want to see win, so they need to understand how their individual statement fits into the larger argument or purpose.

### Composition research project

In my composition courses, I use a month-long research project to encourage students to think about research as a process rather than the product of an over-night marathon session. I provide a scaffolded series of small assignments that culminates in a paper. These small assignments range from something as broad as choosing one's research area to something as specific as writing a one-page summary of a possible source, including correct MLA citation. Because I provide a rigid structure for this project, I let students choose their own research topics; I feel this makes for more meaningful work for the students, since they get to learn and write about something they're already interested in. It also demonstrates the connections between our classroom and their lives beyond it.

In the sample assignment included here, students in a class organized around the life of Muhammad Ali are asked to generate an assignment that could be incorporated into another course, using Ali as a primary text. For example, what can we learn about physics by watching a boxing match? Such an assignment takes a metacognitive approach to writing, asking students not merely to repeat the ideas they hear or read about in class, but to create their own solutions to complex problems; that the problem requires them to become more familiar with General Education objectives at City Tech only further benefits and prepares the students.

## **E. Responding to student work with both evaluation and instruction**

I want students to understand writing as a natural part of the communication process; as a result, it's important to me that they recognize that writing itself is a process. Because I don't want their papers to be a list of items they remember from class discussion or the assigned readings, it's crucial that I respond to their papers not just with evaluation (a letter grade), but with instruction (advice on how they can make their next paper stronger). I explain to my students that I'm not their editor, and that it is not my role to point out all their grammatical mistakes. Instead, I want to make them capable editors, so that

they can eventually revise, edit, and proofread for themselves. The way I do this is that I indicate the grade their paper earns on a rubric--for composition courses, the content of this rubric comes from the department; for literature courses, I create the rubric myself. In addition to this, however, I make comments on the paper itself, pointing out areas that need clarification or ideas that are particularly interesting and strong. I also write individual comments on each paper to synthesize these marginalia. I endeavor in each set of comments to thank the writer for his work and to point out specific areas for improvement. Early in the semester, I explain to students that I see these comments as part of a conversation between the student and myself.

#### **F. Encouraging students to self-reflect and self-evaluate**

To develop core method 6, I encourage students to reflect and to evaluate themselves. In English 1101, I've generated worksheets for students to complete during the writing process, so they can identify specific writing goals for themselves and reflect on their progress towards those goals.

#### **G. Incorporating technology to support pedagogy and course objectives**

I use technology to engage students with the course material and class discussion. The following examples demonstrate the various ways technology helps me to expand the classroom space and to bring the students into our learning environment.

##### Open Lab

The College's digital platform gives me space to host my courses. I make my syllabus and assignments available there and use the blog to communicate with students. I also have students post their work there so it's visible to the class. This fosters communication and develops for the students a sense of audience.

##### Poll-Everywhere

This website allows me to prepare discussion questions in the form of surveys. I use them like slides of a presentation to guide me through topics I want to discuss with the students. Students participate in the surveys via text messages from their phones. The responses are anonymous and are posted on the screen in real time, so even shy or more quiet students can contribute to the discussion.

Click below for screenshots of PollEverywhere slides used to guide discussion in English 1101

[Writing A Summary](#)

[Possible Interventions](#)

[Introducing a New Text](#)

##### Prezis

Prezis allow me to prepare lectures that incorporate videos and use visual metaphor to assist in organizing the information. They are more dynamic and engaging than PowerPoint. I can share the Prezis with students via OpenLab and email, too. Click below to see some sample Prezis.

[E. L. Doctorow's \*The Book of Daniel\*](#) and the theme of the individual in society.

Introducing [Arthur Miller's \*The Crucible\*](#).

Using the elements of fiction to understand Poe's short story ["The Fall of the House of Usher."](#)

#### **H. Designing and implementing assessment tools that evaluate students' mastery of course content and their ability to apply it.**

In 2000-level and higher classes, it is the responsibility of the course instructor to develop exams and grading policies that evaluate students' proficiency with course objectives. I've created midterm exams, final exams, and reading quizzes that allow me to assess students objectively while still challenging them to apply course material in appropriate ways; I've also developed a holistic paper rubric inspired by one used by a faculty member at my graduate institution. I use it not only to evaluate the students but also to communicate to them about their strengths and weaknesses. Click below to see specific examples.

Formal paper rubric for literature classes

Selected reading quizzes

English 2000 midterm exam

English 3401 final exam

## Documentation of Teaching Effectiveness: Peer Assessment of Teaching

(Clicking on each evaluator's name will take you to the observation report for that semester.)

Evaluator	Semester	Course	Evaluation
Monique Ferrell	Fall 2010	ENG 1101 / 5323	Excellent
Nina Bannett	Spring 2011	ENG 1121 / 5421	Excellent
Annette Saddik	Fall 2011	ENG 1101 / 5379	Very Good
Mark Noonan	Spring 2012	ENG 1101 / 5354	Excellent
Juanita But	Fall 2012	ENG 1101 / 5404	Excellent
Jane Mushabac	Spring 2013	ENG 2001 / 1240	Excellent
Aaron Barlow	Fall 2013	ENG 1101 / D386	Satisfactory*
Richard Hanley	Spring 2014	ENG 2000 / D532	Excellent
Kate Falvey	Fall 2014	ENG 3401 / D554	Excellent
Monique Ferrell	Spring 2015	ENG 3401 / D570	Excellent
Carole Harris	Fall 2015	ENG 3401 / D554	Excellent
Julian Williams	Spring 2016	ENG 3401 / E270	Excellent
Mark Noonan	Fall 2016	ENG 1101 / LC85	Excellent
Caroline Hellman	Spring 2017	ENG 1101 / D377	Excellent

\* For all semesters except one, the observation report asked for an overall evaluation of Unsatisfactory, Satisfactory, Very Good, or Excellent. In Fall 2013, however, the form only offered the options of Unsatisfactory or Satisfactory.

### Excerpts from observation reports

*Prof. Monique Ferrell, Fall 2010:* “Dr. Devers’ students appear to hold her in high regard. They seem to enjoy the course, level of instruction, and they showed an enthusiasm for the course materials.”

*Prof. Nina Bannett, Spring 2011:* “Prof. Devers is a thoughtful and engaging composition instructor who is invested in helping her students become more invested in the writing process, and is providing them with valuable guidance.”

*Prof. Annette Saddik, Fall 2011:* “The syllabus illustrated a well-thought-out plan for the semester, and covered a variety of interesting essays and topics. Dr. Devers guided students and used appropriate terminology, defining terms that she thought might be unfamiliar, and directing discussion toward comparison of the two points of view presented.”

*Prof. Mark Noonan, Spring 2012:* “Professor Devers is a superb teacher. Her comments are always helpful and to the point, and it is clear that the students appreciate and learn from her enthusiasm for teaching writing.”

*Prof. Juanita But, Fall 2012:* “The class was focused and dynamic. Professor Devers effectively helped students understand the lesson and engaged them in class activities.”

*Prof. Jane Mushabac, Spring 2013:* “Professor Devers is impressive in every way, on everything she addresses. She brings out the best in her students, and they respond consistently at a high level with great interest.”

*Prof. Aaron Barlow, Fall 2013:* “Professor Devers engages with her students in a way that combines the personal and the professional. That is, they clearly understand that she cares about them individually but respond to her as a professor and not as a friend.”

*Prof. Richard Hanley, Spring 2014:* “Professor Devers used a variety of methods and media to present her materials. Not only did she lecture, she had her students do writing, group work, and critiquing. She also used the chalkboard, the screen, and handouts. She was adept at keeping the attention of the students as she and the class made their way through the lesson.”

*Prof. Kate Falvey, Fall 2014:* “Professor Devers is a dynamic, engaging, thoughtful facilitator, with a seemingly effortless way of remaining in charge of her classroom. There were clear class routines and expectations for professional behavior and courtesy – such as papers being turned in complete with staples, respectful attention paid to peers, the use of the course’s Open Lab site to present material, and the use of power point for the well-organized, informative student presentations.”

*Prof. Monique Ferrell, Spring 2015:* “Professor Devers used her time well. Each portion of the class transitioned seamlessly into the next. Students appeared comfortable with the course content and time devoted to discussion and classwork.”

*Prof. Carole Harris, Fall 2015:* “This was a satisfying lesson that demonstrates a high level of learning in the classroom. Students were engaged with each other and the material, and Professor Devers is



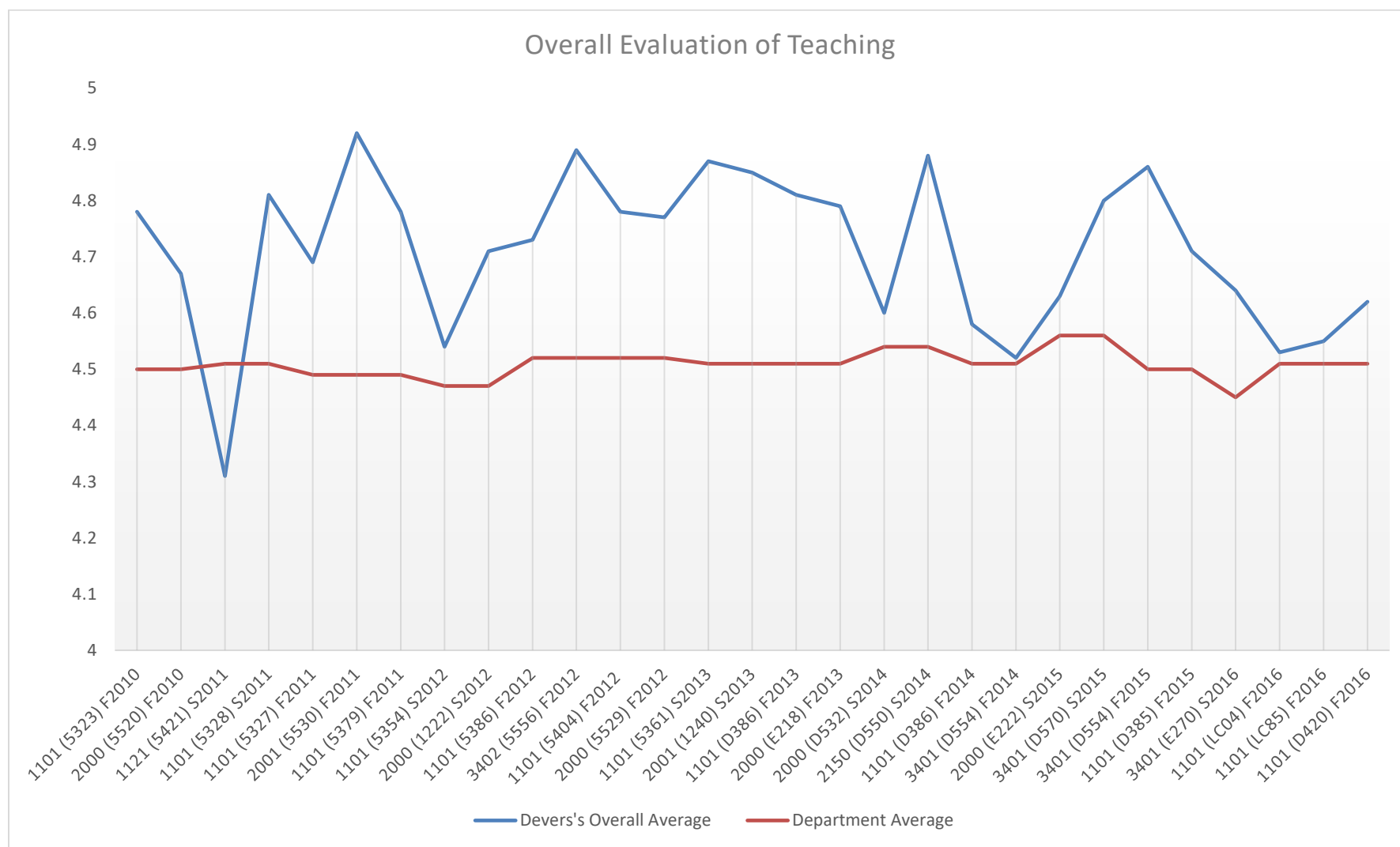
modeling for them approaches to analyzing literary texts that can be applied to current cases involving social justice and the law. Clearly a lot of thought went into planning the syllabus for this course.”

*Prof. Julian Williams, Spring 2016:* “Through her use of technology, Professor Devers is an active-learner revolutionary—a professor who juxtaposes the interdisciplinary course title while, at the same time, makes sure that the college’s mission of utilizing technology is the main stream of communication.”

*Prof. Mark Noonan, Fall 2016:* “Professor Devers is particularly skilled in presenting material in a clear, student-friendly, up-to-date manner. She offers a wide range of useful documents for students including self-reflective grade sheets and questionnaire sheets for complex articles. Particularly impressive is her innovative use of pedagogical technology. While most professors ask students not to be on their cell phones during class, Professor Devers asks her students to take theirs out and to actively respond to questions she posts on the readings for that day. She is truly bringing the composition classroom into the 21<sup>st</sup> century in a meaningful, helpful way that inspires engagement and zest for learning.”

*Prof. Caroline Hellman, Spring 2017:* “Prof. Devers clearly had substantial grasp of the material she presented, discussing complex subject matter (cultural displacement, diaspora, dialects). She was able to deftly balance the fun, energizing the students with a competitive exercise (the scavenger hunt), and the necessary, drawing students’ attention to the ways in which an author builds an argument.”

## Documentation of Teaching Effectiveness: Student Evaluation of Teaching



Criteria	Fall 2010 ENG 1101- 5323 (n=20)	Fall 2010 ENG 2000- 5520 (n=23)	Spring 2011 ENG 1121- 5421 (n=23)	Spring 2011 ENG 1101- 5328 (n=12)	Fall 2011 ENG 1101- 5327 (n=21)	Fall 2011 ENG 2001- 5530 (n=24)	Fall 2011 ENG 1101- 5379 (n=19)	Spring 2012 ENG 1101- 5354 (n=17)	Spring 2012 ENG 2000- 1222 (n=25)	Fall 2012 ENG 1101- 5386 (n=13)	Fall 2012 ENG 3402- 5556 (n=25)
1. The instructor communicated in a way I understood.	4.65	4.65	4.35	4.75	4.81	4.96	4.89	4.53	4.72	4.69	4.92
2. The instructor held my interest and attention in class.	4.65	4.52	4.00	4.67	4.48	4.83	4.37	4.47	4.60	4.54	4.76
3. The instructor took the time to explain the material when students did not understand it.	4.70	4.74	4.43	5.00	4.76	4.96	4.72	4.59	4.76	4.69	4.84
4. Students were encouraged to ask questions and were given meaningful answers.	4.70	4.70	4.35	4.83	4.71	4.96	4.68	4.59	4.72	4.69	4.96
5. Students were encouraged to express their own ideas and/or participate in class activities.	4.80	4.61	4.22	4.83	4.71	4.96	4.84	4.47	4.76	4.69	4.96
6. The instructor treated students with courtesy and respect.	4.85	4.78	4.30	4.83	4.76	4.96	4.95	4.59	4.72	4.77	4.92
7. The instructor was available to students for discussions or conferences.	4.75	4.61	4.30	4.67	4.76	4.92	4.79	4.35	4.72	4.77	4.84
8. The instructor generally met the class on time and held class to the end of the period.	4.90	4.74	4.52	4.92	4.57	4.88	4.84	4.65	4.68	4.85	4.92
9. The instructor spoke clearly and could be heard in class.	4.90	4.78	4.57	4.92	4.71	4.92	4.95	4.71	4.72	4.85	5.00
10. The grading system for the course was clearly explained.	4.90	4.70	4.22	4.67	4.67	4.92	4.68	4.65	4.72	4.77	4.88
11. Overall the instructor's teaching was effective.	4.75	4.57	4.17	4.83	4.67	4.93	4.84	4.35	4.72	4.77	4.84
<b>12. Overall average</b>	<b>4.78</b>	<b>4.67</b>	<b>4.31</b>	<b>4.81</b>	<b>4.69</b>	<b>4.92</b>	<b>4.78</b>	<b>4.54</b>	<b>4.71</b>	<b>4.73</b>	<b>4.89</b>
13. Department average	4.50	4.50	4.51	4.51	4.49	4.49	4.49	4.47	4.47	4.52	4.52

Criteria	Fall 2012 ENG 1101- 5404  (n=21)	Fall 2012 ENG 2000- 5529  (n=26)	Spring 2013 ENG 1101- 5361  (n=13)	Spring 2013 ENG 2001- 1240  (n=24)	Fall 2013 ENG 1101- D386  (n=15)	Fall 2013 ENG 2000- E218  (n=25)	Spring 2014 ENG 2000- D532  (n=23)	Spring 2014 ENG 2150- D550  (n=27)	Fall 2014 ENG 1101- D386  (n=16)	Fall 2014 ENG 3401- D554  (n=18)	Spring 2015 ENG 2000- E222  (n=27)
1. The instructor communicated in a way I understood.	4.76	4.65	4.85	4.88	4.87	4.54	4.48	4.89	4.73	4.44	4.52
2. The instructor held my interest and attention in class.	4.71	4.54	4.69	4.71	4.73	4.80	4.52	4.89	4.53	4.28	4.31
3. The instructor took the time to explain the material when students did not understand it.	4.71	4.81	4.85	4.79	4.87	4.88	4.52	4.93	4.67	4.50	4.69
4. Students were encouraged to ask questions and were given meaningful answers.	4.71	4.85	4.77	4.83	4.80	4.83	4.57	4.85	4.27	4.56	4.65
5. Students were encouraged to express their own ideas and/or participate in class activities.	4.81	4.85	5.00	4.83	4.67	4.83	4.61	4.85	4.47	4.56	4.63
6. The instructor treated students with courtesy and respect.	4.90	4.92	5.00	4.96	4.80	4.83	4.65	4.89	4.67	4.61	4.77
7. The instructor was available to students for discussions or conferences.	4.76	4.73	4.69	4.79	4.80	4.75	4.65	4.85	4.56	4.22	4.52
8. The instructor generally met the class on time and held class to the end of the period.	4.62	4.88	4.92	4.92	4.80	4.83	4.65	4.93	4.67	4.78	4.73
9. The instructor spoke clearly and could be heard in class.	4.90	4.88	5.00	4.92	4.80	4.92	4.70	4.85	4.60	4.78	4.78
10. The grading system for the course was clearly explained.	4.86	4.77	4.92	4.92	4.87	4.83	4.65	4.85	4.73	4.61	4.74
11. Overall the instructor's teaching was effective.	4.86	4.62	4.85	4.83	4.87	4.63	4.61	4.89	4.50	4.39	4.54
<b>12. Overall average</b>	<b>4.78</b>	<b>4.77</b>	<b>4.87</b>	<b>4.85</b>	<b>4.81</b>	<b>4.79</b>	<b>4.60</b>	<b>4.88</b>	<b>4.58</b>	<b>4.52</b>	<b>4.63</b>
13. Department average	4.52	4.52	4.51	4.51	4.51	4.51	4.54	4.54	4.51	4.51	4.56

Criteria	Spring 2015 ENG 3401- D570  (n=12)	Fall 2015 ENG 3401- D554  (n=27)	Fall 2015 ENG 1101- D385  (n=14)	Spring 2016 ENG 3401- E270  (n=12)	Fall 2016 ENG 1101 LC04  (n=14)	Fall 2016 ENG 1101 LC85  (n=9)	Fall 2016 ENG 1101 D420  (n=17)				
1. The instructor communicated in a way I understood.	4.75	4.86	4.79	4.92	4.50	4.44	4.53				
2. The instructor held my interest and attention in class.	4.67	4.81	4.64	4.17	4.50	4.56	4.24				
3. The instructor took the time to explain the material when students did not understand it.	4.83	4.90	4.71	4.58	4.57	4.44	4.59				
4. Students were encouraged to ask questions and were given meaningful answers.	4.83	4.86	4.50	4.75	4.57	4.56	4.59				
5. Students were encouraged to express their own ideas and/or participate in class activities.	4.75	4.86	4.57	4.58	4.57	4.67	4.59				
6. The instructor treated students with courtesy and respect.	4.83	4.86	4.79	4.58	4.50	4.78	4.88				
7. The instructor was available to students for discussions or conferences.	4.75	4.71	4.71	4.58	4.50	4.33	4.71				
8. The instructor generally met the class on time and held class to the end of the period.	4.83	4.90	4.86	4.91	4.62	4.67	4.65				
9. The instructor spoke clearly and could be heard in class.	4.83	4.90	4.86	4.75	4.57	4.67	4.76				
10. The grading system for the course was clearly explained.	4.83	4.90	4.79	4.50	4.43	4.56	4.65				
11. Overall the instructor's teaching was effective.	4.83	4.86	4.64	4.75	4.50	4.33	4.69				
<b>12. Overall average</b>	<b>4.80</b>	<b>4.86</b>	<b>4.71</b>	<b>4.64</b>	<b>4.53</b>	<b>4.55</b>	<b>4.62</b>				
13. Department average	4.56	4.50	4.50	4.45	4.51	4.51	4.51				

## Teaching Improvement Activities

I feel as though I'm constantly reevaluating my courses and my performance as an educator. I'm ever mindful of assignments and activities that need revising (or jettisoning), and I seek out opportunities to discuss pedagogy with colleagues both at City Tech and at other institutions. My continuous efforts to improve can be seen in the following activities.

### A. Summer Institute of Teaching and Learning

I've attended City Tech's Summer Institute of Teaching and Learning twice (2011 and 2016). The SITL affords the opportunity to discuss pedagogy and innovative classroom activities with City Tech faculty I may not otherwise get to work with. I've learned about new activities at the SITL, which I've been able to adapt and incorporate into my classes.

### B. FYLC workshops

Through my work with First Year Learning Communities, I've attended workshops designed to support the interdisciplinary partnerships between participating faculty.

### C. SENCER Summer Institute

In 2014 and 2016, I attended the SENCER (Science Education for New Civic Engagements and Responsibilities) Summer Institute (SSI). The majority of conference attendees are STEM faculty but the humanities are represented too. The conference offers workshops and lectures on pedagogies that privilege interdisciplinarity, creative problem solving, active learning, and the learning of course content through civic engagement. I've found both SSIs to be very inspiring, and I've made valuable professional relationships there.

### D. WAC

Perhaps the greatest impact on my teaching has come from my work with the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program at City Tech. I've written about this at more length in my PARSE, since it is an administrative role, but it has also shaped my understanding of the role of writing in the classroom. With my co-coordinator and the graduate writing fellows, we generate faculty development workshops, manage the College's Writing Intensive Certification program, and support faculty who incorporate writing into their classes. We also provide workshops on notetaking and ethical use of sources for students. This role has helped me to understand the importance of writing as a pedagogical tool, and not only as a way to assess student performance. It has also given me the opportunity to work with faculty at other CUNY campuses and to learn about the cultures of writing there.

### E. Assessment

I regularly participate in General Education assessment activities in order to contribute to the department's and the college's efforts to establish and maintain continuous cycles of improvement. I've also taken a leadership role as the department's assessment liaison to support these efforts.

## Future Teaching Goals

### A. Interdisciplinary work

I plan to continue my work with other departments whether as part of a First Year Learning Community or the grant-funded civic engagement project I'm currently working on with faculty in Math and chemistry. Through my exposure to SENCER pedagogy (see the SENCER Summer Institute above), I've become increasingly invested in classes that are designed to help students solve real-world problems using course content. Such challenges are far more realistic than the silo-style compartmentalization of disciplines that currently characterizes much of higher education. However, the shift toward interdisciplinarity and civic engagement is gaining steam, and I'm excited to continue adapting my classes to incorporate more real-world learning opportunities.

### B. Permanent course offering

The response to my 3402 class on Graphic Novels was very positive. I'd like to work toward making this a permanent course offering at City Tech, not only because the field of graphic novels is currently not represented in our catalog, but also because our Communication Design students would benefit from (and regularly enroll in) such a course.

## Appendix

Supporting materials follow.

1. ENG 1101, English Composition I sample syllabus
2. ENG 1121, English Composition II sample syllabus
3. ENG 2000, Perspectives in Literature sample syllabus
4. ENG 2001, Introduction to Literature I—Fiction sample syllabus
5. ENG 2150, Introduction to Women Writers sample syllabus
6. ENG 3401, Law through Literature sample syllabus
7. ENG 3402, Topics in Literature: The Graphic Novel sample syllabus
8. Meet-Match-Teach activity
9. Frankenstein Bingo
10. Jeopardy
11. Henry James Scavenger Hunt
12. Oppression Journals/Explications
13. Podcast transcript
14. 2000 assignment apply lit to major
15. 1101 Ali Research Assignment
16. IQIAA
17. Debate
18. Research project
19. Examples of midterm and final exams, quizzes
20. Reflection work with revision strategies (1101)
21. Monique Ferrell evaluation
22. Nina Bannett evaluation
23. Annette Saddik evaluation
24. Mark Noonan evaluation
25. Juanita But evaluation
26. Jane Mushabac evaluation
27. Aaron Barlow evaluation
28. Richard Hanley evaluation
29. Kate Falvey evaluation
30. Monique Ferrell evaluation
31. Carole Harris evaluation
32. Julian Williams evaluation
33. Mark Noonan evaluation
34. Caroline Hellman evaluation