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# Critical Compassion in the Composition Classroom

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CRITICAL COMPASSION IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

by

BRITTNY BYROM

Under the Direction of Michael Harker, PhD

ABSTRACT

The following research thesis redefines critical compassion as a thematic framework that composition instructors can use to create civic and harmonious classrooms. After establishing a working definition, this research goes further to explore ways critical compassion is already in use in three GSU ENGL 1102 courses, and ways instructors can more mindfully incorporate the framework into their curricula.

INDEX WORDS: Composition, Composition pedagogy, Compassion, Critical compassion, Writing

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by

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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**DEDICATION**

I want to dedicate this work to my friends who pushed me, and my family who comforted me during my academic journey; without them, I would not have made it this far. I also want to give a special dedication to my mom who provided endless advice, understanding, and support—even though she's a "math" person.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# 1   INTRODUCTION

Over the last academic year, I have been working as a Graduate Teaching Assistant

(GTA) in Georgia State University's English department for Lower Division Studies[1] (LDS).

During this time, I became interested in exploring the different ways composition curricula can

help first- and second-year students become better writers and researchers. Crafting lesson plans,

modifying required assignments, and organizing readings have helped me gain a sense of the

approaches that work in a Freshman Learning Community (FLC) composition classroom at

GSU. As I learn to balance the demands of the classroom and the expectations of my department,

I have steadily become more and more aware of conversations surrounding teaching composition

and writing processes. Many of these pedagogical conversations take place at academic

conferences, and, since our department actively encourages attending and presenting at

conferences, I found my thesis topic while looking through a call for papers.

As I looked through the CFPs under the rhetoric and composition section for the South

Atlantic Modern Language Association (SAMLA) 2017 conference, I noticed a panel titled

"Pedagogies of Empathy in the Writing Class" calling for presentations that discuss composition

pedagogies based on empathy. I found the CFP appealing because it piqued my interest in

creating a curriculum focused on the social nature of both learning and empathy. Originally, I

assumed that connecting writing assignments that promote empathy with curricula that foster

social connections to knowledge would be rather simple. So, in response to the CFP, I submitted

a proposal that suggested revising three standard assignments from the GSU Lower Division

Studies—a literacy narrative, an object analysis, and a cultural analysis—theorizing that the

social nature of these assignments will help students build an appreciation of another's

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[1] At Georgia State University, Lower Division Studies is a program in the English department that encompasses all first- and second-year literature and composition courses. For majority of these courses, GTA's are listed as instructors of record.

worldview from their personal worldview. However, while researching and preparing for my presentation, I realized that the demands of this CFP were more complex than I had originally envisioned.

My original concept involved rearranging the order of assignments LDS requires in the standardized syllabus and developing mini-writing communities by having students work collaboratively. First, the literacy narrative would ask students to reflect on their individual literacy practices and how those practices are influenced by their cultural backgrounds. Following the literacy narrative, students would present to the class an object that represents their literacy practices. However, minutes prior to each presentation, the students in the audience would write down their thoughts and assumptions about each object. Following the object analysis, students would complete the cultural analysis by switching objects with one another and research the cultural background of the artifact. For this arrangement to succeed, students would need to work together to learn about each other's literacy practices and cultural backgrounds.

I hypothesized that, through these collaborative assignments, students could learn from one another and experience writing as a social act. Through this process, working together and socializing about the struggles they experience with writing, students would develop empathy for each other's experiences and perspectives. Although reorganizing the projects would have students engage in more social acts among themselves, I soon realized that my attempt at developing an empathetic curriculum based solely on social interaction was an unsophisticated response to a complex demand.

In general terms, scholars in writing program administration seek pedagogies that engage first-year composition (FYC) students with empathy to create civic and harmonious learning

environments. The search for this type of pedagogy is apparent through the incorporation of civic-engagement and community-based writing projects in first-year composition classrooms. Serendipitously, I found out more about this search over the summer of 2017, when I noticed an uptick in the number of emails from the Writing Program Administrator-listserv (WPA-listserv). Through the email chain, I observed instructors discussing teaching practices in a post-2016-election classroom. These conversations made apparent that many instructors are struggling with student apathy toward writing and uncivil debates during discussions. In an exchange during which instructors shared ideas and ideologies they implement in their classrooms, I read a reply that provided a direct pedagogical approach to crafting civic classrooms. Adrienne Jones Daly submitted the following commentary:

> I think we must start by listening. As instructors, we listen to what our students have to say and write, and we guide our students to listen to what each other has to say. By listening I mean hearing what the other person has to say without correcting them, without having to prove them wrong, but allowing ourselves to hear behind the words, to hear what they value and are concerned about. (Daly)

Asking instructors to listen, Daly provides a simple, yet potentially the most effective, response to this call for civic classrooms because, as she notes, "Listening...is a key part of creating a civil yet open dialogue" (Daly). Incorporating listening, especially rhetorical listening—listening that facilitates conscious identification needed for cross-cultural communication—as described in Ratcliffe's work *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness*, into the composition classroom allows instructors more available means to meet the needs of students and provide opportunities for open, active learning (47-48). Although talking and listening does not guarantee complete communication or understanding about other's ideologies, identities, and

identifications, "…socializing discourses both shape a person and afford a person opportunities to reinforce, revise, and/or interrupt identifications with such discourses" (Ratcliffe 65). Through teaching students how emotions create connections between people and others, worldviews, and various sources and objects, composition instructors can demonstrate how writing crosses boundaries between the critical and emotional to unearth new understanding.

Daly's call for listening requires instructors to develop activities and conversations—especially those focused on (dis)identifications—that achieve empathy. Her description of how listening achieves empathy is reinforced by Theresa Wiseman's four qualities of empathy: (1) taking perspective of someone's emotion, (2) remaining out of judgment, (3) recognizing the emotion, and (4) communicating that recognition. Only through listening can instructors and students gain perspective of another's experience and become more empathetic[2], which, presumably, fosters more harmoniously social and productively active classrooms.

Eventually, somewhere between pedagogy readings, hallway discussions, and listserv emails, I began asking myself questions: What does "empathy" mean to instructors who call for harmonious classrooms? Why are composition classrooms ideal for teaching empathy? Is empathy the correct terminology, or would altering the discourse's nomenclature from "empathy" to "compassion" be more effective in searching for solutions? What problems are solved or complicated by incorporating empathy or compassion into the curriculum? What insight could viewing compassion as an action and empathy as an emotion offer? How could we use this knowledge to help students better understand the writing process? I found that answering these questions first requires an understanding of what expectations instructors place on

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[2] The terms *empathetic* and *empathic* are interchangeable adjectives of the term *empathy*; however, the literature reviewed uses *empathetic* as the dominate adjective, thus my work uses that spelling as well.

empathy. Therefore, my first step in this project is defining and interrogating the differences in the recurring terms empathy, critical empathy, compassion, and critical compassion.

Next, I will shift from works on *empathy* to discuss the ongoing conversations between works on *critical empathy* and *compassion*, which leads to my assembled definition of *critical compassion.* Following the nuanced shifts from *empathy* to *compassion* and discussing the necessity for critical awareness to accompany emotions and actions, my research will answer the above questions, laying the foundation for later research and the significance of mindful practices of such curricula. Thereby, in my following project, I theorize that students who engage in critical compassion—situated within FYC classrooms as a thematic component—will engage in a more successful writing process. In this study, I define critical compassion by breaking it down into four requirements: (1) listening to someone's thoughts or ideas, (2) using perspective taking to attempt understanding, (3) assessing the rhetorical concepts or situation critically, and (4) seeking out solutions or resolutions actively. Incorporating critical compassion into the classroom can help composition students better engage with writing processes because each part of the aforementioned process respectively parallels what I consider the four 'R's of first-year writing: researching, reflecting, reasoning, and resolving.

The first 'R of the first-year writing process, *research*, corresponds to the first prong of the critical compassion process, a willingness to listen to someone's thoughts. Research requires students to learn from others and to use each other's thoughts. *Reflection* parallels an appreciation of a person's emotions and perspectives because reflecting on a piece of writing or on another person's emotions demands that students respect alternative perspectives. The third 'R, *reason*, correlates to a student's ability to critically assess a situation. The critical nature of critical compassion comes into play in this step because students must be capable of evaluating

information and resources when writing. The final 'R, *resolution*, parallels the desire to actively seek out solutions because writing is epistemic in nature. When students perform each aspect of the four 'R's, they produce well-thought-out texts that adhere to their audience's expectations. At its foundation, critical compassion is contextualized in the composition classrooms as, what I call, the four 'R's of a first-year writing process. Although writing processes take on many shapes and cross different modes of composition, students can correlate research, reflection, reason, and resolution respectively with the offered four-pronged definition of critical compassion and thereby experience the writing process as a cyclical action, one that builds and improves upon itself with time and work.

In chapter one, I review interdisciplinary, yet corresponding, literature to explain current expectations of empathy in the classroom and to establish definitions that support the shifts between terms of emotion, criticalness, and action. Next, I detail the parallelism between critical compassion and the writing process in order to demonstrate ways critical compassion can be enacted within the confines of a composition classroom. Although this thesis lacks quantifiable results of such curricula, a thorough literature review will develop a needed foundation to fill the gap for other studies to take place. For chapter two, I code three FYC courses by locating instances of critical compassion in the syllabi, assignments, and readings from each class. By analyzing how each of these materials incorporate critical compassion, I expose how instructors are already incorporating critical compassion and highlight areas in the course where critical compassion could further enhance students understanding of their writing process. In the conclusion, I synthesize the conversations in chapter one and the analysis results in chapter two to offer the field suggestions on crafting mindful composition courses that further encompass critical compassion as a pedagogical approach.

In summation, my thesis will set up the language behind the current expectations of using empathy in the composition classroom and explain why critical compassion is an effective route for teaching the writing process. Ultimately, I argue incorporating critical compassion in the composition classroom meets the expectations of instructors looking to build courses that create civic classrooms while simultaneously supporting the needs of students.

## 2    CHAPTER ONE: SHIFTING EMPATHY TO CRITICAL COMPASSION

In this chapter, I explain current expectations of empathy in the classroom by defining three emerging keywords of this interdisciplinary conversation: empathy, critical empathy, and compassion. Understanding how these words are used in both colloquial and academic conversations aids in my ultimate reframing of the term critical compassion to position composition classrooms as spaces not only ripe for civic and harmonious curricula but also as spaces where moves towards these curricula are already happening. In reframing critical compassion and mirroring its components to a first-year writing process, I will draw attention to ways composition instructors are already incorporating critical compassion into the writing classroom and point out areas where it could be incorporated more effectively.

Once I have defined the terms and set up the expectations for critical compassion, I will detail the parallelism between critical compassion's four-prong definition and my four-part take on the first-year writing process. As I explore each part of critical compassion's definition, I will also contextualize how it functions in the writing classroom, which leads to the development of my four 'R's of writing. Within this section, I will flesh out how each corresponding concept works together to effectively aid students in achieving GSU's general learning outcomes.

I conclude this chapter discussing the potential benefits that incorporating critical compassion has on composition learning outcomes. These potential benefits include helping students better conceptualize three of the four 'R's, which are prevalent in GSU's general learning outcomes: research, reflection, and reasoning. By setting up the language shift from empathy to critical compassion and defining each of the four 'R's, I analyze how the components of critical compassion are already being used and in what ways instructors can further incorporate these components into their classrooms.

**2.1   Exploring Recurring Terms**

Writing is emotional. Instructors in the composition field encounter student emotions during class discussions, private emails, and assigned writings. While writing and emotions are intertwined, composition coursework also calls for critical thinking and analysis. Academia's hyper-focus on critical analysis has created an internalized boundary between the emotional and the critical that often makes people suspicious of emotion, as Lauren Micciche discusses in her text *Doing Emotion: Rhetoric, Writing, Teaching:*

> One of the problems associated with positioning emotion as a category of analysis is the tendency within intellectual as well as popular thought to collapse emotion with all things feminine…Emotion, much like rhetoric, has been denoted as having a "mere" quality. To say that an argument is "merely" emotive is tantamount to saying it is not representative, but instead personal and idiosyncratic; not thoughtful, but solely reliant on opinion, which academics are more than ready to cast as suspicious… (3)

As Micciche explains, although this suspicion is justifiable to some extent, not exploring the emotional nature of critical thinking, writing, and understanding hinders students' comprehension of rhetorical situations and composition. Offering critical compassion as an alternative within, or even a complement of, composition pedagogy provides a balance between emotional and critical understanding by validating emotional experiences while also questioning the circumstances of those experiences.

What language are we currently using to achieve the current desire for active student engagement in social movements and civic discussions given composition pedagogy's emotional basis? Throughout scholarship on this topic, I've noticed three primary terms playing recursive

roles: empathy, critical empathy, and compassion; however, many conversations utilizing these terms do so in casual ways, which leave the connotations and expectations of these terms ambiguous. Since these terms are used within various disciplines—nursing, psychology, pedagogy—with varying definitions, this section of my research focuses on framing these discussions into rhetoric and composition.

Not only do I show what these three terms offer, I also point out how these terms do not adequately provide a clear framework for creating civic and harmonious classrooms. In establishing where these areas lack, I define the phrase critical compassion in a way that adequately fulfills these needs. Although affect theory has its own definition of critical compassion, framing it in rhetoric and composition allows us to mirror it with the first-year writing process, which can result in a clearer course that strengthens both writing and compassion. In other words, critical compassion helps instructors create civic and harmonious classes that are conducive for thoughtful discussions and helps students develop writing practices that extend beyond the classroom.

### 2.1.1   Empathy

Empathy is commonly used to reference sharing emotions and feeling for one's "fellow man," and, although this term is generally well known and understood, the colloquial and habitual uses of the term create ambiguous meanings and expectations. The ambiguity, yet necessity, of empathy led nursing scholar, Theresa Wiseman, to develop a concept analysis of empathy in the *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. While Wiseman's work originally served to elucidate expectations of empathy for nursing students, psychologists and social work researchers continuously reference her four attributes to explain empathy. Wiseman's attributes

prove the need for clearly defined expectations, which, when applied to rhetoric and composition scholarship, can aid discussions of teaching empathy in first-year composition courses.

In her work, Wiseman synthesizes empathy into four main characteristics, each of which serves as steps toward completing an empathetic action. The first attribute of empathy is seeing "the world as others see it," meaning that, for anyone to perform tasks empathetic ally, they must be capable of thinking outside of their own experiences and reflecting on how they would feel in someone else's position (1165). The second attribute is remaining non-judgmental of someone experiencing a situation, meaning that a nurse should not judge a patient for how they respond to their experience (1165). Wiseman's third attribute of empathy calls for understanding and reflecting on another's feelings (1165). To accomplish this understanding, a nurse must reflect on and tap into an emotion that is similar to what the patient is experiencing; by doing so, a nurse can better understand a patient's emotional state and evaluate how to aid in the patient's care. Outside of nursing, this attribute of empathy is understood as feeling *with* someone else, rather than feeling *for* someone else, and lends to the term's vacuity (Bloom 138). The final attribute Wiseman assigns empathy is communicating an understanding of an expressed emotion without providing commentary (1165). In the nursing field, this communication establishes a humanistic connection between the person experiencing the emotion and the nurse. Brené Brown, a research professor of social work at the University of Houston, explains that this attribute is tricky for everyone—even nurses and instructors—because people, when faced with difficult conversations, try to add a silver lining around the emotional dark cloud hovering over the emotionally hurt person (Brown). The issue with this tactic, Brown explains, is that adding a bright(er) outlook on a dark situation does not actually communicate an understanding of the emotion.

Although Wiseman's contribution was specifically written for the nursing field, English has its own history of incorporating and discussing the need for empathy. In 2016, Pearl McHaney, through her lecture series *Connecting Lines: Building Empathy through Literature*, applied empathy to English studies. McHaney's work promotes the incorporation of empathy vis-à-vis two outcomes. First, empathy can be taught through literature. Connecting empathy to literature inadvertently corresponds back to Wiseman's first attribute of empathy as the ability to see the world as another sees it because, as McHaney explains, literature has the unique ability to offer insight into "multiple points of view so that many versions, many truths can be explored" (15). Since literature provides a catalyst through which students can explore and experience the realities and emotions of another person—or, in this case, a character—instructors can use literature to connect students to empathy. McHaney's second proposed outcome of using empathy is that of action, and she explains that appreciating another's emotions is an active choice:

> The ability to understand and appreciate are intentional and deliberate actions. And we leave feeling about objects of contemplation to feeling sympathy, being sympathetic, these are feelings only. Empathy involves understandings and appreciations of another person's feelings and experiences and the understanding is active and may lead to action. (4)

In this conversation, McHaney illustrates how instructors can use literature to prompt empathetic discussions of community and to inspire civic action.

Through their separate discussions, Wiseman and McHaney collectively show how expectations surrounding empathy shift among disciples. Empathy's flexibility is beneficial because the term, while generally understood, is loaded with perceived expectations that are

vague enough to fill emotional or humanistic gaps whenever needed. However, this flexibility and indistinctness is also problematic. Since empathy is understood as *feeling with* another person, the general expectation of empathy then empathizes only *feeling*. McHaney explains that, under the luring guise of feeling, showing empathy "make[s] us 'feel' useful and less demonstrative of our fear and stasis" because the general act of feeling for others makes people feel good about themselves as though they have performed an expected action (4). *Feeling* is typically enough for someone to believe that they accomplished an empathetic action even though they have physically done nothing at all.

McHaney and Wiseman's concerns with empathy are shared by psychologist Paul Bloom whose text *Against Empathy* problematizes the term through examples from philosophy and analyses from psychology and neurology. Bloom's critical analysis contradicts McHaney's humanitarian definition of empathy because people are not necessarily *empathetic* as much as acting to alleviate a guilty conscience. Bloom shows empathy is a self-indulgent practice through his narrative of Thomas Hobbes, the English philosopher who worked on theories of social contracts and natural rights. Hobbes was questioned why he gave money to a beggar after arguing that human nature is inherently egoistic; Hobbes explained that his charitable act was purely motivated by self-interest because he did not like seeing the beggar suffer (Bloom 167). Bloom explains that when Hobbes alleviated the beggar's pain, although appearing to be a noble, empathetic act, he was purely acting on self-interest to alleviate a guilty conscience. The narrative example demonstrates how empathy and empathetic actions do not always connote good intentions.

Attributes of Wiseman's definition of empathy can translate to composition classroom, even if the term is not ideal. When a composition instructor provides reading materials for class

discussions, she is asking her students to *see the world as others see it*. Furthermore, these discussions require both the instructor and her students to remain free from judgment, particularly when students discuss their opinions or concerns about sensitive material within a reading. However, incorporation of empathy in this manner puts the onus on the instructor rather than on the classroom design. Although reflecting on her students' feelings to determine what works well in the classroom, emotionally connecting to students one-on-one or even the class collectively can cause emotional, psychological, and physical drain on the instructor. Additionally, as Brown explains, *communicating an understanding of an expressed emotion without providing commentary* drives connections by making people vulnerable and reflective. Although reflective practices are crucial in effective teaching, making empathetic connections with students is difficult for many instructors and can lead to empathetic burnout.

Considering its vague expectations and the unachievable burdens it places on composition instructors, empathy lacks the continuity needed in definition and association to efficiently create a civic and harmonious classroom. Teaching writing and composition requires instructors to encourage their students to be critical of their research, reflective of their biases, capable of reasoning and problem solving, and motivated to resolve issues. While effective at inspiring students to become more aware of the emotional and material needs of others, empathy alone does not completely address the critical or motivational needs of a composition class.

### 2.1.2 Critical Empathy

Bloom's work shows how empathy alone lacks the *critical* and *motivational* exigencies needed to foster civic or harmonious practices in the composition classroom. Since the *critical* aspects of composition involve activities that enhance students' reflection and reasoning skills, adding the qualifier *critical* to empathy when incorporated in a composition classroom would

focus the curriculum to make students both critical and empathetic. In his book, *In the Words of Another: On the Promises and Paradoxes of Rhetorics of Empathy*, Eric Leake—assistant professor at Texas State University—shares Bloom's concerns that using empathy in perfunctory and non-critical ways will perpetuate an undue expectation of empathetic pedagogies:

> Pedagogies of empathy in literary studies also provide reasoned caution against rushing too quickly to embrace pedagogies of empathy as saving the humanities and society in general. Missing from pedagogies of empathy in literary studies, however, is a deeper engagement with pedagogy and with writing. (Leake 150)

As Leake explains, though pedagogies of empathy can be helpful with teaching active citizenship and altruism, placing undue expectations on the term does not serve the writing classroom. When considering empathy and developing critical rhetoric and composition pedagogies, instructors must remain critical and constantly question the limitations and uses of empathy (Leake 198). Leake borrows the definition of critical empathy from Todd DeStigter, an English pedagogy scholar at the University of Illinois at Chicago. DeStigter explains that critical empathy:

> refers to the process of establishing informed and affective connections with other human beings, of thinking and feeling with them at some emotionally, intellectually, and socially significant level, while always remembering that such connections are complicated by sociohistorical forces that hinder the equitable, just relationships that we presumably seek. (DeStigter 240)

Simply, critical empathy refers to the ability to appreciate someone's emotions while remaining critically aware of the rhetorical situations at play and comprehending that we cannot fully understand others as they cannot fully understand us. Being unaware of the complexities of

empathy leads people to misinterpret the limitations of empathy and how people can misuse—or be misused by—rhetorical, critical empathy.

To explain empathy's limitations and uses, Leake refers to Theresa Kulbaga's critique of Azar Nafisi's audio essay, *This I Believe*, and memoir, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. Kulbaga, an associate professor who studies nonfiction rhetoric and feminist theory, uses affect theory to explain why Nafisi's use of empathy panders to a Western neoliberal feminism that commercializes what would be McHaney's ideal empathy. Kulbaga's explanation of the texts shows how Nafisi's work "mystifies systematic social, historical, and political constraints" placed on Iranian women without addressing social and cultural constructions, opting, instead, to become a transnational commodity available for Western consumption (509). Although Nafisi's audio essay reiterates McHaney's sentiments that literature can inspire readers' imagination and invoke empathy, Kulbaga explains that Nafisi's texts fall short of engaging her readers in a critical understanding of Middle Eastern culture and motivating them to help disenfranchised women. Since readers are physically removed from the situation, they are less likely to be affected and thus motivated to perform actions of empathy.

When assessing the texts, Kulbaga explains that critical aspect of critical empathy, as Leake defines it, is removed from Nafisi's call because neither text prompts a critical understanding of emotion or an engages in a civic moment. Instead, Nafisi's uses empathy to sell her memoir, further problematizing empathy's implied altruistic nature. If Nafisi genuinely meant to spark discussions and inspire others to empathy, what would the end result of that empathy be? Or, as Kulbaga questions, "empathy to what end" (518). Nafisi is not clear on what she expects people to do with this emotion other than to buy her book and experience or "feel" an emotion.

Leake's utilization of Kulbaga's analysis explains the need for critical empathy and exposes the paradoxes that occur when analyzing empathy. Leake describes the *self* and the *other* paradox within the conversation that "forces a critical empathy that recognizes empathy's rhetorical purposes" (Leake 160-161). Leake uses the self/other paradox to further explain Kulbaga's question of "empathy to what end," explaining that, though people can understand their worldview and attempt to understand another's, people can never fully comprehend how others see the world. According to Leake, instructors who are critically aware of the rhetorical uses of empathy and the self/other divide can develop writing pedagogies that focus on effective critical thinking skills and writing processes, which lends to creating civic and harmonious classrooms.

Although Leake provides a practical framework to teach self/other awareness and the importance of critical empathy in the writing classroom, critical of empathy still does not compel action. Critical empathy is still more about feeling *with* others than it is about performing empathetic acts. Although offering a method that is effective in teaching critical analysis, critical empathy lacks the means for moving the discussions and analyses from within the classroom to outside of it and lacks the motivation needed for moving from feeling an emotion to performing an action. Therefore, I suggest shifting the nomenclature from empathy to *compassion* to see what compassion can offer this conversation.

### 2.1.3   Compassion

To discuss this shift from empathy to compassion—words that are used interchangeably in colloquial communication—I pull definitions from research in psychology because those particular definitions explain the differences between these terms. Psychologists and neuroscientists have found that empathy and compassion generate different neurological

reactions that shift from an emotional response to an actionable response. Depending on the

motivating factors behind the response, these reactions can prompt someone to seek out

situational resolutions.

Compassion literally means suffering together, or, as Bloom defines it, "feeling for"

someone else and "wanting them to thrive" (138, 50). In his work, Bloom offers compassion as

an alternative to empathy—even though compassion has its own set of problems—because the

term serves as middle ground between empathy and apathy. On this compassionate middle

ground, an individual remains critical and rational in emotional situations, but still seek

beneficial outcomes for everyone involved. Establishing a balance between passionate responses

and clinical evaluations allows instructors and students to engage in discussions that lead to

active empathy and harmonious classrooms.

Like Leake and Kulbaga, Bloom's research examines the self/other paradox and explains

how empathy and compassion influence the human brain differently. He also explains that the

discovery of shared representations (i.e., the ability to identify with others) helped spark the

discussion about the self/other paradox and how people traverse social interactions:

> You can see this overlap between self and other as a clever evolutionary trick. To
>
> thrive as a social being, one must make sense of the internal lives of other
>
> individuals, to accurately guess what other people are thinking, wanting, and
>
> feeling. Since we are not telepathic, we must infer this from information we get
>
> from our senses. (Bloom 65)

People use observations and personal experiences to understand why others behave in certain

ways and how others think and feel, and Bloom explains that this is because people have a

unique capacity to assess the emotional state of another person and respond compassionately to

that feeling. Micciche reiterates this capacity by explaining how emotions are more than just personal because emotions are "produced among people, through interaction, in contexts where the swirl of affective meanings is variable rather transhistorical and transcultural" (109). Much like writing and knowledge, compassion is learned within relation to others.

Although both compassion and empathy signify emotional states of being, what makes compassion different from empathy is its capability for response. This responding aspect is what makes the term *compassion* beneficial to this conversation because it provides a basis of motivation for resolution in addition to its emotional facets. Clara Strauss, a psychology researcher at the University of Surrey and the Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, worked with a team of researchers to conduct a large-scale literature review that defines compassion. Ultimately, the final definition for *compassion* Strauss and her team developed was it is "a cognitive, affective, and behavioral process consisting of the following five elements that refer to both self- and other-compassion" (Strauss, et al. 19). The five elements of compassion Strauss et al. identify are (1) suffering recognition, (2) understanding the universality of suffering, (3) experiencing emotional resonance, (4) tolerating the situation while remaining open and accepting of the person suffering, and (5) motivation to act/acting to alleviate suffering (19).

Between the definitions and explanations of compassion provided by Strauss et al. and Bloom, *motivation* is the factor separating empathy's emotional "feeling for" from compassion's actional "feeling with" (Bloom 138). Motivation is a beneficial component of compassion because it helps move people from a knee-jerk, emotional response to a thought-out, actionable resolution. However, Bloom warns that compassion is not perfect and that evaluating another's need based on our own worldview is problematic because it can lead to an oversimplification of another's experiences, which can lead to misunderstandings and misconceptions:

A lot of misery in the world—and a lot of bad birthday presents—exists because

we understand other people by using ourselves as a model: This doesn't offend

me, so I assume it doesn't offend you. I like this, so I assume you do too. And

sometimes we get it wrong. (Bloom 66-67)

Although compassion can embody active empathy, it lacks critical and analytical elements that

would foster a civic and harmonious classroom, elements found in both Leake's critical empathy

and Bloom's rational compassion. As composition instructors, we want our students to actively

engage in research and reflective writing practices that meet established learning outcomes and

require critical thinking, but we must first establish the foundation on which students can build

these skills. For this reason, I suggest synthesizing the motivations of compassion with the

analytical air of critical empathy to form a new definition for the term *critical compassion*.

### 2.2   Conjecturing and Defining Critical Compassion

In my analysis of empathy, critical empathy, and compassion, I explored the limitations

of each term to extract components that are more applicable to composition classrooms.

Colloquial empathy, though necessary to support humanism and humanitarian situations, relies

too heavily on emotional responses and detached hopes that someone else will save the day.

Empathy alone lacks critical understanding and cannot sustain without clear expectations. On the

other hand, critical empathy, while effective for teaching theoretical concepts such as the

self/other paradox, lacks motivational factors that transfer that critical awareness beyond the

classroom. Compassion, although containing both emotional elements and motivation needed to

enact change, also lacks the critical inclination needed to enhance composition classrooms.

Composition classrooms must merge emotional and motivational responses with critical

thinking to both archive active empathy and create harmonious classrooms. To accomplish these

goals of active empathy and harmonious classrooms, I propose considering the phrase *critical compassion*. Matthew Newcomb uses this term in his work, "Totalized Compassion: The (Im)Possibilities for Acting out of Compassion in the Rhetoric of Hannah Arendt," to teach students to question their ideas:

> In the classroom, students that feel a totalized connection to a particular group or ideology have difficulty discussing anything potentially critical of that affiliation. Talking about critical compassion is a way to consider the ties themselves, still keeping the feelings of connection valuable, but sometimes creating the space for more independent action. (111)

Using suffering as a classroom theme, Newcomb combines compassion and critical thinking to teach his students how to expand their critical thinking and to question their personal ideologies no matter their social affiliations.

Referencing Newcomb's definition and mirroring Wiseman's concept analysis of empathy, I define critical compassion as a four-requirement process: (1) a willingness to listen to someone's thoughts, (2) an appreciation of that person's emotions and perspectives, (3) an ability to critically assess the situation, (4) and a desire to actively seek out solutions. This process provides balance among the emotional nature of empathy, the critical nature of critical empathy, and the motivational nature of compassion thus offering composition instructors an opportunity to teach writing through an altruistic lens.

### 2.2.1   *Paralleling Writing with Critical Compassion*

Defining critical compassion through the four-requirement process not only enables emotional and motivational responses—which leads to active empathy and harmonious classrooms—it also teaches critical thinking and helps FYC students better engage with the

writing process. Out of the various writing processes available, translating critical compassion into a teachable theme requires a parallelism between critical compassion's definition and current practices within composition. To accommodate this parallelism, I scrutinized critical compassion's four requirements to contextualize how each concept aids in teaching composition.

The writing process that best contextualizes critical compassion is a process developed out of the general learning outcomes from composition courses, what I call the four 'R's of first-year writing. My understanding of the writing processes lead me to develop the four 'R's as to reflect each component of critical compassion's definition, like so: research reflects listening, reflection reflects taking perspective, reason reflects critical assessment, and resolve reflects active solutions. The following is an expanded explanation of reach 'R' and how each correlate to a component of critical compassion; and, after each explanation, I contextualized how each pairing functions within the FYC classroom.

<u>**Research as Willingness to Listen**</u>

Following the order of critical compassion's definition, the first pair of concepts is critical compassion's *willingness to listen* and the writing process's focus on *research*. Research pairs with listening because composition is epistemological in nature. Students develop knowledge of new topics through researching and writing about them; listening to knew thoughts and writing to make connections. FYC instructors teach how listening and not listening affects comprehension of research topics. Often knowledge is peddled as "interiorized, solitary, individually derived, [and] individually held" by a "deep-seated attachment to [an] American brand of individualism," causing students difficulty at articulating what influences their knowledge (Lunsford 72). Instructors, understanding that knowledge and writing "draw[s] upon

the ideas and experiences of countless others," aptly request students to explore various viewpoints to better understand and write about their research topic (Roozen 17).

A specific example of such a request is having students discuss point-counterpoints within their compositions. Instructors can accomplish this by requiring students to represent descending opinions within their essays and to provide a counterargument. Such a requirement necessitates students to research and listen to opposing ideas in order to craft a strong counterargument. Encountering new and opposing ideas helps students develop a clearer awareness about what and whom they listen to, which gives students "opportunities to reinforce, revise, and/or interrupt identifications with such discourses" (Ratcliffe 65).

These *identifications* I referenced here are connections or ideologies student subscribe to before entering a composition classroom. As previously described by Newcomb, teaching students to research and listen to opinions and evidence that oppose their ideologies is a difficult task FYC instructors face. However, by teaching this mindful awareness, instructors equip students to search for sources and listen to voices they would not have originally considered.

## Reflection as Perspective Taking

Critical compassion's next requirement, an *appreciation of another person's emotions and perspectives*, is contextualized by way of *reflection*. Reflection and reflective practices allow writers—of all levels—to reach levels of self-awareness, which enables them to tap into personal emotions that connects them to others (Brown). Through reflection and self-observation, students recognize and question any implicit biases they may have as opposed to making snap judgments. Christy Wenger reaffirms reflection's importance by explaining that self-observation helps writers "learn to monitor and regulate both our thoughts and emotions [by] using a conscious mode of acceptance" of others' stories and teachings (128). Such mindfulness and acceptance

can leave students feeling vulnerable; however, that vulnerability creates emotional connections, well-rounded perceptions, and potential responses (Brown, Wenger 128).

Teaching reflective practices that are both emotionally open yet critically aware is difficult because making a classroom into a vulnerable space can cause discomfort for both students as well as instructors. However, some scholars use pedagogical techniques that achieve this balance. A specific technique is Peter Elbow's "believing game:"

> ...[a] disciplined practice of trying to be as welcoming or accepting as possible to every idea we encounter: not just listening to views different from our own and holding back from arguing with them; not just trying to restate them without bias; but *trying* to believe them. (Elbow 1)

Elbow's game uses believing as a tool to scrutinize and test a nuanced state of critical awareness, not by sorting ideas into true or false categories, but, instead, by accepting that someone else's perspective is their truth. Accepting and reflecting on that truth allows students to enact perspective taking—albeit in a limited way (Leake, Bloom).

To utilize this technique in a FYC course, instructors can craft prompts or questions for students to answer for reading responses or reflections. Such as provide prompts that ask students to reflect on the various perspectives contained within an assigned reading. In Appendix B: Sample Schedule, I list "The Yellow Wallpaper" as an accompanying text to read and discuss during Unit 1: Listening and Research. Although the unit focuses on the first pairing of critical compassion and the four 'R's, the short story is apt for reflection about the perspectives of the narrator, her husband John, the sister-in-law Jennie, and the reader. Questions instructors could pose are: "How does the narrator's story change when reading it through John's or Jennie's perspective?"; "What do readers gain when reading a story about hysteria from someone

experiencing hysteria?"; and "How do you interpret or connect the narrator's experience?" Prompting reflective questions such as these can help students examine the differences and similarities between the characters' and readers' perspectives and worldviews.

Overall, reflective exercises aid students in examining texts through new lenses and making connections between. Whither these connections be mental or emotional, such connective exercises aid instructors in crafting spaces, which leads to students to reflect on their interceptions and explore different perspectives.

### Reason as Critical Assessment

Critical compassion's requirement for *critical assessment* contextualizes in the composition classroom as *reasoning*. Reason, here, indicates an ability to critically assess information in order to make an educated claim or take a knowledgeable stance. Once students can listen/research and take perspective/reflect, they must then learn to reason through all the available information to develop a position that balances previously held viewpoints and newly discovered evidence. This facet of critical compassion and the four 'R's develop through practices of "noticing: thinking actively about an idea or concept and seeing it from multiple perspectives without automatically rushing to judgment" (Wenger 103). Instead of seeking information that solely backs their original claim, students should look for information that helps them reach understanding by critically analyzing their research through various lenses.

Instructors can implement reasoning through class activities that focus on fact-checking or assignments that require students to write about their sources before using them. A specific assignment that interrogates information is the annotated bibliography. In Appendix A: Sample Syllabus, I list an annotated bibliography as the main assignment for the Unit 3: Analysis and Reasoning section because this assignment pushes students to advocate for each piece of

evidence they plan to use in their creative research project. Utilizing the rhetorical précis model—namely the one listed in the *Guide to First-Year Writing*[3]—students organize their information through general summary, identification of rhetorical aspects, and explanation of how they plan to use the work in their own. By writing about their sources, students develop a more concrete understanding of how each piece affects their work in positive and/or negative ways. When paired with a class activity, such as Nan Johnson's archival wheel[4], organizational assignments such as this one helps students assess what connections they have made and what connection are missing.

## **Resolve as Sought Solutions**

The final requirement of critical compassion is a *desire to actively seek out solutions*, which focuses on engaging students with the motivation needed to move from writing a paper to enacting a resolution. This element meets the desire for active empathy by asking students to engage with issues beyond the classroom by seeking resolutions to problems in their communities, as seen through community-based writing assignments. For example, when a student researches food waste in Atlanta for their research project, they can use that information to write letters to government officials explaining how food-waste affects the community. When students write to an outward facing audience in attempts to solve a problem or raise awareness, they can see how their role as a writing student can actively impact the world around them.

If the concept of creating a large scale and outward facing project gives you pause—as it does many GTAs, new instructors, and administrators—resolve does not necessarily require fanfare. Teaching students to recognize their emotional responses and allowing that response to

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[3] The *Guide to First-Year Writing* 6th ed. is a text required for all GSU FYC courses, and introduces all the main concepts taught in ENGL 1101, 1102, and 1103. LDS and Fountainhead Press collaboratively produce this text.
[4] I use the archival wheel in my ENGL 1101 course to help students visually organize their research materials into categories I require for their research paper. This way students know if they are missing material for their counter argument or rebuttal.

guide their engagement is also significant. For example, Micciche recounts when she used one-on-one conference time to aid a student experiencing a negative emotional response to the assigned reading material *Fasting Girls: The History of Anorexia Nervosa.* Micciche explained the student's emotional investment in religious practice and how that emotion could be channeled to explore the assumption about the body and religion that informed the saints' concept of a spiritual act (68). That conference lead to a class discussion about using emotion as a basis for critical work—rather than as a tool to move audiences into action or merely emoting—led to a class discussion of using emotion as an "enabling invention-point" and as a "site of meaning-making" (68).

Additionally, solution seeking contextualized as resolve helps instructors establish an achievable end goal for their class. Whether the goal be crafting a public project or using emotion as an invention-point for meaning-making, establishing a class goal that requires active input—by way of physical product or class participation—pushes students to be more active with their composition works.

### 2.2.2   *Achieving Critical Compassion in the Classroom*

The parallelism explored between critical compassion and the four 'R's of first-year writing provides us with enough indications to conclude that composition instructors are already incorporating aspects of critical compassion, even though they may not be referring to it as such. Critical compassion provides a comprehensive framework that balances the emotional, motivational, and critical thinking skills necessary to create civic and harmonious classrooms.

Critical compassion as a thematic component also helps instructors achieve active empathy and harmonious and civic classrooms because it helps students better understand writing as a social process. Writing is collaborative in nature and cannot be performed in true

isolation, because—even if we are physically alone when we write—we are constantly pulling from others' ideas, feedback, and influences when creating our own works (Lunsford, Roozen). When students associate writing as a means of establishing connections with others, they begin to see how writing operates beyond the classroom. Therefore, writing enforces listening to and appreciating others' points of views, teaches critical thinking and problem solving, and encourages community and public activism.

To further show how the incorporation of critical compassion lends to a civic classroom, in the following chapter I will analyze materials from three first-year composition courses. Through this analysis, I will highlight areas of GSU's curriculum that already implicitly includes critical compassion, and I will show how creating course materials that mindfully incorporate critical compassion can more effectively fulfill the call for more civic and harmonious classrooms.

# 3    CHAPTER TWO: MATERIALS ANALYSIS

The goal of this chapter is to show how composition instructors are already incorporating critical compassion even if they may not explicitly reference it. When gathering materials for this analysis, I first searched for curricula that specifically identified empathy and/or compassion somewhere within the learning outcomes, assignment sheets, and reading lists. Many of the materials that I combed through contained general references to empathy and compassion; however, I had difficulty finding examples of instructors explicitly incorporating either empathy or compassion into their classrooms.

Although I have not yet found a course that uses critical compassion as a thematic component for first-year writing, I have found courses that *teach* compassion through mindful reflection and those that teach rhetoric through the analysis of distant suffering and service. Emory University's Geshe Lobsang Tenzin Negi, for example, developed Cognitively-Based Compassion Training on the premise that compassion is a trait that develops and expands with awareness and reflection ("CBCT: Compassion Training"). The training courses expand over six modules that offer a range of techniques from meditative exercises that focus on stabilizing attention and awareness to discussions about contemplative science and secular ethics ("Course Offerings"). These modules show the importance of teaching compassion and understanding factors that contribute to overall well-being and promote both ethical and emotional literacy (*SEE Learning*[5] 5). Additionally, Emory University's compassion modules serve as a basis for objectively teaching compassion—and other subjective concepts—using reflective practices and ethical discussions to promote student and instructor autonomy. Unfortunately, these courses

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[5] "*SEE Learning*" is a condensed reference to the Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics citation.

teach compassion as a state of well-being rather than as a thematic approach, and therefore model does not easily translate into the composition classroom.

The concepts of Emory University's CBCT do, however, reflect several general learning outcomes of comprehension and communication listed on many composition course syllabi. For instance, in his article, "Totalized Compassion: The (Im)Possibilities for Acting out of Compassion in the Rhetoric of Hannah Arendt," SUNY composition instructor Matthew Newcomb reflected on how his English 030 course, "When There is Nothing to Say: the Rhetoric of Suffering and Service," incorporated *compassion* to teach students how to openly explore a variety of perspectives and *critically* reflect on readings and research:

> Assignments like this one provide students the opportunity to approach composition in global analytic terms and provide chances to teach skills of critical compassion that are important in a world where affective labor has become more and more powerful. Students can better learn to analyze what shapes their own feelings, and they can think of creative alternatives for finding new affective connections to others, particularly those in need. (120, 122)

Combined with Emory University's move towards teaching compassion, Newcomb's indication that critical compassion is an important skill in an affect-labor world helps materialize the significance of teaching with critical compassion, reifies the argument that we are already doing so in implicit if not explicit ways, and provides a framework through which to analyze materials for this study. With this framework in mind, I narrowed my research to GSU's composition curriculum because I met an instructor in my GTA cohort who themed their composition class on empathy. As I searched for more college curricula materials that focused on empathy or compassion, I found that the materials at my current institution were more readily

accessible for my research. Thus, I narrowed my scope to analyze how GSU's composition courses use critical compassion. Additionally, when considering the size of GSU and the LDS department—for example, in 2018 Fall semester we offer more than one-hundred and sixty courses between ENGL 1101 and 1102 alone—I decided to concentrate on ENGL 1102 courses because this particular curriculum is research oriented, which makes it more likely to include thematic approaches to teaching writing and/or critical compassion.

Although I narrowed my scope to focus on ENGL 1102 composition courses taught at GSU, I still had to choose from fifty classes for analysis. Considering the limitations of a thesis, I narrowed my scope further by focusing on three sets of curricula: sample materials provided by LDS and materials from two modified courses, one of which focuses on research and writing and one that focuses on empathy as a theme. I chose these sets of curricula in particular due to the accessibility[6] and range[7] of materials provided from each set: the Sample syllabus is publicly available through the LDS "Curriculum Materials" webpage and the modified materials I received via email after discussing this project with two colleagues.

The evidence I am using for this particular analysis comes from common curriculum materials—syllabi, assignments, and readings—gathered from three composition classrooms at GSU. LDS provides a standard syllabus that all new GTAs are required to use and many experienced GTAs modify to fit their pedagogical style. I used the Sample syllabus as a control to analyze the modified materials, and I noticed that Class A's materials were more writing and research focused compared to Class B's, which focused on discussions and reflections. Although

[6] As a note: I did an open call through a GTA social media page, these two colleagues were the only ones to respond and allow me access to copies of their materials.

[7] To keep the materials of this analysis in order and respect the privacy of the volunteering instructors, each group of course materials will be referenced as follows: *Sample* indicates the standard ENGL 1102 curriculum, Class A indicates the modified ENGL 1102 course materials that focuses on writing and research, and Class B indicates the ENGL 1102 course materials that engages with critical empathy.

the sampling used for this analysis is not large, it provides a triple comparison among the provided Sample and two modified courses. A final benefit of the materials for these three classes is that all were crafted for courses taught within the 2017-2018 year, making all materials up-to-date.

**3.1 Analyzing Critical Compassion in the Composition Classroom**

### *3.1.1 Learning Outcomes*

Since the Sample syllabus provides the standard language of all curriculum materials developed for LDS, it is of little surprise that all eight of the "General Learning Outcomes" are repeated on each syllabus. While all the listed learning outcomes implicitly reference critical compassion by way of the four 'R's, two of the learning outcomes are more explicit such as "produce *well-reasoned*[8], argumentative essays demonstrating rhetorical engagement" and "*reflect* on what contributed to their writing process and evaluate their own work." The remaining six learning outcomes are more implicit:

1. "analyze, evaluate, document, and draw inferences from various sources;"

2. "identify, select, and analyze appropriate research methods, research questions, and evidence for a specific rhetorical situation;"

3. "use argumentative strategies and genres in order to engage various audiences;"

4. "integrate others' ideas with their own;"

5. "use grammatical, stylistic, and mechanical formats and conventions appropriate for a variety of audiences;" and

6. "critique their own and others' work in written and oral formats."

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[8] Italics added for emphasis.

Although, several of the learning outcomes repeat components of critical compassion, such reiterations are important because they highlight a general goal of developing students' critical thinking skills through research, writing, and analysis.

Learning Outcome One & Six

The first and sixth learning outcomes, "analyze, evaluate, document, and draw inferences from various sources" and "critique their own and others' work in written and oral formats," both indirectly demonstrate critical compassion because both require students to listen and critically assess the various voices around their work. The first learning outcome calls for students to allow their research to guide them through what the *various—*primary and secondary*— sources* convey. Asking students to listen to the resonating voices within academic and civic conversations illustrates the social nature of learning and the epistemic nature of writing.

An activity that engages listening and research is an Interview/Human Profile piece, because this activity meets the learning outcome's expectations of students learning about a topic (interviewee/subject) by listening to the person and listening to the research to draw connections and make educated inferences. Through listening, students develop research skills by gathering information from various viewpoints about a topic. After gathering that information students must also use reasoning skills to analyze and evaluate the information to draw inferences between materials and critiques.

Learning Outcome Two & Five

Learning outcomes number two and five—"identify, select, and analyze appropriate research methods, research questions, and evidence for a specific rhetorical situation" and "use grammatical, stylistic, and mechanical formats and conventions appropriate for a variety of audiences"—demonstrate critical compassion by calling students to take perspective and

critically assess information and conventions to meet a rhetorical situation. The language of these outcomes sets expectations that students will learn listening techniques and responding methods in order to traverse rhetorical situations and various audiences.

The language also shows an incorporation of the four 'R's because both learning outcomes require students to gather their research materials and reflect on how to present their work to appropriate audiences using appropriate rhetorical moves of academic discourse. Students perform these two learning outcomes predominantly during peer review sessions, during which students critically assess each other's pieces while reflecting on appropriate methods of communicating their review of their peers' works. Analyzing work and communicating connections, per the rhetorical situation, are important and transferable skills learned in the composition classroom.

Learning Outcome Three

The third learning outcome calls students to "use argumentative strategies and genres to engage various audiences." This outcome engages critical compassion by having students listen to and take on the perspective of their audience. Most first-year students struggle to identify their audience because many of our students have backgrounds in public education, which notoriously trains students to write for exam graders. Since students are trained to write for such a narrow audience during most of their educational careers, they must now learn how to write for new audiences.

The language of this learning outcome also shows an incorporation of the four 'R's research and reflection. In order to "engage with various audiences," students must research their perspective audience and reflect on their expectations. For example, composition instructors

teach students to consider audience in all writing projects, a task that encourages them to reflect on how their writing changes as their audience changes.

Learning Outcome Four

The fourth learning outcome, "integrate others' ideas with their own," implies critical compassion by having students listen to others' ideas, take perspective of the academic or civic conversation, and critically assess how those ideas work within the context of their research. Since knowledge is social by nature, listening to others and taking perspective on how students understand and interact with research and information are imperative when conveying a new message drawn from these integrations (Lunsford, Roozen). Students learn by taking others' ideas and reflecting on them through their research and ideological lenses. However, critically assessing how their research and ideologies affect their interpretation of knowledge allows students to better understand a topic.

When students connect their ideas to others; they develop their researching, reflecting, and reasoning skills. By researching topics, students become aware of ongoing conversations. Students then reflect on their ideologies and assess (or, reason) how their understanding of a topic determines how they interact within the larger conversation. Putting ideas and works into conversation with one another and having them work together are tasks easier said than done, but critical compassion—by way of research, reflection, and reason—can help students learn how and when to make appropriate concessions.

Learning Outcome Seven

The seventh learning outcome, "produce well-reasoned, argumentative essays demonstrating rhetorical engagement," requires students to produce their findings through texts of various genres. This learning outcome incorporates critical compassion by having students

evoke the writing process to seek solutions to their research questions, which also requires them to perform critical assessment of their research. This learning outcome reiterates how GSU's composition curriculum emphasizes critical thinking, assessment, and reasoning.

This learning outcome also corresponds to reason and resolve. Notably, this is the only learning outcome that references the *production* of a text. After researching the ongoing conversation, evaluating sources and materials, learning about respective audiences, listening to peers' feedback, learning different writing conventions, being critiqued and critiquing other's work, students are finally asked to produce resolutions to their research questions. Although other learning outcomes do use verbs to show how students will perform actions throughout the course—analyze, draw (inferences), identify, engage, integrate, use, critique, reflect, and evaluate—none of those terms have the same connotation as "produce." The language of this learning outcome incorporates of critical compassion by communicating to students that they will actively create and, in doing so, produce solutions and resolutions.

Learning Outcome Eight

The final learning outcome "reflect on what contributed to their writing process and evaluate their own work," explicitly illustrates critical compassion's attribute of taking perspective by having students reflect on their work. Reflection helps students better understand their writing and find ways they can make it better. Many instructors have their students engage in reflection through in-class exercises and discussions or as out-of-class assignments. More specifically, this learning outcome plays out as an in-class free-writing exercise or a revision reflection assignment, in which students reflect on their previous work and write about the changes needed, how they changed it, and how those changes impacted their work.

### 3.1.2   *Assignments*

GSU's composition instructors modify and design assignments materials for students to achieve the respective learning outcomes. Since these learning outcomes already enact one or more components of critical compassion and the four 'R's, my analysis focused on how specific assignments fulfilled each element. Of the fourteen assignments analyzed, I selected four assignments—the "Interview/Human Profile," the "Discourse Analysis/Ethnography Essay," the "Annotated Bibliography," and the "Social Advocacy Project"—to discuss. I pulled these assignments in particular because each of the assignments clearly, albeit sometimes indirectly, enact critical comparison by way of teaching the four 'R's.

Interview/Human Profile

Class B's "Interview/Human Profile" assignment asks students to find someone "who might offer some insight" to the prompted question, "What makes us human?" In conducting interviews—either face-to-face or over phone/email—students develop their abilities to "evaluate, document, and draw inferences from various sources" and "integrate others' ideas with their own." Critical compassion is apparent in this assignment by students focusing on their listening and researching skills. Through the discussions prompted by the interview questions, students can discuss questions of experiences, identity, and perspectives.

Completing the interview and human profile essay pushes students to listen to their research because they must listen to their interviewees in the most literal sense. The assignment sheet also notes that students must be flexible in their questions because interviewees may "offer information that leads to unexpected avenues of thought, perspective, and inquiry." By allowing the research to guide them, by listening to their sources, students learn the nuances of finding

information, unearthing voices from within personal narratives, and working with primary research material.

Discourse Analysis/Ethnography Essay

Class A's assignment, "Discourse Analysis/Ethnography Essay," allows students to conduct either a discourse analysis or an ethnography for their essay. For both options of this assignment, students document observations and experiences within a discourse community or particular space and then reflect on their interactions based on suggested questions: "Respond to what you saw. What are your reactions and why? What surprised you? Intrigued you? Bothered you? Essentially, what did you expect to see that you didn't see and vice versa?" Such reflective questions, require students to "reflect on what contributed to their writing process[,] evaluate their own work" and their perceptions, and prompts critical compassion by having students appreciate various perspectives and reflect on new and/or establish understanding.

What is particularly interesting about Class A's assignment sheet is that the instructor acknowledged that their students will encounter forms of conscience and unconscious prejudices during their observations. Instead of warning students to refrain from these biases, this assignment calls for students to reflect on them and to understand their positionalities as lensed through which they understand their observations. As students begin to acknowledge what they see, they can also reflect on what is missing from their observations so they can better understand how they perceive the world and why they carry the positionalities that they do.

Annotated Bibliography

One assignment common in ENGL 1101 and 1102 at GSU is the "Annotated Bibliography," which covers aspects of critical assessment and reasoning. Pulled from LDS's Sample materials, this assignment requires students to cite sources for a research project,

providing annotations and evaluations for each source. The annotated bibliography requires students to critically assess the materials they gather for their research by "reading more critically [and] evaluating the methods, claims, evidence, and credibility of each source." Requiring students to critically assess their sources pushes them to reason through their methodology and focus their research scope.

<u>Social Advocacy Project</u>

Most of the assignments from the Sample and Class A's course materials do not call for students to actively seek out solutions for problems; instead, those assignments call students to pay attention to the research problem and explain it. However, final assignment, Class B's "Social Advocacy" project, engages students with active solutions and resolutions by having students create acts of advocacy. These "acts of advocacy" develop from prior research and take shape as social media campaigns, creative pieces, essays/speeches, or digital projects like PSAs. Furthermore, Class B's assignment explicitly requests students to channel their research and concepts of empathy into acts of advocacy:

> This act of advocacy will also be "real world"—in other words, it will not consist of a standard paper written for a standard class that dies a metaphoric death after your professor reads it. Rather, [it] will be a project designed to actually *do something*—that *can* actually do something—should you choose to employ it beyond this course.

During the production of this project, students perform acts of advocacy and thus engage with attributes of critical compassion that seek to actively find solutions. The instructor employs the term "empathy" to explain the goals of the project; however, I believe the assignment adheres to

the criteria for critical compassion particularly in that students seek out real-world solutions for projects they are passionate or curious about.

### 3.1.3    Readings

While the *Guide to First-Year Writing* is a required text listed on all three syllabi, each course—either through design or organization—provides its own sets reading lists over. For example, the Sample course schedule lists five chapters of the *Guide to First-Year Writing* as required reading—Chapter 3[9], Chapter 5[10], Chapter 7[11], Chapter 8[12], and Chapter 9[13]—while Class A chose not to list readings at all. Class B on the other hand, listed two chapters from the *Guide*—Chapter 9 and Chapter 5—and supplied over twenty-nine texts (poems, short stories, and videos) through iCollege. The variations between these three reading lists most likely occurred for thematic or pedagogical goals.

Thematically, the *Guide* largely focuses on critical assessment and research by illustrating different types of research and documentations as explored in Chapter 5. Additionally, Chapter 8 explains how listening to the audience helps with conveying messages effectively, a means through which invokes critical compassion's willingness to listen:

> In the authoring of a successful composition—one that inspires its readers to feel, behave, and act—considering audience is of prime importance...when you feel confident about what you want to say, in order to make clear decisions about how to craft your message, it's imperative to consider audience. (Christie 364-365)

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[9] Chapter 3: Persuading Rhetorically
[10] Chapter 5: Research and Documentation
[11] Chapter 7: Visual Rhetoric and Writing about Visual Images
[12] Chapter 8: Writing in Digital Spaces
[13] Chapter 9: Civic Engagement and Community-Based Writing

As expected, the chapters within the *Guide* correlate specifically to assignments listed within the Sample syllabus and the standard course materials for ENGL 1102. The text follows LDS's goal of developing critical thinking to assess and reason through various forms of research and writing.

The *Guide* also provides information on activism and social advocacy in Chapter 9 ("About Us"). In "Chapter 9: Civic Engagement and Community-Based Writing," the *Guide* informs students that the assignments they complete in their composition courses will help "develop [their] critical thinking, reading, and writing skills" while they reflect on how writing can be used for "responsible, purposeful social action" (Williams, et al 373). Reiterating the need for active empathy, this chapter explores ways students can get involved with different advocacy projects through archival research, service learning, and many discipline-specific projects. Chapter 9 explicitly incorporates critical compassion's "seeking out solutions" and the four 'R's "resolve," while also discussing listening/research, perspective taking/reflection, and critical assessment/reason.

Though the *Guide* text is the only textbook listed on the three syllabi, many composition courses traditionally provide supplemental readings through GSU's online interface iCollege. Class B's required reading list, in comparison to the Sample syllabus' and Class A's non-disclosed reading list span a large area of conversations. All thirty-one readings are organized into five units that focus on particular aspects of human experiences: Disability and Trauma; Gender and Sexuality; Race and Ethnicity; Religion and Ritual; and Poverty, Work and Wealth. Each reading offers students with new perspectives that they may not have previously considered. For example, Unit 3: Race and Ethnicity, includes the poem "Blood" by Naomi Shihab Nye, in which she discusses growing up Arab and questioning her cultural identity.

Poems such as Nye's make accessible perspectives that students may not have experienced or considered before. The utilization and organization of such materials into the classroom effectively incorporates critical compassion because these readings call for students to listen to other voices and to consider other perspectives. Going through the motions of listening and perspective-taking could offer students opportunities to experiment with critical compassion, which motivates them to actively perform it.

**3.2    Mindful Redesign of Course Materials to Include Critical Compassion**

This analysis indicates that instructors already incorporate critical compassion into their classroom even if they are not specifically referencing the term, which shows—if nothing else— an unconscious shift toward this pedagogical approach. However, being aware of this term could lead to a stronger understanding of the attributes and benefits of utilizing critical compassion in the composition classroom. Furthermore, this awareness could result in instructors more mindfully incorporating critical compassion in their course designs, which would prompt more purposeful and focused civic discussions and engagements like those seen in Class B.

Since the instructor of Class B themed the course on *empathy*, the curriculum materials encourage students to learn about categorically diverse groups and to discover ways to enact change thus promoting civic discourse and forms of advocacy. Using empathy as a thematic framework provides students with opportunities to build emotional connections with people considered categorically different from them and with chances to engage in social activism. Class B exemplifies the significance of mindfully designing a course with empathy as a pedagogical goal; however, as previously discussed, empathy's definitive vagueness and hyper-emotional focus limits this framework. Reimagining this course through critical compassion can help instructors engage students on both an emotional and—importantly—critical level.

To demonstrate a mindful incorporation of *critical compassion*, I offer some suggestions to help instructors interested in incorporating critical compassion into their classrooms. Although these suggestions are not the only ways to incorporate this theme—nor are these requirements to teach critical thinking and first-year writing—I offer these suggestions as a way to address the call for civic and harmonious composition classrooms and to develop more ways of envisioning critical compassion to meet that call.

One suggestion is to use critical compassion as a thematic framework for a FYC course and to organize the course through course units. Similar to how Class B used empathy as a theme and divided categories of difference into five units, I suggest incorporating critical compassion as a theme and dividing its main requirements into four units. For example, in Appendix A and B I crafted course materials focused on critical compassion as a theme, and—specifically in Appendix B—I organized the main components of critical compassion and the four 'R's into four units: Unit 1: Listening & Researching, Unit 2: Perspective & Reflecting, Unit 3: Analysis & Reasoning, and Unit 4: Action & Resolving. Incorporating this framework allows instructors to establish expectations of critical compassion and the four 'R's, which will help focus the readings, discussions, and assignments through each unit's lens.

The second suggestion is to provide appropriate expectations for students by modifying the learning outcomes so they reflect the course's theme. If a course is themed for critical compassion, an instructor can take the four attributes and incorporate them into the general learning outcomes as an addendum for that particular section. For example, Class B provides an example of modifying learning outcomes by listing focus questions before the "General Learning Outcomes" section of the syllabus: "(1) What is effective writing? Why does it matter? (2) What does it mean to empathize with someone categorically different than yourself? (3) What does it

mean to advocate on behalf of others through writing?" Although these are questions and are not included within the "General Learning Outcomes" section, including these questions informs students of what they will seek to answer over the semester. Providing these focus questions within the learning outcomes allows students to see how the course differs from a general ENGL 1102. Appendix A illustrates how modifications to the learning outcomes can focus the course and establish clear expectations.

The final suggestion for incorporating critical compassion is to modify assignments to have civic objectives. An assignment that could effectively accomplish this is the general New Media Project, which each course offers in different variations. The Sample class—for which this assignment was created—asks students to create a three- to five- minute video that presents an argument, which allows students to think of arguments through non-print texts. Class A's version of the New Media Project asks students to present an argument through three delivery mediums, which requires students to reflect on how the structure of their argument changes depending on the genre and delivery form. Class B refashioned their version of the New Media Project into the Human Community Photo Essay, for which students curated four photographs and created captions to showcase the identity of a community.

Altering this project to have civic objectives—like Class B did—encourages students to research a community problem and produce a project that informs and persuades their audience. Adopting Class B's approach, I modified the New Media Project into the Creative Research Project, for which students take the concepts they learned to prepare a photo essay, a written essay or speech, or a digital project. Each project has the caveat that students must provide a reflection justifying their rhetorical approaches and indemnifying their work's intended audience. Provided students have done their due diligence in their research, they can identify

what rhetorical choices they made and name an intended audience their work is for. With all that information, students can then join in civic engagement and perform active empathy.

Holistically, these suggested modifications do not heavily alter the curricula materials, but instead call for more mindful approaches when setting expectations and utilizing themes that promote effective writing practices. As instructors continue to explore ways of utilizing critical compassion, creating harmonious classrooms, and teaching first-year writing, we must remain mindful of the parameters and expectations we have for our courses. In doing so, instructors can coordinate their courses to teach writing, critical thinking, and advocacy while simultaneously meeting the needs of students.

# 4    CONCLUSION

As I discussed throughout this project, empathy alone falls short of helping students critically assess their personal and communal ideologies—such as reflecting on why they perform certain acts of advocacy and for whom. Newcomb explains that when students "feel a totalized connection" with particular groups or ideologies they struggle with "discussing anything potentially critical of that affiliation" because students feel as though their personal identity is under attack during these discussions (111). To create more harmonious classrooms that encourage students to consider their personal ties while also creating space for more independent action, this thesis argued that a mindful incorporation of critical compassion promotes critical awareness, compassionate openness, and first-year writing (Newcomb 111).

Each part of critical compassion's four-part process and its paralleled 'R' of first-year writing aids students in understanding others, themselves, given situations, and what they can do to alter the situation to meet their goals. Considering Lunsford's explanation of social knowledge from writing center pedagogies and Roozen's reasoning of social writing, the composition classroom is a prime space for students to engage with new knowledge through research and writing. Such activities range from discussing readings in small-group settings to conducting interviews and documenting findings.

As students conduct research, reflect on their personal knowledge or understanding, and assess effective materials and writing strategies to communicate their ideas, it is helpful for them to have an objective in mind to keep their work focused and give it purpose. Assignments can have a simple utility within the classroom that equates completing an assignment for a grade. However, if instructors want their students to be more active members of their communities and engage in civil discourse with others about their work, then they should craft activities and

assignments that go beyond the classroom. These activities and assignments can take any shape depending the course's thematic framework and materials. For example, a technology-centered composition classroom could have students develop a social media campaign. A poetry-centered class could organize an open-mic night to share their work. Moving beyond the four walls of the classroom allows students to see their work in action and realize that their coursework could be worth more than a grade.

Through chapter one's literature review and chapter two's analysis, I illustrated how teaching critical compassion is beneficial in teaching a writing process that responds to the call for civic and harmonious classrooms. While critical compassion and the four 'R's of first-year writing are not the only means by which instructors can teach writing or maintain a harmonious classroom, defining expectations allows instructors to better communicate the desired learning outcomes to their students. However, instructors must keep in mind the purpose of the writing classroom, as Newcomb explains:

> The point here is not to make human rights activists out of all of my students, nor is it to congratulate myself on changing the thought process of a few students... The issue is that what some students may get out of the course like this is a change in their approach to composition and feelings, still valuing compassion, but in a more critical way. The students are at least considering their own compassionate reactions in the classroom (Newcomb 127).

Establishing expectations and parameters also helps instructors remain focused on the purpose of the composition classroom and mindful not to overburden the class with undue expectations.

Future research could determine how successful my suggestions for critical compassion aid students and instructors in achieving civil and harmonious classrooms. Although this work

focuses on the conceptual and theoretical implications of using critical compassion in the composition classroom, further research is needed to assess to what degree critical compassion aides or hinders students' understanding of a first-year writing process. Another avenue for further research is outlining the ethical implications of having students go beyond the classroom to understand the writing process. Although students in writing classrooms participate in activities and exercises that teach transferable skills—skills that students will use in their academic and social lives—to what extent should composition instructors encourage or discourage students to work outside of their comfort zones? Furthermore, should students be required to act politically or civically at all?

      Whether or not composition instructors choose to enact critical compassion within their classrooms' through learning outcomes, assignments, or reading lists, the research shows that critical compassion can help build connections to a first-year writing process that could aid both instructors and students. Introducing first-year students to academic writing and critical thinking are typical primary goals of composition courses. By exposing avenues through which we can use critical compassion, instructors can continue to make efforts to craft civil and harmonious classrooms that teach students the skills needed to make the changes they want to see in the world.

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## APPENDIX

**1 Appendix A: Sample Syllabus**

**ENGL 1102: ENGLISH COMPOSITION II - CRN #**
**COMPOSITION AND CRITICAL COMPASSION: THINKING, WRITING, ENACTING**
Class Date(s), Class Times
Location

Professor Name
Office Location
Office Hours
Office Phone
University Email

### SAMPLE SYLLABUS DISCLAIMER

*This sample syllabus provides suggestions on how to mindfully incorporate critical compassion into ENGL 1102's learning outcomes, assignments, and reading lists at Georgia State University. The following is not meant to limit instructors from implementing further creative modifications for their course syllabi. Additionally, this sample syllabus is intended to provide examples of the previously analyzed section and is not meant to serve as a template.*

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course builds on writing proficiencies, reading skills, and critical thinking skills developed in ENGL 1101. It incorporates several research methods in addition to persuasive and argumentative techniques. A passing grade is C.

*Prerequisite: C or above in ENGL 1101.*

More specifically, this section of ENGL 1102 focuses on the connection between writing and critical compassion. Critical compassion is defined as a four-pronged process: (1) listening to someone's thoughts or ideas; (2) taking perspective to attempt understanding; (3) assessing the rhetorical concepts or situation critically; and (4) seeking out solutions or resolutions actively. Each part of critical compassion parallels crucial learning outcomes of a first-year writing process, also known as the four 'R's: researching, reflecting, reasoning, and resolving. This course suggests that critical compassion can lead to better understanding of first-year writing and the creation of an open learning environment. Establishing this understanding and openness to learning teaches effective methods of achieving change. With these ideas in mind, our class will explore how emotional rhetoric acts as a catalyst towards critical thinking that balances accepting and challenging perspectives.

Although critical compassion and the four 'R's will play a heavy role in this course, we must not forget the main purpose of composition classes. Overall, composition courses involve writing and composing, so expect to write and compose in appropriately rhetorical ways. The series of assignments and in-class discussions will help your ability to think through/with your writing and your ability to makes sense of difficult texts, themes, and ideas.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, students will be able to:
1. Establish strong research skills.
2. Identify, select, and analyze appropriate research methods, research questions, and evidence for a specific rhetorical situation.
3. Hone their written and verbal communication skills to fit the formats and conventions appropriate for a variety of audiences.
4. Integrate others' ideas with their own.
5. Critique their own and others' work in written and oral formats.
6. Produce well-reasoned, research essays demonstrating rhetorical engagement.
7. Reflect on what contributed to their writing process and evaluate their own work.
8. Help them understand themselves better as writers and connect that self to their potential audiences more intentionally.

Our specific section also focus on these questions:

9. What connections influence perspectives, knowledge, and writing?
10. How can focusing on critical compassion aid in research and writing?

### REQUIRED TEXTS

*Guide to First-Year Writing ("FYG")*. 6th Edition. Edited by Elizabeth Lopez, Angela M. Christie, and Kristen Ruccio. Published by Fountainhead Press, 2017. Print. (Purchase Here)

This text is required for both your English 1101 and 1102 course. Over the term, I will assign additional readings that I will provide via iCollege.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICY INFO

Community

We are part of a learning community and must treat one another with **respect** at all times. Eating, sleeping, text messaging, web browsing, holding personal conversations, doing work for other classes, or any other disruptive behavior cannot be tolerated. If you are disturbing the class, I may ask you to leave, forfeiting any in-class assignments we may complete after your departure. Our community does not end at the classroom door, but extends to our iCollege space and all other out-of-class environments used for our course interactions as well.

Please see http://deanofstudents.gsu.edu/faculty-staff-resources/disruptive-student-conduct/ and http://codeofconduct.gsu.edu/files/2016/09/Disruptive_Student_September9_2016.pdf for information regarding the Disruptive Student Behavior Policy.

Expectations of a University-Level Student

English 1101 is the first university-level classroom experience for most students. The expectations in this space and community may be very different from those of your previous classrooms and teachers. In this course, students should understand the following expectations that are customary in classes at the college level:

- Read and know the policies stated on the course syllabus
- Adhere to all submission guidelines and procedures set out by your instructor

- Attend class
- Attend class prepared to participate and to complete any work assigned in class
- Follow the posted schedule for the course for attendance and work
- Keep track of any deadlines whether given on a printed calendar, in an electronic form (e.g., email or iCollege), on the board, or verbally in class
- Correspond with your instructor in a respectful and polite way
- Talk to your instructor and ask questions when they arise (this may be in class, via email, or during office hours)

Academic Honesty/Plagiarism

While we will discuss what plagiarism is in class and you should familiarize yourself with Georgia State's policy on Academic Honesty. This policy refers to every piece of writing, drafts, reading responses, and finished essays alike. If you are ever unsure what may or may not be plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask me. In fact, I welcome your questions. Any work that is turned in to this class that is plagiarized will receive an automatic "0" for the assignment grade. Furthermore, I may refer you to the Dean of Undergraduate Studies for further disciplinary action.

**Georgia State University defines plagiarism as:**

> ". . . any paraphrasing or summarizing of the works of another person without acknowledgment, including the submitting of another student's work as one's own . . . [It] frequently involves a failure to acknowledge in the text . . . the quotation of paragraphs, sentences, or even phrases written by someone else." At GSU, "the student is responsible for understanding the legitimate use of sources . . . and the consequences of violating this responsibility."

For the university's policies, see "Academic Honesty" in the student catalog: http://www2.gsu.edu/~catalogs/2010-2011/undergraduate/1300/1380_academic_honesty.htm

Student Accommodations

Students who wish to request accommodation for a disability may do so by registering with the Office of Disability Services. Georgia State University complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students may only be accommodated upon issuance by the Office of Disability Services of a signed Accommodation Plan and are responsible for providing a copy of that plan to instructors of all classes in which an accommodation is sought. Also, please schedule an appointment with me so that we may discuss any accommodations you need in our class during office hours. To respect your privacy, we will not discuss these accommodations in class.

For purposes of paragraph (1), a major life activity also includes the operation of a major bodily function, including but not limited to, functions of the immune system, normal cell growth, digestive, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine, and reproductive functions.

To contact and/or register with the Office of Disability Services, see their contact listing at: http://disability.gsu.edu/about-us/contact-us/

Available Help & Support

The class has many supportive services that can help you as you strive to achieve your goals. I encourage you to reach out to me or other professionals on campus. Here is some information about the resources available to you.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Your Professor** | Email me at pname@gsu.edu with any questions or concerns. |
| **Academic Advisor** | The University Advisement Center offers drop-in advising services. If you have any questions about your courses, major, or career, make an appointment with your advisor at (404)413-2300 or stop by the 4th floor of 25 Park Place. |
| **Academic Coach** | An Academic Coach is available to meet with you to go over academic issues you may be experiencing or to support you in reaching your goals. You are encouraged to meet with your coach on a regular basis. Make an appointment in 255 Sparks Hall or by calling (404)413-2692. |
| **Writing Studio** | The Writing Studio is a resource for students of all classifications. Writing is a craft that takes practice and dedication. Please visit the Writing Studio to have your papers reviewed and for assistance in strengthening your ability to effectively communication through written word. It is located on the 24th floor of 25 Park Place. http://www.writingstudio.gsu.edu/ |
| **CATLab** | The CATLab (aka The Digital Aquarium) provides multimedia equipment for rent to anyone with a Panther Card. You can rent Still Cameras, Video Cameras, Microphones, Tripods, and the like. Checkout their website for more information: https://goo.gl/bF5Sbf |
| **Personal Counselor** | The Testing and Counseling Center offers confidential individual counseling and offers several workshops throughout the semester. Stop by the 2nd floor of 75 Piedmont to make an appointment. http://counselingcenter.gsu.edu/ |
| **Academic Success Workshops** | The Office of Undergraduate Studies provides a series of workshops throughout the semester to help you succeed both in and out of the classroom. Find the schedule here: http://success.students.gsu.edu/success-programs/student-success-workshops/ |
| **Dean of Students** | Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. Furthermore, please notify me, if you are comfortable in doing so, because I can provide any resources that I may possess. Find contact info here: http://deanofstudents.gsu.edu/home/contact-us/ |
| **Student Victim Assistance** | Your professor is required to report any disclosure of violence committed against or committed by students to the Dean of Students. If you do not wish to report a crime, but need someone to talk to, the Division of Student Affairs offers Student Victim Assistance who can help in almost any case. Find their info here: http://victimassistance.gsu.edu/ <br> 24-hour contact #: (404)413-1965 <br> If the emergency is urgent call 9-11 <br> If the emergency is on campus call 3-3333 |

Attendance and Punctuality

Attendance is mandatory and integral to success in the course, so come to class each day, on-time and prepared to work, and be sure to stay for the duration of the class. Students can view a summary of their absences and tardy record during instructor office hours. During the first 10-15 minutes of class we will have a brief writing warmup or reading quiz to hand in which will prove your attendance during our class time. If you, for any reason, will be absent from class, contact me before class.

Electronic Communication

The only mode of electronic communication with me is via email to pname@gsu.edu. Plan to check your GSU student email and iCollege News Feed daily for announcements regarding this class. Remember: when sending emails, **check the address**, so it reaches the correct account. Any misaddressed emails will be promptly deleted. Also note, all electronic communications received Monday-Friday between 8am-5pm will be responded to within a day. Any communication received outside those allotted days/times will be addressed the following business day.

Online Evaluation of Instructor

Your constructive assessment of this course plays an indispensable role in shaping education at Georgia State. Upon completing the course, please take time to fill out the online course evaluation.

### COURSE ASSIGNMENTS, EVALUATION, AND GRADING

Course Assignments

*Reading Reflections*

> Throughout the semester, we'll read chapters from our *First-Year Guide* text and readings posted on iCollege. The reading list was crafted to focus our attention on the particular unit discussion and to aid with any upcoming essays and projects. For this set of assignments, you will read the listed materials and post a 250-400 word reflection to an iCollege discussion board. The reflections give you a space to generate content that draws connections between your ideas, discussions in-class, and concepts found in the readings.

*Interview & Human Interest Piece*

> For this assignment, we will work in pairs to conduct interviews with each other. After crafting interview questions, you will record your interview and take notes about the interviewee. You will then transcribe the recording and compile the notes to write a 700-word human interest piece about the interviewee. These pieces will be presented/discussed during a round-table day.

*Exploring an Issue: Collaborative Essay & Mini-Presentation*

> This collaborative essay and mini-presentation will have our class divided into five groups of five students. Each group will be supplied a general topic or event to research, and each group member will explore one aspect of that event. With the expectation that each group member will provide multiple perspectives on their issue or concept. Each participant will write a 1000-word essay about their research and how it connects to the

topic's overall conversation. Finally, each group will lead the class in a discussion by putting their five parts together.

Example:

GSU-Turner Field Neighborhood—1. Role of GSU, 2. Role of the neighborhood, 3. Definition of Gentrification, 4. Who is financially responsible, 5. Role of the media.

*Annotated Bibliography*

During the one-on-one conferences, each student will identify a research topic focusing on the role of emotion in communication, writing, or rhetoric. After narrowing your research scope, you will begin the annotated bibliography. To complete this assignment, you will find 6 sources—5 of which **must** be scholarly works—citing each one in MLA format. Each annotation will follow a structure that both summarizes and evaluates each citation in 250-words. Pay special attention to the structure of the rhetorical précises example in Chapter 5, pp190-195, of the *First-Year Guide* for additional assistance.

*Creative Research Project*

This project is your chance to implement the different concepts learned over the semester to integrate your own voice into the conversations you researched for the annotated bibliography. Your project can take any shape needed to appropriately translate your research to an audience. Your options for the project are as follows:

1. Photo Essay: curate 5-6 photographs of your research subject to tell a narrative about your subject. Accompany each photo with a block of text (around 100 words each) telling your audience what to observe and how to interpret each photo.
2. Write an Essay or Speech: 3-5 pages, with an intended place of publication or delivery.
3. Digital Project: design a 2-minute video, a website with a homepage linked to two other webpages, or a digital project previously approved by me.

No matter what project you pick, 4 sources from the annotated bibliography must be referenced within the project with an in-text citation and works cited. Accompanying your project will be a 1-page (double-spaced) explanation of your rhetorical decisions when creating your project. All materials are due on Finals Day.

Course Evaluation

Evaluation for English 1101 will be determined by the following percentages:

| Assignments | Percentage |
|---|---|
| **Interview & Human Profile** | 20% |
| **Exploring an Issue: Collaborative Essay & Mini-Presentation** | 20% |
| **Annotated Bibliography** | 15% |
| **Creative Research Project** | 20% |
| **In-Class Activities and Discussions** | 10% |
| **Weekly Reading Reflections** | 15% |
| *Total* | *100%* |

Grading

| *Superior* | *Satisfactory* | *Needs Improvement* | *Failing* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *100 to 98 =A+* | *89 to 88 = B+* | *79 to 78 =C+* | *69 to 60 =D* |
| *97 to 93 = A* | *87 to 83 = B* | *77 to 70 = C* | *Below 60 = F* |
| *92 to 90 = A-* | *82 to 80 = B-* | | |

Assessment Criteria for A+

Starting Fall 2017, students will be able to earn an A+ in English 1101 and 1102. An A+ paper must both *meet and exceed* the assessment criteria for the A. There are two circumstances under which a student can earn an A+ on a formal paper or project assignment in these courses. 1. A+ work is writing at a higher academic level (i.e., a paper for a first-year class meeting expectations for a junior or senior level course) and 2. A+ work addresses audience expectations or writing needs beyond the course; for example, the paper has been accepted or is being reviewed for publication, serves a public or community service, or influences social or policy change in the student's community.

Banned Writing Topics

Due to ease of plagiarism or lack of appropriateness for our discourse community, the following topics are banned: abortion, gun laws, arguments based solely on religious texts, and legalization or decriminalization of controlled substances. The Internet is overloaded with student papers that explore these topics and the creativity has been thoroughly exhausted.

Essay Submission

All assignments are due at the date and time assigned by the instructor. Late assignments **will not be accepted**. The date an assignment is due, please submit an electronic copy of your work via the Assignment Folder in iCollege under the Assignments tab. If circumstances arise that will prevent you from submitting work on time, contact the instructor prior to the assignment due date. *Extensions are only given in rare situations and at my discretion*. It is the responsibility of the student to have and maintain access to iCollege, to properly submit all work through this platform, and to contact the instructor *immediately* if they have issues with paper submission. If a student is unable to upload a paper to the iCollege platform, the student must notify the instructor and include the paper as an attachment to notification the email.

All written assignments should follow MLA guidelines: typed using 12-point, Times New Roman font, double spaced, have no more than one-inch margins, and list the proper Works Cited page along with in-text citations. Please keep in mind proper grammar and spelling while submitting your work, as these will be taken into consideration in your final grade. All other forms of submission (ex: hardcopies or emailed copies) must be approved by the instructor **before** the assignment is due. All turned in essays must be in Word .doc or .pdf formatting. No other formatting will be accepted!

Essay Revision Policy

Every assignment is due on the date listed on the course schedule, and all assigned grades are official and non-negotiable (no exceptions). With that said, if you received a grade below 95 on any of the major compositions, sans the Final Project and Presentation, you can revise and

resubmit for additional 10 points of credit. To submit revisions, follow ALL of the steps listed below:

1. Revise your paper in a substantial manner.
2. Include a revision reflection, in which you explain what changes you made to your essay; how you picked the modifications and edits you did; and why those changes benefited your essay.
3. Upload the revised essay and your revision reflection to the provided iCollege folder before the revision deadline.

I reserve the right to refuse revised work based on the disclaimers set forth below:

Revisions Disclaimer

The opportunity to rewrite for additional credit is a privilege, not a right. I reserve the right, according to my sole personal discretion, to refuse revisions from any student, on any assigned composition, for any reason. While I am not inclined to preclude any student from an opportunity to participate in a constructive, guided revision process (which is inherently part of the writing process as a whole), I will do so under certain circumstances, including but not limited to: plagiarism in any draft of the essay, failure to revise the essay in a significant manner, failure to turn in the original essay by the deadline, failure to turn in the revision reflection by the deadline, and/or behavioral conflicts.

Incompletes

In order to receive an incomplete, a student must inform the instructor, either in person or in writing, of his/her inability to complete the requirements of the course. A grade of incomplete will only be considered for students who re a) passing the course with a C or better, b) present a legitimate, non-academic reason to the instructor, and c) have only one major assignment left to finish. Assignment of incompletes and the terms for removal of the "I" will be set at the instructor's discretion.

Late Work

Late work will **not** be accepted, even for a reduced grade. All assignments should be submitted, through the provided iCollege Assignment Folder, on time, and in the correct MLA format. In-class assignments cannot be made up for credit if you are absent. Please see me if you are having any difficulty completing an assignment before it becomes late and affects your grade.

In case of a major extenuating emergency, notify me **immediately**. In case of a *valid emergency*, absences can be excused and deadlines for major assignments (exams, essays, projects) can be extended. If you have any questions or doubts as to the nature of your absence and its ability to be excused, contact me as soon as possible. I will be much better equipped to help you accommodate an absence with advance notice. Ultimately, I reserve the right to excuse (or not excuse) absences for circumstances that are not already outlined on GSU's Lower Division Studies Attendance Policy on at www.english.gsu.edu/~lds.

**ENGLISH MAJORS AND THE GRADUATION PORTFOLIO**

The English department at GSU requires an exit portfolio of all students graduating with a degree in English. Ideally, students should work on this every semester, selecting 1-2 papers

from each course in the major and revising them, with direction from faculty members. The portfolio includes revised work and a reflective essay about what you've learned.

Each concentration (literature, creative writing, rhetoric/composition, and secondary education) within the major has specific items to place in the portfolio, so be sure to download the packet from our website at http://english.gsu.edu/undergraduate/undergraduate_resources/senior-portfolios/. In preparation for this assessment, each student must apply for graduation with the Graduation office and also sign up in the English Department portfolio assessment system at http://www.wac.gsu.edu/EngDept/signup.php.

The Senior Portfolio is due at the midpoint of the semester you intend to graduate. Please check the university's academic calendar for that date. Please direct questions about your portfolio to a faculty advisor or the instructor of your senior seminar. You may also contact Dr. Stephen Dobranski, Director of Undergraduate Studies, for more information.

## 2      Appendix B: Sample Schedule

<div align="center"><b>TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE</b></div>

This syllabus provides a general plan for the course; deviations may be necessary, and the instructor reserves the right to alter planned weekly activities and/or assignment due dates. Any changes to the syllabus will be discussed in class **prior to** their implementation. Students are responsible for taking note of changes announced during class time **when** they occur. The provided schedule reflects a plan for the course, but deviations from this plan **will** become necessary as the semester progresses. Students are responsible for taking note of changes announced during class time **when** they occur.

| Date | Class Day Activities | *Homework & Due Dates* |
|---|---|---|
| Week 1 | Introduction to the course and theme<br>Go over class protocol and expectations | Check-out ENGL 1102's page in iCollege<br>Begin Reading "The Yellow Wallpaper" |
| | Unit 1: Listen & Researching<br>How does listening make us better researchers? Discussion and Class Activity | Finish Reading "The Yellow Wallpaper" |
| Week 2 | Unit 1: Listen & Researching<br>Discuss *The Yellow Wall Paper*<br>The academic's binary between the emotional and critical. | Read *FYG* pp. 168- 172 and pp. 373-380 |
| | Unit 1: Listen & Researching<br>Pair up for Interview & Human Profile<br>Interviewing 101 and Workshop<br>Tutor CATLab | Review *The New York Times* article "How to Write a Profile Feature Article" |
| Week 3 | Unit 1: Listen & Researching<br>Ethos, Pathos, Logos, Kairos Refresher<br>Creating & Discovering Audiences | Post Reading Reflection on iCollege |
| | Unit 1: Listen & Researching<br>Peer Review Interview & Human Profile piece. | Bring printed draft of Interview & Human Profile piece to class today!<br>Read *FYG* pp. 163-168 |
| Week 4 | Unit 1: Listen & Researching<br>Evaluating Sources<br>MLA Style Practice | **Interview & Human Profile due** |
| | Roundtable Discussion and Mini-Presentations of Interview & Human Profiles | Read *FYG* pp. 373-384 |

| Week 5 | Unit 2: Perspective & Reflecting<br>Purpose of Perspective Taking and<br>Reflection, Discussion and Activity | Read *FYG* pp. 384-394 |
|---|---|---|
| | Unit 2: Perspective & Reflecting<br>Group up for Exploring an Issue Project<br>Discuss how to explore issues<br>collaboratively | |
| Week 6 | Unit 2: Perspective & Reflecting<br>Writer's Workshop | Read *FYG* pp. 126-132 |
| | Unit 2: Perspective & Reflecting<br>Review Stasis Theory and Invention | Post Reading Reflection on iCollege |
| Week 7 | Unit 2: Perspective & Reflecting<br>Group Peer Review<br>Meet in Computer Room (TBA) | Have access to an electronic version of<br>your essay. |
| | Unit 2: Perspective & Reflecting<br>Discuss Perspective Shifts During<br>Projects: Letting Research Guide You | **Exploring an Issue Presentations (1<br>Group Presents)** |
| Week 8 | Group Presentation Day | **Exploring an Issue Presentations (2<br>Groups Present)** |
| | Group Presentation Day | **Exploring an Issue Presentations (2<br>Groups Present)** |
| Week 9 | *One-on-On Conferences<br>(No Class Meeting)* | |
| | *One-on-On Conferences<br>(No Class Meeting)* | Read over "The Importance of Critical<br>Thinking" by the University of Essex |
| Week<br>10 | Unit 3: Analysis & Reasoning<br>Discuss "The Importance of Critical<br>Thinking" and Class Activity | Watch video, "Jason Silvia on<br>Perspective" by National Geographic<br>Read over the 5 Canon's Handout |
| | Unit 3: Analysis & Reasoning<br>5 Canons of Rhetoric<br>Reasoning through Different<br>Perspectives Game | |
| Week<br>11 | Unit 3: Analysis & Reasoning<br>What is a Rhetorical Analysis and<br>Rhetorical Precis? | Post Reading Reflection on iCollege |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Unit 3: Analysis & Reasoning<br>Annotated Bibliography Writing and Workshop | Bring a rough draft copy of your citations to class to work on. |
| Week 12 | Unit 3: Analysis & Reasoning<br>Peer Review Annotated Bibliography | Bring in printed draft of Annotated Bib for peer review. |
| | Making Research Active: Intro to Creative Research Project and Action | **Annotated Bibliography due** |
| Week 13 | Unit 4: Action & Resolving<br>What is the importance of active research? And, can anything really be "resolved"? | Read Chapter 1 of *Vision, Rhetoric, and Social Action* by Kristie Fleckenstein pp. 16-29 |
| | Unit 4: Action & Resolving<br>What is social action, and how can we active it through writing? | Read Chapter 1 of *Vision, Rhetoric, and Social Action* pp. 29-35 |
| Week 14 | Unit 4: Action & Resolving<br>How does visual rhetoric affect our messages? | Read Chapter 1 of *Vision, Rhetoric, and Social Action* pp. 35-41 |
| | Unit 4: Action & Resolving<br>Making arguments persuasive workshop | Finish Reading Chapter 1 of *Vision, Rhetoric, and Social Action* pp. 41-44<br>Post Reading Reflection on iCollege |
| Week 15 | Unit 4: Action & Resolving<br>Agency in communicating and researching | |
| | Unit 4: Action & Resolving<br>Final Peer Review, meeting in computer room (TBA)<br>Last Day for Q&A before finals week! | Have access to an electronic version of your project and 1-page rhetorical explanation. |
| Week 16 | **Finals Week (No Class Meeting)** | **Creative Research Project** |