Jennifer Falcón
Department of English
500 W. University Ave. El Paso, Texas 79968
E-Mail: jfalcon3@utep.edu

Teaching Philosophy

The most rewarding part of teaching for me is witnessing students' progress and gain knowledge throughout a semester. I teach to help them learn, to watch them grow, and this growth is not as a result of what I've done as a teacher, but of the work they've done as students. To help facilitate students' growth as writers, as researchers and communicators, I approach teaching with an eye on four things: draw from theories and concepts in digital composition and digital rhetoric: work hard to create an active and engaged environment in my classes; and create opportunities for meaningful collaboration.

Digital Rhetoric and Multiliteracies

I define digital rhetoric not only as the application of rhetorical theories and practices in a digital environment, but as a relationship between the composer and the device, platform, network, or software individuals and groups use to compose. Students' rhetorical choices speak to their understanding of digital tools, their knowledge, and their effectiveness as much as a final project.

For this reason I use the first-year composition classroom as a space to begin introducing theories and practices in digital rhetoric. I scaffold these theories and practices, so that they first appear as minor or low-stakes assignments and eventually work up to major multimodal, or multimedia assignments. In professional writing classes I require students to compose brochures, presentation aids, or slideshows as supplemental material to enhance their presentations. This urges students to continue to think about the relationship between their audience, the genre they are composing in, and the constraints and benefits using specific software, platforms, and devices to compose. Students are familiar with many devices, software, and frameworks that they don't consider as part of academic writing or communication. As an instructor, this provides me with an opportunity to leverage students' interests and aptitudes with multiliteracies.

Creating an active and engaged learning environment

Students, I believe, are aware of composition that includes more than alphabetic text, as they continually find themselves exposed to and interacting with mixed modes, and/or multimedia compositions. However, this exposure does not always equate to them possessing experience in composing by mixing modes. Knowing that students will enter my composition classroom with a varying degree of experience and skill it is important to me to create an atmosphere that is

inviting, and promotes risk-taking and collaboration. I want them to leave the class not only having improved as writers, but in their approach to writing.

Often students express concern, anxiety, or a general dislike of writing. To make them feel more at ease with the rigors of writing I always begin the semester with a discussion of the writing process. I ask what they think the writing process is, and to describe their own writing process. I believe this helps them to better understand that everyone's process is different, and understanding what works for them and repeating it can help them become more efficient writers. I'm open about my own struggles with sitting down to write, and stress that finding what works best for them and helps them stay organized can only improve their writing process. This is an important conversation to have in the first-year composition classroom because it helps to build a relaxed classroom. Discussions of writing process, and using humor to share my experiences help keep the mood light, but productive by creating a supportive learning environment in order to build a strong classroom community.

Student-centered learning by negotiating learning goals

When students first enter the classroom, we discuss their learning goals for the semester. This approach to discussion begins on the first day when I ask students to explain why there are taking the course. By asking the students why they are in my classroom, and what they hope to learn throughout the semester I can refer to these goals throughout the semester. This allows me to point out the relationship between desired learning outcomes of an assignment to their own goals. I find this to be particularly helpful not only in first-year composition courses, but also when I teach Professional Writing because it provides the students the opportunity to openly discuss their transition form academic writers to professional writers.

We also discuss and negotiate the goals of each assignment in the realm of composition, communication, and/or professional writing. This helps to gauge the student's level of understanding, and open discussion on why a specific assignment is part of their composition curriculum. Essentially, I like to introduce assignments and then immediately begin discussion on why they are asked to complete these assignments. Why do we study genres? Why create a documentary? How does academic writing differ from professional writing? How is this useful for my professional development?

Collaboration

In first-year composition courses, students may view collaboration as a group project or peer review. Students work together, but may not always see the real-life application of this group work. Whereas in workplace writing I use collaboration as an opportunity for students to collectively demonstrate their knowledge of genres and audience expectations as they attempt to effectively deliver a message, and/or their research much like they would in the workplace.

In addition to group projects I provide students with opportunities to collaborate with me and with their audience. I schedule peer review conferences amongst their peers in addition to scheduling one-on-one conferences with me. The one-on-one conferences allow me to provide feedback and discuss each student's project. Much like students will mix and use modes in collaboration with each other; they will collaborate with their peers, their audiences, and me. Helping students to understand that collaboration is a key aspect of writing.

Creating a learning environment where students are comfortable to write, and eager to collaborate is an important component of my approach to teaching writing. I believe in the universal necessity of writing, and I teach writing because it is a large part of our communication both inside and outside the classroom. Writing is difficult to do, difficult to teach, but rewarding on both ends when you see students' progress throughout a semester.