Jeff Naftzinger—Teaching Philosophy

My primary goal as an instructor of Composition and Rhetoric courses is to help students see the reach, applications, and presence of these fields in their lives. I want students to see the writing and composing they regularly engage in as important rhetorical acts that are not so different from the ones we study in the classroom. I want students to think about and understand writing and rhetoric more broadly, especially to see how writing and rhetoric affect the world around them. My hope is that, through engaging with the readings and assignments in my courses, students will learn to think rhetorically about the choices they make in their own compositions in and outside of the classroom. To accomplish this, all of my courses are planned around three key features: relevance, application, and reflection. Through my pedagogy, I aim to help students see how the readings are relevant and applicable to their lives and experiences; through my assignments, I aim to help students grapple with the course material and establish their own connections to it; and through guided reflections, I aim to help students think about what they have learned and how it might be helpful to them in the future.

To help make the material relevant, I apply the concepts and theories from my courses, which students often see as antiquated or irrelevant, to contemporary examples that are more likely to engage them. In my upper-level Rhetorical Theory survey course, for example, I take theoretical frameworks developed in Ancient Greece or Stalinist Russia and show students how they can still be used to analyze artifacts like discrepancies in news coverage or memes taking Twitter by storm. Similarly, in my sophomore writing class, Research, Genre and Context, I use our discussions about generic conventions to help students see that the research paper, a genre they think of as being solely for school and often disdain for that reason, is similar to genres and texts they regularly use and enjoy: *Wikipedia* articles, documentary films, and the *Serial* podcast. Designing courses that include relevant texts and examples, according to my student evaluations, has had the effect of making "difficult material understandable and relevant."

To make the material applicable, I ask students—in class discussions and in more formal assignments in projects—to connect the concepts we discuss to examples from their own lives and experiences. In Writing for a Digital World, a course in the Rhetoric, Writing, and Media Studies minor at Trinity College, students use theories of multimodal composing, visual rhetoric, and circulation to construct multi-text, multimedia campaigns for organizations in Hartford that they care about. Working in groups, students met with leaders of local organizations such as the Charter Oak Boxing Academy and the Trinity Protect Our Breasts Chapter. With their organizations, the groups identified ways they could use their digital writing to accomplish a task, like promoting COBA to prospective students and donors. As part of the composing process, students work continually with their organizations in order to draft, revise, and eventually circulate their texts. Asking students to participate in this way helps them see that material can be useful outside of the classroom, while also giving them a stake in guiding the direction of the course.

To facilitate reflection, I ask students, at multiple points during the semester, to think about and define the major theories and concepts of the course. At the end of the Rhetorical Theory course, for instance, students construct a cumulative definition of rhetoric based on their understanding of the course. As they construct this definition, students look back over their responses to earlier writings so they can see how their understandings have, or have not, changed over the course of the semester. This activity gives students the opportunity to see how and

why their understandings of the course material have changed through the semester. In my writing classes, students construct ePortfolios hosting texts they have composed and reflecting on the processes of invention, drafting, and revision they employed to develop them. Activities like the cumulative definition and the ePortfolios give students the opportunity to look back at the work they have completed during the semester and trace how that work has helped them reach new understandings of the material and new writing practices.

By making the course material relevant to my students, I help them see that what we are discussing is important outside the walls of the classroom. By asking students to apply the material to their own lives, I help them see how the material can be useful to them. By inviting students to reflect on the material, I help them see what they have learned and how their understandings have changed. Just as important, this three-part schema functions dialogically: I am able to share my interest in and enthusiasm for the course material with students, while they animate that material and illuminate new connections for me.