Developing Writers in Higher Education

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SWEETLAND MINOR IN WRITING PROGRAM DETAILS

Overview and Learning Goals

The 15-credit Sweetland Minor in Writing Program requires an application. Admitted students take both Gateway and Capstone courses within Sweetland, and must allow at least one “gap” semester between the two courses to enable greater opportunity for their growth as writers. In addition to these two required Sweetland courses, minors take two upper-level writing requirement (ULWR) courses (rather than the one required of all students), and are encouraged to select one in their major area of study and the other outside of it, to broaden their exposure to genres of disciplinary writing. Minor students also select one more course focused on argumentative writing, creative nonfiction writing, professional writing, writing and other arts, or digital media writing. Fulfilling these requirements means taking a writing-focused course nearly every semester and encountering a broad range of genres, modes, and media.

Learning goals for the minor state that students will:

- Produce complex and well-supported arguments that matter in academic and nonacademic contexts.
- Explore different strategies for organizing, revising, and proofreading writing of varying lengths and genres.
- Identify and implement rhetorical choices that meet the demands of specific genres, audiences, and rhetorical situations.
- Compose in a variety of modes, including a range of new media such as blogs, interactive maps, online magazines, etc.
• Identify the expectations that characterize writing in the major, and use this knowledge to write effectively in a range of genres in that discipline.
• Learn the language to describe writing processes, rhetorical choices, genre expectations, and disciplinary discourse to discuss writing-in-progress and writing development over time.
• Collaborate with other writers to improve writing-in-progress.

Electronic Portfolios

The two Sweetland courses required by the minor, the Gateway and Capstone, address these goals explicitly and at the same time give students a good deal of latitude in how to accomplish them. One significant feature of the program is the creation of an electronic portfolio in both the Gateway and Capstone courses, creating a kind of reflective bookending of each student’s writing experiences and growth. Though each of the two eportfolios is guided by an assignment prompt, students can select their own platform (often a templated one such as WordPress or Wix, though a small number of students hand-code them), and have complete freedom of design. The major writing projects for the two courses also foreground student interests and commitments. The Gateway course leads students to compose a reflective essay called “Why I Write,” and the Capstone course asks them to look back at their college experiences in a “Writer’s Evolution” essay, accompanied by an annotated bibliography of their own prior writing. Though both projects require a guiding idea and evidence, there is no required format or genre, allowing students to write poems, narratives, and manifestos as well as more conventional essays.

Gateway Course Projects

The primary work of the Gateway course consists of two paired projects, the Repurposing an Argument project and the Remediating an Argument project. In the former, students are asked to select “a piece of writing you’ve already completed on a topic that’s dear to your heart and/or mind, a topic you’ll want to continue living with this semester” and “repurpose it for a new audience and with a new or extended argument.” The latter assignment prompts students “to try to present the same argument [as in the Repurposing project] to the same audience, but in a different medium,” so as “to consider the ways that medium and form affect argument, audience, and purpose.” Students also complete a project asking them to explore
the phrase “Why and How I Write,” to begin to synthesize more deeply their sense of the work they have done during the semester and to begin to think about goals for their writing in the remainder of the program.

Capstone Course Projects

In the Capstone course, students engage in the culmination of their minor in writing work in the Capstone project, a “long-term, research-based project of your design [that] invites you to identify a specific scholarly and/or creative conversation happening in the world to which you’d like to contribute. [. . . ] Your project can take any form you deem appropriate for your overall argument and audience—as long as it is governed by a tightly focused guiding idea or argument and demonstrates this idea through meaningful engagement with research.” These projects span the full semester, and multiple drafts, including a proposal; production plan; annotated bibliography; rough draft, rough cut, or mockup, depending on the medium; peer review and instructor feedback; and more. Students also complete an Evidence-Based Essay on Your Development as a Writer (Evolutionary Project) that asks them to demonstrate and reflect on their evolution as writers, and in particular, what they explored and learned during their college writing career and the minor in writing program.