

# Writing Our Way into an Equitable, Inclusive, and Sustainable Post-Pandemic Future

Laura K. Lease & Joseph R. Lease  
Wesleyan College



# Who are our first year traditional students?

- 97% identify as female
- 65% students of color
- 52+% First Gen
- 63% working
- 79% high school GPA of 3.0 or higher (avg. 3.55)
- 47% bring TR credit
- 81% attending for career prep

(self-reported Student Success Navigator data, Fall 2020; 129 of 139 students responding)



# Motivations for Writing Sequence Re-Design

- Declining engagement and connection in these courses
- Success of themed, discipline-focused ENG 102
- Moving to a hybrid format for increased COVID safety
- Deadly pandemic, widespread social unrest, and heightened psychosocial stress on students
- WISE 101 (first-year experience course) re-boot

We faced a  
daunting  
instructional  
challenge.

“Education is an excellent way of moving beyond trauma to a place of agency, confidence, control, community, care, activism, and contribution.”

Cathy Davidson  
HASTAC Co-Founder &  
Founding Director of the Futures Initiative

# Re-Design Goal

Reframe the first-year writing sequence to promote:

- Engagement with social and personal identity development (in self and others)
- Deep listening
- Passion for civic engagement and social justice
- Inclusive and anti-racist class climate

The resulting coursework has empowered our students to build their college reading and writing skills as a means of leaning into their opportunity to become change makers through their writing.



# Design Moves

# Cultivate Re-Design Connections & Co-Curricular HIP Opportunities

- Departmental faculty buy-in
- WISE 101 (first year experience course) Director/Designer
- Diversity and Inclusion Dialogues (DID)
- Lane Center for Service & Leadership
- Additional coursework opportunities

# Engage Students Where They Are

- Intersectional identities and lived experiences
- Complexities of student identity development along multiple spectrums
- Transitioning to being their own learning managers
- Strengths- (versus deficit-) based strategies
- “Breakaway” learners, rather than “vulnerable” ones (Gross, *Breakaway Learners*, 2017)

# Choose Topics, Assignments, & Resources that Resonate with Students

- Intersectional topics and voices (both popular and academic)
- Timely and urgent
- Relatable language and tone
- Connected to first-year seminar coursework

# Don't Shy Away from the Hard Stuff

- Help students cultivate skills to “grapple with ideas and experiences that challenge their existing values and assumptions” (Ambrose et al., 159).
- Make room for complex and uncomfortable topics.
- Problematize being a white (or otherwise privileged) faculty member.

# Emphasize Student-Development Informed & Anti-Racist Teaching Practices

- Student learning outcomes
- Process over product
- Low-stakes practice and drafting
- Transparent assessment practices
- Routine reflection and sub-goal setting
- Class-generated learning climate guidelines

What does  
this look  
like in  
practice?



# WRI 101 (Learning Support English) Equipping & Empowering Changemakers Lens:

## Social & Personal Identity Development (self and others)

## Listening to Understand vs. to Respond

## Understanding Our Everyday Privilege

## Negotiating the Language of Power

## Agency & Activism in Writing

Identity Wheels exercise

Telling Our Name Stories forum

Anonymous polling for areas of connection and difference

Intersectional identities

Core Value/Belief Narrative Essay

10 Ways to Have a Conversation (Celeste Headlee, TedTalk)

Listening in conversation vs. in writing

Intent vs. impact

Turning discord & tension into a learning opportunity (Ambrose et al., 186)

“Use Your Everyday Privilege to Help Others” by Dolly Chugh

How privilege normalizes some identities over others (“Spectrum Activity”)

Amplifying under- or unrepresented voices in academic discourse

Connections between privilege, stereotyping, and bias

Code switching (benefits, risks, and choices; articles by Deggans & Waring)

Problematizing formal academic English

Claiming a seat “at the table” to influence change

Leaning into authentic voice, intersectional identity, and passion for subject matter

Making targeted writing moves to join the conversation, connect with audience, and achieve overall writing goal

Community Based Problem-Solution Research Project

# ENG 101:

English Composition, Essays

- Continuing the work of WIS 101 and WRI 101 on identity development
- Building on the message that writing is a key component to students becoming change makers in their communities
- “Theming” sections to allow students some choice in topics
- Problem-Solution Research via a Disciplinary Lens Project

# ENG 101: Racial Justice

Setting the Tone to Frame Up  
Success Both for Students and  
Instructor

## Day 1 Goals and Conversation:

- Own the issues with/challenges of privilege(s)
- Reposition instructor not as an authority figure but as a facilitator of, and contributor to, a semester-long discussion
- How we talk to each other and handle mistakes

**Risks vs. Rewards:**

*Is it worth it?*

# Risks

- Instructor fear and discomfort (so what?)
- Students' fear and discomfort (mitigated through open, private communication and ability to choose sections?)
- Miscommunication and alienation

# Rewards

- Student engagement and a more personal investment in their writing
- Fight compassion fade (Västfjäll, et al.)
- Reduce susceptibility to conspiracy thinking (Whitson, et al.)
- Follow up opportunities for students to use their research and writing are key here

# Risks vs. Rewards:

*Is it worth it? YES!*



# Looking Ahead

What will we be reading and thinking about as we prepare for our next first-year cohort?

- Adapting for Online Program
- More intentional, in-depth collaboration between faculty and Student Affairs educators
- Further study on Self-Authorship in Diverse Populations
- *Cultivating Genius: Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy* (Gholdy Muhammad, 2020)
- *Breakaway Learners: Strategies for Post-Secondary Success with At-Risk Students* (Karen Gross, 2017)
- *Rethinking College Student Development Theory Using Critical Frameworks* (Abes, Jones, & Stewart, 2019)

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