The Rhetorical Situation of Syllabi

Collaborating with Your Students to Foster Rhetorical Awareness

Dr. Yasmine Romero
UHWO - English
Step 1: Course Goals/Outcomes

- **Course Goals/Outcomes** = How do students understand the course goals/outcomes?
  - **Activities?** Students put course goals/outcomes into their own words, as well as brainstorm some possible assignments that would help them reach these course goals/outcomes
  - **Leads into:** Scaffolding Discussion and Activity, or how do we reach these goals as a class?
Step 2: Scaffolding

- **Scaffolding** = How do we work towards learning/teaching goals? What are the differences between learning/teaching goals?
  - **Activities?** Explain what scaffolding is, and even give students a “puzzle” that asks them to put together a sequence.
  - **Leads into:** Course Syllabi are one way to plan or scaffold towards goals/outcomes, and so we need to examine syllabi as a genre
Step 3: Syllabus Genre

- **Syllabus** = How do students navigate/recognize the genre of the syllabus?
  - **Activities?** Students reverse outline syllabi models (your own) or brainstorm and decide the required sections. Discuss the expectations and what makes a strong/weak syllabus.
  - **Leads into:** Group-Authored Assignment, Syllabi Section for English 100/200 that targets 1 randomly assigned Course Outcome (based upon their rewording)
Step 4: Creating Syllabi

• **Syllabi Creation** = Students are responsible for ensuring that certain parts of the syllabi are present, such as Academic Honesty clauses, Civility Clauses. They should use their understanding of Syllabi as Genre to put the syllabus together.

• **Activities?** Come prepared with cut-outs for students of the required clauses. For the assignment section, students should be limited to deciding the first 4-5 weeks of class.
  - **Leads into:** What can creating syllabi teach us about rhetorical situations? Discussion.
Step 5:
Rhetorical Situation

• Rhetorical Situation = How can a syllabus teach us about rhetorical situations?
  • Activities? Use a visual model of the rhetorical triangle, working as a class to identify the rhetorical situation for a syllabus as a class.
  • Leads into: Homework, reflect on your group’s decision. Did you accomplish the course goals in your scaffolding of assignments and activities?
Step 6: Reflection & Decision Making

- **Reflection** = Students reflect on their process of creating a syllabus and prepare to pitch their syllabi suggestions at the next class
  - **Activities?** Have a description of the expectations for “pitching syllabi suggestions” ready to hand out. This activity should be informal and lead to whole-class decisions at the end of the next class session.
• **Limitations**
  • Demands more time and preparation of the instructor.
  • Takes up the first week of class.
Strengths/Limitations

• **Strengths**
  • Reinforces the notion that syllabi are contracts between students and instructors
  • Creates rapport between students and instructors
  • Makes students invest in course goals/outcomes
  • Approaches teaching in a student-oriented manner
  • Motivates instructors to reconsider and reassess how they’ve been teaching 100-level composition