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Proposing a Purpose: Rhetorical *Paideia* Goals for First Year Composition

Lauren E. Johnson

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Proposing a Purpose: Rhetorical *Paideia* Goals for First Year Composition

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Master of Arts

First Year Composition (FYC) instructors are often left to puzzle out the larger meaning of the most ubiquitous course in our field for themselves; consequently, goals for the course are frequently selected by the instructor, and are not always most effective for laying a groundwork of lifelong learning and education, or *paideia*. This lack of clear and unifying goals for the course is illustrated by a piece of 2005 scholarship that points to multiple focuses for FYC, each different in its values and aims. FYC is an important course for students, not only because it is one of only a few writing courses students must take, but also because it is often required as part of a general education core. Because it is such an important course, it is imperative that we identify a unified set of goals for FYC—a set of goals that work toward a larger goal of *paideia*, or preparation for lifelong learning and citizenship. Some well-received and recently popularized approaches to the course try and fail to meet this criteria of enhancing students' pursuit of *paideia*, namely goals of teaching course-specific genres and general writing skills. Rather than continuing in these problematic to FYC, we must adopt a rhetorical *paideia* focus and seek to achieve the goals of rhetorical *paideia* in our courses. We must help students gain insights, through their development as writers, into their world (*phronesis*) and themselves (self knowledge), and FYC is the vehicle through which we can accomplish these goals.

Keywords: first year composition, first year writing, writing instruction, genre, genre instruction, general writing skills instruction, *paideia*, general education, rhetorical *paideia*, rhetoric education, writing course outcomes, writing course goals

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Introduction

A firm grasp of the purpose of first year composition (FYC) has eluded me since I began teaching the course three years ago. I remember watching my students walk out of the first final I ever administered. Even more vividly, I remember wondering how I had prepared those students for academic life at the university or meaningful life beyond their university experience. The unfortunate reality was that I couldn't answer that question very well, and that while I had guided them (somewhat) successfully through the required assignments of the course, I hadn't helped my students fulfill a broader purpose or achieve any larger goals. While my students had successfully jumped through the hoops of FYC at our university and passed off their general education requirement, I was left wondering how their completion of my course would impact their academic and individual futures. What should my FYC course have done for the students I watched walk out of that final? Ultimately, I was unsure. And I knew that if the goals of FYC were not clear to me, the teacher, they had most definitely not been clear to my students.

Over time, I attempted a few different goals for the course, each time hoping my students would leave the class with knowledge they would use in their academic and personal futures. During that first semester, I had sought to teach students the genres of the course and focused almost explicitly on how to write those genres successfully. However, at the end of the semester I was left wondering if the genre skills I had taught would transfer to future writing endeavors. Seeking to right this wrong, I made the acquisition of transferable writing skills the primary goal of the subsequent semester's course and focused my energies on endowing students with writing skills they would use for the rest of their lives. Ultimately, though, neither approach left me satisfied as an instructor. I found myself asking, once again, what broader purpose FYC should

fulfill, and what goals for the course I should adopt in order to ensure that FYC would be useful to students in their lives beyond our classroom.

While I know some would argue that my seemingly failed attempts at FYC simply add fuel to the abolitionist fire¹, I believe that the course, despite being misaligned as a “sentimental favorite . . . like big bands and Norman Schwarzkopf,” is worth keeping around (Crowley 156). Of course FYC is a course with lots of baggage (what we might call purpose baggage) and I am not the first instructor to wrestle with its purpose problem, nor the first researcher to investigate solutions. Since its beginnings, FYC has continually prompted the same question: what should the course accomplish for students? (David et al.; Fulkerson; Harrington et al.; Smit).

This question has yielded myriad diverse answers, as demonstrated by Fulkerson’s 2005 report on “Comp-landia.” Fulkerson demonstrates that ways of approaching FYC, or ways of answering the three key questions of “who we are, what we wish to achieve with students, and how we ought to go about it” in FYC have increased from eight in the nineties to twelve in the twenty-first century (654). In other words, whereas novice instructors in 1980 encountered eight distinct approaches to the course in a representative anthology (intended as an introductory reader for novice instructors), readers of a similar anthology encountered twelve approaches to

¹ FYC teachers and scholars have long contributed to what Greenbaum calls the “tradition of complaint,” and many of those scholars argue for the abolition of FYC as we know it. From Sharon Crowley in the 1990s to David Smit in 2004 and Anne Beaufort in 2007, arguments for the abolition of FYC as we know it have persisted, even in the last two decades. See Connors, “The New Abolitionism,” for a more detailed history of this tradition.

teaching the course in 2005². Indeed, today there are arguments for the abolition of FYC (Beaufort; Crowley), arguments for a writing education/comp studies approach (David et al.; Downs and Wardle), arguments for public writing as the ultimate goal of FYC (Weisser; Wells), arguments for a rhetoric instruction focus (Bacon; Hauser), and arguments for just about any other goal you can think of, including critical cultural studies (CCS) and expressivism (Fulkerson).

But while these authors' works demonstrate the exceptional progress our discipline has made towards an understanding of FYC and an essential field of scholarship, we seem to still be working out a clear purpose for the course that has become the hallmark of our discipline. This is evidenced by Fulkerson's findings that "there is genuine controversy—*within* the field, not in the eyes of the public, the administration, or the legislature—over the goal of teaching writing in college" (679). Of course, Fulkerson asserts (and I agree) that there's no sense trying to unify the field on goals for all writing courses, primarily because "there is no ultimate ground . . . for proving that one approach is proper" (680). Nor would we want to flatten the robust field of composition scholarship and impose a single set of goals or pedagogies on all writing courses, ignoring diverse research that has legitimized so many effective ways of teaching writing.

However, FYC is a unique writing course in that it is often part of a general education core or other program that students are required to complete. Moreover, it is a course frequently taught by novice instructors and taken by novice students. So not only is it a required course, but

² Fulkerson looks at two anthologies: *Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition* (Donovan and McLelland, 1980) and *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies* (Tate, Rupiper, and Schick, 2001).

it is also one that is taught by those who are new to the field. These realities lead me to believe that, as Fulkerson asserts, “some degree of commonality is likely be required” in FYC courses (680). In other words, FYC needs a set of common goals—clearly expressed ends for which instructors can devise specific means—in order to be truly valuable for students. And by “goals” I don’t necessarily mean a set curriculum, or even a content focus for the course. Rather, I’m speaking of common assumptions that instructors must have about what the course should accomplish for students in the long term, and how we as instructors hope to achieve those long-term goals in FYC. Fulkerson would call these concerns about purpose “axiological,” or related to “theories of value”—agreeing on what good writing is and what kind of writing we would like students to learn to produce in the course. And axiological concerns are something that we have yet to agree upon for any writing course, let alone FYC (Fulkerson).

But do we truly need to articulate common goals for FYC? I would argue that it is extremely important to articulate clearly the goal of a course that has become the hallmark of our discipline³. It is even more important that we clarify goals for FYC so novice teachers like myself can structure their courses and pedagogies with a clear end in mind. How are such

³ Not only do we need to articulate goals for FYC because it is an important course, but also because the coming shift towards learner-centered teaching and outcomes-based assessment will soon demand that every course articulate clear goals and outcomes (*see* Huba and Freed, Middle States Commission on Higher Education). This movement believes, just as I do, that “tomorrow’s citizens, tomorrow’s leaders, tomorrow’s experts are sitting in today’s college classrooms” (Huba and Freed 2). What we are doing to prepare these students for their futures must be clearly expressed in course goals and outcomes.

instructors to choose the appropriate means for instruction when what the course should do for students remains shrouded in mystery? Further, instructors must be able to explain the goals of the course to students who take it simply because it's required. Most importantly, we must be able to articulate how their work and experiences in our classrooms will contribute to the larger goals of the university and to each student's lifelong education.

How the course will contribute to the larger goals of the university and the student's lifelong education is a question that has been most recently answered by scholars like Hauser and Fleming, who support rhetorical *paideia* goals for FYC. The idea of rhetorical *paideia* as a larger goal for FYC is promising because it encourages us to think of the course as an integral part of students' educational pursuits at the university—specifically their general education. And that, I believe, is essential to the usefulness of FYC. The course must be about more than simply “teaching students to write well.” While goals like those I adopted in my first few semesters of teaching FYC (genre studies, general skills instruction) might seem practical, even ideal for endowing students with writing abilities they will use throughout their lives, such goals don't allow us to do the most important thing that FYC can and must do for students: lay the groundwork for a lifetime of *paideia*, a process of education that results not just in good writers, but rather in the capacitating of “the individual student to lead the life of an active and responsible citizen” (Hauser 40). FYC can and should be part of the tradition of *paideia*, “a whole process of education that cultivated the mind, trained the intellect and formed the character”; however, we must recognize common rhetorical *paideia* goals for FYC in order to make this happen (Miller 187).

So often, we try and fail to prepare students for life, school, and citizenship beyond our classroom. What we need, I believe, is a higher level of pedagogical abstraction—a goal that

supercedes the details of assignments and day-to-day preparations to give instructors and students alike a sense of how FYC fits into students' broader, *paideiutic* education. In this article, I will argue that although widely-accepted goals for the course like mastering genres or mastering general writing skills often masquerade as *paideiutic* by seeking to endow students with abilities they will use outside of the FYC classroom, they fail to truly impact students' education beyond the FYC classroom. I will then describe some characteristics of a FYC course that seeks to achieve the goals of rhetorical *paideia* and argue that FYC must function as a location for rhetorical *paideia* in order to be a useful general education and writing course for our students.

Genre Goals for FYC

Often, we seek to prepare students for life beyond our FYC classrooms by making the mastery of genres the ultimate goal of our FYC courses. Teaching course-specific genres is an important FYC goal to investigate because it is fairly prominent in both practice and scholarship (Fulkerson; Smit). Fulkerson situates this approach under the larger umbrella of rhetorical approaches to FYC, and describes how a FYC course focused on teaching course-specific genres involves teachers explaining “both required and optional features of the genre in question, as well as any constraints on order of elements” (675). In other words, a FYC course that teaches students to master specific genres involves students and teachers examining “several samples of the target genre plus their rhetorical contexts prior to students' launching their own projects” (Fulkerson 675).

It is important to note that a course focused on teaching course-specific genres seeks to prepare students to respond to writing situations both in and outside of the classroom; its ultimate goal is *paideiutic* in that it seeks to prepare students to write not just the genres of the FYC

course, but of professional and civic life as well. Wendy Bishop would call this preparing students for “writing lives,” or for writing in everyday life beyond the university (16). In fact, scholarship by Bishop, Amy Devitt, Aviva Freedman, and others has portrayed a focus on teaching contexts and genres in FYC as an effective way to endow students with writing skills and strategies that they will use in the classroom and, more importantly, in their lives beyond the university. This is a seemingly *paideiutic* goal for the course that is often adopted by teachers of FYC.

When I talk about adopting the mastery of genres as a goal for the FYC course, I mean focusing our courses on teaching students to successfully write the genres of our courses. Caroline Miller defined rhetorical genres as “a conventional category of discourse based in large-scale typification of rhetorical action” in 1984 (163). More recently, Amy Devitt defined genres as appropriate responses to “situations that writers encounter repeatedly” (576). In other words, teaching genres means teaching students to consider specific exigencies and how to respond to them (Medway). Further, teaching genres involves not just teaching the form or type of a certain genre, but the situation and social context as well (Devitt; Bawarshi; Miller). Fulkerson notes that this type of composition course focuses on close readings of texts, and that “the readings serve as discourse models from which students can generalize” in a genre-focused course (675). Essentially then, a FYC course focused on teaching students to write genres assumes that the best way to teach students to write both in and outside of FYC is to expose students to “target discourses” and then ask them to produce those target discourses on their own (Hyland 26).

A FYC course focused on mastering course-specific genres might look something like my first semester FYC course, which aimed to teach students how to respond appropriately to the exigencies they were assigned to respond to—the prescribed writing prompts for the course.

Because our writing program uses a rhetoric focus for FYC, the students spent much of their semester contemplating rhetorical situation, social context, and audience of their writing assignments. The idea of responding appropriately to the situations they encountered as writers was consistently emphasized throughout the semester. This meant that we spent a great deal of time discussing the appropriate form of students' writing, looking at sample papers, identifying and profiling the audiences to whom their writing was addressed, and investigating the contexts (both social and rhetorical) in which their writing was produced. The ultimate goal of the course was to help students successfully respond to the exigencies that I, the instructor, had put before them. Through this type of instruction, I assumed, students would learn to respond appropriately to the complexity and situatedness of all kinds of writing—both in our classroom and in their civic lives beyond the university.

However, it is this aspect of genre instruction—the necessity of teaching the complex and situated nature of real writing—that makes the teaching of genres an increasingly problematic goal for the FYC course. I must agree with Smit and Wardle, both of whom take issue with teaching genre in the FYC course, that teaching genres can't quite accomplish what we would hope for in FYC. While teaching genres does attempt to teach the situated nature of "real" writing, it also demands that composition instructors teach either genres that students might never encounter outside of the FYC classroom—the often arbitrary "mutt genres" of FYC—or genres of the disciplines, about which the instructors themselves have little knowledge.

Teaching the "mutt genres" of FYC does not initially seem a worrisome practice; it sounds reasonable to use "unique" genres as a form of guided practice for students. Although they might not write an opinion editorial or rhetorical analysis ever again, the idea is that students develop the ability to adapt to different genres—abilities that should transfer to writing

in other areas of study at the university and in life beyond the university. However, the concern here is that when we teach the “mutt” genres of FYC (which can include anything from personal narratives to observations to many kinds of arguments), we teach students to respond to artificial exigencies (Wardle). More importantly, we teach genres out of context, which means that our instruction can’t effectively teach students to respond to the true complexities of real genres.

This problem holds true not just for the genres of FYC, but for all academic genres we might teach students to negotiate. As Smit puts it, “academic essays are not usually taught as an actual response to a personal need or a real exigency” (147). If, as genre theorists posit, genres mediate activities in activity systems, then it is problematic that the academic and “mutt genres teachers assigned [in FYC] mimic genres that mediate activities in other activity systems, but within the FYC system their purposes and audiences are vague or even contradictory” (Wardle 774). In Smit and Wardle’s opinions, and in my own experience, the vague and contradictory contexts of “academic writing” or “mutt genres” provided for students in FYC is problematic and hinders our attempts to successfully teach students to respond to exigencies, both in our classrooms and in future writing endeavors.

Consider for example the final exigency to which my students were required to respond in my FYC course, a research-based argument assignment in which students were asked to support an argument about globalization (that was our topic focus for the course) and direct it to a “general academic audience (e.g., faculty and students on college campuses)” (McInelly and Perry 47). What was I able to teach students about responding to social and rhetorical contexts through this assignment? Not much, as the audience was quite vague and the rhetorical context of the argument artificially constructed by program administrators. Wardle gives additional examples of “argument papers” in FYC, noting that in the FYC course she observed, “the

argument assignment rarely reflected the varied and complex genres that include argument in the broader university” (775). Wardle’s argument is a valid one; the genres we frequently teach in FYC are often simplified, confused, or isolated versions of the complex genres that exist in other disciplines and professions. They are artificial exigencies that don’t teach students to respond to real exigencies in meaningful ways. Or as Smit puts it, “if school genres lack sufficient context to help students grapple with all of the rhetorical constraints they will confront in the world at large, just how useful are they in preparing students to write for that world?” (148).

So, what if we address this genre problem by forsaking the flattened, useless academic genres of a traditional FYC course and instead focus on real, complex genres of the disciplines? How might we go about teaching those genres? As teachers of writing, our area of expertise lies not in biology, nor social science, nor even humanities and art history. Because genres are so complex and ever-changing (Devitt), the genres of these disciplines are best taught by professors and scholars in the discourse communities these students will attempt to join, professors who can impart the content, genre, and discourse community knowledge that students need in order to become capable writers in their fields (Wardle). Moreover, when writing courses like FYC focus on discipline-specific knowledge, “there is the real question of where it should be offered in the curriculum and who is best qualified to teach it” (Smit 146). In other words, a FYC course about writing in biology is not a FYC course and cannot be taught by a FYC instructor.

All of this is not to say that genre theory isn’t helpful for understanding the enactment of FYC, or especially helpful for understanding the situations of the FYC classroom. However, adopting the teaching of academic “mutt” or discipline-specific genres as our ultimate goal for the course is problematic because it does not allow us to prepare students to write successfully in the “world at large.” Of course, we could attempt to teach the genres of public life in an effort to

prepare students to do real writing in the real world. However, we would run into much the same problems with civic genres as we do with mutt and discipline-specific—problems of authenticity of exigencies and expertise of the instructor, especially because authentic, civic genres can vary so widely. So while teaching genres appears to be a *paideiutic* goal that could prepare students for life beyond FYC, in fact it does not ensure that students will begin to become the kind of writers and citizens that FYC can and should help them to become.

Writing Skills Instruction Goals for FYC

If a goal of teaching genres does not allow us to achieve *paideia* in FYC because it does not successfully prepare students for life beyond the FYC classroom, it seems reasonable that a focus on teaching general, transferable writing skills would help us achieve *paideia* by preparing students for writing endeavors outside of our classrooms. And although a general writing skills instruction (GWSI) approach to teaching writing has been much critiqued in the last two decades, it is an approach that persists today, as evidenced by Downs and Wardle, Bacon, and Fulkerson. While Downs and Wardle simply bemoan the fact that writing courses are still focusing on the teaching of fundamental, transferable skills, Fulkerson reminds us that this approach (which fits under his broader heading of current-traditional approaches) is absolutely still in practice today: “there are also still plenty of current-traditionalist teachers. Their views don’t appear in publications, but signs of their existence show up in anecdotes about papers being failed for comma errors, and in the continued sales of handbooks and workbooks” (681). Further, Bacon asserts that GWSI has been an underlying assumption of many a composition course for generations (589).

Such a tenacious goal for FYC bears further scrutiny. Indeed, the idea that we can teach “‘college writing’ as a set of basic, fundamental skills that will apply in other college courses and

in business and public spheres after college” is appealing, especially to students and administrators, because it enhances the perceived utility of FYC (Downs and Wardle 553). When instructors adopt GWSI as the primary goal of FYC, they focus their efforts on teaching students general, transferable writing skills. Adopting this goal for FYC legitimizes the course at the university because it assures administrators, students, and teachers alike that students will develop transferable skills, a valuable commodity in an age of increasing specialization. Further, a focus on writing skill goals can seem especially promising when we are hoping to endow students with abilities that will aid them in life beyond the university; one assumes that students in such a course would learn transferable skills to be used in future writing endeavors at the university and in the world at large.

For all of these reasons, a writing skills instruction goal seems fairly commonsensical for FYC—or at least seemed to me as an instructor with no clear alternative goal for the course in mind. As a new instructor, I knew that I at least wanted my students to leave the course having learned the set of skills we consider necessary for good writing: skills like “the general ability to develop and organize ideas, use techniques for inventing topics worthy of investigation, adapt one’s purpose to an audience, and anticipate reader response” (Petraglia xi).

And so my second semester FYC course had, at its core, a goal of teaching students general, transferable writing skills. In each genre-specific unit (Opinion Editorial, Rhetorical Analysis, Research Paper) I set specific skill goals that delimited the transferable writing skills we would focus on during that unit. Over the course of the unit, I would teach the specific skills I had identified as priorities for that assignment—skills like paragraphing, writing effective thesis statements, etc. At the end of each unit, students completed a reflective exercise where they identified writing skills they would use in future writing endeavors—both at the university and

beyond. At the end of the semester, some students declared that they would indeed use the writing skills we'd focused on—skills like thesis-writing and research capabilities—in future courses and writing endeavors. Success, I thought.

But my delusions of success were short lived. While I knew I had done my best to teach and encourage the transfer of some important general writing skills, I questioned whether the skills students learned in my class would ever really be adapted for use in writing situations outside of the university. Ultimately, teaching students general writing skills was a problematic approach to the course not only because it was difficult to teach, in one semester, all of the writing and communication skills that students would need to be successful writers (Kitzhaber), but also because I could not ensure transfer of those skills to writing endeavors outside of my classroom. As Downs and Wardle remind us, countless researchers “have seriously questioned what students can and do transfer from one context to another” (552). Further, we cannot ensure that “students’ *knowledge* about texts acquired in one setting would be available to them when they undertake writing tasks in other settings” (Bacon 590). Not only is adopting a GWSI goal for FYC difficult to accomplish, but it is also only moderately (if at all) successful in helping students become better writers outside of our classrooms.

Most importantly though, a GWSI approach to the course, when taken to the extreme, effectively divorces thought from writing: when FYC teachers focus solely on teaching general writing skills, they do so at the expense the development of students’ reasoning abilities. This is representative of GWSI’s most recent incarnation, publicly championed by famed educator Stanley Fish. In his publications, both on his *NY Times* blog and in his book, *Save the World on Your Own Time*, Fish insists that writing courses must focus solely on basic, sentence-level writing skills. In his writing course, Fish focuses explicitly on teaching linguistic skills; as the

instructor he is “not interested in ideas”—the students’, the teacher’s, or anyone else’s (40). Instead, students come to understand “linguistic forms” like the structure of the sentence in his FYC course.

While this focus on very basic writing skills might be productive for helping student know how to use language (a reckless way to define writing), it cannot provide the social context and open exchange of ideas that are so essential to effective discourse, written or verbal. And now, more than ever, experts agree that the perception of writing as mastery of general skills is inaccurate, and that writing is indeed socially situated and best learned in specific contexts—not as a set of independent skills of expression (Bacon; Petraglia; Russell). While Fish’s argument for a focus on teaching basic writing skills is an understandable reaction to the frequent politicization of FYC courses, it is too extreme to be effective for FYC. By eliminating any discussion of contingent or public issues, Fish is asking that we stop trying to teach students to understand complex issues, that we stop asking them to join the fray (or conversation as Burke would call it) in their writing and instead suffer through an entire semester of lessons on the nature and structure of language—a curriculum better suited to a linguistics or English language course than to a general education writing course.

Fish’s goals for FYC are important to discuss though because they so dramatically illustrate one end of the FYC goals spectrum. On the one hand, we have those who aim to teach genres, the mastery of exegetic response, in FYC. These instructors believe that students must learn to do to “real” writing, or at least learn techniques for doing real writing by responding to “real” exigencies. On the other hand, we have teachers like Fish and those other silent practitioners alluded to by Fulkerson who toil away, teaching students to “write” by ignoring real or contextualized writing and instead focusing on basic writing skills that may or may not

transfer to other writing endeavors. And while both approaches ultimately seek to help students develop as writers, neither one is *paideiutic* because neither approach encourages the development of abilities that will serve students in their lives beyond FYC.

Rhetorical *Paideia* Goals for FYC

Ultimately, we can strive to endow students with writing abilities they will use in our course and beyond, but we cannot successfully do this without a clear focus on the larger context of our students' educations. In the last two sections, I've described seemingly *paideiutic* approaches to FYC—goals for the course that focus on developing each student's ability to think and write in academic and civic settings beyond FYC—that ultimately do not achieve what I believe FYC can achieve for our students. In this section, I will describe an alternative goal for FYC: rhetorical *paideia*.

While rhetorical *paideia* is based on the values and assumptions of the Greek notion of *paideia*, it is primarily concerned with achieving *paideiutic* education through the teaching of rhetoric or communication skills. Fleming distinguishes between rhetorical *paideia* and the simple acquisition of writing or rhetorical skills, noting that “the goal of rhetorical training is neither a material product, nor a body of knowledge, nor technical proficiency in achieving pre-determined ends; it is rather to become a certain kind of person, one who has internalized the art of rhetoric” (179). A rhetorical *paideia* seeks to achieve, through rhetoric education, the goals of *paideia*—the development of the individual into a good citizen who can participate meaningfully in public affairs (Woodruff).

Moreover, rhetorical *paideia* is a curriculum “involving both theory and practice and aimed at the moral and intellectual development of the student” (Fleming 172). Essentially, rhetorical *paideia* is the idea that we can teach students in such a way that they develop as

communicators, thinkers, *and* citizens. It is the idea that learning to write, or learning to communicate, is about more than checking skills off a list or mastering the conventions of a genre. It truly is about the moral and intellectual development of the student. Rhetorical *paideia* assumes that we can, through the teaching of good communication practices, help our students along their path to becoming Quintilian's good men and women speaking well. Alistair Miller calls the rhetorical *paideia* "a liberal education founded on rhetoric, the very embodiment of an educational philosophy that seeks to develop practical reason or judgment together with self-knowledge" (184). These two goals—developing practical reason or judgment as well as self-knowledge—are the heart of rhetorical *paideia* and what rhetorical education can do for students.

But what would a FYC focused on achieving rhetorical *paideia* look like? You might already have ideas, as elements of the rhetorical *paideia* have been underlying, but perhaps unexpressed, assumptions for your courses. However, I'd like to describe the goals of this type of course:

First, the primary goal of a rhetorically paideiutic FYC course would be self-knowledge through writing. Writing must be a primary focus of a rhetorically *paideiutic* FYC course because it is the vehicle through which students will develop self-knowledge. A goal of self-knowledge comes naturally to a course on writing and communication, and it is a goal that I think many of us have already adopted for our courses, even without the specific direction of our writing programs, or training materials. Instructors like Sheila Carter-Tod have long encouraged this kind of development in FYC courses:

Previously driven and guided only by our own knowledge of what makes for a good writing class, my colleagues and I taught first-year writing courses that

encouraged students to realize that writing is valuable. We helped them understand that through writing they could better reflect upon and gain insight into themselves and their world. (82)

Isn't this self knowledge ultimately what we want for every student in our FYC classes? As Carter-Tod learned from her own experiences as a FYC instructor, our students need more than a mastery of basic syntactical skills. Rather, they need opportunities where they are "encouraged to write towards a sense of themselves as authors, and individuals, who could assume the power to shape their social and political environments" (82). In other words, a writing course like FYC has the power to help students write towards self-knowledge, and not just expressivist self-knowledge; writing, or "the essay" as Alistair Miller calls it, is the vehicle through which students gain a sense of self as author, as citizen, as empowered individual. This is the ultimate goal of the rhetorical *paideia*, and it cannot be accomplished without writing. Thus the focus of rhetorically *paideiutic* FYC courses must be on writing—not on a course theme (i.e. Technology and Paranoia), and not on basic writing skills. Instead, students must read and write towards a sense of self as both author and individual.

It is important to note that a rhetorically *paideiutic* FYC course would have a dual focus on knowledge of the self as author and the self as individual (rather than a general focus on self-knowledge through writing). While the idea of focusing explicitly on writing in FYC is not a novel one, (see David, et al.; Downs and Wardle) the two aspects of self-knowledge through writing are not often addressed. It is important though that students not only come to know themselves as authors and come to understand their own writing practices (see Downs and Wardle), but it is also vital that they come to know themselves as thinkers, or more specifically, "individuals who could assume the power to shape their social and political environments"

(Carter-Tod 82). Essentially, students must come to know themselves as a writer in the procedural sense, gaining an understanding of how they write, but they must also come to know themselves as a writer in a more personal sense, understanding why they write what they write and how their thinking influences what they write. Writing assignments, both reflective and publics-centered, are the means we can use to achieve such ends in FYC.

Reflective writing assignments can help students come to know themselves as writers and encourage better use of writing practices. Consider, for example, a reflective writing assignment in which students reflect on and describe their own writing processes. After completing this assignment in my tutoring training course, students frequently remark how helpful it is for them to understand their own writing processes. They find they become more efficient writers once they understand how they confront rhetorical exigencies like course writing assignments. Reflective writing assignments that ask writers to come to know themselves as authors in the procedural sense can help students become more confident and efficient writers. Further, such assignments can empower students to take on future writing tasks they will encounter outside of our classrooms (Downs and Wardle).

In addition to reflective writing in which students draw from their own experiences to better understand themselves as writers, students must also engage in writing assignments where they must make decisions about content (what they will write) and rhetorical effectiveness (how they write). Assignments in which they must defend their choices can help students know themselves as individuals seeking to make arguments and changes in their communities. These kinds of assignments are essential to the development of *phronesis*, and bring us to *the second goal of a rhetorically paideutic FYC course: the course would encourage the development of*

phronesis, or practical wisdom, by asking students to produce rhetorically effective writing for publics.

Perhaps the most important assumption of a rhetorically *paideiutic* FYC course is that the ability to make reasoned judgments and the ability to write effectively are inseparable; as Alistair Miller notes, “it is the essay that is the best vehicle for learning how to think and make reasoned judgments” (184). And while this notion is confirmed in scholarship (see Fleming, Hauser) it is also confirmed, I think, in our own experiences as teachers. How many times has writing or rewriting an essay prompted a student to think about an issue in a new way, to consider new or additional evidence, and to take an overall better-reasoned stance on an issue? If we are striving not only to teach students to use writing practices effectively, but also how to make and defend arguments and to “make a choice,” then writing assignments that encourage the development of *phronesis* are essential to achieving our rhetorical *paideia* goals (Zernike 2).

The development of *phronesis* is not solely about writing, nor is it singularly focused on the development of critical thinking. Rather, developing *phronesis* means that we engender in our students, through the teaching of communication skills, the ability to think and decide judiciously about personal and community issues. Essentially, we assist students as they develop into careful thinkers and writers. This is not a far-fetched goal for those of us teaching writing—in fact, careful reasoning is something that most of us already seek to teach in FYC, especially through assignments like analyses and research-based arguments. Even ancient instructors like Homer “recognized the essential connection between oratory and sagacious judgment and the importance of that connection for sound communal deliberation and decision making” (Sloane 631). Adopting the cultivation of *phronesis*, “a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man,” as a goal for FYC can allow us to re-

appropriate the course as one that adds to a student's general education—and not just in title alone (Noel 273).

What this means is that students in a rhetorical *paideia*-focused FYC course, in addition to writing reflectively and coming to know themselves as writers on a process level, would also research and write about contingent issues that are important to them. As David et al. put it, “rather than composing solipsistic, expressionist pieces, students can be provoked to think about what they are saying, and why and how they are saying it—and the motivation for such hard thinking is the greatest when writing springs from a writer's desire to give voice to his or her ideas” (527). In other words, students must write to give voice to their ideas, which are in turn honed by their writing. When they are asked (and taught) to produce rhetorically effective writing that demonstrates hard thinking about their ideas and their writing, they are not only coming to know themselves as citizen thinkers, but they are also honing practical reasoning skills—thereby achieving the two aims of rhetorical *paideia*. Ultimately, the development of writing ability, or eloquence, and *phronesis* are inextricably linked: “eloquence and practical wisdom or judgment were regarded as two sides of the same coin, the one entailing the other, and they were outcomes of a whole process of education that cultivated the mind, trained the intellect and formed the character—the process the Ancient Greeks termed *paideia*” (Fleming 187). If our FYC courses are to prepare students for a lifetime of citizenship and writing, then the development of *phronesis* must be a key component of that education.

The kind of writing assignments I'm talking about—the kind that ask students to create rhetorically effective texts regarding contingent issues—are already in use by some who ascribe to the public writing movement. Rosa Eberly, one of the early scholars in public writing, described her classroom as a “protopublic” space in which the goal was to “help students create

and enter real-world discourses through the protopublic space of the writing classroom” (174). Interestingly, she does not suggest that classrooms should be made into their own publics as a sort of imagined and artificially-constructed training ground where students write to each other as if members of the same public. Rather, students think, talk, and “write about and for different publics” (172). What Eberly suggests, and what scholars like Christian Weisser, Elizabeth Ervin, and Susan Wells confirm, is that we can in fact ask students to engage with contingent issues—especially contingent community issues—in their writing. This kind of writing is central to the development of *paideia*, as it encourages students to develop *phronesis* as they reason about issues, and enhances their self-knowledge as authors and actors in their community.

Finally, a paideiutic FYC course must be a collaborative course—not only in that teacher and student must be of the same mind regarding larger course goals, but also in that the course must use collaborative conversation to develop self-knowledge, *phronesis*, and writing abilities. Miller reminds us that Dewey believed “that the self is formed in collaborative, active and practical interaction with one’s natural and social environment” (186). Bruffee’s theories of thought, conversation, and writing are useful here; *paideia* assumes that with writing development or eloquence comes a similar development of *phronesis* or judgment. Similarly, Bruffee believes that conversation, writing, and thought are inextricably linked. If thought is internalized conversation, and conversation is the key to honing thought, then we must encourage conversation in our FYC courses. When we ask students to converse with one another, we allow them to hone their reflexive thinking abilities. And when we ask them to write, we ask them to hone those speaking and thinking skills even further, as “thought is internalized public and social thought” and “writing is internalized talk made public and social again” (Bruffee 130).

This relationship is something that is paramount in a rhetorically *paideiutic* FYC course: we encourage conversation, which hones student thinking, which leads to better writing, which leads to more conversation, and so on (see also David et al.7). Why? Because

Speaking and listening to one another—and exploring their similarities and differences (along lines suggested by the instructor or developed on their own)—provides opportunities for students not only to learn the assigned materials more effectively but also to experience ‘relativizing moments’ from deliberating with their classmates. These moments create opportunities for students to develop critical reason, judgment, creativity, and transcendence. (Jablonski 343)

In simpler terms, conversation and collaboration are key to student’s development of critical reason and judgment, which in turn are critical to their development as rhetoricians and writers.

In order to achieve these goals, *it is essential that the rhetorically paideiutic FYC course’s goals be clearly articulated to teachers and students alike*. It is my firm belief that we must be upfront with students about the reasons they’re taking our course—especially courses that are required by the university and are not voluntary. As teachers, we need to know what the course should do for students. Similarly, our students need to know what the course is intended to do for them. Often we find that while the goals of a course might be clear to instructors or to our department heads and administrators, our students aren’t in on the secret. Fulkerson confirms this, noting that “the students themselves in general hold a different view of what we should be up to than we do” (680). Teacher and student can find themselves with conflicting goals for FYC, and that does not bode well for achievement of either party’s goals. Only when we resolve the cross purposes of teacher and student can we move toward a larger goal of rhetorical *paideia*

and prepare students for their lives outside of FYC. And the only way to resolve those cross purposes is to be clear with students about the goals of the course and how those goals can and should be important to them as individuals.

Of course, the issue of assessment for a course of this nature is an important concern. How does one measure *phronesis* or self-knowledge? I will admit, this seems problematic. However, I am not asking that we abandon our more traditional objectives and assessment tools for FYC. The course remains one focused on thinking and writing. What I am asking is that we use these requirements and assessment tools (graded essays, presentations, etc.) to work towards a larger, more coherent goal of *paideiutic* education for students. We won't need to radically overhaul assessment tools, other than to ensure that the things we are requiring of students are working toward our larger purpose of developing *phronesis* and self-knowledge. Additionally, the kind of development this type of FYC course hopes to engender in students is the kind of development that is reflected in conversation, thought, and writing—all of which are produced and assessed in our writing courses.

I am also aware that while the argument that FYC should be focused on the development of individual thinking abilities and communication skills is not a new idea, it is, in some ways, a frightening one for many. This is indeed a risky idea in today's culture of specialization: as Lanham admonishes, "the rhetorical *paideia* is not only an applied curriculum, it is resolutely a *generalist* one, and nothing is so suspect in a specialist world as a generalist" (138). Perhaps this is why it has not been embraced or clearly expressed by writing programs and administrators. But a fear of the difficult, unknown, or simply lengthy should not deter us from making progress with such an important course.

Why Rhetorical *Paideia* Goals for FYC?

Implementing rhetorical *paideia* goals for FYC might prove difficult and will indeed be, for some, a journey into the unknown. However, the very nature of FYC (typically part of a general education core), as well as its focus on teaching writing, justify this shift toward a more unified set of goals—goals that focus on the larger arc of a student’s education rather than simple skill development. In fact, FYC must adopt the broader goals of rhetorical *paideia* in order to achieve the aims of general education and writing courses. Self-knowledge and practical wisdom goals are essential to each student’s development as a citizen, which is one of the primary goals of general education. Further, the ability to produce rhetorically effective texts and to reason about contingent issues are essential aims of writing courses. Thus, by embracing rhetorical *paideia* goals for FYC we are merely asking the course to be all that it could be in the first place—a course that contributes meaningfully to students’ general educations while also encouraging their development as writers.

It is essential that FYC adopt the goals of rhetorical *paideia* if it is to achieve its aims as a general education course. At most universities, general education is a constellation of core classes “designed to give college students a firm grounding in the areas of knowledge they will use for a lifetime” (ACTA). The concept of general education is grounded in more than administrator’s sadistic tendencies; it is widely acknowledge that students need more than just specialized education from their university experience. Educators like Sue Coleman, president of the University of Michigan, have loftier goals for their students than the development of technical expertise; in a recent article in the *New York Times*, Dr. Coleman expressed that she wants students to be able to analyze, gather, and assess information. She also believes that we must teach students ““how to make an argument, how to defend an argument, to make a choice””

(qtd. in Zernike 2). On my own university's website, administrators write that a general education enhances and enlarges the education provided by a specific major, and "students' perspectives about themselves and the world around them are deepened" by general education courses ("The Value"). Ultimately, the idea behind general education is that students must gain more than just technical expertise from their education; self-knowledge (deepening their perspectives) and *phronesis* (the ability to make choices and arguments) are essential components of this general education.

Although these broader purposes of general education are occasionally lost on students, educators generally agree that a university education should do more for students than produce technical expertise (Hauser; Medhurst), and that education should prepare students for a lifetime of learning, citizenship and leadership (ACTA; Jablonski; Medhurst). What this means is that students should be prepared by their education to be more than just accountants, nurses or biologists. Rather, they must be prepared to learn, lead, and participate in civic life. As Hauser reminds us, "An education that provides theoretical knowledge and technical skill without the balancing capacity to consider the civic consequences of their actions is a nightmare" (Hauser 43). In other words, a general education course has a specific duty: its purpose is to endow students with the ability to reason and consider consequences, and the capacity to be responsible, contributing citizens who can continue to learn and lead in their lives beyond the university.

If indeed the goal of general education is to prepare students for a lifetime of learning, citizenship, and leadership, then FYC must contribute to that goal. And the best way to contribute to the larger goals of general education is by adopting rhetorical *paideia* as the course's larger, transparent goal. By doing so, we simply acknowledge that FYC should do what all general education courses do—prepare students for lives of learning, citizenship and

leadership. And rhetoric and *paideia* cannot be separated from preparation for civic life. Hauser reminds us that rhetoric education is central to civic education, one of the ultimate goals of a general education (41). When we require students to produce rhetorically effective texts that present arguments on contingent issues, and when we ask them to engage in collaborative talk and writing with other students, we are doing much more than helping students jump through the hoops of FYC. Instead, we are preparing students, through rhetorical *paideia*, to continue to learn, lead, and participate in civic life; we are helping students meet the aims of general education.

Not only does adopting rhetorical *paideia* goals for FYC allow us to prepare students for their lives beyond the university, but it also allows us to achieve important writing course aims like the development of students' abilities to write and to reason. In 1995, David et al. outlined guiding assumptions for writing courses, choosing as the primary objective of writing courses "the development of writing and the writer" (525). Choosing the writer and his or her development as the primary focus of FYC was not a new idea then; Maxine Hairston proposed the same thing in 1992 when she argued that "writing courses, especially required freshman courses, should not be *for* anything or *about* anything other than writing itself, and how one uses it to learn and think and communicate" (emphasis original, 179). Rhetorical *paideia* goals like focusing on student development and teaching students to produce rhetorically effective writing help us achieve this essential goal of a writing course. The goals of rhetorical *paideia* and the goals of writing courses are not at cross purposes; rather, they reinforce each other, which means that rhetorical *paideia* goals simply help us achieve the goals of a good writing course.

In fact, it is the collision of thought and language in FYC make rhetorical *paideia* goals so uniquely appropriate for FYC. Language "has the power to shape or limit the manner in

which an individual's ideas are formed" (Agnew 23). More simply put, writing and the study of writing have the power to shape the way students think, and can help students understand and create knowledge through their writing. For David et al., the development of writing and writer are inseparable; truly, it is "through education, which guides reason towards sharper critical judgment" that we learn not only to communicate well, but also to think well (Agnew 30). This is the very goal of rhetorical *paideia*, and it is also the goal of writing courses.

Ultimately, rhetorical *paideia* and writing cannot be separated; Richard Lanham notes that rhetorical *paideia* has to occur in writing courses: he argues that rhetorical *paideia* should occur in "the lower divisions, in the composition courses and in a series of humanities courses designed to follow them, or in the upper divisions, in a Writing Across the Curriculum program" (140-41). In other words, rhetorical *paideia* must happen in a writing course like FYC, not just because rhetoric and writing are connected, but because *phronesis* and self-knowledge are best developed *through writing*. That is why rhetorical *paideia* goals are not only essential to fulfilling FYC's role as a general education course, but also to fulfilling FYC's role as a writing course. The goals of the rhetorical *paideia* are to develop each student's ability to think and communicate clearly. This must also be the goal of FYC if it is to truly be a writing course.

Of course we cannot accomplish the goals of rhetorical *paideia* by adhering dogmatically to popular goals like teaching genres and writing skills. The mere instruction of general writing skills or practice of writing in specific genres cannot accomplish what needs to be accomplished in FYC—a general education, the beginning of lifelong learning, rhetorical *paideia*. Such focuses (GWSI, genre) require that we as teachers dwell on what students can do and what they know. However, if we adopt a rhetorical *paideia* focus for the course, making the development of practical reason (*phronesis*) and self-knowledge through writing the primary goals of the

course, we can encourage in students more than just a mastery of skills or genres. We can encourage the individual development that general education courses *should* encourage.

The crux of the issue is this: while any old version of FYC (genre-centered, GWSI-centered, CCS-centered, etc.) might help students know what we want them to know, do what we want them to do, and understand what we want them to understand, FYC can and must be more than just a course about knowing, doing and understanding (Harrington, et al. 323). It must also be about *becoming*—about developing as an individual, a writer, and a citizen. And without a clear set of goals focused on this idea of *becoming* (and becoming more than just proficient at jumping through academic hoops), we cannot harness FYC’s full potential for students who must take it.

What I’m proposing for FYC isn’t as radical as it might sound; in fact, I believe we can adapt assignments and strategies already in use in many of our classrooms to achieve these new desired goals. The difference, I would argue, is that instead of asking students to successfully write a genre or even exhibit mastery of basic writing skills, we are asking students to think and write towards larger goals of self-knowledge and reasoning. It truly is a higher level of pedagogical abstraction. Instead of focusing on smaller goals like producing rhetorically effective writing for the sake of learning “to write,” we would instead be asking our students to work towards a larger goal of rhetorical *paideia*—of preparing through development of self-knowledge and practical wisdom to function meaningfully outside of our classroom.

Conclusion

It is important to consider and choose carefully the goals we adopt for FYC. Because it is a course that is often required of all students, and one that is often taught by novice instructors, it is essential that we clearly articulate what the course should accomplish for students. If we do

not, students will remain resigned to simply jumping through the hoops of FYC in order to pass off a requirement, and instructors like myself will remain lost, grasping for a useful goal for a course that has potential to provide students with so much more than technical expertise in writing. Over the course of this article, I have made the argument that some of the current goals for the FYC course, while seemingly *paideiutic*, in fact do not meaningfully enhance our students' lives beyond the FYC classroom. Ultimately, we must achieve a larger set of goals: we must seek to achieve rhetorical *paideia* in FYC. We must help students gain insights, through their development as writers, into their world (*phronesis*) and themselves (self knowledge), and FYC is the vehicle through which we can accomplish these goals. If we are to harness the full potential of FYC, we must make the development of students as writers, thinkers, and citizens the ultimate goal of our FYC courses. In doing so, we can ensure that we won't be left to wonder how our course will impact students in their academic and civic lives, and neither will our students. Instead, we will be able to work, as students and teachers, towards common, larger goals that are in tune with the very nature of FYC as a general education and writing course.

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