

Annual Assessment Report AY22-23: Rhetoric and Language

I. LOGISTICS

1. Please indicate the name and email of the program contact person to whom feedback should be sent (usually Chair, Program Director, or Faculty Assessment Coordinator).

Mark Meritt
Department Chair

2. Please indicate if you are submitting report for (a) a Major, (b) a Minor, (c) an aggregate report for a Major & Minor (in which case, each should be explained in a separate paragraph as in this template), (d) a Graduate or (e) a Certificate Program

None of the above.

3. Please note that a Curricular Map should accompany every assessment report. Has there been any revisions to the Curricular Map?

II. MISSION STATEMENT & PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Were any changes made to the program mission statement since the last assessment cycle?

No changes

Program Mission

The mission of the Rhetoric Program in the Department of Rhetoric and Language is to teach all University of San Francisco students to communicate effectively and ethically in academic, civic, and professional contexts. Through our classes, service, and co-curricular activities, we advance the Jesuit ideal of *eloquentia perfecta*--reason and eloquence in writing, speaking, and languaging--and guide our students as they learn to engage critically with the texts that influence their beliefs, values and actions.

2. Were any changes made to the program learning outcomes (PLOs) since the last assessment cycle?

No changes

Rhetoric Program Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the rhetoric program, students will be able to:

1. Explain and apply rhetorical concepts, theories, and principles in the process of analyzing various texts and rhetorical situations.
2. Evaluate the ethics and effectiveness of their own and others' communication in academic, civic, and professional situations.
3. Produce research-driven written, oral, and digital communication that demonstrates awareness, knowledge, and application of rhetorical concepts.
4. Articulate and interpret their own rhetorical choices and composing processes.

3. Assessment Schedule: Your assessment schedule between APRs: a year-by-year list of PLOs assessed since your last APR and those to be assessed before your next APR (Contact your FDCCD for clarification if needed)

- 2019: Most recent APR
- 2018-2019: Articulate and interpret their own rhetorical choices and composing processes. Note: Due to the fact that USF decided to go "Test Optional," the Department of Rhetoric and Language had to prepare to place students in writing classes using a method other than test scores. Given that situation, we designed and assessed a placement tool. This effort assessed the "co-curricular activities" mentioned in our mission statement, although the object of our assessment—placement—might be better labeled "pre-curricular." Thus, this wasn't really an assessment of a PLO, but rather an assessment of the *effectiveness of our new placement system (the Directed Self Placement Test)*.
- 2019-2020: During this (pandemic) year, we were given free rein to choose our own assessment goals. We elected to evaluate "*anti-racism in course descriptions*" for RHET 103, RHET 110/N, RHET 120, and RHET 130/131 (the courses taken by the vast majority of USF students to fulfill their Core A requirements).
- 2020-2021: **Articulate and interpret their own rhetorical choices and composing processes.**
- 2021-2022: We didn't assess a program LO, but instead a pilot LO of the capstone course in our proposed "vertical" curriculum: "*Identify, analyze, and critique norms and biases of genres within your discipline and others*"
- 2022-2023: *Student success in hybrid modality courses* (current year)

What were the most important suggestions/feedback from the FDCCD on your last assessment report? How did you incorporate or address the suggestion(s) in this report?

The feedback we received was as follows: “I appreciate the work being done in Rhetoric and Language to think critically about the student experience overall and how your course content assists students as individual scholars as well as in their major curricula. I hope the annual assessment process provides space for your department to explore the curricular advancements that interest your faculty and students. **In future years, I encourage you to continue with these creative assessment activities even if they deviate from the traditional PLO assessment.** Your process and report were so well organized that I honestly have very little feedback to offer. The three-pronged approach to your evaluation of “Course C” is exactly what we are looking for in our assessment activities in order to be able to draw informed conclusions, as you have done in this report. **Additionally, your use of direct assessment of student work products and a survey of your students (indirect assessment) to compare your pilot courses to their non-pilot counterparts is exceptional.** The discussion, analysis, and closing the loop sections are also very clear and include specific steps for refining the pilot courses and your plan for communicating this information to your (large) faculty body.

I appreciated the discussion on difficulties we face with developing skills related to analysis and critique, and the way you tie that back to larger, University-wide assessment initiatives like the Core Graduation Competencies project. **Finally, I love that you included the student feedback from your survey within the report.** This is such an incredible way to include the students' voice in this process and to ensure that their experiences are centered throughout the development of your vertical curriculum.

I apologize for my lack of constructive feedback, but please keep doing what you all are doing! I am so impressed with your work on assessment and the way you center your students and your commitment to social justice/anti-racism year after year. If it is alright with you, I would love to use this report as an example for other programs moving forward. Thank you again!”

Response: In response to this feedback, we continued with a “non-traditional” approach this year, both in our selection of *what* to assess and *how* we assessed it.

What to assess: Rather than assess a single PLO, we decided to assess the effectiveness of a specific teaching modality - hybrid - in accomplishing our overall program outcomes. The dean’s request for instructors or departments to submit applications for continued permission to teach in a hybrid modality presented an immediate and pressing need for the R&L department to determine how effective and engaging that modality has been for our students and faculty over the last 2-3 semesters. We felt that this evaluation was necessary in order to a) determine whether or not a department-wide application was warranted, and b) to justify our request with evidence and analysis.

How to assess: The feedback from last year’s report confirmed the importance of gathering data from multiple sources, including both “direct” and “indirect.” Because of the difficulty in finding a single student “work-product” to compare across hybrid and fully in-person modalities, we looked for alternative sources of “direct-assessment” data, including final grades. We also consider results of Teaching Effectiveness Surveys to be a “direct-assessment” data point for this particular purpose. In turn, we combined this with indirect assessment, namely faculty and students surveys, in order to reflect and promote the “student voices” that we were commended for in the feedback to our last report.

3. State what you assessed for the academic year 2022-2023.

We assessed student success in hybrid modality courses.

III.METHODOLOGY

We drew on multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative data about student success and student experiences across two academic years and dozens of sections of the three major Core A1 and A2 Rhetoric and Language courses. As a result, we analyzed the experiences and performance of thousands of USF students.

- We examined data from two iterations of the University-wide New Student Success Survey (Fall 2022 and Fall 2023)
- We conducted a survey of Rhetoric and Language faculty who taught hybrid courses in Fall 2023
- We conducted a survey of students who were enrolled in hybrid RHET courses in Fall 2023 (with a robust response rate of 265 students)
- We compared data from BLUE Teaching Effectiveness surveys for 3 semesters of Public Speaking (RHET 103), Written Communication 1 (RHET 110), and Written Communication 2 (RHET 120)
- We analyzed student grades for the academic years 2021-22 and 2022-2023 with the goal of answering the following questions:
 1. Is there a difference in student success in hybrid vs fully in-person classes in RHET, as indicated by grades?
 - a. What is the average final grade of students in RHET hybrid and fully in-person courses?
 - b. What is the DFW rate (grade of D or F or withdrawal) of RHET hybrid and fully in-person courses?
 2. Is there a difference in subsequent student performance in RHET courses? In other words, for students taking courses hybrid or in-person RHET 106 or RHET

- 110, do we see a difference in average final grades in subsequent RHET courses (120 or 310)?
3. Is there a difference in subsequent student performance in non-RHET courses? In other words, considering students who take hybrid vs in-person RHET courses, do we see a difference in average final grades in subsequent non-RHET courses?
 4. Is there a difference in retention for students who take hybrid vs. in-person RHET courses (isolating data for 1st-year and transfer students)?
 5. In each of the above queries, is there a difference in the impact of hybrid vs fully in-person on Pell-Grant-eligible students and non-Pell-Grant-eligible students?

We consider these data to be robust, while acknowledging their limitations. For example, the New Student Success Survey, our departmentally administered surveys, and the BLUE Teaching Effectiveness survey included data from thousands of students across 4 semesters of instruction. However, these data are not a direct measure of students' success. We similarly have information about the grades of thousands of students, which gives the appearance of a direct measure. However, treating average grades as a direct measure of student learning or success would be neither statistically nor ethically responsible.

Our team identified two methods that we were not able to pursue due to lack of resources or expertise:

1. examination, analysis, and/or rating of student work
2. responsible statistical analysis of grade data and BLUE survey results

IV. RESULTS & MAJOR FINDINGS

Distribution:

Our distribution of hybrid versus fully in-person classes has been fairly stable since our return from pandemic conditions (Spring 22, Fall 22, Fall 23). We've offered around 50% hybrid courses across our main offerings (Rhet 110, Rhet 120, and Rhet 103).

BLUE Teaching Effectiveness Scores:

BLUE scores in Rhet 110, 120, and 103 were broadly similar in hybrid and in-person modalities. In fact, composition-focused hybrid courses (Rhet 110 and 120) have slightly higher scores for 2 out of the 3 semesters we compared. Although it's hard to discern "significance," we did note slightly lower scores for Rhet 103 (public speaking) across all three semesters. This does prompt us to consider a more rigorous internal application process for Rhet 103 instructors. But, on the whole, this data **does not indicate lower student engagement or learning in hybrid sections, and, in fact, may indicate that hybrid improves the experience in composition courses** (See Appendix A for full BLUE data).

CIPE Grade Data:

CIPE data on student grades **indicated almost no differences between the average grades of students in hybrid or in-person RHET courses** (and almost no differences between Pell-eligible and non-Pell-eligible students). This held true longitudinally as well - there were no differences in grades for students who had been in hybrid vs in-person in subsequent RHET courses or in subsequent courses in general. But the data did indicate a **higher DFW rate for hybrid RHET courses** (although there is no significant difference between Pell and Non-Pell recipients). We also see that the gap is closing; in other words, we may be seeing an emerging trend that collapses the difference between hybrid and in-person DFW rates. (See Appendix B for CIPE data).

Survey Findings:

University-Wide Student Success Survey

Relevant data from the university-wide Student Success Survey indicates **almost no difference in student experience between hybrid and in-person** (results shared by Sarah Solloway, Assistant Dean for Student Academic Success). Regarding the Fall 22 data, Sarah wrote, “From my interpretation of the data, it seems that hybrid and hyflex modalities **are not negatively impacting student learning** (almost 89% of them say no impact) from what they are telling us on the survey. We had a response rate of 87% of the incoming class, so the data is robust.” While this indicates that hybrid courses are not “net negative,” we wanted to assess if they might, in fact, be “net positive.” Thus, we aimed to dig deeper into student and faculty experience, with a particular focus on the benefits/drawbacks of hybrid for teaching rhetorical theories and skills.

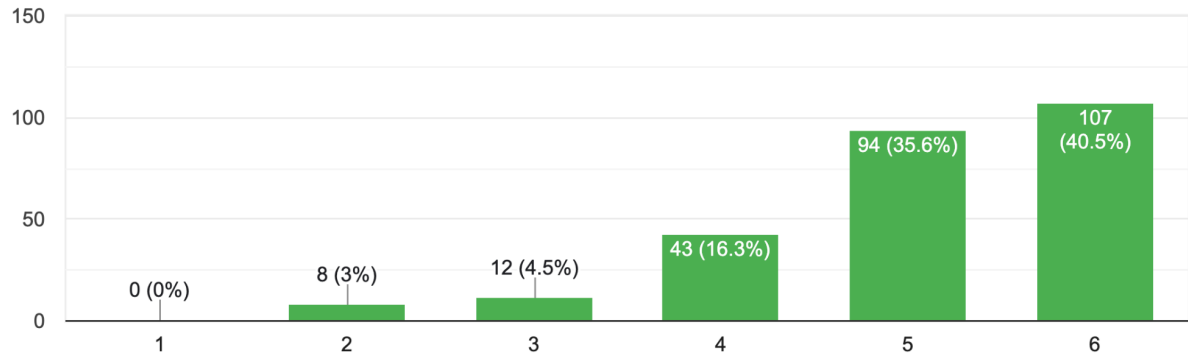
Rhetoric-Specific Student and Faculty Surveys:

We conducted two surveys of hybrid sections in R&L in Fall 23, one focused on faculty experience, and one on student experience (with a robust response rate of 265 students). Both faculty and students reported some issues with disengagement, but the bulk of their comments were overwhelmingly positive.

Selected student survey results are as follows (1 indicates “Strong Negative and 6 indicates “Strong Positive”):

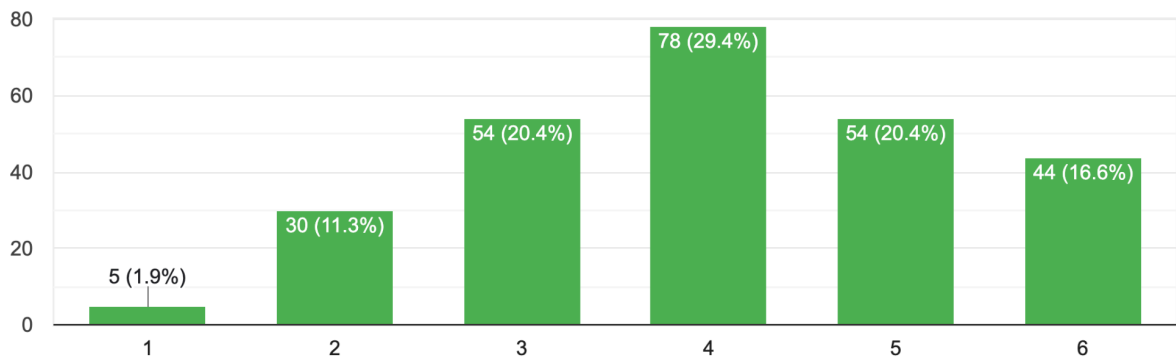
1. Overall learning experience: How has your experience in a hybrid RHET course impacted your learning?

264 responses



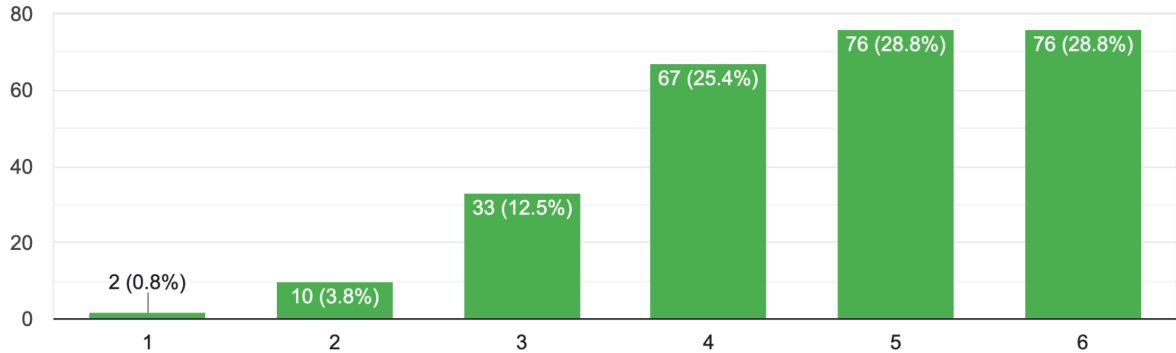
2. Community: How has your experience in a hybrid RHET course impacted your connection to your classmates?

265 responses



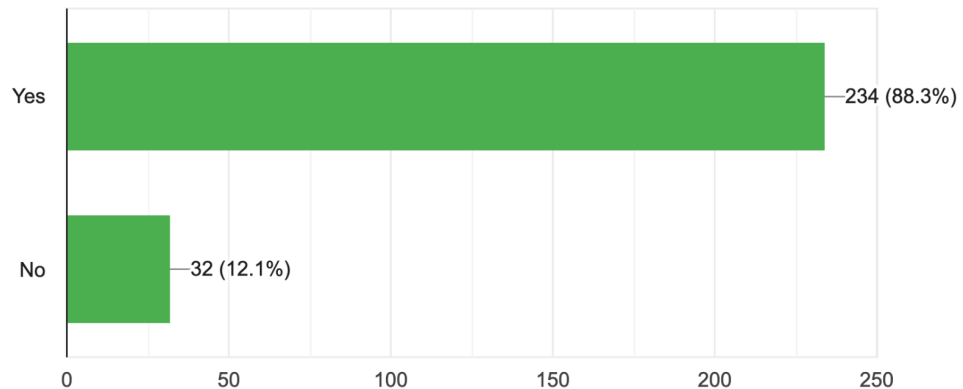
3. Instructor: How has your experience in a hybrid RHET course impacted your connection to your instructor?

264 responses



6. If you could choose to take a hybrid RHET class again, would you do so?

265 responses



Students and faculty also noted that hybrid instruction offered teaching/learning benefits not available in fully in-person classes, including:

- reducing student performance anxiety;
- providing more modalities for student engagement and discussion (zoom chat, google slides/docs, etc), particularly helpful for more introverted or international students;
- offering more opportunities for individualized support (i.e., providing private space for instructor/student one-on-ones);
- minimizing distractions during individual writing and revision work;

- reducing barriers to hosting guest speakers;
- facilitating the sharing and creation of online or video resources;
- supporting instruction in online/multimodal communication;
- Reducing stress and easing time-management

Student comments that reflect these benefits include:

- “[It was a benefit to] be able to work remotely and ask questions in the chat rather than speaking out in the zoom meeting or in class. Breakout rooms got me connected to some students that I worked with during projects or peer review.”
- “Being in an argument and debate class, it was interesting to see assignments carried out in both an online and in-person setting, and I believe it did aid my presentation skills. In the future, we might have to carry out meetings or speeches online, and I think having this hybrid format better prepared me for those scenarios.”
- “During a speech or presentation, being in the comfort of your own home can make it easier to give as you are less anxious, you are more relaxed./ Being able to go home on weekends in stressful times./ Whenever I felt like taking a break or missing class, I was able to hold out until the hybrid course. I still did work, it was just comfortable and quiet while I did it.”

While more research is certainly warranted (particularly in terms of equity and whether all students have access to fast internet and a “quiet space”), we see the stress and anxiety-reduction as a positive development, given the growing mental health issues in our student population.

In terms of challenges, both students and faculty indicated some issues with lack of class community and dis-engagement. The following student comments reflect this:

- “I have really not connected with my classmates in this semester, I feel like this class should've been one where I gained relationships with classmates but I did not get that and I am sad about that.”
- “There are a couple things I don't like being on Zoom for Rhet for. Engaging is kind of hard to do over Zoom because you'll be formulating your answer but because its harder to gauge your body language over Zoom, there are times the professor can just blast by and you won't be able to participate. There's also the issue of lecture-heavy portions of the class. When we have slides and it's really just students listening and not necessarily having to engage, it's very easy to become disengaged from the class. This is the case for other classes but I found it most prominent in this class.”

(See Appendix C for full survey data)

Discussion:

Ultimately, the data we have collected from BLUE evals, CIPE, and surveys of students and faculty have helped us to develop a fairly nuanced assessment of hybrid and in-person classes. This has revealed some differences that we will continue to consider, and evaluate, through our assessment process in Spring and Fall 24.

Analysis:

Based on our analysis of multiple measures of quantitative and qualitative data, we believe that while there are areas of concern we intend to evaluate further, **there is no robust indication of negative impacts from hybrid courses and significant evidence of pedagogical benefits.**

As noted above, our department has had an approximately 50/50 in-person/hybrid distribution of courses in our main offerings. Roughly speaking, we would like to preserve this distribution going forward, as it allows students to choose an option that speaks to their goals, strengths, and constraints.

Most of the metrics we analyzed indicated roughly equivalent experiences and outcomes in hybrid and in-person classes. Our own surveys suggest that both students and faculty see real pedagogical value in the hybrid modality. Further, both students and faculty noted the mental health benefits of hybrid courses. Respondents noted that the hybrid format reduced stress and eased time management.

However, we do see some differences that are concerning. Student quantitative survey responses suggest **challenges with developing “course community”** (relationships among students), even though dyadic relationships between instructors and students seems relatively unaffected. Both student and faculty qualitative comments also suggest some **issues with engagement**, including turning off cameras and failing to participate as robustly in small groups.

In turn, CIPE indicates a **higher DFW rate for hybrid courses**. It may be that students who choose the hybrid option tend to be those juggling additional commitments (like jobs or caretaking), which make it more challenging to complete the course. Or this may be caused by the increased disengagement that was articulated by students and faculty in our survey - it may be easier to simply stop attending or participating in a hybrid course (thus leading to dropping or failing the course). However, we also see that the gap is closing; in other words, we may be seeing an emerging trend that collapses the difference between hybrid and in-person DFW rates. To truly ascertain if this is a trend, we need one or two more semesters-worth of data.

V. CLOSING THE LOOP

1. How will you notify your faculty and close the loop between the implication of these results and your curriculum?

Our findings and analysis have been communicated to R&L faculty through a number of mechanisms:

- Our memo to the CAS deans requesting department-wide approval to run hybrid courses was shared with the FT faculty. See memo [here](#).
- We presented our initial findings, and discussed implications and next steps, at the December 2023 Department retreat to FT faculty. See slides [here](#).

Further, part of our request to the Deans included a commitment to conduct an internal application process; all faculty (PT and FT) who wish to teach in hybrid modality in our department for F24 and S25 are required to answer the following questions:

- 1) Student-Facing Syllabus Statement (please share the language you are including in your syllabus that explains and justifies the benefits of hybrid learning):
- 2) What specific strategies are you using to build and maintain **community** in your hybrid course?
- 3) What specific strategies are you using to ensure **equity and inclusion** in your hybrid course?
- 4) How does the hybrid approach help you achieve your Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)? Please provide (2-3) examples of a relevant class activity or assignment and how it's tied to a specific CLO.

These questions were developed in response to the concerns we articulated above - ie., some of our data indicates that hybrid may lead to a lack of engagement and class community, as well as a potential inequity in access. We hope that the application process will both highlight these areas of concern for instructors, and also help to address them. We have already implemented this application for F24. See Google Form [here](#).

We plan to use faculty responses to this year's application to develop concrete examples and guidelines for future semesters, as well as potential revisions to the application questions. We have begun to develop a support document with examples; it's intended to be a "living document" that we add to each semester. See the initial document [here](#).

Finally, we plan to share pedagogical resources with current and future faculty applying to teach in the hybrid modality for Fall 24, such as the 2024 OER collection, [Better Practices: Exploring the Teaching of Writing in Online and Hybrid Spaces](#). Pending funding availability, we would also like to offer professional-development training in 2024-25 around the teaching of writing and communication in a hybrid format, particularly with an eye towards fostering anti-racist and inclusive practices.

Appendix A: BLUE Teaching Evaluations (Comparison between hybrid and non-hybrid for Rhet 103, 110, and 120)

- <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1LuxDnK1NHrY2EHA5R9N5stYx29GqFXVL?usp=sharing>

Appendix B: CIPE Grade Data (Comparisons between hybrid and non-hybrid rhet courses in terms of grades earned in initial course, subsequent grades, DWF rates, and retention)

- <https://docs.google.com/document/d/13eqqW2130IMekCQ6br-PuHcF2GESOUY-eOztqQrPJzU/edit?usp=sharing>

Appendix C: Results from Fall 23 R&L Surveys:

- Faculty Survey Data (Raw):
<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1KiZKQlDpR0iY2Qu7hMYbewsLVKesBOBNIdxUdhS7vWs/edit?usp=sharing>
- Student Survey Data (Raw):
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1QTda-jnhnN5T-_1CkuBzv3lOtGP2crqp8L4Padj39KI/edit?usp=sharing
- Slide Presentation Overview of Survey Results (Initial analysis):
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/13hbk2emv52jAaydDFRodDunIOT0FkGso7eIQx_uhP4/edit?usp=sharing