Annual Assessment Report AY21-22: 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
Leigh Meredith, Assessment Committee 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 FDCD 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: Current

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

We didn't receive any feedback on our last report. Upon double-checking this with Ella Aviananda Frazer, Associate Director of Assessment, they noted that this was an oversight, and offered to send feedback. We demurred in favor of focusing efforts on the current assessment.

3. **State what you assessed for the academic year 2021-2022.**

As a department, we have been in the process of developing a "vertical curriculum," a course sequence which spreads the Core writing and speaking curriculum over the span of a student's time at USF. Currently, students tend to take their three Rhetoric courses (typically 2 Writing and 1 Speaking) in their first and second years at USF. A "vertical" curriculum would encourage (or require) students to have reached their junior level before finishing their final course. Such a sequence, which is supported by research in undergraduate composition, would help students develop deeper rhetorical acumen and support their upper-level and discipline-specific communication skills. In the service of this curriculum, we've been piloting a new course curriculum for that final, junior-level course in the sequence, which we call "Course C."

To measure the effectiveness of this new curriculum, we have assessed the following pilot course outcome:

> "Identify, analyze, and critique norms and biases of genres within your discipline
> and others"

While this is technically a Course Outcome, not a Program Outcome, it also reflects on a number of Program Outcomes, perhaps most specifically:

> PLO 1. Explain and apply rhetorical concepts, theories, and principles in the process
> of analyzing various texts and rhetorical situations.

Our "Course C" curriculum, as the above Course Learning Outcome reflects, is intended to *expand* the depth and breadth of "rhetorical concepts and theories" students are exposed to -- primarily by adding "genre theory" to the curriculum. One of the main things we intended to assess is whether or not students are, indeed, receiving a deeper and richer understanding of "rhetorical concepts and theories" through the pilot curriculum.

III. METHODOLOGY

We investigated the Course Learning Outcome using a three-pronged method:
- Pilot
- Student survey (indirect assessment)
- Quantitative comparison of student work products (direct assessment)

Pilot: Over the course of the last 4 years, a subcommittee of the Department of Rhetoric and Language has created a pilot curriculum for "Course C." This curriculum is designed to build on the speaking, writing, and digital skills of earlier rhetoric courses, and to help students navigate and critique the communication norms of their majors/disciplines.

3 classes were involved in the Spring '22 pilot, including one section of HONC 132, and 2 sections of RHET 250. The HONC class was chosen because it was originally designed with the "vertical" vision in mind (i.e, its original design included key elements of the pilot curriculum and it requires junior-level standing for enrollment). The RHET 250s were chosen for the pilot because, as transfer-specific courses, they tend to enroll many juniors.

Student Survey: A survey was developed to compare student responses in the 3 pilot courses with responses in our "control" group (namely, students in the traditional RHET 120 sections). The survey asked the following questions:
- To what extent do you agree with this statement: "This course helped me to identify, analyze, and critique norms and biases of genres within my discipline and others" (please rate on a scale of 1-5)
- If you chose 4-5 on the scale above, please provide 3-4 sentences describing specific aspects of the class (such as assignments, activities, or discussions) that helped you achieve that Learning Outcome.
- If you chose 1-3 on the scale above, please explain why you feel you didn't achieve this Learning Outcome.
- Do you have any suggestions for how the course could better help you achieve the learning outcomes stated above?

117 students participated in the survey, including 47 (40%) in RHET 250, 14 (12%) in HONC 132, and 56 (48%) in RHET 120.

See survey instrument here: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1JEJtsaa6hCiWiTQaibe1YbaKyO35gDWSlUr2EATTYmE/edit#responses

Quantitative comparison of student work products: An assessment sub-committee of the Rhetoric and Language department solicited and rated 43 student work products (18 from pilot courses, and 25 from non-pilot courses). We asked instructors of both pilot and control courses to choose an assignment that best fit the relevant LO, and to submit randomized student products reflecting these assignments. The work-products we received primarily consisted of short ($\sim$ 5 page) essays and presentation slide-decks.

The committee rated products on a 3-point scale: does not meet; emerging; meets. In addition, we assessed each product according to 4 sub-components of the original LO (see rubric below). Thus, each of these 4 components was rated individually on the 3-part scale and used to inform the overall/holistic rating. Each work product was rated by at least 2 raters; any product with conflicting ratings was sent to a third rater as a tie-breaker. All raters participated in a norming session before rating began.

	1 (Does not Meet)	2 (Emerging)	3 (Meets/Exceeds)
Identify genres			

Analyze genres			
Critique norms and biases of genres			
Address genres within your discipline and others			

IV. RESULTS & MAJOR FINDINGS

Holistic Work Product Ratings

	Pilot	Non-Pilot
Does not meet	1	20
Emerging	5	5
Meets	12	0
Total	18	25

Survey Findings:

	Pilot Average	Non-Pilot Average
On a scale of 1-5, to what extent do you agree with this statement: "This course helped me to identify, analyze, and critique norms and biases of genres within my discipline and others"	4.4	3.9

Sample responses to the survey question, "please provide 3-4 sentences describing specific aspects of the class (such as assignments, activities, or discussions) that helped you achieve that Learning Outcome"

Pilot Courses	Non-Pilot Courses
The assignments allow for consciousness and increased awareness in connection to other majors. The aspect of interlinking work of	Reading and writing about specific problems plaguing our world. Working on topics that help us further our world view.

other classmates and being able to recognize and understand their form of linguistics expanded understanding and clearance of how some people communicate information. The class is structured in a very useful manner to be able to consider alongside the ideology of cura personalis while going against the grain of systemic form of oppressive literature that damages opportunities to underrepresented minorities and allow opportunities for people to speak in their most comfortable tone without academic penalty.

I believe that this course helped me analyze all different types of texts and those that I did analyze were all different and had different meanings so I had to breakdown each of their meanings. There were multiple biases that we had to break away from to fully understand the text and also analyze the text and we were able to spot out those biases and call out why they were biased.

The projects we did directly correlated to the norms of writing and rhetoric. For instance, we analyzed the genres within our major and also used different forms of presentation (website, essay, and speaking) to talk about topics.

I think the assignments and all the writing activities we did helped me see text through a different light. Through looking over both sides of an argument allows us to see different perspectives as well. Overall, this course was great and I feel like I learned many valuable things.

I liked inspecting my own major material with the purpose of identifying the genre. I thought the meeting was very helpful in the middle of the genre paper because I felt unsure and It clarified my questions.

I really enjoyed the analysis essay my class did the second half of the semester. We were tasked with analyzing artifacts of. specific genres common in our major/discipline. This really helped me get a better understanding of all the other things I was learning in my major courses since I had to play close attention to details and characteristics.

There were various assignments that helped me expand my knowledge about different writing styles. We got to study the language of various texts and we would have class discussions on them. There were many opportunities to get in to smaller groups to have discussions with our peers about what we were studying.

This class implemented the skill of critical thinking. I was able to look at my major in different perspectives and point out the significance of its standards. All of the projects (good ideas, genre, and the speech) combined allowed me to think broadly and learn more about my major than I initially thought.

This course taught me a lot when it comes to formatting an essay in an academic format. It also helps whenever we did group discussions because I usually learn from my classmates more than being solo. Activities like citation or fixing sentences also helped me grasp my common mistakes/bad habits made in my writing.

See complete survey responses in Appendix A.

Discussion:
- ***Pilot work products were much more effective at meeting the LO.*** Only one pilot course product was rated as "Does Not Meet." The majority were rated "Meets" (67%) and the rest were rated "Emerging" (28%). This is in contrast to non-pilot courses, where the majority were rated "Does Not Meet" (80%). This meets with our hypothesis.
- ***There is some genre instruction already going on within standard Core A2 courses.*** Perhaps more surprisingly, there were some work products from non-pilot courses that were rated as "Emerging" (20%), and quite a few students in non-pilot courses felt that the class had helped them to identify, analyze, and critique genres (see the comparison between average scores in pilot and non-pilot courses). This indicates that there is some discussion of genre already going on within standard Core A2 courses.
- ***For both pilot and non-pilot courses, the highest rated aspect of the designated LO was "identify genre."*** This indicates that students in pilot courses are *most* confident and skilled at understanding what constitutes a genre (i.e, the definition of genre) and identifying examples. Non-pilot work products that received an "emerging" were also most likely to have effectively fulfilled this criterion. Student survey responses indicated that "academic writing," and associated elements like citation practices, were the most common aspects of genre touched upon in non-pilot courses.
- ***For both pilot and non-pilot courses, the lowest rated aspect of the designated LO was "Critique norms and biases of the genre."*** While pilot courses rated higher on this aspect than non-pilot courses, far fewer pilot work products achieved a "meets" on this criterion. This indicates that students in pilot courses are least confident and skilled at this aspect.
- ***Pilot survey responses indicate a deeper understanding of genre, and how it relates to major/discipline, than non-pilot courses.*** Although this is an indirect

measure, a comparison of almost any random sample of survey responses from pilot and non-pilot courses demonstrates that students in the pilot curriculum gained a deeper and more discipline-specific understanding of genre. Students in non-pilot courses tended to talk about gaining skills in general areas of academic writing, like perspective-taking, or comparing text styles, or learning citation practices. Students in pilot courses spoke specifically about learning about the norms of their own discipline as well as the implications of those norms, as the following student comment illustrates:

> "I've never been encouraged to think about my discipline in any other way than through the lens of my own discipline. I hadn't thought about digging deeper about various aspects and what their implications were. It was helpful to use rhetorical strategies to think about my discipline in a different way."

Relatedly, students were more likely to speak to how skills from this class would transfer to other academic OR non-academic situations, such as:

> "It gave me an unusual approach to nursing by encouraging me to explore and analyze and better understand the tools that I will be using every day as a future nurse."

Again, while these responses are "indirect measures," they reflect upon students metacognitive understanding of communication practices - which is one of our core Program Learning outcomes ("**Articulate and interpret their own rhetorical choices and composing processes").**

Analysis:
One reason, perhaps obvious, that the pilot courses are more effectively meeting the relevant LO is that the pilot courses much more explicitly feature "genre" at the center of readings, discussions, and assignments. Thus, there's nothing that non-pilot instructors are doing "wrong"; this is effectively an assessment of curriculum, not instruction.

That being said, students are already getting some instruction in genre theory in standard A2 courses. This indicates that some aspects of genre theory are already being taught as an aspect of foundational rhetorical instruction. Work products we analyzed in non-pilot courses exhibited attention to genre elements (like how rhetorical strategies conform to audience expectations and fit contexts and situations) even when the term, "genre," was not explicitly used. This, then, raises the question of whether the term, "genre," and explicit theorizing about genre, is an important addition to students' analytical repertoires. In other words, is our current curriculum sufficient in building students' rhetorical skills, so that the explicit "genre" additions are unnecessary?

However, our study also indicates that students in non-pilot courses are much less likely to score highly or even adequately on either the "analyze genre" or "critique" genre aspects. On the one hand, we know that USF students struggle with analysis across the board. For example, in the most recent WASC assessment of Graduation Core Competencies, "analysis" was the lowest rated category. So we know that we need to do more as a university to scaffold and support analytical skill development. That's one rationale to include greater focus on analysis in a junior-level course like Course C.

In turn, while our current curriculum is perhaps introducing some of the key elements of genre (such as audience/context) and even helping students *identify* basic genres (i.e, poems vs speeches), it's not helping students understand or use genre as an *analytical or critical tool*. In other words, we're not seeing students in non-pilot courses unpack and evaluate the features that constitute specific genres, the core functions of specific genres, or how individual rhetorical acts conform to, or deviate from, genre norms. Students in pilots are doing better in this area - so we see this expanded ability to analyze genre as an emerging success of the pilot curriculum. But, because "analysis" and "critique" remain a challenge for students in pilot courses as well as non-pilot courses, this is something we need to further develop and support.

For one, we imagine that it's hard for students to learn what a genre is, how to analyze it, and then be able to critique its biases -- all in a single course. This is a lot to ask students to do when they've barely heard of the concept before. Thus, creating a more robust and *explicit* introduction to genre in earlier courses ("Courses A and B") (i.e, actually referring to genre elements as such) will help students with the more advanced tasks of analysis and critique in Course C.

We also see the discipline-specific focus as bearing fruit; almost all of the pilot student survey responses made some mention of "majors" and major-specific genres. Students spoke to the novelty - and more importantly, the benefit -- of analyzing their majors from this "outside" perspective. Further, they spoke to the utility of this in deepening their understanding of both communication (broadly speaking) as well as the specific communication modes of their chosen fields. Finally, while we were initially somewhat concerned about the challenge of teaching a "discipline-specific" course to a class full of students with different majors, many students spoke to the variety of disciplines as a core strength - in other words, that comparing/contrasting amongst majors helped them better understand genre as a concept and what was distinctive about their own discipline-specific genres.

V.   CLOSING THE LOOP

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

In light of report findings, we propose the following:
- **Ensure more assessible student work products through timely faculty notification.** We had a hard time evaluating oral projects because we only had presentation slide decks to extrapolate from. In the future, we plan to notify faculty with enough lead time so that they can record student presentations (if those are the most applicable assignments for the assessment).

- **Rewrite the Course Learning Outcome.** One challenge for raters was that the current LO incorporates at least three distinct skills: "identify," "analyze," and "critique norms and biases." We plan to disaggregate this compound LO into separate (and separately assessible) LOs.

  Further, we've seen the benefit in having students not only analyze their own discipline, but also across disciplines, and even in other "discourse communities" (e.g., clubs, civic organizations, etc). We plan to incorporate more inclusive language (e.g., "in their own discourse communities and others") to indicate this wider focus.

- **Revise Courses "A" and "B" to incorporate basics of genre theory.** As indicated above, we need to lay a foundation in genre theory in earlier courses in the vertical curriculum, so that students are prepared for more advanced genre analysis by the time that they reach "Course C." This, however, is a long-term goal that will require a multi-step rethinking of the curriculum as well as professional development for instructors.

- **Emphasize "Critique norms and biases" to reflect/reinforce our linguistic justice and anti-racist curriculum**. While students are beginning to understand how genre features can reinforce biases and act as "gatekeepers" in terms of race, class, education, and gender, they demonstrate the weakest skills in this area. An increased emphasis in this area would also better dovetail with our holistic efforts to revise our entire programmatic curriculum to be more anti-racist. Pilot courses for next semester will reflect this increased emphasis.

We plan to report these findings at our beginning-of-the-semester orientation meeting for the Spring semester. In turn, this will jump-start our assessment cycle for 22-23.