

2011

# College Composition I: Persuasive Writing (ENG 110) City as Classroom Project Report

Craig Franson PhD

La Salle University, [franson@lasalle.edu](mailto:franson@lasalle.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/city\\_as\\_classroom](http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/city_as_classroom)



Part of the [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Franson, Craig PhD, "College Composition I: Persuasive Writing (ENG 110) City as Classroom Project Report" (2011). *City as Classroom Projects*. 4.

[http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/city\\_as\\_classroom/4](http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/city_as_classroom/4)

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Community Engaged Learning at La Salle University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in City as Classroom Projects by an authorized administrator of La Salle University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [careyc@lasalle.edu](mailto:careyc@lasalle.edu).



## **City as Classroom Project for College Composition I: Persuasive Writing, ENG 110 (pilot)**

### **Course Description**

ENG 110 introduces students to rhetorical analysis and argument, while helping students to improve their writing skills and to develop their writing process. Students learn to read critically from a variety of texts, disciplines, and media. They also learn to synthesize texts to develop original arguments aimed at an academic audience. Grounded in ethical inquiry and reasoned debate, the course prompts students to use writing to make meaningful connections between and among their academic, social, and political lives.

### **Project Description**

This project tested the effectiveness of grounding a process-based, argumentative paper in a visit to a Philadelphia civic institution. In ENG 110, students compose three argumentative paper cycles, responding to controversies developed in class readings and discussions. For the third of their paper cycles, I had my students read arguments about the function of civic spaces and then visit one of three Philadelphia museums: the Constitution Center, the Black History Museum, and the Liberty Museum. After their site visits, students gave group presentations, describing their experiences and connecting the spaces to the reading. Next, they developed papers offering an argument about the civic purpose of the institution. At the end of class, students submitted full portfolios containing all the development materials for each of their three paper cycles. They also filled out a survey designed to compare the three cycles. Thus, I was able to make a qualitative, longitudinal analysis of all their course work and then to supplement this analysis with their own perceptions of their experiences. I also compared my results to those from another section of this class that I taught which excluded the site visit.



**Dr. Craig Franson**  
**Assistant Professor**  
**English Department**

### ▪ **Outcomes**

Results were evenly mixed. Students with a strong connection to class clearly enjoyed working with Philadelphia museums. Nearly half of the students perceived the site visit to be very helpful to their writing. Yet, the other half found the site visit to be either an encumbrance or an apparently irrelevant activity. For moderate to high achieving students, the project was successful. For students facing serious difficulty with course concepts or with college life, the project was a headache. Given free choice of all their assigned units, the largest group of students saw writing about political journalism (the theme of the second cycle) as the biggest help to their writing.

Difficulties added by the site visit seem to have been reflected in the papers, too. In process-based writing classes, students can progress unevenly. Scores rise substantially from the beginning to the end of a class, but the highest grade often appears on the second paper cycle, when students get the most help from an instructor. With the third cycle, writing quality can decline slightly as students seek out tougher projects and rely more upon their peers for criticism. During the term of my project, nine students saw their paper grades dip slightly between the second and third cycles. In the comparator term, only five students saw that same dip. The difference is suggestive, if also inconclusive, given the small sample size and the many variables.

### ▪ **Student Feedback**

Students with positive responses said, the site visit “helped relate the material” together and “provided a realistic view to the readings, which made it easier to come up with an argument.” Many students professed a strong love for the class overall, and a few claimed that the added difficulty of the site visit was a positive element. Students with negative responses felt it was “pointless” and “seemed irrelevant.” One student noted he/she “could not make connections between [the museum visit and the paper] and make an argument I cared about.” On a positive note, one student who professed to “loath writing” said that “this class eased some of that.”

### ▪ **Lessons Learned**

Writing a process-based argument from an analysis of a physical space is a time-intensive and intellectually demanding assignment for first year students. Probably, that makes it more, rather than less useful. That said, so extensive a project requires a cutback in other course components; and the merits and demerits of such a trade-off need to be weighed carefully. My attempt to combine in a single paper cycle both a small forum of course readings and a museum project proved more burdensome than illuminating for several students. To make this project more effective in the future, I would make the theoretical readings the base of the second paper cycle; then, I would make the site visit into the base of the third cycle, prompting students to approach this last paper as a critical application of ideas carried over from earlier work. Rather than attempting to wed theory and praxis in a single curricular unit, I would ask students to develop the theory in one unit and the praxis in the next. This way they would get the most assistance from me on the most abstract portion of the class. Then, in the more concrete task to follow, they could rely more on their fellow explorers.