



Changing Students, Changing Expectations

Key Words

pedagogy, composition, rhetoric, esl, assessment

Abstract

The 2008 economic crisis fundamentally changed our universities in America--the class divide grew, as middle class students found the rising tuition unaffordable; the classrooms are now a mix of the wealthy students and the poor students on scholarship. Our international student populations have grown tremendously, as our universities have courted them for the increased revenue they provide. This influx of working class (often generation 1.5) and foreign students has created a demand for more ESL and remedial composition courses. At UCD, non-Hispanic White students are in the minority (Asian-American and Asian students are the majority, at 34%). Non-resident alien students are close to 10%. There is also a significant number of Hispanic undocumented students who face the threat of deportation under the current administration. When I began teaching at UCD, about 20% of incoming freshmen had to take remedial writing. The percentage is now closer to 40%--and is rising. These population shifts have coincided with a rising debate in composition studies: should grammar and diction be on our rubrics (in and out of writing classes)? If a rhetoric and composition learning outcome (for example, the ability to do a timed-writing exam or a timed close reading) is difficult for an international or first generation student to reach, should the expectation be done away with for everyone? What services should we provide? How do we assess if they're effective? The debate--in theory and in practice--is about access and equality. We want our second language students, our foreign students, our "dreamers," and our first generation college students to have an equal opportunity to succeed. However, this is tempered by a desire to have equal (high) standards for our students--and a respected diploma that indicates the student has met them. This paper will explore the convergence of the debate and the demographic shift, using UC Davis (UCD) as a case study.