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ENGL 1213 at NOC

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Sample Final Portfolio: Why Not Have a Rhetoric Requirement among UL Lafayette PhD
Students in English?

On the following pages are several documents written to guide students in the section of ENGL 1213: Composition II I taught at Northern Oklahoma College during the Spring 2016 instructional term through their own work in the class; their collection, along with this statement and the summative statement at the end of the document continue to serve that purpose. With luck, the model of composition offered in this portfolio will help them to compile their own portfolios and to improve their own writing thereby. Perhaps it might also work towards improving the instruction my own successors at graduate school receive, as the component documents are aimed at doing.

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Sample Topic Proposal: Why Not Have a Rhetoric Requirement among UL Lafayette PhD Students in English?

I received a doctorate in English from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in 2012, having completed a dissertation in late medieval literature and having passed with distinction comprehensive examinations in medieval English literature, early modern English literature, early American literature, and fantasy literature of the United States and Britain from 1950 to 2009 (when I sat for my exams). Composing the dissertation and studying for the exams, as well as taking the coursework that informed both, offered me rewarding experiences that I am glad to have had, as well as enabling many others outside the classroom that have been to my benefit.

Even so, they did not wholly equip me for the kind of work I have faced since leaving the school. The comprehensive exams, particularly, are discussed by the English Department that requires them in terms of both research and teaching, but most of the teaching that I and others who have earned graduate degrees through the Department has been in rhetoric and composition. Even those of us whose areas of interest and expertise are wholly literary are asked to teach more writing than anything else—and it is not something for which we are adequately prepared. Yet those students who concentrate in rhetoric and composition are prepared to teach literature, compelled to sit for exams in literary areas even as literature students are not obliged to sit for an exam in rhetoric.

Why no such requirement is in place bears some inquiry. The PhD program in English at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette is explicitly generalist in its orientation, and requiring all students to take an examination in rhetoric—effectively calling for them to take coursework in rhetoric, as well—would reinforce that orientation. Additionally, it would, as is gestured toward above, help students prepare more effectively for an academic job market that will call most of

them to spend time teaching writing courses off of the tenure track, whatever their specialization may be. The Department and its doctoral students would therefore be better placed within the academy, helping the Department to continue offering its graduate programs and its graduates to secure employment in the short and long terms.

Sample Exploratory Essay: Why Not Have a Rhetoric Requirement among UL Lafayette PhD Students in English?

Earning a doctorate in English from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in 2012 required me to take coursework and complete a dissertation, both of which register in public consciousness. It also required me to do something perhaps less well known: sit for comprehensive exams. Widely required across disciplines, the exams serve several purposes; in most cases, they are prerequisite to beginning work on the dissertation. In the English department at my graduate school, they also serve to help reinforce the generalist nature of the department and suit graduates of the program to the work of teaching after they have earned their degrees. In the event, however, most of the teaching done by those who earn graduate degrees in English is the teaching of writing, and there is no requirement that graduates of the PhD program in English at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette demonstrate proficiency in the relevant area of English studies—rhetoric and composition—as there is that they demonstrate proficiency in one or more areas of literature. Why this is the case is not entirely clear, although some potential reasons suggest themselves.

One such is a logistical reason. Although it is not the case that coursework necessarily directly or fully prepares students for their comprehensive exams, it is not at all expected that students will sit for exams in areas outside their classroom experiences. That is, students rarely if ever take exams in an area in which they have not taken courses; examining in a given area effectively obliges sitting for coursework in it. Graduate classes tend to have low enrollment caps—which is good, given the relative intensity of the interactions between professors and graduate students. (In practice, the relationship is much more like a master/apprentice dynamic than the “traditional” teacher/student pattern in force at the undergraduate level, particularly at

the doctoral level.) Having a doctoral rhetoric requirement would oblige either a raising of such caps, which would likely diminish the quality of instruction in rhetoric classes by diminishing the time each professor has available to interact with students, or the hiring of additional faculty in rhetoric and composition, which would likely not be feasible due to ever-tightening budgets. Although not perhaps the most pedagogically valid reason not to have a rhetoric requirement, it is a remarkably sound practical concern, and academics do well to recall that they must negotiate the tensions between the embodied and the intellectual.

Another reason may have to do with the disciplinary status of rhetoric in the Department. There is a prevailing tendency, albeit one that is diminishing, to regard rhetoric and composition as service disciplines. That is, rhetoric and composition are held not so much to have their own distinct identity, but to exist to enable other disciplines to do the work they do. This is reinforced by dominant teaching practices, which assign the common classes in rhetoric and composition—first-year composition classes—to the least experienced instructors—typically second-year graduate students, irrespective of their own concentrations within English studies. My own teaching at that institution was of such a kind; while I did teach first-year courses throughout my attendance at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, I began to do so after completing but one year of graduate school. I was hardly typical, and the collective experience argues that the teaching of rhetoric and composition is devalued. If it is devalued, then a lack of a rhetoric requirement in doctoral examinations makes sense; the exams emphasize areas of study, and the devalued does not generally receive emphasis.

There is some vitiation of the point, however, as still another possible reason is motioned towards in the University of Louisiana at Lafayette English Department's 2010 online *English Graduate Student Handbook*. The document, which includes the Department's treatment of the

doctoral comprehensive exams, explicitly notes that “Both the M.A. and Ph.D. degrees offered by the UL English Department are **generalist degrees in English and American literature** [emphasis added].” That is, they explicitly and specifically frame themselves as literature degrees primarily, falling in line with traditional conceptions of what an English department is and does. It would be expected that such degrees would de-emphasize rhetorical/compositional study in favor of their stated foci. A problem with accepting such an explanation uncritically emerges, however; were the degrees meant to be literary, there would not be options for students to focus their curricula and examinations primarily on non-literary fields. Yet it is the case that the doctoral program in the English department permits, and perhaps encourages, other approaches than literary study, as such. The aforementioned *Handbook* notes

In addition to the traditional M.A. degree in literature, masters students may pursue an M.A. with an emphasis in American Culture, English as a Second Language, Folklore, Linguistics, Reading, Creative Writing, Professional Writing, or Rhetoric; and in addition to the traditional Ph.D. in literature, doctoral students may pursue a Ph.D. with a concentration in Creative Writing, Folklore, Linguistics, or Rhetoric.

The avowed availability of other emphases and concentrations than literature belies the statement that the graduate English degrees are “in English and American literature”—specifically because not modified. More justification for such a reason, then, would be needed—although it may well be available.

That a few reasons there might not be a rhetoric requirement included among the doctoral comprehensive exams in English at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette suggest themselves does not mean no others are possible, of course. Any one analysis will be limited in what it can

treat, and additional causes may arise from outside those limitations. In any event, however, whatever the reason that the doctoral comprehensive exams in English at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette lack a rhetoric requirement *is*, having that answer will prove of benefit to those students who mean to pursue a career in English studies; knowing what schools offer what curricula and why will help in selecting the most appropriate programs to try to enter. Since graduate school is arduous and expensive, careful selection is vital, indeed.

Sample Annotated Bibliography: Why Not Have a Rhetoric Requirement among UL**Lafayette PhD Students in English?**

I hold a doctorate in English from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (ULL).

Earning it obliged me to take many hours of coursework, draft and defend a dissertation, and sit for a battery of comprehensive exams. Those exams are described by the ULL English Department as helping to prepare students for teaching and research—but most of the teaching that I have done since leaving ULL has been in rhetoric and composition, and the training the exams promote and assess did not require me to make much if any formal study of that area of English studies. That a combination of logistical and disciplinary factors contribute to the lack of a rhetoric requirement in a battery of generalist English exams seems likely, but more investigation is needed to ascertain whether or not it is.

Conducting such an investigation suggests looking at discussions of comprehensive exams, generally, as well as of the disciplines in which the specific exams being discussed might exist. Those discussions are easily found in a number of disciplinary-education journals, such as are available through the Oklahoma State University library and through subscriptions to publications of organizations invested in English education, such as the National Council of Teachers of English. A few prominent results of searches through such materials are related below; they, and other sources yet, argue for a dominant format of comprehensive exams and a view of the field into which graduates of the ULL English PhD program will enter, highlighting some of the disconnections between how the program prepares its students for their likely career paths.

Hassel, Holly, and Joanne Baird Giordano. "Occupy Writing Studies: Rethinking College Composition for the Needs of the Teaching Majority." *CCC* 65.1 (September 2013): 117-39. Print.

The article argues against perceptions among writing scholars that devalue the work done by most writing teachers, who work in two-year and open-admission institutions. After defining a number of its terms, the authors note that studies of such teachers are not proportionate to the work they do. They continue with discussions of the two-year teaching environment, the focus of writing scholarship on four-year and elite institutions and the concomitant problems associated with community colleges, and what benefits would accrue to teachers and scholars from a reconsideration of such positions as they outline. The article concludes with a few recommendations of how to proceed, namely the support of research by and about two-year and open-admission institutions.

Of particular importance in the article is a quotation from a *Chronicle of Higher Education* article by Schmidt, one noting that non-tenure-track faculty account for more than three quarters of teaching positions (119). While it does not discuss the comprehensive exam as an item, it does point towards the ubiquity of writing instruction by those with graduate degrees in English, irrespective of their specialization; it is a point the article reiterates. As such, it helps provide context and support for the need for graduate students in English to take exams and concomitant training in rhetoric, since it is from rhetoric that the practice of teaching writing emerges.

Nolan, Robert E. "How Graduate Students of Adult and Continuing Education Are Assessed at the Doctoral Level." *Journal of Continuing Higher Education* 50.3 (Fall 2002): 38-43. PDF file.

The article encourages discussion of the forms comprehensive examinations in doctoral coursework should take to increase completion rates and more accurately reflect the expectations placed on those who pursue advanced graduate study. After explicating then-current demographic data among graduate students, the piece lays out its purpose and summarizes previous studies of the topic. It then lays out its methods—noting the group surveyed and describing the survey used. Findings follow, identifying major trends about the timing, format, and intentions of comprehensive exams. The article concludes with notes that indicate no consensus among programs about how to hold comprehensive exams and what they ought to do.

The article may suffer somewhat from concerns of age, and repeated mentions of what various things "presumably" do weaken some of the rhetorical force of the piece. The brevity of the piece may also be of some concern. The article does, however, provide a useful summary of tendencies in how examinations have been conducted at the doctoral level across disciplines. In that regard, the article offers a useful starting point for discussion of any topic treating comprehensive exams at the doctoral level. As background material for framing investigation of the comprehensive exam, then, it is worth reading.

Palmquist, Mike, and Sue Doe. "Contingent Faculty: Introduction." *College English* 73.4 (March 2011): 353-55. Print.

Introducing a special issue of *College English* they edit, Palmquist and Doe note the centennial of the National Council of Teachers of English, the quarter-century anniversary of the

Wyoming Resolution (one of the major statements regarding contingent those members of college and university faculties with the least protection), and the many statements made by scholarly societies calling for improvements to the working conditions contingent faculty face. They then lay out the contents of the special issue of the journal, summarizing three articles and three discussion forums that occupy the following pages.

Of particular note in the piece are cited comments from the American Association of University Professors and a committee of the Modern Language Association of America. Combined, the comments speak to the prevailing conditions faced by those who will teach English. Most postsecondary teaching positions are contingent, and most composition teaching is done by contingent faculty. The chance that a graduate of any English PhD program will teach composition off of the tenure track is therefore substantial, making preparation for that work all the more important—and its lack all the more curious.

Ponder, Nicole, Sharon E. Beatty, and William Foxx. “Doctoral Comprehensive Exams in Marketing: Current Practices and Emerging Perspectives.” *Journal of Marketing Education* 26.3 (December 2004): 226-35. PDF file.

The authors identify and explain then-current and -emerging practices regarding doctoral comprehensive exams in United States marketing programs. After offering a general introduction to the topic, the authors review available literature on the topic, focusing largely on Bloom’s taxonomy. Methodology follows, with a survey described and the process of its dissemination, completion, and interpretation articulated. Results detailing the perceived purposes of doctoral comprehensive exams, structures of those exams, and changes to the latter are presented, and less traditional emergent structures—an “original papers” approach, an “extended take-home,” a

“specialist,” and a “no exam–no paper” approach—are explicated. Results are discussed, and a conclusion suggesting that the traditional closed-book format of comprehensive exams will be less common in marketing schools finishes the article.

Although Ponder, Beatty, and Foxx discuss marketing, specifically, many of their assertions are likely applicable to other fields. Despite common perceptions of advanced education as liberal and socially deconstructive, academia tends to remain wedded to older structures, so the “traditional” examination structures discussed in the article are likely to be represented in other fields and programs entirely. If such points of correspondence are in place, then others may also be, making the conclusions reached by the article at least provisionally applicable to other areas of advanced education. Also notable in the article is the concern voiced by some faculty that changes to traditional exam structures “are depriving students of the opportunity to integrate a broad range of knowledge at a deeper level than they will ever have an opportunity to achieve again” (234), offering an unusual perspective on the comprehensive exam that may well bear examination.

Schafer, Joseph A., and Matthew J. Giblin. “Doctoral Comprehensive Exams: Standardization, Customization, and Everywhere in Between.” *Journal of Criminal Justice Education* 19.2 (July 2008): 275–89. PDF file.

The authors describe general tendencies regarding treatment of comprehensive exams by programs awarding doctoral degrees in criminal justice. The need for systematic study of criminal justice programs is articulated before the doctoral comprehensive exam is contextualized. Exam procedures are described and historicized. Study methods—largely focused on conducting surveys and interviews—are described and findings articulated, the latter focusing

largely on the forms the exams take. Findings are subsequently discussed, identifying and commenting on the patterns that emerge from the study and treating relative merits of several exam formats. The article concludes with questions about the ongoing utility of curricular standards to both the discipline and the broader community the discipline serves.

Although Schafer and Giblin treat the discipline of criminal justice, specifically, they ground their article in information deriving from studies of other fields—notably including rhetoric—and assert that their own discipline largely follows the structures of others. The conclusions they reach about their own field therefore present themselves as able to be generalized back to those other fields, so that what they say about comprehensive exams can be applied to other areas than their own. Additionally, their relatively recent (to this writing) article allows their conclusions to be taken as more timely, and their relatively extensive bibliography offers useful insights as to further reading.

Scott Shields, Sara. "Like Climbing Jacob's Ladder: An Art-Based Exploration of the Comprehensive Exam Process." *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 14.2 (April 2015): 206-27. PDF file.

Following an epigraph taken from Scripture, Scott Shields explains that her piece is a reflection on the experience of doctoral comprehensive exams. The reflection is framed in terms of the general shape and purpose of the doctoral exam, described as having ritual aspects that are not clear to graduate students who will soon take such tests; the author notes desiring to explicate the ritual through narration in reflection. Excerpts of exam questions and answers, as well as visual and verbal materials taken from personal journal entries relating to the exam experience follow; reflections on individual exam components accompany each set of materials. Ultimately,

the author arrives at the notion that the value of the comprehensive exam is in its facilitation of individual focus on personal growth leading to shared experiences.

While the piece is unconventional, it is of value in that it offers an inside perspective on comprehensive exams; most treatments of the subject look at them from the perspective of having long completed them. The anecdotal and idiosyncratic nature of the article may read to some as lessening the effectiveness of the piece as a whole, but that same individualistic narration does much to remind readers of the deeply personal nature of the comprehensive exam. It bespeaks the overall engagement with subject matter inherent in the comprehensive exam, making it all the more important that the exercise is directed to good effect.

Sample Researched Paper: Why Not Have a Rhetoric Requirement among UL Lafayette PhD Students in English?

Among the many things of which I am proud is that I hold a doctorate in English from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (ULL). Earning it required me to sit for no few hours of coursework past my Master of Arts degree and to complete a dissertation. It also obliged me to pass a series of comprehensive exams. Those exams are described by the ULL English department in its online “English Graduate Student Handbook” as consisting of four five-hour on-site tests taken in one or two semesters and spread across four of the following areas of inquiry: English literature to approximately 1500 CE, early modern English literature, Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English literature, Nineteenth-Century British literature, British literature from the twentieth century forward, American literature to approximately 1900 CE, American literature from approximately 1900 CE, literary theory, rhetoric, linguistics, and folklore; an option exists to sit for one exam in an open topic that must be proposed by the student and approved by the Department on a case-by-case basis. (My own were in early British literature, early modern English literature, early American literature, and contemporary fantasy literatures.) The exams reinforce the avowed generalist nature of the program, seeking to equip students to research and teach across a number of fields, but a problem arises when that theory encounters predominant practice. As Holly Hassel and Joanne Baird Giordano note in a 2013 *CCC* article, most of the teaching done at the collegiate level is by non-tenure-track faculty, reaffirming comments from Mike Palmquist and Sue Doe in a 2011 issue of *College English*. Also, as Brad Hammer notes in a 2012 *CCC* commentary, most of the teaching non-tenure-track faculty do is in first-year composition. If the curriculum, encapsulated by the comprehensive exams, is meant to equip its graduates to enter into the academic job market, then

it would be sensible for it to require coursework in rhetoric and composition as it does for literature; per the “English Graduate Student Handbook,” all students must take at least two examinations in literature, regardless of their concentration or emphasis. The same is not true for rhetoric, however, and it defies sense to think there is no reason there is no rhetoric requirement among PhD students in English at ULL. The most likely primary reason—because there are doubtlessly many contributing factors— inheres in concerns of logistics.

It is, admittedly, tempting to try to ascribe the lack of a rhetoric requirement instead to perceived disciplinary status. There is a prevailing tendency among institutions of higher learning to regard rhetoric and composition as service disciplines. That is, rhetoric and composition are held not so much to have their own distinct identity, but to exist to enable other disciplines to do the work they do. Hammer makes the point, as do Hassel and Giordano; both pieces speak to the relegation of the experience most have with rhetoric and composition to lower hierarchical levels. This is reinforced by dominant teaching practices, which assign the common classes in rhetoric and composition—first-year composition classes—to the least experienced instructors—typically second-year graduate students, irrespective of their own concentrations within English studies. My own teaching at ULL was of such a kind; while I did teach first-year courses throughout my attendance at that institution, I began to do so after completing but one year of graduate school. I was hardly atypical in that (although I might have been so in coming into graduate work with some formal teaching experience already), and the collective experience argues that the teaching of rhetoric and composition is devalued. If it is devalued, then a lack of a rhetoric requirement in doctoral examinations makes sense; the exams emphasize areas of study, and the devalued does not generally receive emphasis.

While such a thing might be true in other English departments, however, it is not at all likely to be the case for the ULL English Department. Many of the faculty list “rhetoric” or some convenient variation thereof as a principal research and teaching interest; the list of graduate faculty in the “English Graduate Student Handbook” identifies four of the 25 members included thereupon as explicitly claiming to be rhetoricians, more than any single other identification (taking the specific variations of “creative writing” listed as each constituting its own area). The more general faculty webpage identifies another member of the graduate faculty, one who does not list “rhetoric” as an interest on the graduate faculty list, as the first-year writing director, which position necessarily carries a strong professional interest in rhetoric and composition. Further, the general faculty list identifies as interested in rhetoric and composition four other members of the teaching corps in the ULL English Department—in addition to several others whose research and teaching interests are *not* listed and who may well therefore be rhetoricians by training. (Several faculty have been added to the roster since I completed my studies at the institution, so I cannot speak to their interests.) Additionally, several of the English faculty are prominent in rhetoric and composition studies more broadly. Clancy Ratliff, for example, is highly placed in the National Council of Teachers of English, which body concerns itself greatly with rhetoric and composition, and James McDonald, a former head of the department, has contributed much to prevailing rhetorical study. It is not to be expected that such people will devalue rhetoric and composition as a field of study; it is not to be expected that disciplinary bias argues against requiring all PhD students in English at ULL to sit for a comprehensive exam in rhetoric.

Rather the opposite of disciplinary or departmental disfavor would seem to be in place, which demands another explanation entirely—and logistical concerns seem the most likely culprit

for obliging members of the professoriate to set aside their own areas of interest. And they are substantial as regards comprehensive exams. For one thing, there are interdisciplinary standards and expectations that apply to the institution of the comprehensive exam as a whole. Surveys of comprehensive exam practices conducted by Robert E. Nolan; Nicole Ponder, Sharon E. Beatty, and William Foxx; and Joseph A. Schafer and Matthew J. Giblin, among others, note that a scant few forms of exams are found in practice; the surveys work across disciplinary boundaries, which makes all the more compelling the idea that the exams must happen, and that they must happen according to particular formulas. (Notably, however, Ponder, Beatty, and Foxx identify only one program that eschews the comprehensive exam altogether [233].) The idea receives reinforcement by the notion that the comprehensive exam serves as rite of passage, a ritual that must be performed before participants can be recognized as peers in intellectual inquiry. Nolan speaks to the issue (39, 42); as do Ponder, Beatty, and Foxx (230); as well as Schafer and Giblin (277, 284). Both a 1987 piece in *The American Sociologist* by Cynthia Negrey and a 2015 piece in *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* by Sara Scott Shields explicate the ritual aspects of the comprehensive exam in more detail, pointing to the enduring concept of the comprehensive exam as a thing that must be done in particular ways across disciplines to ensure the very identity of the intellectual *as* an intellectual. Such a concept tends towards making changes to forms difficult, which may account for some part of the non-adjustment of the ULL PhD comprehensive exams in English to account for current employment demands.

More concrete a reason for maintaining comprehensive exams, as well as one more frequently attested, is to allow students to demonstrate their mastery of the existing work done in a given field. Since the doctorate, particularly the PhD, is a research degree, one whose holders are expected to generate new knowledge, that it would oblige those who seek it to demonstrate

such mastery is sensible. Again, scholars across disciplines speak to the issue (Nolan 41-42; Ponder, Beatty, and Foxx 227, 229-30; Schafer and Giblin 277, 284), situating it as one prevalent in the academy broadly. Changing the comprehensive exams therefore potentially registers as a possible lowering of standards for graduates, something that any academic unit will be chary of inviting; humanities departments such as the ULL English Department, which face a prevailing social onus (the jape of “I have a degree in English; would you like fries with that?” comes to mind, despite the many problems attendant on it), will be even more likely to look askance at any adjustment that might make them look less rigorous. This is not to say that including rhetoric as a required area of examination for ULL PhD students in English would *be* a lowering of standards—quite the opposite is likely to be true, as is noted below—but it *is* to say that it might *appear* to be so as looked at by those outside the field who exert unfortunately disproportionate influence on the allocation of resources to the Department and whose views must therefore be considered. (Indeed, recent problems with funding of Louisiana public universities highlight the immediacy of the problem. In February 2016, Louisiana announced that a funding program upon which students and the institutions that serve them rely would be suspended, as Brock Sues reports for WBRZ in New Orleans. Rebekah Allen, writing for *The Advocate*, reports that universities would be expected to absorb any costs incurred. Outside concerns about funding therefore loom large.) *Any* change, even one that would likely be for the better, thus must be approached with caution—if it can be safely approached at all.

As noted above, requiring students to take a comprehensive exam in rhetoric would, despite potential appearances, be an increase in their workload, as well as that of the faculty involved in the examination process. The additional area requirement would oblige many students to stretch their areas of study further than the generalist curriculum in place in the ULL

PhD program in English already demands. I would not have been able to focus my area of endeavor even as much as I did were there a rhetoric exam requirement in place when I sat for exams, for example, and I often experience the sense of being insufficiently rigorously trained in my primary area of study (hence my eagerness to remain in practice through certain classroom activities, such as the riddle quizzes that have appeared in my teaching and that are discussed in an older set of teaching materials [“About”]). I was not atypical in seeking to align my exam areas or the areas of intellectual inquiry they represent. Since comprehensive exams purport to have students demonstrate mastery of the literature in a given field, asking for an additional area of examination that might well be markedly dissimilar from the areas students are already studying intently presents a formidable challenge to students who are already asked to do a substantial amount of work to earn their degrees. While it might well be argued—and with some justice—that those who seek doctorates should be able to handle many intellectual challenges, it is also true that an exam that covers one thousand years of literature in a minimum of three languages (Old English, Middle English, and Latin), or another that asks for several hundred years of material that could be in three *other* different languages (Spanish, French, and modern English), already presents a formidable challenge. Adding to it would doubtlessly occasion comment, and unfavorable comment, from the students who would have to face such an exam; given the work that is done by graduate students, helping faculty with their own research and teaching no few classes, there is some incentive to keep them content. Since imposing additional requirements would vitiate against that contentment, it suggests another type of logistical challenge to adding a required exam in rhetoric to what students in the ULL PhD program in English face.

One such additional requirement would be an added burden of coursework. Presently, PhD-seekers in the ULL English Department are obliged to take a gamut of courses to meet distribution requirements, per the “English Graduate Student Handbook,” courses that allow them to fulfill the generalist mission of the program. Implicit in the description of the coursework is that the courses lead up to and help prepare students for their comprehensive exams, the completion of which must precede the work to develop new knowledge conducted in the dissertation. For students to be able to successfully complete their dissertations, however, they must generally focus their attentions reasonably narrowly; again, my own exam spread is not atypical, as I am given to understand it. (I remain in contact with a number of people who have successfully completed the PhD program in English at ULL, and in focal areas other than mine. The discussions, informal in nature, corroborate my own experience reasonably well.) For many students, the addition of a rhetoric exam requirement would prove distracting from their intended foci, potentially hampering their ability to conduct the sustained research and investigation that a dissertation in the humanities demands—for while many might argue that poring over texts is easy, poring over hundreds of years of texts or the thousands of years that rhetorical study would seem to oblige quickly becomes quite the demand. Again, then, the added burden is one likely to occasion unfavorable comment, making it something that must be approached carefully if at all. It becomes something of a logistical concern therefore, one not necessarily easily treated and so one that suggests being set aside in favor of more immediate concerns.

Another such concern suggests itself, although one for the faculty more than for the students. As noted above, there is a strong implicit expectation that students who will examine in an area of inquiry will take courses in that area, taking the time not spent in meeting distribution

requirements to cement their knowledge and understanding of those sub-fields in advance of demonstrating that knowledge and understanding. Obliging a rhetoric exam would therefore prompt more students to take courses in rhetoric and composition—wherein lies some difficulty. Graduate courses, because they are more intense due to the higher level of study and the increased depth of inquiry prompted thereby, demand more faculty involvement than almost any undergraduate class. (Directed independent studies at the undergraduate level, as well as undergraduate thesis work, are the exceptions.) This means that they must necessarily enroll fewer students—a need more emphatic for rhetoric classes, whose very subject matter is argumentation, such that they will demand more display of argumentative technique, demanding more time and effort to assess than many other classes might. That is, while a literature class might well ask for two papers (conference- and seminar-length, or 10- and 20-page pieces), supplemented by discussion and perhaps an exam (although the last is not necessarily common, in my experience), a class in rhetoric will be likely to demand persistent writing—and so persistent assessment from faculty. If a graduate seminar has a maximum enrollment of, say 15 students (which number seems a bit high), then a literature seminar can expect to see the professor review some 30 pages per student, or some 450 for the class—and the professor is likely to read graduate work with greater intensity and higher expectations than undergraduate work will receive. A rhetoric seminar might well expect twice that—and professors rarely teach but one graduate seminar in a term.

Even if faculty are willing to bear the brunt of student ire—and they may well be, particularly since an exam and concomitant coursework in rhetoric would be helpful for those going into the dominant academic job market—they may well not be willing to take on yet more burdens than they already carry with their current teaching loads, service obligations, and the

calling to research which many feel. Increasing class sizes will not work for the reasons noted above, and keeping matters as they are in terms of enrollment would also be ineffective; class size caps would ensure that students are delayed in completing their degrees, which has deleterious effects on individual students (Nolan speaks thereto), as well as on programs, as completion rates and times factor into how programs are assessed and valued. The simple solution to the issue of workload and increased enrollment—bringing in additional faculty—runs afoul of the budgetary concerns that are always present but particularly prominent at public universities in Louisiana in 2016. It might well also begin to introduce difficulties at higher administrative levels; the PhD program in English at ULL is explicitly generalist, and bringing in several additional rhetoric and composition faculty at the level they would need to be introduced—graduate faculty designation is a separate thing, markedly subject to administrative shenanigans, as my experience has shown me—would begin to argue that the program is adopting a rhetorical focus. Such adoption might lead to the perception that the program is duplicating other institutions' works—even if ULL is the only institution in the University of Louisiana system that offers a doctorate in English (Elliott, "Sample"), there are other public school systems in the state and other institutions available. Access to such a thing through other venues might well suggest that the ULL program is redundant and can be eliminated therefore. It is not something that would be good to see for the faculty, understandably, nor yet for those who have yet to complete their courses of study or who have already done so. Another systemic concern that argues against requiring an exam in rhetoric, useful though it would be, thus presents itself.

The kinds of logistical challenges that attend on requiring PhD students in English at ULL to sit for a comprehensive exam in rhetoric are formidable, certainly, and facing them will take no small degree of political will at the institutional level and above. As the only member of

the University of Louisiana system to grant a doctorate in English and one of only three in its athletic conference to do so (Elliott, “Sample”), it does not face much competition, and so it may not have much immediate reason to change. But it does have long-term reasons to adjust how it prepares its students. The more of its graduates who can successfully enter the academic workforce, or who can successfully pivot into the kinds of professional writing demands of the emergent workplace, the more attractive ULL and its English Department will both be, which cannot help but conduce to the long-term health of the organizations. Obliging PhD students in English to sit for an examination in rhetoric—and to take the courses that such an examination effectively demands—will help in both cases, suggesting that the change, although difficult, is one well worth making.

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Sample Summative Statement: A Few Final Comments

My compositional situation differs from that of my students, of course. I have already long since completed my composition coursework, so that while I still have much to learn, I approach the tasks assigned to my students from a position of knowing I can do them because I have already done them. The processes of putting together information from which to write sample assignments for my students and of conducting that writing are useful to me as a source of additional practice and as teaching through modeling the behavior I want to see from my pupils, but, for me, they are not new.

That they are not new, though, does not mean that their results are of no use. Again, I write sample assignments with the idea that my students will benefit from having models of the kinds of writing I want to see from them. Offering such guidance seems to me to be useful for them, both in the narrow classroom sense of “how do I get a good grade” and in the broader sense of “oh, so *that*’s what he means.” Additionally, the specific projects I have asked students to undertake during the Spring 2016 instructional term, treating issues of students’ curricula, have been directed towards helping them to gain more agency with their courses of study; it seems a helpful, useful thing to do.

My own work, treating the lack of a rhetoric requirement in the UL Lafayette PhD program in English, emerges from the proliferation of positions I have noted (because I am on the job market as I write this) that ask for explicit qualification in rhetoric and composition. Having such training would likely have made easier my search for a continuing position, and I can only hope that those who have followed me into the fine program where I earned my graduate degrees will opt to take such training themselves.