A REVISIONS ASSIGNMENT SEQUENCE

How we live with others: exploring what's often unspoken

Students consider (through analysis and production) how they become members of different groups in order to consider aspects of communication that are often implicit in our day-to-day lives.

ASSIGNMENT SEQUENCE GOALS

This assignment encourages students to focus on the following goals for Revisions:

• learning a rhetorical process for analyzing and producing texts using written, visual, and oral communication.
• understanding how the audience and purpose in any communication situation shape effective communication.
• revising written, visual, and oral communication.
• acquiring strategies for testing and assessing their communications.
• discussing and analyzing the ethical implications of a communicator's choices in a text.
• recognizing that, in the context of global cultural diversity, our communication choices are effective only when we understand that and how different audiences interpret texts.

WHEN TO USE THIS ASSIGNMENT

This sequence is good in the middle of the semester, when students have had an introduction to rhetorical principles; this also prepares them to do a longer research project which can build on the work of this sequence. This sequence takes 4-6 weeks.

WHAT STUDENTS MAKE

With textbook chapters as support and based on observational research and reflection, students develop illustrated instruction sets for people who are new to groups to which they themselves belong, such as church groups, sororities or fraternities, non-profits, community groups, and so on. The instruction sets are to help new members of the group learn unspoken assumptions about group expectations, attitudes, and behaviors. Students then write a more formal paper, supported by some research, into how people become members of groups.

THE ASSIGNMENT SEQUENCE ITSELF

1. Introduce students to the overall sequence and its goals of considering how people become members of social groups (groups into which they were not born).
2. Students read chapter 11 of cda, Analyzing Documentary Photography. (With in-class discussion.)
3. Students produce — individually or in pairs — quick informal documentary photography reflections on a group to which they belong. (They have to take the photographs themselves; there are digital cameras they can borrow from the HU department if they do not have access to cameras themselves.)
4. Looking at their own and the photographs taken by others in class, students use the photographs to reflect on the expectations, attitudes, and behaviors that characterize the group.
5. Students write 3-4 pages of reflection on their productions and discussions. They share their reflections with each other, and — through further discussion and teacher feedback — produce a more formal 4-5 page writing that considers what actions people must take (what attitudes they must take on, what knowledge they must gain, and so on) to become comfortable members of the group they are considering.
6. Students read chapter 12 of cda, Analyzing Instruction Sets. (With in-class discussion.)
7. Students analyze — through writing — several printed and online instruction sets. These should be 3-4 page formal rhetorical analyses.
8. Students develop (through several drafts) an instruction set to help someone new ease into the group they have documented. Chapters 7 and 9 of cda, on written and visual communication, support this work.
9. Using the class's instruction sets to generate questions about group membership, students research the topic and develop, through several drafts, papers that address one of the questions raised. (Questions could be, for example, How do group members change when they join groups? Why do people join groups? What sorts of groups encourage the most change in their members? Which groups ask the least behavioral / attitudinal change of their members, and why?)