**Notes on Faculty Development Workshops:**

**What Counts as a Passing Capstone Essay?**

Monday, November 16

Attending: Linda Holman, Rachel Ihara, Anna Kosierkiewicz, Jared Pratt

We looked closely at three essays that had been submitted by instructors as examples of “C-” capstone essays from their English 12 classes for Spring 2015.

The first considered the parent-child relationships in two stories of American immigrant families. It was approximately three pages long (although there seemed to be a page missing from the assignment). An additional academic source was listed, which may have been cited in the missing page. The second sample evaluated the career of New York mayor John Lindsay, drawing upon seven academic sources, including one book. It was five pages long. The third considered the career of Harry Houdini, drawing upon two biographies. It was two pages long.

These student texts varied in many ways, including the clarity and strength of the thesis, the development and use of textual sources, and the overall organization and the degree of surface-level error. As a group, we discussed the ways that certain strengths might have been used to justify the C- grade despite the significant weaknesses in other areas. For instance, the students’ clear engagement with the narrative texts in the first essays might have countered his/her poor handling of organization and the significant language errors. Most felt that the ambition and academic efforts evident in the second essay, justified at least a C grade, despite problems in the clarity of the argument being advanced. The instructor for the third essay might have appreciated the lack of error and evidence of organization in the third essay, even though we saw it as having an extremely weak or superficial thesis, making it seem more like a “report” than a thesis-driven essay.

Tuesday, November 17

Attending: Lesley Broder, Ann DelPrincipe, Michelle Gabay, Rachel Ihara

In this session, we began by reviewing the departmental assessment documents (the revised Student Learning Outcomes and the Capstone Rubric). We noted that a single assignment like the capstone essay most likely would not show evidence of all course learning outcomes, although some might be visible. We talked about which ones we tended to emphasize in our own capstone assignments.

We then focused on two essays, the one on Mayor Lindsay’s career and the one on Houdini. We discussed issues of scope or scale: The first essay might have suffered from the writer’s inability to use so many sources. The length for the second essay seemed problematic. We considered how different capstone assignments might prompt certain genres of writing. For instance, too much information could result in a “report.” A better structure might call for a comparison of two texts, thereby prompting some analysis beyond mere summary.