Quite often an instructor or department wants to change the title or course description of a GE course. In order to do this, a formal Course Modification must be entered into the Course proposal system in UAccess. However, when a GE course is requesting a modification, it undergoes the same review as a new course proposal. Therefore, you should be prepared to identify the following things (as does a new course being proposed):

- **Course Content**: does the content of the course meet the identified study area and, if Tier One, the category?
- **Student Learning Outcomes**: Does the course have clearly stated learning outcomes? These outcomes should reflect what the student will know or be able to do by the end of the course. How do the course outcomes align with the GE Program Outcomes? What assessments are you using to measure whether your students have met the expected learning outcomes?
- Does the course meet the writing policy requirements?
- Does the course meet the 40% rule? (Is 40% of the grade available by Week 8 of the semester?)
- Does the course include a component for Honors students?
- Does the course address at least one of the Information Literacy Standards?
- Does the course:
  - Require sufficient readings (in terms of volume and content) to provide fundamental knowledge?
  - Emphasize critical and evaluative thinking?
  - Foster independent, creative, and interactive learning (i.e. group work, research projects, library work requiring use of printed and electronic sources)?
  - Provide students with opportunities to discuss course topics and material?
  - Identify multiple faculty members who can teach the course?

All of the information needed can be found at the UWGEC website.
**Writing Tip of the Month**

**Helping students use feedback toward revision**

The decisions made during revision help students learn to be more aware of their writing choices by thinking through which strategies are best for reaching their audience, accomplishing their purpose, and conveying their message. However, incorporating feedback as part of the revision process can be a bit of a mystery, particularly when students are short on time, writing in an unfamiliar discipline or genre, or there is a lot of feedback to consider. As teachers, we can help guide students to work with their feedback to lead to stronger revisions. Time spent revising is time invested in learning.

**Read, Select, and Prioritize**

Here is a short protocol you could model for students as a way to approach feedback and think through meaningful revisions to their writing beyond “fixing mistakes”:

**Writers who revise most effectively take time to:**

- **Read** the feedback with an open mind. Try to understand what each reviewer was trying to say, and how the feedback helps you adjust your work so that it acknowledges different viewpoints in your audience.

- **Select** the feedback that will lead to the most important changes; you don’t have to answer to every piece of feedback. Ask yourself: Does this comment:
  - help me understand my writing any better?
  - help me to measure my progress toward the assignment goals?
  - offer any specific advice that I can follow when I revise?
  - show respect for my work and me in its tone?

- **Prioritize** the needed changes based on the feedback you selected. Consider prioritizing the comments that help you make the best revisions to meet the assignment criteria and that you have time to realistically address (is the assignment due tomorrow, or next week, for example).

- **Reflect** on why and how to make the changes. Write briefly about what you hope to accomplish in the next version of your draft, and how the feedback you selected and prioritized helps you achieve that goal. This reflective writing connects your goals with specific actions, and builds awareness around your process and deliberate decision-making.

- **Revise** the original draft to include the changes.

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**A BIT OF UA HISTORY**

The ending of World War II and the availability of government financial aid to returning veterans resulted in a flood of young men and women to universities and colleges throughout the country. UA was no exception. Thousands of servicemen had trained at nearby airfields and, remembering the sunlight and clear skies, came “home” to Tucson — many accompanied by wives and small children. There was no time to construct additional dormitories to house the new arrivals but the 114 two-family “Quonset huts” and the 5 TDUs (four families each) offered by the Federal Public Housing Authority appeared to be a good “temporary” solution. They rose on the east and west sides of the Polo Field (now UMC).

No one ever imagined that some of these “temporary” dwellings would last for 38 years.
By James M. Lang

Last year, my family moved to a new house across town, closer to the college where I teach. During the occasional pause in the packing, I opened boxes that had been moldering in the basement to see whether they were move-worthy. In one of them, I discovered a cache of papers that I had written as an undergraduate. They were gathered in a yellow folder which I had pretentiously titled — how I wish I were making this up! — "Literary and Philosophical Criticism."

It will come as no surprise to anyone on the back side of 40 that I found many papers in there that I had little recollection of writing. But it did come as something of a surprise to encounter entire courses that I had little recollection of taking.

As I paged through my almost-forgotten essays on Aristotle’s views on slavery in Politics, on the two missionaries in Things Fall Apart, or on the action and language in Pamela, I finally hit upon the one paper I knew I would find. I still remembered it in much greater detail than any other assignment from my college years: a 20-page analysis of the film My Dinner With Andre, written for a senior seminar I took on late-20th-century poetry and performance.

That essay represented the culmination of my double major in English and philosophy. Although the seminar was housed in my English major, I had learned as an undergraduate that my professors loved it when I referred to texts and ideas from other classes and disciplines. In that long essay on Andre Gregory and Wallace Shawn’s film I pulled together perspectives from both literature and philosophy in support of my analysis.

I was immensely proud of that paper, since I had conceived the topic entirely on my own in response to a very open-ended essay prompt. It gave me an opportunity to explore creative issues that had been pre-occupying me since high school, and to take on the kind of writing and interpretive challenges that I would be facing in graduate school in just a few months’ time.

I thought immediately of that essay as I was reading The Meaningful Writing Project, a thought-provoking book published this year and written by Michele Eodice, Anne Ellen Geller, and Neal Lerner. It includes an analysis of survey results from more than 700 undergraduates at three different institutions, who were given two prompts:

1. Describe a writing project from your undergraduate education that was meaningful to you.
2. Explain why it was meaningful.

The authors spent several years interpreting and categorizing the responses to those two questions. Working with a team (which included undergraduates), they supplemented their survey data by interviews with two groups: (1) a subset of the survey respondents, and (2) faculty members who had created meaningful writing assignments.

The results have tantalizing implications for those of us who design writing assignments — whatever the discipline, and whether they are for a first-year writing course or a senior seminar. After all, if we can identify the common attributes of a meaningful writing assignment, we can presumably translate those findings into concrete ways to make all of our assessments more meaningful.

Pinpointing those concrete strategies, however, is difficult due to the sheer amount of qualitative data gathered by the team. As with any research study of this level of complexity, the findings can be messy. (Readers curious about the design and limitations of the study can learn more about the guts of it at the authors’ website, where they also hope to collect additional responses about meaningful writing projects.)

With those qualifiers in mind, the book ultimately makes a convincing case for three core attributes of a meaningful assignment. All three were mentioned again and again in the survey results and interviews.

They are qualities we should keep in mind as we try to design assessments that our students will find — you guessed it — meaningful:

1. **Give students a say.** The most meaningful assignments offer students a sense of agency. Many of the projects described in the survey afforded students “opportunities or freedom to pursue topics of interest, to connect those topics to what they had passion for or had experienced, and to map their meaningful writing projects to their future writing and professional identities.”

   That sense of agency took many forms — it wasn’t just about offering open-ended prompts that allow students complete freedom to follow their own inclinations. In fact, some students in the survey pointed to writing projects that struck a balance between freedom and structure. “The paper itself was a research paper on a topic we got to choose,” wrote one student. “I liked the fact that we got to discuss something we truly enjoyed from the class, and that the professor also had a narrow enough prompt to where we weren’t floundering around for topic ideas. It gave us guidance without boundaries.”

2. **Engage them actively, not passively.** In a passive writing assignment, students write on their own, using content from class or their own research, and then turn in a finished paper. In the most meaningful assignments cited in the survey, students were far more interactive during the writing process — with their instructor, their peers, and the content.

   This category is the most slippery of the three — it’s almost too broadly defined in the book to offer clear takeaways to those of us who want to design effective writing projects.

   But once the authors begin to describe specific examples of “engagement,” the picture becomes clearer, and looks an awful lot like what composition theorists have been recommending for decades: Students get feedback on multiple drafts from the instructor; they evaluate one another’s drafts in peer-review sessions; they interview sources or do research on the topic outside of class; they connect the project to their personal experiences or write for a specific audience, real or imagined.

3. **Make sure it transfers.** The elusive goal of every college instructor is to create learning that transfers — i.e., learning that students can carry from the context in which they originally learned it and apply it to new questions, problems, and challenges.

   The authors of The Meaningful Writing Project saw two types of transfer in the writing assignments mentioned in their data. First were projects that facilitated what the authors called “transfer in” — meaning, a project in which students could apply their prior learning experiences to a new writing assignment.

   Second, and far more commonly cited in the surveys, were writing projects that promised “transfer out” — that is, students found the work meaningful because they believed it would help them develop skills they would need in the future. Close to 70 percent of the surveyed students agreed that “their meaningful writing projects would transfer to future writing.” I remember this as one of the hallmarks of my undergraduate seminar paper, too. I was practicing the kind of long, critical analyses that I imagined would be required of me in graduate school.

   The Meaningful Writing Project does not argue that every writing assignment must contain some premixed combination of agency, engagement, and transfer potential. "Look closely," the authors recommend instead, "for the places where aspects of a writing assignment can be made more expansive, more inviting, more past connected, and more future-oriented in ways driven by students’ goals and interests."