

Digital Analysis of First-Year Composition Archive for Seeking Writing Teaching Job and Professionalization Purposes

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1.0 Introduction

In this article, I take a deliberate approach to extract data from an unstructured archive, First Year Composition Archive (FYCA; Anand, 2023), and convert its content into a structured database using Microsoft Excel. For the purposes and scope of this assignment, to extract data, I focused only on digitally analyzing syllabi available on FYCA (<https://fyca.colostate.edu>). Collecting and analyzing FYCA will help First-Year Writing (FYW) instructors prepare for the job effectively and efficiently. My digital analysis showed: 1) specific kinds of syllabi FYW instructors offered based on whether the institution was public or private, 2) the preferred mode of FYW instruction based on the institution's location, and 3) primary and secondary FYW audiences based on the institution size. As a First-Year Writing graduate student instructor who will soon enter the job market, this digital data analysis will allow me to manage my employment expectations and help me build my teaching portfolio strategically. The scope of utilities I see from this digital analysis can easily be extended to any FYW instructor who is trying to understand how the FYW field in the US is evolving and operating.

In the following paragraphs, I will elaborate on my data organization and extraction processes: describing the characteristics of syllabi on FYCA, splitting syllabi on the archive into various types and tokens, splitting syllabi into other characteristics and calculating tokens in each category, and presenting thematic analysis using graphics, keeping the scope of this assignment in mind.

2.0 Data Organization Process

FYCA is housed on a Colorado State University website associated with and developed in collaboration with the WAC Clearinghouse, a publishing collaborative established in 1997 that provides open access to scholarly books and journals as well as instructional resources for instructors who wish to use writing in their courses. The open-access FYCA archive is offered as a research repository for FYW scholars (check their “About” page for more information).

Accessing all the syllabi in this archive nudged me to reflect on my teaching practices and look into "mindful and meaningful [FYW instructor] progress... as real agents of change and justice" (Beavers, 2021, p. 3), which can be very useful to find the best employer match when I seek a FYW instructor job. Therefore, adopting digital analysis, a digital humanities (DH) praxis, I sought emergent practices in the FYW field in more professionally accessible and practice-oriented ways (Kirschenbaum, 2010) by reading all 42 syllabi and building structured data.

2.1 Categorizing Syllabi

Upon reading the syllabi in the archive, I realized some FYW instructors contributed more than one syllabus. Hence, I included only one syllabus per instructor for my digital data analysis to maintain my analysis's high reliability and authenticity. Therefore, I analyzed 30 different syllabi as the paper's dataset. I further categorized 30 syllabi into three sub-categories (types, in DH), explained below:

1. **Theme-based syllabi (TS):** In this syllabi category, the FYW instructors assigned a topic/theme to their syllabus and expected their students to produce writing related to that theme. The instructor is the primary audience.
2. **Writing for specific-purpose syllabi (WS):** In this category, the audience is wider than the instructor and has a specific intellectual/general background. FYW students are expected to invest their time and effort in understanding and serving the needs and conventions of a specific community/discipline, which may be an audience other than instructor.
3. **Generic syllabi (GS):** The syllabi in this category did not fit the above categories. These syllabi had no course theme and used writing genres with no connections among them. The FYW students can write on any theme or topic across genres and can focus on any discipline or community.

I maintained data from all 30 syllabi using Microsoft Excel. Using Excel's filter option, I fetched the number of tokens for each syllabus type below:

Table 1

Type of Syllabi and Their Respective Token

Types	GS	TS	WS
Tokens	13	12	5

To extract more specific data, I looked for other common characteristics in all 30 syllabi and added more categories in the Microsoft Excel sheet as columns. These characteristics include:

1. Type of University (Public or Private)
2. Size of Institution (University, Two-year institution, and Four-year institution)
3. Geographical Region in the US
4. Semester FYW Courses Offered
5. FYW Syllabus Type (GS, WS, TS)
6. Course Topic (N/A for GS and Specific Theme/Names for WS and TS)
7. Prerequisite Condition Required to Enroll in the Course (documented as Yes/No)
8. FYW Student Level (Beginner/Advanced)
9. Number of Writing Assignments in the FYW Courses
10. Mode of FYW Course Delivery (Online/In-person) and
11. Whether Each Instructor Controlled Their Syllabus Design (documented as Yes/No).

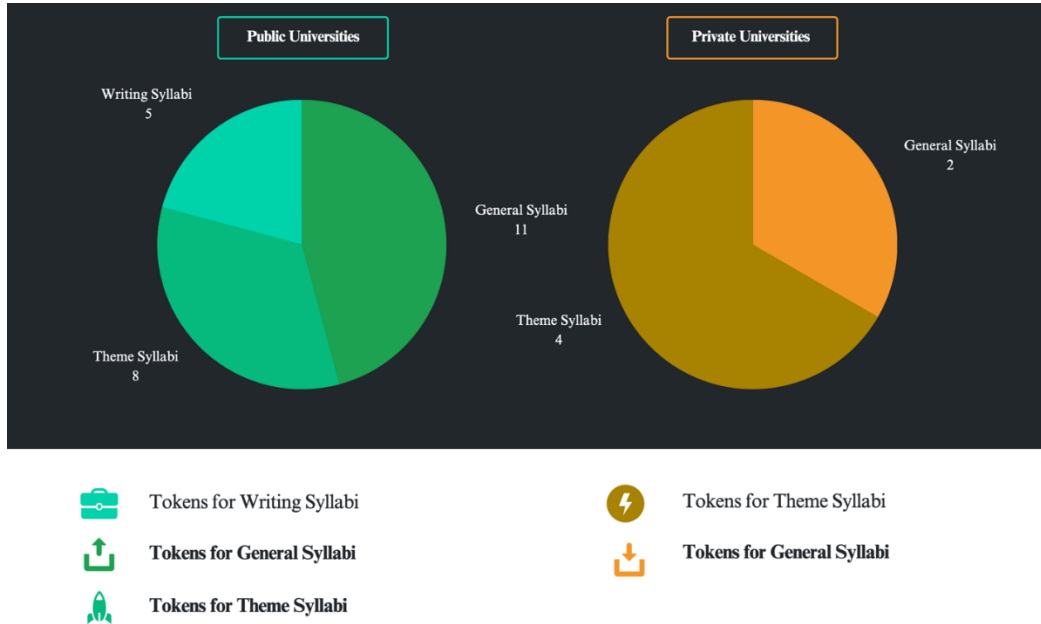
3.0 Digital Analyses

One can view access the [entire Microsoft Excel database](#) with more specific details.¹ However, through my observations in Figures 1, 2, and 3, I will share a few specific analyses keeping in mind the extent and scope of this assignment that I could make based on the data FYCA provided.

¹ The database can be viewed at https://outlookuga-my.sharepoint.com/:x/g/personal/sa62830_uga_edu/EcrGxKYcVhRPuPmyNRmX0_EBuWsyU79bZNNnC4shFCaMOQ?e=ZcuiQS.

Figure 1

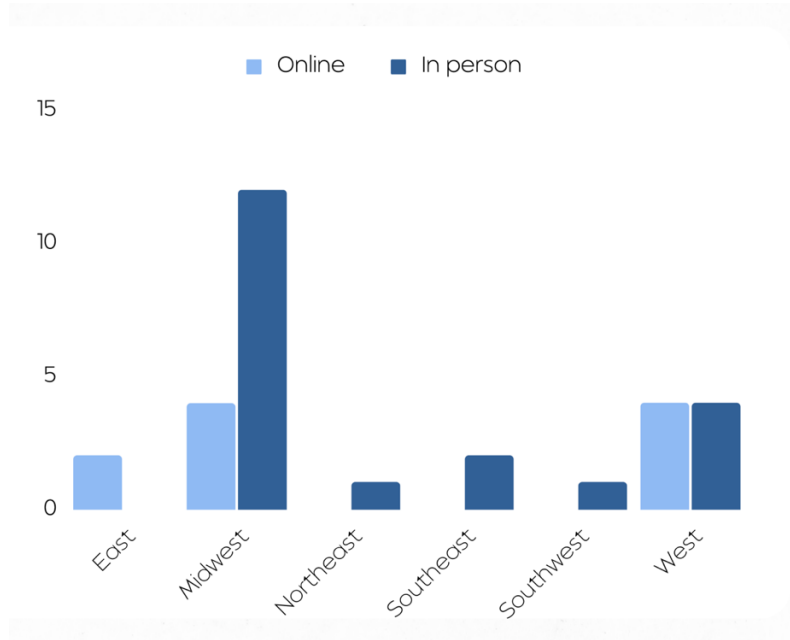
FYW Course Offering Variations based on University Type



Via Figure 1, using FYCA data extraction and data visualization tool Canva (www.canva.com), it can be observed that FYW instructors at Private Universities are more conservative regarding their course offerings than Public Universities instructors. Public University instructors design their FYW courses in more diverse ways than in Private Universities, such as by offering writing courses in Theme-based, Writing for specific-purpose, and Generic syllabi formats. In fact, as no syllabus of a WS type appeared in the chosen FYCA dataset for a private institution. Additionally, the token numbers for each syllabi type are more distributed among public universities than private universities. Therefore, if I get employed at a public university, based on FYCA data, I might expect to have more instructor liberty in designing my writing syllabi to appropriately meet my students' needs specific to rhetorical situations/professions/disciplines.

Figure 2

Mode of FYW Course Offering Based on the Institution Location in the US



Another trend I noticed, depicted using a bar chart in Figure 2 using Canva, was that the FYW teacher taught more in person than online. Based on instructional mode token numbers, most FYW teachers across the collective US regions included in FYCA taught in-person, with some exceptions in the eastern US region. In fact, FYW instructors at Midwestern universities offered three times more (total token=12) in-person FYW courses than online (total token=4). However, in the western US region, I noticed an even split (token=4 in each mode) among FYW instructors regarding instructional mode. I saw the prospects of teaching majorly online-only in the eastern US region. Therefore, if I prefer to teach FYW courses online, doing this digital analysis prompts me to explore FYW teaching opportunities more attentively in the western and eastern US, with some possibility in Midwest. For more specific token numbers across various other regions, please refer to Table 2.

Table 2

Token Representation of FYW Teachers' Instructional Mode in Each US Region

US region	East	Midwest	Northeast	Southeast	Southwest	West
Tokens for Online	2	4	0	0	0	4
Tokens for In-person	0	12	1	2	1	4

Since a significant area in the stacked area chart of Figure 3 is covered by red, it signifies that the FYW instructors across various institution sizes primarily cater to beginner writers rather than advanced writers. I came to this observation because the token number for the institutions across types taught beginner writers is more than its advanced counterparts. Another observation I noticed is that the token number for advanced FYW writers consistently increases (in the grey area) as the institution's size increases from two-year to four-year colleges, and four-year colleges to universities. For specific token numbers aligned with my observations, please refer to Table 3. Based on this token analysis, I can expect to teach beginner FYW writers as my primary audience, regardless of the institution's size (please refer Table 3). However, the bigger the institution's size, the more I might be exposed to teaching more diverse student populations in terms of their writing fluency/skills, such as advanced writers, and beginner FYW writers.

Figure 3

FYW Student Population Variations Based on Institution Size

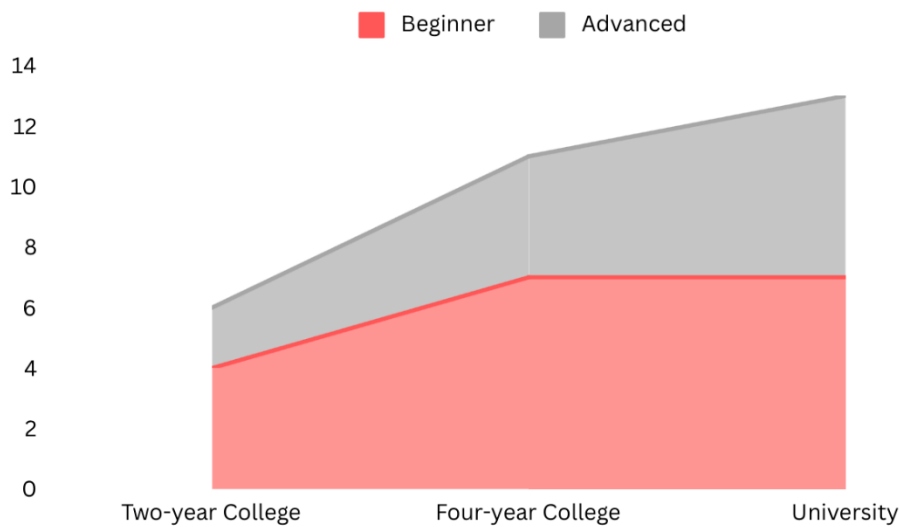


Table 3

Token Representation of FYW Student Population across Various Institution Sizes

Institution size types	Two-year College	Four-year College	University
Beginner FYW students	4	7	7
Advanced FYW students	2	4	6

4.0 Conclusion

Incorporating DH tools such as Microsoft Excel and Canva to analyze FYCA via tokens digitally, I was able to see that even though the areas of focus of the FYW instructors in their classes might be similar, the ways they approach their writing pedagogy could vary based on the type of university one teaches at, instructional mode, and size of the institution. Piloting this digital analysis would be instrumental for me as an early career writing teacher interested in FYW to plan my teaching career. This analysis allows me to manage my professional expectations depending on where I am applying for the job, the mode I want to teach, and what audience I am interested in catering to according to the size of the institution I get employed at. Such information can be handy for other FYW instructors at the same career stage to take relevant graduate courses, gather specific teaching experience, and reflect on teaching methodologies and philosophies to develop and align our teaching expertise with specific institutions' expectations.

Author Biography

Saurabh Anand is an assistant director of the writing center and teaches first-year writing composition in the Department of English at the University of Georgia, where he is also a Ph.D. student of Rhetoric and Composition Studies.

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