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Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)Envisioning "First-Year Composition" as "Introduction to Writing Studies"

In this article we propose, theorize, demonstrate, and report early results from a course that approaches first-year composition as Introduction to Writing Studies. This pedagogy explicitly recognizes the impossibility of teaching a universal academic discourse and rejects that as a goal for first-year composition. It seeks instead to improve students' understanding of writing, rhetoric, language, and literacy in a course that is topically oriented to reading and writing as scholarly inquiry and that encourages more realistic conceptions of writing.

First-year composition (FYC) is usually asked to prepare students to write across the university; this request assumes the existence of a "universal educated discourse" (Russell, "Activity Theory") that can be transferred from one writing situation to another. Yet more than twenty years of research and theory have repeatedly demonstrated that such a unified academic discourse does not exist and have seriously questioned what students can and do transfer from one context to another (Ackerman, Berkenkotter and Huckin, Carter, Diller and Oates, Kaufer and Young, MacDonald, Petraglia, Russell "Activity Theory"). However, for all practical purposes, writing studies as a field has

largely ignored the implications of this research and theory and continued to assure its publics (faculty, administrators, parents, industry) that FYC can do what nonspecialists have always assumed it can: teach, in one or two early courses, "college writing" as a set of basic, fundamental skills that will apply in other college courses and in business and public spheres after college[1]. In making these unsupportable assurances to stakeholders, our field reinforces cultural misconceptions of writing instead of attempting to educate students and publics out of those misconceptions. When we continue to pursue the goal of teaching students "how to write in college" in one or two semesters—despite the fact that our own scholarship extensively calls this possibility into question—we silently support the misconceptions that writing is not a real subject, that writing courses do not require expert instructors, and that rhetoric and composition are not genuine research areas or legitimate intellectual pursuits. We are, thus, complicit in reinforcing outsiders' views of writing studies as a trivial, skill-teaching nondiscipline.

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Though we complain about public misconceptions of writing and of our discipline, our field has not seriously considered radically reimagining the mission of the very course where misconceptions are born and/or reinforced; we have not yet imagined moving first-year composition from teaching "how to write in college" to teaching *about writing*—from acting as if writing is a basic, universal skill to acting as if writing studies is a discipline with content knowledge to which students should be introduced, thereby changing their understandings about writing and thus changing the ways they write. Here we champion such a radical move by proposing, theorizing, demonstrating, and reporting early results from an "Intro to Writing Studies" FYC pedagogy. This pedagogy explicitly recognizes the impossibility of teaching a universal academic discourse and rejects that as a goal for FYC. It seeks instead to improve students' understanding of writing, rhetoric, language, and literacy in a course that is topically oriented to reading and writing as scholarly inquiry and encouraging more realistic understandings of writing.

In this article, we explore and theorize the connection between writing studies' standing in the academy and what it teaches in the courses it accepts

as its *raison d'être*, first-year composition. Despite the progress our field has made over the years at erasing theory/practice oppositions, it is still too easy to imagine pedagogy as "practice," removed from the realm of serious theory or research about the work or direction of writing studies as a discipline. Resisting the notion that talk about pedagogy is merely talk about "practice" is especially important to writing studies because our field is conceived—by those who fund it, those who experience it, and most of those who work in it—as primarily pedagogical. Part of our purpose here is to insist on the deep disciplinary implications of FYC pedagogy; a pedagogical move whose intention is to help resituate an entire field within the academy demonstrates that pedagogy has impact beyond the daily teaching to-do list. For example, reimagining FYC as Intro to Writing Studies might create more natural gateways to WAC and WID programs than FYC typically does now. Further, the Intro to Writing Studies course would be akin to the introductory courses offered in all other disciplines (i.e., Intro to Chemistry or Intro to Philosophy) and would potentially serve as a cornerstone course for writing studies majors beginning to take root across the country. (Having a major, of course, dramatically changes a field's standing in the academy.) While we use the bulk of this article to help readers envision the Intro to Writing Studies pedagogy, our concern is not simply to improve writing instruction but also to improve the position of writing studies in the academy and change common misconceptions about writing.

We begin by establishing the grounds on which we question the traditional "teaching college writing" goal of FYC and theorize a more pedagogically successful alternative. We examine several important misconceptions about writing and writing skills transfer that suffuse expectations for FYC: that academic writing is generally universal, that writing is a basic skill independent of content or context, and that writing abilities automatically transfer from FYC to other courses and contexts. We then describe the introductory pedagogy, report on our own and our students' experiences in pilot courses, and address the challenges to both teachers and students of a writing course whose content is writing theory and research. We conclude by addressing some critiques of the intro pedagogy, showing how they in fact reinforce the case for reimagining FYC both to improve writing instruction and to improve the standing of writing studies in the academy.

Systemic Misconception and Misdirection of Mainstream FYC

A number of assumptions inform the premise that academic writing is somehow universal: writing can be considered independent of content; writing con-

sists primarily of syntactic and mechanical concerns; and academic writing skills can be taught in a one or two introductory general writing skills courses and transferred easily to other courses. These assumptions are reflected in public policy reports such as *Standards for Success* by the Center for Educational Policy Research, which focuses primarily on the need for grammar instruction—even sentence diagramming—in writing instruction. The "blue ribbon" National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges has produced two reports, *The Neglected R* and *Writing: A Ticket to Work... Or a Ticket Out*, both of which favor college professors' and business professionals' impressions of students' writing over actual data developed by writing studies scholarship. Not surprisingly, those impressions focus on syntactic and mechanical concerns and assume that "writing is writing," involving "learn-once/write-many" basic skills. The content-versus-form misconception—as old as FYC itself—appears in standardized testing, with the SAT "writing" test giving better scores to longer essays and completely discounting factual errors. It also finds its way into *New York Times* editorials, where no less a public intellectual than Stanley Fish argues that it is possible to, and therefore that FYC should, focus strictly on writing's grammatical forms and disavow interest in its content.

The field of writing studies has made part of its business for the last forty years testing these assumptions and articulating more complex, realistic, and useful ways of thinking about writing. We understand writing as inseparable from content (CCCC; Crowley; Reither) and as more than collections of grammatical and syntactical constructions (Broad; Diller and Oates; Haswell, *Gaining Ground).* Despite research demonstrating the complexity of writing, misconceptions persist and inform FYC courses around the country that attempt to teach "academic discourse." We next review several of the most intransigent problems that stem from misconceptions about writing.

Academic Discourse as a Category Mistake

The WPA Outcomes Statement adopted by the Council of Writing Program Administrators in April 2000 (http://wpacouncil.org/positions/outcomes.html) highlights four major outcomes for writing instruction: rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, reading, and writing; processes; and knowledge of conventions. These outcomes, which reflect an ideology of access to the academy and a desire to prepare students for academic writing, are increasingly being adopted nationwide (Ericsson). But can FYC fulfill these expectations?

Studies suggest that students write for various communities within the university, each of which uses writing in specialized ways that mediate the activities of the people involved (Bazerman, "Life," *Shaping*; Bazerman and Paradis; Berkenkotter, et al.; Hyland; Miller; Russell, "Activity," "Rethinking"; Smit). While some general features of writing are shared across disciplines (e.g., a view of research writing as disciplinary conversation; writing strategies such as the "moves" made in most research introductions; specialized terminology and explicit citation—see Hyland or Swales, for example), these shared features are realized differently within different academic disciplines, courses, and even assignments (Howard; Hull; Russell, "Looking"; Shamoon). As a result, "academic writing" is constituted by and in the diversity of activities and genres that mediate a wide variety of activities within higher education; its use as an umbrella term is dangerously misleading. In this sense, positing "academic writing" as the object upon which first-year students and teachers can act creates what philosopher Gilbert Ryle labeled a category mistake, "committed when, in seeking to give an account of some concept, one says that it is of one logical type or category when in fact it is of another" (Lyons 44). Ryle's example is mistaking a single building on a university campus for the university itself (Lyons 44–45).

In a similar fashion, asking teachers to teach "academic writing" begs the question: *which* academic writing—what content, what genre, for what activity, context, and audience? FYC teachers are thus forced to define academic discourse for themselves (usually unconsciously) before they can teach it. FYC teachers trained in English studies and working in English departments realize academic writing as the genres and content mediating English studies—for example, literary and rhetorical analyses (MacDonald; Wardle, "Cross-Disciplinary" and "Mutt Genres"). These instructors are unlikely to be involved in, familiar with, or able to teach the specialized discourses used to mediate other activities within disciplinary systems across the university. In effect, the flavor of the purportedly universal academic discourse taught in FYC is typically humanities-based and more specifically English studies-based.

The Open Question of Transfer

Even when FYC courses do attempt to directly address the complexity of "academic discourse," they tend to operate on the assumption that writing instruction easily transfers to other writing situations—a deeply ingrained assumption with little empirical verification. Our field does not know what genres and tasks will help students in the myriad writing situations they will later find them-

selves. We do not know how writing in the major develops. We do not know if writing essays on biology in an English course helps students write lab reports in biology courses. We do not know which genres or rhetorical strategies truly are universal in the academy, nor how to help FYC students recognize such universality. According to David Smit's summary of what we know about transfer, assumptions of direct and automatic transfer from one writing situation to another are unfounded. With scant research-based information about how to best help students write successfully in other courses, FYC teachers do not know whether choosing genre A over genre B will be of service to students who must write genre B or genre C later on. In "academic discourse" FYC, then, instructors must hope that any writing instruction will help students in some way and/or limit their teaching to basic scribal and syntactic skills[2]. The limited research on writing transfer (e.g., Beaufort; McCarthy; Walvoord; Walvoord and McCarthy) mirrors the larger body of research on educational transfer (Perkins and Salomon, "Teaching" and "Transfer") in suggesting that neither choice may serve students adequately. We are not arguing that transfer of writing knowledge cannot happen; rather, we are arguing that "far transfer" is difficult (Perkins and Salomon, "Teaching" and "Transfer") and that most current incarnations of FYC do not teach for it as explicitly as is necessary.

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Resisting Misconceptions

The range of theoretical and practical problems associated with teaching and transferring "universal educated discourse" (Russell, "Activity Theory") or "general writing skills instruction" (Petraglia, "Introduction" and "Writing") forces us to ask what FYC can actually do to prepare students for academic writing, particularly as it is currently constituted: taught in English departments mostly by adjuncts and graduate students and enrolling students from a variety of majors. By enacting the assumption of the larger academic culture that academic writing can be taught in one or two introductory writing skills courses, FYC effectively reinforces the misconceptions about the nature of writing on which that assumption is based.

If writing studies as a discipline is to have any authority over its own courses, our cornerstone course must resist conventional but inaccurate models of writing[3]. A reenvisioned FYC shifts the central goal from teaching "academic writing" to *teaching realistic and useful conceptions of writing*—perhaps the

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most significant of which would be that writing is neither basic nor universal but content- and context-contingent and irreducibly complex. Keith Hjortshoj's juxtaposition of two master narratives about writing illustrates this shift. A common narrative prescribes that "all good writing should have a thesis, clearly stated in the introduction. Following paragraphs should each present a point that supports this thesis, and the essay should end with a logical conclusion. Writing throughout the essay should be clear, concise, and correct" (33). A more realistic narrative recognizes that

> features of good writing vary from one situation to another. These variations depend, for example, on the *subject* of the writing, its *purpose*, and the *reader's expectations*. The *form* of writing used in a field of study often structures those expectations. As a consequence, the features of good writing in a literature course will differ greatly from the features of good writing in business or astronomy, and what seems clear to one audience might not be clear to another. (33)

By teaching the more realistic writing narrative *itself*, we have a theoretically greater chance of making students "better writers" than we do by assuming the one or two genres we can teach them will automatically transfer to other writing situations. Instead of teaching situational skills often incorrectly imagined to be generalizable, FYC could teach about the ways writing works in the world and how the "tool" of writing is used to mediate various activities.

Writing about Writing: Rationale and Description

In light of what we know as a field about the subject of writing, we propose a radically reimagined FYC as an Introduction to Writing Studies—a course about how to understand and think about writing in school and society (Russell, "Activity Theory"). The course includes many of the same activities as current FYC courses: researching, reading, and writing arguments. However, the course content explores reading and writing: How does writing work? How do people use writing? What are problems related to writing and reading and how can they be solved? Students read writing research, conduct reading and writing auto-ethnographies, identify writing-related problems that interest them, write reviews of the existing literature on their chosen problems, and conduct their own primary research, which they report both orally and in writing. This course would serve as a gateway to WAC and WID programs better able to address issues of specialized discourse within specific academic disciplines.

Downs has taught writing-about-writing courses in second-semester composition classes at the University of Utah, a Research-I university, and at Utah Valley State College, a regional teaching college, both of approximately 25,000 students. Between spring 2003 and spring 2005, he taught the curriculum in three sections totaling about sixty students, and formally evaluated the course alongside a traditional "academic writing" version of an FYC course in a semester-length study involving forty students. Wardle has implemented a similar curriculum at the University of Dayton, a private liberal arts school of over 10,000. In the fall semesters of 2004 and 2005, she taught the curriculum in a first-year writing course of twenty-four honors and engineering students. At the end of each semester, the students evaluated the course both anonymously and in portfolio reflections.

Grounding Principles and Goals

Though there are a number of ways to institute an Intro to Writing Studies course, our iterations of the course were designed according to shared core beliefs and a desire to resist and alter students' misconceptions about writing. The first of our shared beliefs corresponds with James Reither's assertion that writing cannot be taught independent of content. It follows that the more an instructor can say about a writing's content, the more she can say about the writing itself; this is another way of saying that writing instructors should be expert readers. When the course content is writing studies, writing instructors are concretely enabled to fill that expert reader role. This change directly contravenes the typical assumption that first-year writing can be about anything, that somehow the content is irrelevant to an instructor's ability to respond to the writing.

Second, the course is forthcoming about what writing instruction can and cannot accomplish; it does not purport to "teach students to write" in general nor does it purport to do all that is necessary to prepare students to write in college. Rather, it promises to help students understand some activities related to written scholarly inquiry by demonstrating the conversational and subjective nature of scholarly texts. In this course, students are taught that writing is conventional and context-specific rather than governed by universal rules—thus they learn that within each new disciplinary course they will need to pay close attention to what counts as appropriate for that discourse community. Taking the research community of writing studies as our example not only allows writing instructors to bring their own expertise to the course, but also heightens students' awareness that writing itself is a subject

of scholarly inquiry. Students leave the course with increased awareness of writing studies as a discipline, as well as a new outlook on writing as a researchable activity rather than a mysterious talent.

Third, the course respects students by refusing to create double standards or different rules for student writers than for expert writers. For example, students learn to recognize the need for expert opinion and cite it where necessary, but they also learn to claim their own situational expertise and write from it as expert writers do. This respect for students is in accord with the field's ethos, thus blending a pedagogical advantage with a disciplinary one. In addition, creating high expectations for students aligns well with current learning theory: students can accomplish far more than we typically give them credit for being able to, if only we will ask them to do it.

In sum, then, the course does not teach from principles that contravene writing studies research. Instead, it draws on research from the field and principles and ethics that shape the field to help students understand the nature of writing and to explore their own writing practices. Unlike pedagogies that are so detached from writing studies' specialized knowledge as to deny it, the Intro pedagogy emerges from that knowledge and ethos.

Readings

In the writing studies course, we use readings that report research about writing and theorize ways of thinking about writing to raise important questions and to provide examples of various textual moves related to scholarly writing based on primary research. The articles we assign vary, as do the ideas on which we focus; thus, we do not prescribe an "ideal" set of readings here. However, the common denominators among our readings are these:

- Material in readings is centered on issues with which students have first-hand experience—for example, problems students are prone to experience throughout the writing process, from conceptual questions of purpose, to procedural questions of drafting and revision, to issues surrounding critical reading.
- Data-driven, research-focused readings seem more useful than highly theoretical pieces. The former tend to be both more readable and more concrete, making them more accessible and relevant to students.

Studies by Berkenkotter, Sommers, Perl, Flower and Hayes, Murray, Swales, Dawkins, Beason, and Berkenkotter and Huckin encourage students' thinking

about invention, introductions, drafting, revision, punctuation and mechanics, error, and conventions of science-reporting articles. Articles that focus on critical reading, notably Haas and Flower's "Rhetorical Reading Strategies" and Margaret Kantz's "Helping Students Use Textual Sources Persuasively," explicitly critique typical student reading strategies and compare them to more effective reading strategies. Readings from Lakoff and Johnson on metaphor and James Gee on cultural discourses explicitly explore situated, motivated discourse; critique notions such as "objective information" and "disembodied text"; and help students demystify the myth of the isolated, inspired writer.

While we are sensitive to concerns about writing courses based on readings, research writing generally entails thoughtful responses to other writing. If writing cannot be separated from content, then scholarly writing cannot be separated from reading. To center the course on student writing and avoid merely banking information, students discuss, write about, and test every reading in light of their own experiences; they discuss why they are reading a piece and how it might influence their understanding of writing. Rick Evans' "Learning Schooled Literacy," for example, helps students reflect on how their past reading and writing experiences shaped them, while Lucille McCarthy's "A Stranger in Strange Lands" explains why students might feel frustration about writing in new classrooms.

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Reflective Assignments

Class time spent on readings focuses more on students' reactions to them than on the readings themselves; thus, our students write about issues raised by readings by responding to prompts such as, "How are your experiences with research writing like and unlike Shirlie's as Kantz describes them? What would you do differently if you could?" We find that students' responses initiate excellent class discussions, and that throughout the course students come back to ideas in the readings they write about to frame discussions about their writing experiences.

We also assign literacy narratives or auto-ethnographies in which students take stock of their literacy educations, experiences, and habits. We encourage students to think historically and to identify sources of their current attitudes and approaches to literacy, and we help students clarify their open questions, problems, and skepticisms regarding writing. What do they like and dislike about writing? What problems do they have with writing? What do they sense they do not know that they would like to? Recognizing dissonances

and gaps from their own experiences helps students identify research questions for the course's research focus.

Research Assignments

The most noteworthy feature of the course is that students conduct primary research, however limited, on issues of interest to both themselves and the field of writing studies. Conducting primary research helps students shift their orientation to research from one of compiling facts to one of generating knowledge (e.g., Greene, "Mining;" Kantz; Nelson, "Constructing," "Research"; Spivey). Primary research projects also clarify for students the nature of scholarly writing processes that the course is tasked with teaching and empowers them to write with legitimate originality and conviction. Perhaps most importantly, conducting first-hand research on writing allows students to take control of problem areas in their own writing when they focus on those problems directly in their research projects. Consequently, the course about writing becomes a *writing* course in which students study writing to learn more about it and potentially improve their own.

The research project is tightly scaffolded. Students begin by conducting library research about the topics of their research questions and learn enough about primary research to suggest methods for studying their questions. They write formal research proposals that articulate their research questions and outline the methods they plan to use in their studies. The questions students develop can be fascinating indeed, as these examples from our courses illustrate:

- Do college freshmen and seniors use rhetorical strategies at all or in similar ways?
- How useful is Microsoft Word's grammar checker?
- What makes a classic literary work a "classic"?
- What makes an effective business plan?
- How does music (or lighting, or other environmental factors) affect writing and revision?
- How do literacy activities vary at high- and low-income day cares?
- What kinds of writing will a social work major encounter in his career?
- Is writing taught in medical school? Should it be, and if so, how?

We assign activities throughout the research project that help students become more proficient at writing with sources, including interpretive summaries in which students practice reading rhetorically and contributively by constructing arguments about what a given article says and what the author may mean by writing it. Annotated bibliographies help students organize their library research and negotiate with instructors about issues such as number of sources, which we teach is contingent, like so much else, on the project in question. A stand-alone literature review moves students toward understanding various studies and statements on an issue as positions in a three-dimensional space rather than as simple binaries. Developing a "community map" of opinion helps students envision research and argument as community inquiry and identify gaps that their primary research can address. Students' primary research methods include surveys and interviews, read aloud/think aloud protocols, close observations of actual writing processes, or discourse analyses of various documents. Through primary research, students begin to learn that careful observation and empirical data-gathering techniques bolster their authority and reduce their reliance on other experts' pronouncements.

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It bears emphasizing that we maintain reasonable expectations for students. Circumstances—particularly the sixteen-week timetable to which no scholar is held—and limited knowledge and experience do not allow for highly ambitious and rigorous projects; students are practicing moves rather than acting as paragons. However, we find that students are able to accomplish discourse analysis of small corpuses, interviews and surveys of manageable numbers of subjects, and small-scale ethnographies and case studies that emphasize quality over quantity in sites, observations, field notes, and coding.

Presentation Assignments

One conception of writing we strive to help students shift is imagining "writing" essentially as merely drafting a paper. The course design helps us show students that most scholarly researched writing in fact begins with becoming curious and establishing a question and moves through research. What students traditionally imagine as writing is actually only the final move in a much larger series of events. However, in our courses, students do arrive at this final move, presenting their research in both a significant written report and an oral presentation.

The final three weeks of our course are devoted to presentations and revision workshops. Students prepare ten-minute presentations of their research and participate on panels organized to create conversation among panelists. Students tend to be genuinely interested in comparing findings and learning from each other the outcomes of their arduous but useful projects. We have rarely seen better student presentations in terms of generating student interest, discussion, and ideas for further research. In fact, throughout the course, as students exchange research tales, data, and questions, it is clear that the writing studies pedagogy answers Reither's and Kleine's calls for communities of inquiry.

The Writing about Writing Course: Student Outcomes

To demonstrate the flavor of the pedagogy, its strengths, and its weaknesses, we present two case studies. The first is about a struggling C student in Downs's course, doubtful about his own reading and writing abilities; the second is about a confident honors student in Wardle's course who found the course challenging but met all the goals. These contrasting cases demonstrate the flexibility and appropriateness of the curriculum for a variety of students.

Case Study 1: Trying to Change Jack's Disposition toward Writing

Jack and "English" (writing and reading) have never been friends, and they still are not after Jack waded through English 2020, "Intermediate Writing: The Science and Technology of How Writing Works," at Utah Valley State College (UVSC). But they have perhaps come to an understanding.

A twenty-nine-year-old chemistry major, Jack had tried college immediately after high school but decided that "the almighty dollar" looked better, so he worked as a state corrections officer before regaining the desire to return to college. Though articulate, thoughtful, and bright, Jack lacked self-confidence. His writing apprehension made his semester a long struggle to simply complete assignments. Although Jack earned only a C-, largely because of incomplete work, we include his story to illustrate how the course can work for less well-prepared students.

As his literacy narrative reveals, Jack's experiences with English (again, both writing and reading) in grade school, high school, and college convinced him that he could do nothing right on paper:

> I had very bad experiences that went back as far as I can remember. My mother, sisters, and father were all very good at English and could not understand how I

> was getting such bad grades in the classes. At one time, my father even said I was stupid. I guess I started to believe him and just kind of gave up. It got to the point that I just didn't care, and I almost didn't graduate from high school. It wasn't that I didn't care about everything, just those things I wasn't good at. I loved Chemistry and Physics and Math, I had taken AP classes in all of those subjects and did well. It was just the English thing. (Reflective Letter)

In high school, Jack was tracked into what he called "English for dummies" where "we sat around and looked at pictures." After a bad experience in a college technical writing class, Jack left college for ten years. Upon his return, he was placed in UVSC's lowest-level remedial writing course (089) but found the experience so distasteful that he retook a placement exam and earned a place in the first-semester writing course, English 1010. There he "had a teacher who thought of my writing what I had known all along, and that was I stink" (Reflective Letter). Not surprisingly, Jack "never really had the hope of doing well" in 2020 and took it only because he "had to take it to make it through school" (Reflective Letter). In an early thought piece responding to Stuart Greene's "Argument as Inquiry," he wrote:

> I feel as though I come into this class with a handicap. I am a student returning to school after 10 years on the job market. I spent everyday writing papers for my last job but never really took the time to think about what I was writing. When you write police reports over and over you just kind of report the facts. I have never put much thought into the papers that I have written. (Thought Piece 3)

Jack "never thought about my audience when writing and maybe that is my problem. Or maybe I am just a hopeless cause" (Thought Piece 3). Reading Flower and Hayes' "The Cognition of Discovery: Defining a Rhetorical Problem" gave Jack a clear and concrete comparison of how invention worked for more expert writers versus how he imagined the task of figuring out what to write. He thought of writing as focused on facts (from his police-report writing) and following rules: "I try to get the information in the paper and the length of the paper needed and make sure it is done properly" (Thought Piece 9). Though he took only the broadest, most accessible points from such readings, he understood those well and his reflective pieces were usually insightful in connecting the readings to his own experiences.

Throughout the course, Jack's engagement remained high, even when writing assignments came late, or not at all, because he'd been too worried about doing them wrong to even begin them. The day of the first draft-reading workshop, everyone but Jack provided drafts of their literacy narratives. In fact

he *had* brought a draft but was unwilling to show it to anyone because he was convinced it was all wrong—and indeed it wasn't exactly right. Later in the course, he began to look forward to workshops: reading Nancy Sommers' "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers" and hearing that other writers, too, have extreme doubts about the quality or rightness of their work helped Jack accept that "not exactly right" is okay when it comes to writing. He had to learn that writing is a series of attempts toward an ideal that is probably never reached.

Only the most authoritarian direction pushed Jack into his semester research project. Since he expected "research" to mean finding and paraphrasing what other people had previously said, Jack was nearly paralyzed by the requirement to do first-hand research and report it in the context of existing research:

> When this assignment was first given I was a little scared about going out on a limb and committing myself to a research question. I mean what if I couldn't find anything on what I was researching? Or worse yet what if the teacher thought it was a dumb question to do research on? After talking to the professor and thinking about it I have decided that if I think about this too much and don't get it done I will get a zero and if I just do the best I can what is the worst that can happen to my score? (Research Proposal)

Because Jack was researching in a subject area with which Downs has more than passing familiarity, Downs was able to help him find resources and arrive at a researchable question much more effectively than if Jack had been researching stem cell research or the death penalty. But even more importantly, the course encouraged Jack to tap his own interests in and experiences relating to writing. So when Jack submitted a proposal nearly five weeks late—he spent those weeks vacillating among a number of questions and entertaining the option of dropping the course—his idea was anything but "dumb":

> I have decided to write about police reports and the way they act as a debriefing for the officer, at least they did for me. The problem with this is that a police report is supposed to report the facts and not become a biased statement or put opinion in it so the court can use it.
>
> The trick with me was I was trained to just write the facts and until this class that is what I always believed I did. Since this class I have seen that my old reports were biased and just my opinion of what I saw. I guess that no one really can write just the facts. . . . I intend to show that even though police officers are told to do one thing they are really trying to get us to use the report as a debrief. Which show a contradiction in the purpose of the report. . . . I think that a lot of officers

> whether they realize it or not they use the police report to accomplish something very emotional, and that is the debrief. (Research Proposal)

Jack's recognition that officers were encouraged to make reports serve a de facto cathartic purpose contrasts strikingly with his assertion near the beginning of the course that "when you write police reports over and over you kind of just report the facts" (Thought Piece 3). His final paper combined research on report writing and stress in police work with accounts and police reports from his own experience as a corrections officer. In the most astute section of the paper, Jack compares his report of an incident with another officer's report of the same incident, working through differences in style, account, perspectives, and tone to demonstrate how those differences could be read as emotive.

Most of the paper wasn't as strong—Jack got a late start on the project that left him no time for the extensive drafting and revision process designed into the course. But Jack's moves were more important than the paper itself—a value at the heart of the writing-about-writing pedagogy. As teachers of college composition and researchers of writing, we want—and are taking—license to decide that what students like Jack *know to do* in order to conduct critical, researched inquiry at the college level is more important than whether they master APA format or produce marginally more fluent writing. Jack may not measurably know better "how to write" if by that we mean greater felicity with punctuation or syntax or even the ability to produce a particular genre. But what Jack reports he did learn in the course represents a more important goal for FYC:

It was the course's focus on how writing works and its constant drive to help students understand writing that helped Jack learn these key principles of writing.

> I can say something did happen to me in this course and that was I really started to think for myself. Your class has also made me realize that I'm really not that bad of a writer. I also learned that writing a paper is not just all about the rules. I still don't think that I am that great of a writer but I do know that a lot of people struggle with their writing and that makes it a little easier for me to write without fear of what people will think. I guess one thing that this course did for me was to open my mind and make me think that it all depends on who is reading my writing and that it isn't all me that stinks. (Reflective Letter)

It was the course's focus on how writing works and its constant drive to help students understand writing that helped Jack learn these key principles of writing. Had he been allowed to write about "intelligent design" rather than

studying writing itself; had he been reading pieces about what makes good citizenship rather than reading research on writing; had class discussions focused on the news of the day rather than describing and grappling with writers' problems; had the course focused just on teaching Jack "how to" write a research paper rather than on the nature of writing; had the class simply enjoined Jack to "research scholarly articles" instead of relentlessly studying how scholarly articles do what they do; it seems unlikely that Jack would have made the progress he did. (If other writing pedagogies succeed in helping students better understand the game of writing and themselves as writers, we might ask why he hadn't learned these things in four previous college writing courses.) In 2020, Jack gained the ability to place himself—his background, abilities, processes, attitudes, and writing—in a broader context of what is known more generally about writers and writing. His case shows that even students potentially disadvantaged by an intense curriculum can benefit from it by changing the ways they understand themselves as writers and imagine the project of writing.

Case Study 2: How Stephanie Learned That Research Is Messy

Stephanie entered the University of Dayton (UD) in Fall 2004 as a biology major in the University Honors Program. Self-identifying as a reader who enjoyed her English classes and was confident in her reading and writing abilities, Stephanie received three credit hours toward FYC for her AP English score and enrolled in Wardle's English 114 Freshman Writing Seminar instead of the English 101/102 sequence taken by most UD students. She was not, then, typical of students at UD or at most universities across the country. However, she was fairly typical of most students in the Freshman Writing Seminar—motivated, prepared, and hardworking.

Despite Stephanie's preparation and experience with reading and writing, she found the course work challenging; the seminar about writers, writing, and discourse covered entirely new ground for her. In past English classes, everything she wrote "dealt with literature instead of composition" (Reflection 1). In high school, she "hardly ever felt it necessary to revise a paper" and her research consisted of "just looking up what other people wrote and rephrasing it" (Reflection 1). The seminar forced her to change her habits and understandings.

Stephanie consistently found ways to link class readings to her own personal experience, linkages that led to her course project. Whereas many students selected research topics related entirely to their own experience with

little direct regard for the course readings, Stephanie's interest in reading led her to become fascinated by Haas and Flower's "Rhetorical Reading Strategies and the Construction of Meaning." She felt that her own experiences with reading disproved Haas and Flower's findings that "novice" readers do not use rhetorical reading strategies. Consequently, Stephanie spent the semester grappling with rhetorical reading—what it was, who studied it, and how *she* might go about studying it.

Finding and reading literature on the topic and writing a literature review proved important in Stephanie's development as a reader and researcher:

> I do not now think that lit reviews are merely paraphrasing things other people have said. In fact, [they are] a place to frame the whole argument in your research paper. Without the lit review to explain what has been said before you, what you have to say doesn't matter to anybody. It also helps to focus your main ideas within your conclusion, by pointing out major ideas and connecting them with each other. Lit reviews basically create the framework for what you're going to do, and how what you're doing will fit into the discourse community. (Reflection 4)

The notion of joining a discourse community or ongoing conversation was a central one for the course. Most students were fascinated by the notion that researchers are responding and writing to one another in an ongoing conversation. Stephanie pursued the notion further in her end of semester reflection:

> . . . I never before realized that every written text is part of an ongoing conversation with those who have discussed the topic before and those who will read your writing in the future and write their own texts in response to yours. I did not connect reading and writing so strongly in the past . . . . (Reflection 1)

When Stephanie felt she adequately understood the "conversation" about rhetorical reading, she designed her own study. Like studies conducted by professionals, hers was messy, complicated, surprising, and imperfect. She set out to discover "whether students read rhetorically in the first place, and if not, whether a push in the right direction aids in the use of rhetorical reading skills" (Final Paper 7). To conduct the research, she contacted five college students from three universities and asked them to complete a three-part reading exercise similar to the exercise given by Haas and Flower (171–172). Stephanie asked participants to complete "a list of questions designed to create a general profile of how these students felt about and approached the reading of a difficult text"; to read a passage from the introduction of Linda Flower's article, "Construction of Purpose in Writing and Reading;" and to write a short explana-

tion of what this text meant. Stephanie did not provide participants with outside information in order to "ensure that whatever information they wrote came from the selected text and not from another place" (Final Paper 8). Finally, Stephanie asked participants to read a portion of the introduction to "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers" by Nancy Sommers, again with no information about the text or where it came from. "This time, however, before writing a response, the reader was asked a series of questions designed to stimulate rhetorical responses, or at least get the reader to start thinking of the writing in such a way as to induce the gathering of rhetorical information" (Final Paper 9).

Almost immediately, Stephanie confronted the difficulties of conducting primary research. She had allowed participants to complete the exercise individually and at their own pace; as a result, some of them were slow to complete the various pieces and Stephanie worried that she would not finish the study on time. She also found that her participants may not have clearly understood her directions (or perhaps chose not to follow them), and, since she was not with the participants when they completed the exercise, she could not clarify the directions. In her final paper, Stephanie addressed methodological shortcomings, explaining ways in which the study could be improved and pointing out the limitations of her findings, which were based on a small number of participants and therefore not generalizable. That students not only *could* but *should* acknowledge shortcomings in their research papers came as a surprise to all the students, including Stephanie. Before the course, they perceived that research must sound perfect and clear-cut. They learned in the seminar that research is never perfect or clear-cut, and that acknowledging shortcomings is essential in a paradigm where research is conversation and readers need to evaluate and perhaps replicate studies.

That students not only *could* but *should* acknowledge shortcomings in their research papers came as a surprise to all the students.

Stephanie was also confused and surprised by her research findings. Much to her dismay, her results confirmed Haas and Flower's study: the students in Stephanie's study were no more able to use rhetorical strategies than the students in the original study. Even when students were told to ask rhetorical questions about the text, those questions did not seem to help them. According to Stephanie, "None of the first year college students in this study are able to make the transition between the rhetorical information they gather and the comprehension of the text, making this rhetorical information useless" (Final

Paper 12). Stephanie found, however, that the only senior in her study did ask himself rhetorical questions and used them to better understand what he read. Interestingly, Stephanie also identified problems beyond those discussed by Haas and Flower. Not only did the first-year students in Stephanie's study fail to use rhetorical reading strategies, they simply failed to understand the content. In fact, the rhetorical questions they asked themselves led them to further misunderstand what they were reading. Stephanie ended her study with more questions than answers, as well as ideas about what she would change if she were to conduct the study again.

As a result of her experiences with real participants, research methodology, and primary data, Stephanie realized a truth about research: it's messy. Moreover, Stephanie's and her classmates' previously held misconceptions about research writing were beginning to dismantle. Their research writing experiences prior to the writing seminar taught them that the right answers to all questions exist "out there somewhere" and that their task is to locate and write up those answers in their own words. When the students became surprised and confused by the results of their own studies, they began to question how they read other people's research as well. They came to understand the contextual and conditional nature of research because their own experiences no longer supported the notion of research writing as objective and acontextual.

At the end of the semester, Stephanie reflected positively on her experiences in the course. Although she "hated it at times," she learned a great deal about the connection between reading and writing, expanded her own reading and writing skills, and developed knowledge about rhetorical reading from which others could benefit: "I would be willing to share everything I have learned with anybody. In fact, from the start of our class, I would try to explain to people how to become better readers and writers . . ." (Reflection 6).

While most students won't achieve Stephanie's level of success in the writing studies course, her story illustrates what is possible: students come to see writing as a conversation, research as historical and contextual, and research findings as messy, complicated, and inconclusive. These are truths about writing that Stephanie, and many other students in the English 114 Writing Seminar, walked away understanding.

Student Feedback

While Stephanie and Jack had radically different experiences, they and most of our other students shared a range of outcomes. Commonalities were appar-

ent in students' end-of-semester reflections, the most prevalent being increased self-awareness about writing, improved reading skills, and a new understanding of research writing as conversation.

Increased Self-Awareness about Writing

Students suggested that they thought a lot about their own writing by the end of this course. For example, one student wrote that the course provided new opportunities to look at her writing: "It's been a real blessing to see more of who *I am* as a writer. . . . Being involved in so many discussions about writing really helped me to take my vision of how I write, and put it on the chopping block (next to Flower and Hayes and Murray)." Another realized, "I need to do more to get other people involved in my writing." A signature comment from Downs's class was, "I never knew that there was so much written about writing. It was extremely helpful to my writing to be able to study these techniques."

Improved Reading Abilities and Confidence

The course focus on reading makes students more aware of their own reading practices and sometimes stretches their abilities. One of Wardle's students commented

> In high school, I would skim the required reading and look for the main details, or if I was given questions to answer I would skim the reading and only look specifically for the answers. In college, I began to read things entirely, from the articles required in English and History to my Chemistry textbook, searching for the main points and occasionally taking notes on the readings if I was having trouble understanding the article.

Students also become much more likely to recognize texts not as information but as the words of real people. As such, they adopt more of the habits of experienced scholarly writers in thinking of and referring to their sources as people. In comparison to students in "academic writing" pedagogies, they are much more likely to introduce sources as people speaking (e.g., "Royar and Giles have studied this question at length. . ."), much less likely to blind quote, and more selective and precise in their use of descriptive attributive verbs such as *argues, claims, insists, questions, states,* and *believes* rather than "the book says." They also become more used to critical maneuvers with texts; as one student wrote, "[Readers must] look at the purpose of [a piece of] writing, find the motivation."

Raised Awareness of Research Writing as Conversation

Unlike students in other pedagogies we have used, students in the Introduction to Writing Studies course conceptualize research writing much more like expert scholarly researchers do, as turns in a conversation or contributions to addressing an open question. A student in Wardle's class saw that "One needs to gather the information already found by other researchers who have either joined or started this conversation, so that one knows what they are going to say in relation to what has already been said by others." Another student wrote,

> . . . I have learned that research is joining an ongoing conversation. In order to do a research project, I had to first learn what others had said in the past on gender and politeness before I even began doing my own research study. I had to become knowledgeable on the conversation that had taken place previously, before I jumped into the current conversation.

Students in the course experience something of how scholarly researchers take authority for themselves and state opinions, thus making their writing more "authentic." As one of Downs's students said, "You made me feel as if my opinion mattered."

These three outcomes were the most obvious ones achieved collectively by students in our courses; though there were others, we have little space to describe them here. Nearly all students reported newfound confidence in their abilities to complete "hard" work, commenting that "After finishing, I was utterly astonished" or noting they accomplished something they "still don't believe" they did. Many commented that they had learned about structuring large projects and completing primary research projects. A number noted that for the first time in an English course they found peer review not only useful but essential and asked for more in future courses—perhaps because all of the students were invested in their work and in the assignments.

Finally, it bears noting that the students in these courses left with an understanding of the field of writing studies. By the end of the term, students used the language of the field often (calling themselves "recursive writers," calling the data they collected "artifacts") and discussed questions that still need to be taken up by the discipline. Though few of these students, if any, will likely earn PhDs in rhetoric and composition, they move into their chosen disciplines with realistic and useful conceptions of writing and they know where to go for answers when confronted by writing-related problems.

Challenges and Critiques

Despite our positive experiences and the positive feedback of most of our students, there are inevitable challenges inherent to this pedagogy. We also find that some of our colleagues resist this pedagogy, for a variety of reasons. Here we briefly outline the challenges we have experienced, as well as respond to additional critiques offered by some of our colleagues.

Challenges

No pedagogy offers perfect solutions, and ours is no exception. Our pedagogy is demanding, confusing to students early on, does not allow for "perfect" student work, and—most obviously—cannot be taught by someone not trained in writing studies. Rather than gloss these challenges, we feel they must be openly discussed if the pedagogy is to see widespread use.

The course is demanding and different. In high school, most of our students experienced English classes that revolved around literature and they often have similar expectations for FYC. By contrast, our course content is not only entirely new, but the readings and assignments are lengthy and complex. As a result, the first few weeks can be difficult as students adjust their expectations of the course and begin to understand its goals. Our classroom experience also suggests that because the writing studies pedagogy is demanding on several levels (engagement, reading, critical thinking), it inverts the traditional FYC bell curve with most students achieving exceptional success or failing and few students earning Cs. Underengaged students may be at greater risk of failing the course than their more invested counterparts.

We do not want to institute a course that can function as a "weed out" course for underprepared students; our goal remains to help students learn more about writing and become more successful writers in the university. The course may be easier for students over two semesters, rather than one; in this scenario, the first semester could be devoted to reading writing studies literature, choosing a research topic, and beginning library research and the second semester devoted to primary research.

Few appropriate resources exist for first-year students. Currently no textbooks exist[4] that provide surveys of our field's central principles and important works tailored for undergraduate students, perhaps in part because the field has not yet summoned enough of a center to agree on what those principles and works might be. While challenging, this approach does have benefits: students receive coaching about how to read scholarly articles (a literacy task too often ignored in courses that purport to teach "academic discourse"),

and the texts serve as examples of principles such as how to cite sources and how to organize research reports.

Realistically, however, teaching a more widespread and easily-implemented introductory course about writing studies will require a textbook like those in other fields summarizing writing studies research. Publisher interest in such a textbook hinges on projected sales, so the course must be taught in larger numbers before publishers will be convinced of the viability of such a textbook; in the meantime, instructors must accept and produce intermediary solutions like supplemental texts that condition publishers and the field to the idea of such textbooks.

Students will produce imperfect work. Given the limits of time and audience-appropriate resources, students often only grasp the most central concepts of highly nuanced and rich readings. Students' research plans, library research, primary methods, and results are limited because of short time, lack of funding, and inexperience. Fewer students produce "complete" and polished final papers in the writing studies course than in other FYC pedagogies. This difference might be problematic for instructors who believe that students should produce perfected and polished writing; only the very best students in the writing studies course will do so. However, we assert that accepting imperfect work recognizes important truths about all research writing: it takes a long time, is inevitably imperfect, and requires extensive revision. The rewards of accepting imperfection as part of a challenging research and writing curriculum outweigh the deficiencies of courses in which students produce more-polished but less-demanding and realistic writing assignments.

Instructors must be educated in writing studies to teach the curriculum we suggest, and a significant portion of the national corps of college writing instructors do not have appropriate training to do so.

Instructors must be knowledgeable about writing studies. Finally, we acknowledge the elephant in the room: instructors must be educated in writing studies to teach the curriculum we suggest, and a significant portion of the national corps of college writing instructors do not have appropriate training to do so. In this sense, ours is a truth-telling course; it forefronts the field's current labor practices and requires that we ask how FYC students are currently being served by writing instructors who *couldn't* teach a writing studies pedagogy. Our field's current labor practices reinforce cultural misconceptions that anyone can teach writing because there is nothing special to know about it. By employing nonspecialists to teach a specialized body of knowledge, we undermine our own claims as to that specialization and make our detractors'

argument in favor of general writing skills for them. As Debra Dew demonstrates, constructing curricula that require specialization goes a long way toward professionalizing the writing instruction workforce.

Critiques

In this section, we respond to two critiques leveled at this pedagogy by some of our colleagues: that this course may not improve student writing and that this pedagogy arises merely from a desire to teach topics that interest us. While we believe these critiques have little merit, both will likely arise again and therefore need to be addressed.

Teaching about writing may not improve student writing. As we noted in discussing the implications of Jack's experience, writing about writing may not result in measurable improvements in students' writing any more than other types of FYC courses. Assessments suggest that particular courses or time periods have not improved student writing (Benton & Slocombe; Curry & Hager; Graham; Scharton), have had no discernible effects on student writing (Jewell, et al.; Sanders), or have even worsened student writing (Scharton). Part of the reason may be that improvement in writing happens slowly and is unlikely to be evident in essays written for a particular course over the short run (Witte and Faigley). Studies do show that over a period of one to three years, college students' writing does improve (Hughes & Martin; Haswell, "Change," "Documenting"); however, it is difficult to attribute improvement to composition courses (Davis) or to any particular curriculum (e.g., Haswell, "Change"; Hurtgen; Vandament).

However, we are not arguing that FYC can have no effect on students' writing. Rather, we are positing different sorts of improvement as the primary focus of the course. Those who seek "general writing improvement" are bound to be disappointed in this pedagogy, but we would argue that the goal of "general writing improvement" ignores the necessity of defining what counts as "writing" and "improvement." Our experiences suggest that some of our criteria for student success in writing courses—such as recognizing the conversational nature of research writing or gaining confidence in and perspective on one's writing abilities and processes—are positively impacted by the writing studies pedagogy. The question is whether and for whom such gains will count as "improved writing."

The writing studies pedagogy is also consonant with current understandings of transfer. Proven means of facilitating transfer include self-reflection, explicit abstraction of principles, and alertness to one's context (Langer; Perkins

and Salomon, "Teaching" and "Transfer"; Smit; Beaufort 186; Flower and Hayes). Teaching students what we know about writing and asking them to research their own writing and the writing of others encourages this self-reflection and mindfulness, thereby improving the possibility that students will maintain a stance of inquiry toward writing as they write in other disciplinary systems. Only with additional implementation of the pedagogy and longitudinal studies to assess students' later writing experiences will we be able to tell whether this theory bears out in practice.

The course simply represents the instructor's desire to teach about things she knows and enjoys. We believe this critique is rooted in the notion that graduate instructors specializing in literature often attempt to teach their own interests and expertise in composition courses at the expense of writing instruction. We submit that our curriculum is not remotely analogous. The case we make for a course *about* writing represents a bid to share our unique disciplinary expertise in a course of the same disciplinary designation; this is no more and no less than any other faculty member across the academy does.

While faculty in other disciplines are expected to teach the content and methods of their fields even in the most introductory courses, many (if not most) FYC classes throughout the country allow students to write on any range of topics, topics which often fall outside the writing teachers' specialization. Writing teachers and students alike are better served by focusing specifically on topics teachers know. To argue otherwise accepts and perpetuates the myth that content is separable from writing—that an FYC instructor *need not be* expert in the subject matter of a paper in order to evaluate the quality of writing in that paper, or need not be a subject expert on writing in order to teach writing. Such claims accept the premise that writing instruction can be limited to fluent English syntax, grammar, and mechanics. As a field, we would do well to ask what assumptions about writing in general and writing studies in particular would lead some to argue that teaching the content and methods of our field is inappropriate, unproductive, or harmful to students.

Conclusion

Those of us working in writing studies find ourselves today confronted by the fact that our own research and theory calls our cornerstone course—and the underlying assumptions upon which it is based—into question. Added to this difficulty is the fact that few outside our own discipline know we exist; if they do know we exist, they know little or nothing about what we do as writing scholars. Certainly, our own research and theory about the nature of writing

has done little to influence public conceptions of writing. These two problems—teaching at odds with our research, and lack of public awareness—can be remedied together through a writing studies pedagogy. While this pedagogy has its drawbacks, we feel those are far outweighed by its benefits.

First, this pedagogy overcomes the problem of contradictory research and practice: rather than purporting to teach students "academic writing" and claiming to prepare them for writing in their disciplines, the course teaches students what we as a field have learned *about* writing as an object of study. Thus, the course acquires an attainable goal and a clear content while continuing to help students understand how writing works in the academy so that they can succeed there. Its content does not distract from writing (the perennial difficulty of writing-course content), since the content *is* writing.

Second, the pedagogy teaches potentially transferable conceptions of the activity of writing rather than "basic" writing skills that are in fact highly specialized and contextualized. This content and the overall project of the course create intellectual rigor and resist characterization of writing instruction as remedial, basic, or inexpert; in doing so, the course professionalizes writing instruction, as Dew demonstrates in a similar program at University of Colorado-Colorado Springs. In addition, this course tells our field's stories, conceptions, and questions by rendering its teaching, researching, and scholarly practices visible—thus serving as an introductory course to a potential writing studies major.

Finally, the course has the added benefit of educating first-year students, adjuncts, and graduate students about the existence and content of the writing studies field. Over time, as these groups move on to other disciplines, professions, and administrative positions, their knowledge about our field may be of assistance in creating more writing studies majors. At the very least, educating the public about our discipline in this way should result in a more widespread understanding and awareness of its existence, focus, and research findings.

As we teach such courses across the country, we will raise awareness not only about the existence of our discipline, but about what we do as a discipline—what we study and think about. Making this change, introducing first-year students to the knowledge of our discipline, will, we believe, lead us further toward full disciplinarity, a fulfillment marked by courses that come from our research and theory, pedagogy that emerges from our common knowledge, and a public awareness of what we do. This realization of disciplinary praxis is one that we look forward to with excitement and optimism.

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Notes

1. We distinguish between what we take as "industry standard" in FYC and different but relatively rare pedagogies that approach FYC more effectively, such as gateway courses to WID programs. Our critique is of dominant "academic discourse" and "cultural studies" pedagogies that teach writing apart from specific contexts.

2. It is often assumed that "skills" or moves such as taking a position, building arguments, developing paragraphs, and writing clear and forceful sentences are "general writing skills" that transfer across all situations. Such "static abstractions" (Connors) are meaningless in the absence of specific contexts and useless in the presence of such contexts. For example, even if all writing were about "taking a position," the ways of doing so vary radically across disciplines, and therefore can only meaningfully be taught within a discipline. What constitutes clarity or forcefulness for a scholar in English is simply different—in kind, not just degree—from what constitutes these qualities in engineering.

3. Other disciplines share the same struggle: To what extent will a misinformed public trump the specialized knowledge of the discipline? Usually, however, these battles take place in secondary education rather than college; higher education has not deemed it the public's right to determine the curriculum of any collegiate subject save the "basic" subject of writing, as Sharon Crowley observes. Letting nonspecialists dictate our pedagogy leaves us with no standing; our writing studies pedagogy addresses this problem.

4. Wendy Bishop's *The Subject Is. . .* series as well as the new book *Conversations about Writing* by Elizabeth Sargent and Cornelia Paraskevas are partial exceptions.

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