

Dave Howland

Narrative for the Senior Lecturer Promotion Process

Department of English

December 23, 2014



Legos, stolen from my children, play a big role in the classroom – helping students assemble and disassemble their story elements and ideas.

When I was five or six, I would set out to build three-foot-long jumbo jets out of multi-colored Lego blocks. Often, I ran short on pieces. The heavy, complicated planes – filled with seats and aisles and little Lego passengers eating dinner – would fall apart under their own weight as I tried to lift them off the floor. And then, I would fall apart in tears amid the disaster on the carpet.

Eventually, I learned that my creations had to be structurally sound if I wanted to get them off the ground. If I didn't have the right pieces, I'd need to either find a way to get a hold of them (ask Mom, Dad, or Santa) or change my design. These frustrating lessons in the value of persistence and managing expectations would help carry me through projects in school and college. They helped me

through tough news reporting and editing assignments and through seven years of graduate research on climate change. The building blocks are still with me – albeit a bigger version of them pilfered from my kids – sitting in front of me at the start of each class. I use these blocks, and many other tools and ideas borrowed and learned over the years, to teach about the tradecraft of writing and the importance of critical thinking to the tasks of deciding what to say to whom and how to say it with greatest effect.

I have assembled this narrative for my senior lecturer promotion case with the goal of conveying for you a sense of my work over the past nine years, my teaching philosophy and practice, and the ways in which it has benefited my students and the university. You can find my most recent course syllabi in Appendix A. Eight people – four former students and four professional colleagues – are writing you with their impressions of my work. I will describe here some of my university service and outreach work and conclude with a brief section on new ideas, including one for a new seminar. I have taken great joy in working with students and am proud of a number of recent accomplishments. These include:

A Successful 502 Section for NR Students – The sections of English 502 that I teach for students in the Department of Natural Resources are going strong. With the support of colleagues in both departments and our Dean's office, we have built a solid bridge between English, Natural Resources, and

a growing network of professionals in non-profit academic, environmental, and social services circles. This work has served many interests:

- ✓ Through lectures and one-on-one instruction, leveraging my background in natural resource policy in lessons, I have helped many NR students become stronger writers (and team players) in their department classes and beyond.
- ✓ Faculty and staff across UNH and professionals in non-profit organizations in a wide range of fields have benefitted from the students' 10-week community service learning projects. And the students have gained experience and confidence using their skills for these "real-world" clients.
- ✓ The English Department and COLA enjoys extra-college enrollments and the praise that comes from many quarters for our 502 program.

I recently visited a Natural Resources faculty meeting, where my old colleagues reaffirmed their enthusiasm and support for our 502 section. I have included a one-page flyer (Appendix B) that I brought to the meeting about the course. The faculty asked that enrollment be opened to students across all department programs in addition to the original two concentrations – Community Environmental Planning & Environmental Conservation Studies – and we've done so.

Critical thinking/ debate in 401 Classes

– I have put a premium on spurring my freshmen students to engage in discussion and thoughtful writing about issues of social justice and freedom of information and expression. Last semester, my freshmen watched the movie "The Square" (Al Midan) – a beautiful but somewhat controversial documentary about the recent protests and revolution in Egypt. We discussed the film with Arabic teacher

Islam Karkour, a Fulbright Scholar who spoke from experience of the country's turbulent and conflicting protest movement. He noted that despite documenting important events, the film cast the Muslim Brotherhood – a major force in Egyptian society its revolution – in an unfair light. In this, and other such discussions of current events in my classes, I have tried to help my students understand the importance and fragility of the basic freedoms they enjoy here. I also encourage them to see through divisive black-and-white narratives and to explore the grey. We practice discerning matters of verifiable fact from opinion. When approaching tough topics, I have them ask of themselves and others a couple of key questions: "How do you know that?" and "Why do you feel that way?"



I may not yet be a rock star in the classroom, but as with my Boston band (above, on tour this summer in Colorado's Front Range) I'm always working to improve.

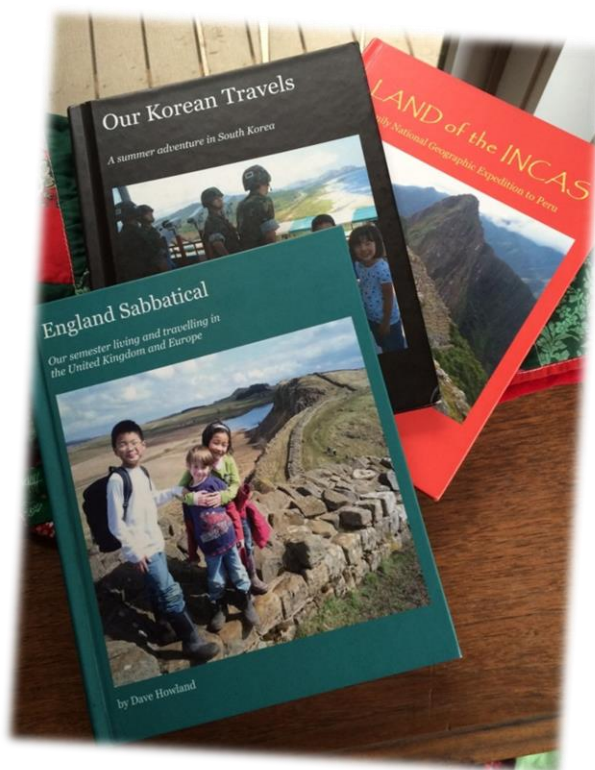
Happy Students – Separately, I think many of my students have enjoyed and learned a good deal from my classes. This is reflected in the words of some of my hardest working pupils – four of whom I have asked to write you on my behalf. It's reflected in visits and calls I receive from former students (one of the most rewarding parts of the job!), thank-you notes, and consistently favorable remarks on my evaluations. I include a chart of my evaluation scores for Question 14, "Overall Rating of Instructor" (Appendix C). For what it's worth, these average to 4.4 over the past nine years – and 4.5 for the past three years. I am grateful for this and grateful for merit pay I have received.

In the following pages, I'll try to paint a picture for you of my pedagogy, supported by several example documents in the appendix – including syllabi, assignments, and samples of good student work. This narrative includes a description of my professional and academic background and how it informs my lessons. I'll move to a description of strategies and tools I use in the classroom and close with a brief pitch, broadly outlined, for a new writing seminar built upon my experience and successes in 502.

Who's the teacher?

A good place to start an explanation of my approach to teaching is with a description of the teacher. In class I draw heavily on my experiences in the professional world for examples of problem-solving, generating new ideas, networking, advocating and debating, investigating and documenting. Sometimes, on the second day class, I give a little slide show with photos from years past of the places I've been and hats I've worn. In this way the students have a sense of the wells I draw from:

- ✓ *News reporting* – I worked for papers in California and New England, including The Associated Press in Boston. I have many stories from covering crime, local government, environmental issues, professional sports, and some national and international politics. I am a news addict and like to stay up to the hour on current events.
- ✓ *Environmental policy research* – In addition to the subject matter, I can share stories from researching and writing my master's project and doctoral thesis. Researchers are using my content analysis methods and I have volunteered on occasion to review academic articles and grant applications.



When traveling with family, I keep a family photo and story blog and write books – a habit I encourage in my students.

- ✓ *Durham Town Council* – My elected position as Town Councilor, as well as my membership on the town Agriculture Commission and Parks & Recreation Committee has required a good deal of writing, research, problem solving, consensus building, and public speaking.
- ✓ *Parent* (of three kids) – This occupation, as any parent knows, requires some serious collaboration and conflict resolution skills. I draw occasionally upon lessons from the home and our family travels, specifically, the story and photo journaling I do for books to keep our memories alive.
- ✓ *Part-time musician/song writer* – This is new for me. For the past couple years I've been a member of a Boston rock band called The Westminster Hillbillies. We're close friends and we went on a 16-day road trip this summer to play bars along Colorado's Front Range. Writing music, designing artwork, arranging shows, and traveling together puts a lot of those production and collaborative 502 skills to work!

Teaching Tools/Strategies

Perhaps the best way to describe my work in the classroom is with a list of things I strive to do. Here they are, in some broad categories:

Lead by example – Knowing the value of this as a parent, I believe in practicing what I preach. That starts with showing up on time prepared for class, and sending (and expecting) e-mails in well-edited complete sentences. I frequently remind my students that they are closer than they know to the full-time working world and they will need to be sharp, and stay sharp, for the job market. I remind them they face a good deal of competition, domestically and internationally, for the best positions. So, while I'm not a morning person at all, I come to class energetic and ready to go – and almost always in a coat and tie, as my father and brothers do at their universities. I tell my students that I'll keep class interesting but that they will get the most for their tuition dollars in my office hours. We go over their ideas intensively and their drafts sentence by sentence. In class exercises I offer up examples of my own writing. Students often relish a chance to poke holes in their professor's work and we all learn from it.

Get to know my students – In all of my classes, especially 502, I stress the importance of a golden rule of sorts: knowing one's *audience* and *purpose*. To that end, on the first day of class I pass out a grab bag of written materials – cereal boxes, cookbooks, appliance manuals, Lego assembly directions without

Dave Howland SAMPLE COURSE LICENSE

ABOUT ME – Hello, my name is Dave Howland, my home is Durham, NH and I'll be teaching your course this semester. I've worked as a lecturer in the English Department since 2006, after completing my doctorate in Environmental Studies in the Department of Natural Resources. Before that, I was a news reporter at papers in California and at The Associated Press in Boston. I'm serving on the Durham Town Council and I'm in a Boston rock band called the Westminster Hillbillies. We spent part of our summer playing in bars and breweries along Colorado's front range. I like to hike, rock climb and cook. The other guy in the photo with me is my big German shepherd, Hagrid. He's super friendly and likes to meet students in my office hours.

SELF IMPROVEMENT – Just as I hope to help you improve your writing and to help you exercise your critical thinking skills, I too seek to improve my teaching each semester. I learn a great deal from my students every year and my collection of outstanding student writing samples grows with each semester. We have many moving parts in this class, and I am always working to make it run more smoothly. I am excited to introduce two books to this section – Richard Wright's *Black Boy* and Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* – and I hope you'll enjoy reading and comparing them.

STRENGTHS – Since I started making my own "local newspaper" at age 5, I have been writing and editing stories and essays in one capacity or another for most of my life. Long before I veered into academia (the family business) I produced local, national and international news stories under intense deadline pressure. This has served me well in teaching. Reporting exposed me to experiences exciting, wonderful, and tragic and this has helped me understand and write about people and their experiences more thoughtfully.

MY INSPIRATIONAL TEACER – My seventh-grade English teacher, Mrs. Hawk, recognized my ability to write and encouraged and pushed me. She fought to remove me from an unfair course track for students deemed unlikely to go to college and she told me I could succeed.

HOPES FOR CLASS I enjoy teaching English 401 very much, and especially relish our first assignment, the personal essay. As freshmen, you are embarking on a pretty exciting adventure and I enjoy reading stories about your experiences in life so far. With teaching this class comes the responsibility of helping you out on the right foot – in terms of writing, organization and critical thinking skills – for the rest of your college career and also work beyond that. I take that mission very seriously and thought I might not show it, it makes me a little nervous. I am rooting for all of you to succeed. This semester, I'm introducing a new assignment, a literary analysis essay, which I hope you will enjoy.

I have my students make a "Course Driver's License" to help me tailor my teaching to their needs and learning styles. I provide them a sample of my own version.

words (only 3D drawings), even instructions one student made for playing beer pong. As an ice breaker, we take turns discussing the audience, purpose and rhetorical situation (the circumstances under which the documents will be used), for each of our items. Quickly, their design begins to make sense: Would a child diving into a new box of Legos need assembly instructions with words? Nope. Drawings alone do just fine. Would plain-paper instructions last long on a beer-soaked ping-pong table? Probably not. After a usability test (with water) my student found out for sure and laminated his final copy.

For their first homework assignment, I have the students assemble their own “course driver’s license”, complete with name, a well-sized and recognizable photo, and some remarks on the following: their hopes concerns/fears about class, strengths they bring to the class, skills they want to work on, and a description of the best lesson/teacher/class/learning experience they’ve had and why it worked for them. I use these as a handy reference; to learn my students’ names quickly and to help adapt my teaching style to their interests, abilities and goals. In 502, I use this information, and my observations in the first third of the semester, to help sort students into effective writing teams for their community service learning projects.

Meta Teach – Perhaps more than some teachers, I explain the learning goals for each class and exercise and provide a brief explanation of how they link to the previous classes and the overall arc of our course. I’ve learned the value of this from practice and also lessons in our university’s Teaching Excellence Program. It is especially important in my 502 class, where each skill set – for example, library research, the use of multiple document formats, persuasion, interviewing, and detailed note taking – builds firmly on the next up through the group collaborative project.

I make sure that my syllabi and assignment instructions also include a clear explanation of our learning goals. Of course, not every student pays close attention to these and so they often bear repeating. I sometimes get knocked in semester’s-end evaluations for repetition or long windedness. I have not ignored that critique, but I believe I have found a balance in my instruction between the positive class-wide results of being thorough (re-casting instructions to reach students with varied learning styles) and the expense of class time taken to say something important more than once. I’ve also been criticized, for better or worse, as a demanding professor. On that count, I’m guilty as charged.

OPEN-ENDED REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK 17772947

15. Please write below any comments or suggestions related to course content, grading, or structure.

16. Please write below any comments or suggestions related to the instructor of this course.

I have never had a more challenging english class thus far at UNH. What I have learned in this class is long term. Even if I wanted to rip my hair out at times, Howland's enthusiasm and persistence showed me how great a professor he truly is. One of the most dedicated professors I have had. Exhausting class but worth it. Thank you.

A comment on Fall 2010, 502 evaluation reflects fairly what I work for.

Build a Learning Community – In each of my classes, in ways big and small, I work to create a sense of a shared learning community. It starts with calling everyone by their name and stressing, as I do with my own children, that we’re all on the same team. On many assignments, I have the students brainstorm ideas and strategies – first in small groups and then as an entire class. I post evolving lists generated from class discussions on Blackboard. Appendix D features two topics: best and worst practices for 1) public speaking and 2) group collaboration. Separately, especially in 401, we workshop each other’s drafts and we discuss current events. Of course, to do this well is no simple task and I provide (and often repeat) some simple ground rules from our syllabus:

“Your active participation in class exercises and group work directly constitutes 15% of your grade and will doubtless affect your learning and the outcome of your work in the rest of class. Don’t be shy. If contributing in class is not your thing – for whatever reason – please let me know right away and we can come up with some strategies to turn that around. Separately, good discussions and workshops often demand creativity, tact, patience, and some humor and humility. Debate and disagreement can be very constructive provided they are conducted in a courteous manner respectful of classmates. If you’re fired up about an issue and/or completely disagree with what someone’s saying, focus your response on the content of what they’re saying – not the person who is saying it. Be constructive: offer a solution to go along with that criticism.”

I have found that one of the best ways to motivate and encourage my students is to share their individual victories, examples of work done well/ challenges overcome, with the entire class. I do this on a case-by-case basis with the consent of each author. It serves as both reward for the hard-working student and a lesson for their peers that is not only an example for instruction, but often an inspiration. I have included a few examples in Appendix E: a draft of the opening article in a three-part series on the Non-Lethal Weapons Program at UNH by Derek Price (English 621), a draft policy memo by Peter Wilkinson (English 502), and two short videos prepared for 502 clients. The most recent of these videos won praise from folks at the U.S. Forest Service .



I work to connect students with professionals who rely on good writing. Bryan Bisette and Malin Clyde were among several clients this semester for my English 502 writing teams.

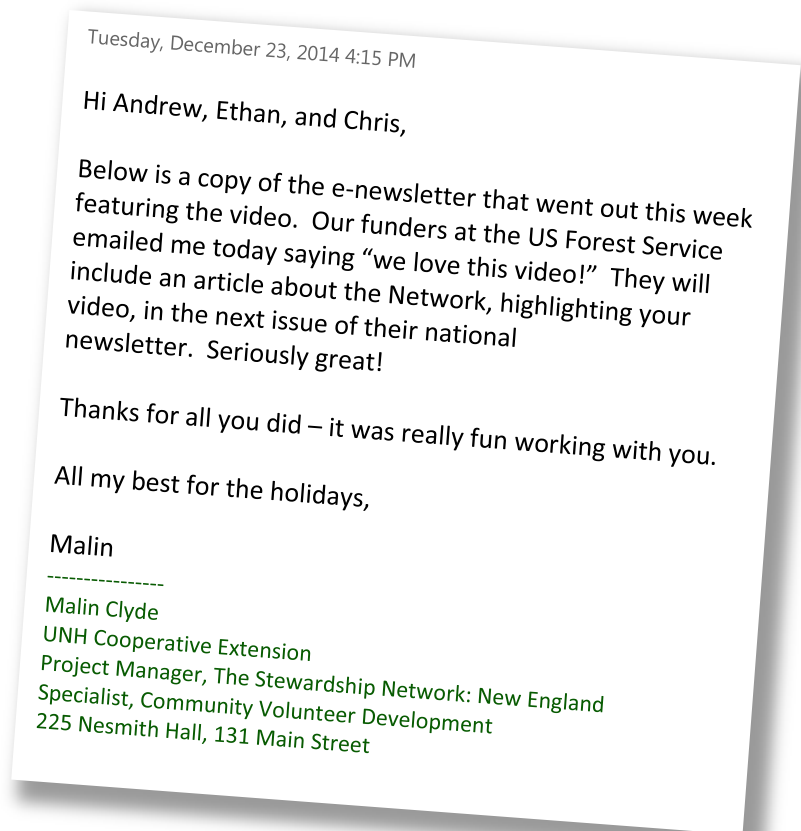
Connect Students to the Outside World – I prize the opportunity for my students to interact with professionals and colleagues who are putting into practice the skills we’re working on in a variety of contexts. The service learning project assignment in English 502 (Appendix F) is designed for just that,

and I am proud of a large and growing list of non-profit clients who have benefited from and helped to mentor teams of my students, among them, the Durham Agriculture Commission, EcoQuest, Shoals Marine Lab, and Northeast Passage. Steve Adams of NH Sea Grant, who has written a letter on my behalf, is one of our regular customers. I could fill a small book in praise of the work my students have done for these many clients. This includes a full-color 40-page booklet summarizing a marine research symposium, many websites, informational videos, flyers, and binders filled with materials for coordinating volunteer work (such as the Blue Ocean Society) and events (like SolarFest). One group designed an entire program for the Great Bay Stewards to incentivize ecologically sound lawn-care choices to protect the bay from harmful runoff.

For 401, I owe a debt to colleagues including Professor Reginald Wilburn and Monica Chiu for visiting my classes to talk about social justice and race. In 2008, when members of the UNH Black Student Union received a torrent of criticism online, and even threats, for starting Black Family Weekend (a long-established tradition at other universities) I scrapped the lesson plans in my three sections of 621 and Professor Wilburn helped me facilitate some challenging discussions about race with my students and members of the BSU.

Afterwards, many of my students told me they carried on that discussion at their family holiday tables. It is my opinion that our students are collectively handicapped by our state's lack of ethnic diversity, and I seize upon and create what opportunity I can to explore issues of race, gender and culture. I work to build critical thinking and writing skills around this and other difficult topics that demand attention.

Teach them to fish – I am a fan of the phrase that if you give someone a fish, they can eat for a day, but if you teach them to fish, they'll eat for a lifetime. On that count, I try to send my students forward with a sense of confidence and some concrete advice, rubrics and templates they can call upon later in life as writers. This starts, again, with the bedrock practice of understanding one's audience, purpose, and rhetorical situation. I have grouped other crucial lessons in three basic categories:



Fresh praise for a job well done by students! Their video can be found at:
<http://newengland.stewardshipnetwork.org/announcements/join-network>

Grammar/Sentence Structure Fundamentals – Though we wish it weren't so at the college level, the fundamentals of sentence structure, grammar, and punctuation bedevil many students (and their instructors). I address it by intervening early and often, diagnosing for my students their most common mistakes (we all have a list) and providing references to help. Our Lannon textbook has excellent sections on common usage errors and remedies. I take care to identify mistakes and provide thorough feedback in conferences and in writing to my 502 students, on key early papers. I have included in Appendix G an example of our Policy memo assignment and some substantive written feedback on a student's paper. For students with chronic problems, I make a deal: If they work hard and visit the Writing Center to work on their specific challenges, I'll spend as much time as needed in office hours going over their work sentence by sentence. We work on writing straight forwardly and in active voice, with clear subjects and verbs. It's hard work sometimes, but most everyone pulls through.

The Writer's Palate (for 401) – I cannot take credit for that phase, but it is a handy collection of elements essential to good story telling that I use with my freshmen: a hook (to captivate and build suspense), characters (we can care about), description (that is relevant and moves the story forward), dialogue (also relevant), scenes (that are distinct), context (that informs), metaphor, cadence, and mood (that derives from the rest). We arrange and rearrange these elements in class and conferences, sometimes with the help of our large Legos, into a cohesive narrative arc. I remind students to "show" us, not "tell"

us their stories. I remind them that "less is more". And I remind them, constantly, to proofread. I have a growing library of beautiful student essays – about adventures in faraway lands, family tragedies, and hard life lessons learned – that demonstrate these concepts in good form.



A growing library of 502 projects helps inform and inspire current students.

Writing Project Group Collaborative Process (for 502) – It took me some time to really appreciate and properly convey the usefulness of our long-time 502 group project process (passed to me back in 2006). I stress to students how each step is crucial to the next: Team organization, client recruitment, client needs analysis, project proposal, product usability testing, product revisions, and product transmittal. Here, too, a growing library of student work serves to help set the bar for my current pupils. This year's crop of projects includes a PowerPoint presentation for Work Inc., which helps employ thousands of people with disabilities across New England. My students will have a chance to see their work presented at a gala celebration to be attended by the mayor of Boston, members of the Kennedy family, and other philanthropists.

Community Engagement and Outreach

I value not only teaching but being an active member of our campus community and will speak briefly here to some of my activities beyond the classroom. I have also included these in my most recent CV (Appendix H). In addition to mentoring my own undergraduate students (sharing advice and writing letters of recommendation), it has been a privilege to help participate occasionally in colleagues' classes across UNH and to share my work in the university's English Department and Department of Natural Resources with a wider audience outside of UNH. A few examples:

- ✓ *Parenting Panel* - This month I returned to Professor Jane Stapelton's course on Race, Class, Gender and Families for a small panel discussion on adoption and parenting in a multi-cultural family. I enjoy sharing stories about my kids and these are always candid and entertaining discussions.
- ✓ *Guest Lecturing* – I have guest lectured occasionally for Professor Jessica Bolker's Science Communication seminar for graduate students, sharing advice on writing and how they can present their complicated research to a variety of audiences.
- ✓ *Research* – I have shared my research in environmental policy analysis with grad students in the Department of Natural Resources and also with a few scholars in different corners of the world interested in adopting or better understanding my dissertation content analysis methodology.
- ✓ *Grant Reviewing/ Conference Participant* – At the request of Nancy Kinner, I served as a grant reviewer for the University's Coastal Research Response Center, evaluating proposals to research the communication of risk to the public in wake of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. That summer I participated in a multi-day workshop/conference hosted by the CRRC in Birmingham, Alabama on the use of chemical dispersants in that disaster.
- ✓ *NH Suicide Prevention Council* – Since 2008, I have collaborated with members of the New Hampshire Suicide Prevention Council to discuss their work, in particular, their public messaging and conversations with the news media around the coverage of suicide as a public health problem. A team of NHSPC leaders comes to at least one of my writing classes each year for lively discussions with my students. In the spring of 2013, I moderated a panel discussion on the NHSPC's work for an audience of professional news reporters, and public health and law enforcement officials. And that fall, I gave a short speech about speaking with reporters on suicide and also served on a panel at the opening of the NHSPC's 10th annual conference in Manchester.



I've had the chance to share my research on climate change policy in Europe and the US. In South Korea, I had the pleasure of speaking to faculty and graduate students at Seoul's Kyonggi University.

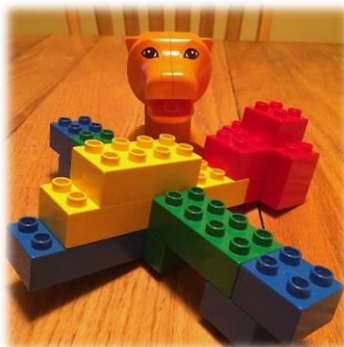
- ✓ *Research Talk, Seoul, South Korea* – In June 2008, while spending a summer in South Korea, I gave a talk (in English and a little Korean) about my research on climate change policy to graduate students, including experts in law and military policy, at Kyonggi University in Seoul.

That said, I think my greatest contribution to our university community comes in my service in our town government, which is inextricably linked to the health and well-being of our campus and educational mission. As a Town Councilor, I have participated in many discussions at Thompson Hall and Town Hall: about the development of our shared downtown, the handling of celebratory riots, and the accessibility of our elections to students. Most importantly, I have fought for sound policy on our shared public drinking water system (including an emergency drought ordinance) to make sure that everyone, students and town residents, have an adequate and safe water supply. And I've shared with my writing students the 20-page policy report I wrote last year about that issue for the community.

New Ideas

With each passing year, I get a little better at all of this. And each semester I try something new. For example, this Fall in 401, I had students simultaneously read Richard Wright's autobiography, *Black Boy*, and Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*. We held a series of weekly discussions (following quizzes on both books) about their iconoclast protagonists. This led to a modified analysis essay assignment in which I invited students to explore what these contrasting characters and their experiences and tell us about the state of race and individuality in America today.

With my term wrapping on the Durham Town Council, and loads of material from this experience for future lessons, I am looking forward to investing extra energy and ideas into my teaching. I would like to better encourage and help my students to publish their writing. And, given the opportunity, I would love to design and teach a seminar that links students with writers across many professions. This could include units on writing for a variety of audiences in the areas of technical workplace writing (proposals and reports), social justice and activism (persuasive policy documents), journalism (investigative pieces), and science (journals, both academic and popular). I have a good number of terrific professionals in mind, including former students, who I'm sure would be happy to visit and share their experiences. Finally, I would like to thank you again for taking time to read through my materials, especially the words of my former students. They remind me just how much our labor of love really matters.



Appendices

Appendix A – Course Syllabi

- ❖ English 502, Professional and Technical Writing
- ❖ English 401, First-Year Writing
- ❖ English 501, Creative Non-Fiction
- ❖ English 621, Introduction to Journalism
- ❖ English 622, Advanced Journalism

Appendix B – Description of 502 for new NR faculty

Appendix C – Compilation of Question 14 Evaluation Scores

Appendix D – Examples of class brainstorming for best-practices lists

Group Collaborative Process
Presentation Advice

Appendix E – Examples of Student Work

- ❖ A draft article from the non-lethal weapons series stories by Derek Price
- ❖ Peter Wilkinson's Policy Memo
~ *Please find clickable links to the following videos on transmittal e-mail* ~
- ❖ Fish to Dish: An explanatory piece on the journey of a local fish to a local restaurant for NH SeaGrant by Taylor Ackerman, James McDermott, and James Coenen
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3oSCuEwWws>
- ❖ Join the Network: An informational video for the New England Stewardship Network by Andrew Desjardins, Ethan Hogan, and Yaohan Wang
<http://newengland.stewardshipnetwork.org/announcements/join-network>

Appendix F – Group Collaborative Project Assignment (English 502)

Appendix G – Example feedback and grade

Policy Memo (English 502)
Example of written feedback on graded policy memo

Appendix H – Curriculum Vitae