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Writing Program Newsletter — Research Institutes, Centers and Programs

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Write Free or Die: Vol. 02, No. 02

UNH Writing Program

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WRITE FREE 🔲 OR DIE

IN THIS ISSUE

What Does Reading 2,100 Undergraduate Writing Assignments Tell Us?

Ed Mueller
Director, University Writing Program

Dan Melzer, University Reading and Writing Coordinator at California State University, Sacramento, has the answer to the above question. He recently studied 2,101 undergraduate writing assignments from 100 colleges, on subjects ranging across the disciplines and levels. In so doing, Melzer presents a view into practice that has generally only been visible locally, within departments or among instructors in large courses.

Among the many findings found in his subsequent book, *Assignments Across the Curriculum: A National Study of College Writing*, he presents the following: "The writing assignments in each discipline, and even each course, are so rhetorically diverse that we should think of each college course as its own discourse community" (110).

In his study, Melzer found that key terms like "describe" or "compare" (among others) aren't generic but vary with assignments and instructors. He also found that genre definitions, like what constituted a literature review, and other components, like definitions of evidence, also differed. These variations were found not only between disciplines, but also among courses in the same sub-disciplines. The takeaway would seem to be that faculty can't assume

Future Tense:
Upcoming Writing Across the Curriculum Events

- **March 30: Guest Speaker Dr. Barbara Walvoord: "How to make grading efficient and useful for learning" (1-2:30 p.m., Memorial Union Building, Room 330/332).** The UNH Writing Program is pleased to welcome Dr. Barbara Walvoord, Professor Emerita, University of Notre Dame, to give an interactive talk on feedback and grading student papers. Dr. Walvoord is a former director of award winning faculty development programs at Central College in Iowa, Loyola College in Maryland, University of Cincinnati, and University of Notre Dame, and author of *Helping Students Write Well,* and *Thinking and Writing in College: A Naturalistic Study of Students in Four Disciplines* as well as several texts on assessment in higher education, most notably *Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education*. Space is limited. Please contact Ed Mueller by March 23rd to reserve a space: edward.mueller@unh.edu.

- **June 6-8: WI Faculty Retreat, Omni Mount Washington Hotel:** Enabled by the generosity of the Dey Family Fund, the UNH Writing Program is reprising the WI Faculty retreat, an offsite at the Omni Mount Washington Hotel (lodging and noon meals covered by the Writing Program) followed by a 1/2 day session at UNH in August. During the program, participants will design or revise a WI course. Among the goals of the experience will be to give faculty an enhanced awareness of the principles underlying WI courses, to equip them with practices to better work with student writing, and to promote exchange and forge connections among WI faculty. Participation will be limited to ten faculty members (tenure track, lecturers, and clinical), to be decided by the Writing Committee. Applications are due by March 30. Contact Ed Mueller for information: edward.mueller@unh.edu.

- **May 4: Student Exit Interviews (12:45-2 p.m., Dimond 352):** The Writing Committee will once again be conducting exit interviews with a panel of graduating seniors on their writing histories at UNH. Faculty are invited to join in this event. Please get in touch with your Writing Committee representative or drop a line to Ed Mueller if you'd like to attend: edward.mueller@unh.edu.

that students will share their understanding of these terms.

By extension, this means that students may sometimes fail to meet faculty expectations because they are bringing to bear a different set of assumptions than those that were implied for the writing task. Even worse, in the absence of specific guidance, students have been shown to sometimes default to formulaic writing approaches learned in K-12 (see "The Writing Transfer Project" in the Fall 2014 Newsletter). This latter tendency could account, in part, for the often-reported dominance of summary or rote recitation of material found in student writing.

Melzer's findings go one step beyond the already-heard suggestion that students must be introduced to the conventions of writing in a discipline. The emphasis shifts to the individual course and assignment. When asking students to do analysis, for instance, the findings suggest that it would be important to be more explicit, to model or explain what is intended even if students have had other courses in the discipline.

At first glance, this approach may seem like overkill. However, it is consistent with teaching for transfer, which also holds that this kind of explanatory material helps prompt students to make connections to writing habits learned in other classes.

Melzer, Dan. *Assignments Across the Curriculum: A National Study of College Writing*. Boulder: Utah UP-Colorado UP, 2014. Print.

For more information, please contact edward.mueller@unh.edu.

Writing is not necessarily something to be ashamed of, but do it in private and wash your hands afterwards.

— *Robert A. Heinlein*

Barbara Walvoord to Speak at UNH

Sarah B. Franco
Associate Director, University Writing Program

On March 30, the University Writing Program welcomes Dr. Barbara E. Walvoord to offer an interactive talk about efficiently, effectively assessing student papers. Barbara strives for a pragmatic, "clear and simple" approach.

Dr. Walvoord has previously given talks at UNH through the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. Well-versed in academic assessment at the institutional, departmental, and classroom levels, Dr. Walvoord presents assessment as straightforward, effective, and manageable while still acknowledging the complexities involved in student learning. She will speak to UNH faculty about articulating writing goals for students, selecting appropriate tools for measuring students' writing, improving students' writing, and measuring students' improvement.

Dr. Walvoord has founded four faculty-development programs—all of which have received national recognition—and has led over 350 workshops on assessment, teaching, and learning. She is also a well known author on assessment; one of her texts, *Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education*, has become a staple for higher education. Please see the "Future Tense" section for details.

The Dangling Modifier:

Writing to Promote Reading

Wendy VanDellon
Associate Director, University Writing Program

Reading, like writing, is a process, one where readers often find themselves revising their original assumptions. But how can faculty get students to actively engage in reading in this way, to experience discovery through reading? Donna Qualley suggests several principles to guide approaches to get students to see reading as something more than a reductive act of decoding words on a page:

1. Reading and writing are linked processes.
2. Reading is different for each individual, and each person finds different meaning in a text.
3. Marking a text can help keep a reader engaged. This promotes active reading, a skill that is transferable between courses.
4. Reading involves making connections. This means that students are making connections with their own lives and also with other texts as they read.
5. Learning the reading process allows students to learn the writing process. When we ask students to consider the audience and purpose of a text as readers, for instance, it reflects on their own consideration of audience when writing themselves.

Here are some ideas for using writing to help apply these principles:

1. Have students keep an ongoing reading journal. These allow students to work through the texts that they are reading in an informal way. In addition, this creates dialogue between the student and author and promotes student-faculty dialogue.
2. Have students keep a double-entry reading journal. In the left column, students record interesting facts and quotes. In the right column, students respond to these items and consider how they might link to other readings or projects.
3. Have students produce some targeted low stakes or informal writing that they bring to class or a reading conference with you that shares their insights and questions regarding the reading. The main goal is not content, but for students to teach you about what and how they read.
4. Form small reading discussion groups. This can be done in class or out of class and ensures that everyone participates. Have the groups produce a memo or summary of the discussion. (This also helps create an active, participatory community in the classroom.)

Derived from: Qualley, Donna. "Using Reading in the Writing Class room." *Nuts and Bolts: A Practical Guide to Teaching College Composition.* Ed. Thomas Newkirk. Portsmouth: Boynton, 1993. Print.

For more on writing to promote reading, please contact Wendy: wja26@wildcats.unh.edu.

Style should be suited to the specific person with whom you wish to communicate.

—Friedrich Nietzsche

2016 WhIte Mountain **Faculty Retreat** ~Sponsored by the Writing Program~

Open to Tenure Track, Clinical Faculty, and Lecturers Teaching WI Courses

~Apply by March 30th~

Contact Ed Mueller for information: edward.mueller@unh.edu

June 6-8, 2016
Omni Mount Washington Hotel

Ask Sarah:

Your writing concerns addressed by our very own Sarah B. Franco

Dear Sarah:
I find that many of my students, even though they use citations, are still plagiarizing parts of their work. How do I stop students from plagiarizing?
—Sincerely, Plagued by Plagiarism

Dear Plagued,

Ah, the age old question: how do we teach students to think for themselves while using other people's research to support their ideas? Preventing plagiarism is an ongoing challenge for faculty, and—believe it or not—an ongoing concern for students. Part of the issue stems from the word plagiarism, and that it may hold different meanings for faculty than it does for students.

Plagiarism is the intentional or unintentional use of someone else's work as one's own without attributing credit to the source. Your question, "how do I stop students from plagiarizing," is a common one that, from instructors, often means, "how can I get students to attribute credit to their sources?" Students, however, are acutely aware of the severe consequences associated with a plagiarism accusation, and sometimes interpret that question in a far more ominous way: "did you cheat?" Students who fear that accusation often become overly cautious, either by extensively "patch writing" and then citing every sentence, or avoiding incorporating research altogether. It's important to distinguish between instances of careless or intentional plagiarism and instances where students may need more practice or guidance about citation and attribution conventions in your field. Approaching plagiarism as a learning opportunity is tricky, but if documentation is addressed throughout the writing process, it becomes lower stakes and can help students learn how to appropriately attribute sources without feeling as if they are risking a plagiarism case.

So how can you teach students to avoid plagiarizing? Try these approaches:

1. Have a conversation with your students about what plagiarism means to you and within the context of your course. Often times students are unaware they are plagiarizing. They confuse summarizing with paraphrasing, and a reminder at the start of the semester is always a good idea. Starting on common ground paves the way for a smoother, less plagiarized writing process.
2. Have students keep research journals that include the sources they find, brief descriptions of each source (could be a few key words or sentences), and any direct quotes that may be relevant to the student's project. When steeped in research, it is challenging to remember which source a bit of information came from, and it's easy to accidently repeat found information as one's own. By keeping track of the sources read, the main ideas, and direct references to specific pages, students generate a research log from which they can draw when writing their drafts, and the sources and page numbers are directly accessible.
3. Tell students to avoid cutting information from an online source and pasting right into the working draft. When sources are mixed in with the student's writing, plagiarism becomes all too easy. By keeping sources separate from the draft, students must learn to be more vigilant about selecting and integrating sources from their research journal.
4. Introduce stages in the writing process and have students integrate sources into their work starting with the first draft. Even just putting authors' names in the text will help jog students' memory in later drafts so they will easily be able to attribute credit. And the research journal will offer students easy access to source information so they won't have to go hunting for it.

A word about plagiarism checkers. Many instructors choose to use programs like SafeAssign or Turnitin to police student plagiarism. As with all online resources, these are imperfect tools, and the originality reports they generate should be used strategically, as they only give a partial picture of what is happening in a student draft. They can't tell you whether a passage is plagiarized due to poor attribution, a missing quotation mark, coincidence, or because the student intentionally copied and pasted directly from Wikipedia. They have also been known to generate false reports. Ultimately, it's important to determine whether any passage in question is an example of intentional plagiarism, or evidence that the student needs additional practice or support with paraphrasing and citation.

There is no quick fix for addressing plagiarism. But the more often techniques to avoid plagiarism are integrated into the writing process, the greater the chance we have of receiving stacks of non-plagiarized, correctly cited essays at the end of the writing road.

Sincerely,
Sarah

If you have a question for Sarah, send it to: sbl39@wildcats.unh.edu.

"I find I journalize too tediously. Let me try to abbreviate."

- James Boswell

"I see writing as an important part of every course I've ever taught."

Professor of Hospitality Management Clayton W. Barrows

Molly Tetreault
Assistant Director, University Writing Program

We invited a faculty member to talk to us about writing in his classes. Speaking with Professor Clayton Barrows, it became clear that writing is integral to his teaching, in both WI and non-WI courses.

In one of the courses Barrows teaches, HMGT 401, he intends that, among other things, the assignments serve as an introduction to writing in the field. He uses the assignments as a vehicle for getting students to read the trade journals "where industry people talk to other industry people." The assignments are also designed to support class discussion, focusing on major aspects of the industry. Students read and write about the food service industry, the lodging industry, and then the travel and tourism industry. As such, Barrows' course provides a threshold experience into reading and writing in the discipline.

The size of HMGT 401 presents a challenge, with upwards of 100 students each semester. Rather than assigning several large written projects, Barrows attempts to "accomplish several goals by creating a series of shorter assignments." Students write a series of 2-3 page papers with the same elements: an abstract of an article along with a reflection connecting the article to topics from class or students' experiences in the industry, all with proper APA citation. Through iteration, Barrows successfully incorporates process and feedback: "The students really struggle with the first one, but you see improvement by the end of the semester. I like using these short, focused assignments so that every student in the class can get it right eventually." Students will see this kind of assignment again in later HMGT courses, building on this foundation.

In addition to formal graded assignments, Barrows incorporates informal "write-to-learn" methods in his classes as well. Whether in response to guest lectures, videos, or topics students might be struggling with, Barrows uses in-class writing prompts to help students think about course concepts. For example, while talking about the restaurant scene in Portsmouth, Barrows has students do a short in-class write up on a restaurant that they might open there:

discussing the location, the theme, the menu, and other considerations. He found that with this kind of exercise students both engaged the larger concepts operating behind the material and had fun. In another class, Barrows might ask students to free write about trips they *haven't* taken "to emphasize the motivation behind travel." Contextualizing writing in the local scene or having students imagine that they are embarking on trips themselves also brings a sense of authenticity to the writing, which can help to motivate students to apply themselves.

Like many other faculty, Barrows researches and writes in his field. As such, he relates to students as a writer himself, how he is obliged to both travel and to write about it. (The photo of Barrows, left, was taken in Iceland.) Since students use his textbook in the course, it provides a tangible model of "what writing can do and how important it is." He can also talk to students about the writing process behind the readings.

In the smaller upper division class that Barrows teaches, HMGT 682: Private Club Management, writing is also a critical component. The class contains a major group writing project that is a combination research report and hands-on analysis. Once again, it has an authentic flavor. Students are organized into small groups and must attend a local club and do a club analysis. To meet one of the course goals, collaboration, the group writing project is deliberately designed as a large undertaking that necessitates a collective effort to complete.

In addition to this major project, he incorporates informal writing via the Blackboard discussion boards. Given the schedule, this approach allows him to extend the in-class discussion, "I only teach the class once a week, so we'll get into a topic, get great momentum, and then I won't see the class for a week." The online component, according to Barrows, also keeps students actively engaged between meetings.

He also brings forward writing tasks done in earlier courses. He requires students to complete abstracts of journal articles, following the model he introduced in HMGT 401. ◢

Past Perfect
Director's Notes

Ed Mueller
Director, University Writing Program

The spring semester is our most active, presenting several opportunities for faculty to become involved with writing across the curriculum. On March 30, just in time for April showers (of student papers), our guest speaker, Dr. Barbara Walvoord, will equip faculty with insights and practices to more effectively give feedback and grade student writing. The 2016 WI faculty retreat (June 6-8) will offer faculty the opportunity to spend some focused time on writing in their courses and join a growing community of practice among alums of that experience. We are very fortunate to be able to offer both of these opportunities through the generosity of the Dey Family Fund.

The 2016 student exit interviews (May 4) will allow faculty to participate in a unique forum on writing in the UNH curriculum. Please see the "Future Tense" section of the newsletter for details on all of the above.

Over the course of the spring and summer, we will be revamping our web presence in a major way, both updating the appearance and adding more resources for faculty and students (which will be a work in progress).

Our next newsletter will be in the fall. In the meantime, we continue to welcome your feedback and input. ◢

The Grammar Box:
Misplaced Modifiers

Sarah B. Franco
Associate Director, University Writing Program

Modifiers are descriptive words, phrases, or clauses attributed to a specific noun. The placement of modifiers affects meaning. Consider how the meaning changes in the following with the placement of "again":

> *He enlisted after he married again.*
>
> *He enlisted again after he married.*

As a general rule, modifiers should be placed directly next to the word described. The careless placement of modifiers can be misleading or even create the wrong meaning:

> *Even on a meager sheriff's salary, a family may have some comforts.*
>
> *Even on a sheriff's meager salary, a family may have some comforts.*

In the above example, placing "meager" next to the word it refers to, "salary," clarifies the meaning.

The unclear placement of a modifier (a "squinting modifier") between two possible referents can confuse meaning:

> *Persons who exercise frequently will live longer. (squinting)*
>
> *Persons who frequently exercise will live longer. (clear)*

If you have ideas for future topics for The Grammar Box please contact Sarah: sbl39@wildcats.unh.edu. ◢

The above examples were drawn from: the *Practical English Handbook* by Watkins and Dillingham (10th edition), Houghton Mifflin.

WAC(ky) Resources
Tools for Faculty

•**Pdf Handouts:** The Writing Program website has a range of pdf handouts that faculty may find useful to assist with managing writing in their classes: http://www.unh.edu/writing/cwc/handouts/

•**Writing Center Videos:** The Connors Writing Center has informational videos as well as a video on peer review on its website: http://www.unh.edu/writing/cwc/videos/

•**WI Course Proposals:** Fall 2016 Semester proposals are due by March 31. Spring 2017 Semester proposals are due by October 15, 2016. See: http://www.unh.edu/writing/uwr/faculty/WIproposal/

•**Other:** Feel free to contact the Director of the Writing Program for consultation on managing writing in a course, department, or program: edward.mueller@unh.edu.