Elon Statement on
WRITING BEYOND THE UNIVERSITY

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From 2019 to 2021, thirty-four scholars participated in the Center for Engaged Learning (CEL) research seminar on Writing Beyond the University: Fostering Writers' Lifelong Learning and Agency. This seminar built on CEL's 2011-2013 research seminar on Critical Transitions: Writing and the Question of Transfer, which fostered significant growth in what higher education knows about transfer of writing knowledge and practices. The Writing Beyond the University (WBU) seminar facilitated international, multi-institutional, and cross-disciplinary research on the writing that higher education alumni do after they graduate, the concurrent writing experiences students have while at university, the recursive relationships between the various kinds of obligatory and self-sponsored writing writers do within and beyond the university, and the various ways that higher education instruction and experiences prepare students and alumni for lifelong writing and learning.

This statement shares the seminar's meta-level (cross-team) discussions about understanding writing experiences and knowledge development across contexts for lifelong learning; exploring writers' experiences, prior knowledge, and writerly capacity; and facilitating writers' ongoing self-agency and networked learning, which includes both networks of people and networked access to integration of knowledge.

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KEY TERMS

Genre: a specific category or type of writing

Agency: a person's control and autonomy over their decisions and actions

Spheres of writing: the non-time-bound and non-text-bound circumstances shaping writing

Recursivities: the relationships among the contexts in which writers compose their work

Mapping: creating visual representations

Self-sponsored writing: writing that individuals pursue for their own purposes

Writing transfer: transforming or repurposing prior writing knowledge for new contexts

We offer extended definitions of these and related terms in the glossary of **Writing Beyond the University: Preparing Lifeline Learners for Lifewide Writing**.

PURSUING RESEARCH ON WRITING BEYOND THE UNIVERSITY

Drawing on their own research and that of other scholars, WBU participants identified a number of principles in which they have high confidence – that is, principles that emerged from their empirical studies that focus on writing beyond the university. In their research, participants identified key features of writing beyond the university, how alumni navigate and learn how to write beyond the university, and how students, alumni, and other individuals view themselves as writers. The research teams explored these topics by examining:

The Chameleons team
Neil Baird, Alena Kasparkova, Stephen Macharia, and Amanda Sturgill
The reality of workplace writing for alumni and how their university education enables them, or doesn't enable them, to succeed as workplace writers, as well as their adaptability as writers.

The Dream team
Ryan Dippre, Lucie Sam Dvorakova, Alison Farrell, Melissa Weresh, and Nadya Yakovchuk
How students preparing to enter a work placement make sense of the writing demands they will face; and the connections between that sense-making, students' various writing experiences, and the writing instruction they received in college.

5.5 Scholars team
Ann Blakeslee, Jenn Mallette, Rebecca Nowacek, Michael Rifenberg, and Liane Robertso
Professionals' stories about their writing experiences, the formation of their identities as writers, and the role that mentoring or other resources play in their workplace writing contexts.

Green Rogues team
Dana Driscoll, Andrea R. Efthymiou, Heather Lindenman, Matthew Pavesich, Jennifer Reid
The functions and purposes of self-sponsored writing, the relationship between self-sponsored and non-obligatory writing, and the relationship between those functions and writers' identities.

MMIRKL team
Michael-John DePalma, Michelle Eady, Radhika Jaidev, Ina Alexandra Machura, Lilian Mina, and Kara Taczak
How work-integrated learning experiences influence university students' recursive transfer of writing knowledge and practices, and how university faculty and workplace supervisors promote and impede writing transfer.

Recursivities team
Ashley Holmes, Alexis Hart, Anna Knutson, Íde O'Sullivan, Yogesh Sinha, and Kathleen Blake Yancey
The non-linear complexities of the writing students do inside and outside of class — their occasions and opportunities for writing; their writing processes; the texts they produce; and the complex, messy, recursive relationships between all of these aspects of writing.

FEATURES OF WRITING BEYOND THE UNIVERSITY

Two of the key features of writing beyond the university are its **pervasiveness** and **variety**. Writing is a vital dimension of many people's professional lives and, for some, a high percentage of their time at work is spent writing. For workplace writing contexts, writing mediates a vast range of workplace activities and has significant bearing on professionals' ability to meet the demands of their professional roles and their satisfaction with their work lives. Professionals are required to write in a variety of genres in their workplace contexts; these workplace genres can often differ from genres that are taught in the university (MMIRKL). Moreover, the writing that current students and recent alumni complete in internships or in the first years after graduation may not accurately reflect professional expectations for workplace writing, as these writers enter a transitory phase of their professional work.

Writing beyond the university also encapsulates writing in self-sponsored and non-obligatory spaces beyond school and work. Self-sponsored and obligatory writing (such as college or workplace writing) are not opposites, or even on a spectrum; rather, they are in dynamic relationship with each other (Green Rogues; Recursivities). Self-sponsored writing may include a wide variety of functions including writing to: heal, express oneself, support and explore one's identity, advocate, teach, learn, document one's history and path, create art, or organize life.

Different types of writing can have high stakes for writers in professional and other contexts, but it is also important to note that writers do not always call what they are doing "writing" (Chameleons, Dream Team). For example, writers use "notes" and "journaling" as terms to describe the products of writing, and terms such as "create," "communicate," "design," or "translate" to

describe elements of the writing process. These variations regarding how writers and industries talk about, produce, and value writing, complicate communication about writing expectations. University leaders, faculty, employers, students, internship and work-integrated learning directors, writing across the curriculum (WAC) and faculty development directors, as well as other constituents often have different expectations for writing and different terms to identify it. These variations also complicate how higher education can prepare students for writing beyond the university (MMIRKL). Furthermore, both state and national policies and accreditation/regulatory agencies sometimes require ongoing communication between universities and community or industry partners. Conversations about the central role writing plays in alumni's professional lives can (and in some institutional contexts, must) inform writing across the curriculum initiatives, curriculum revisions, and ongoing faculty development.

A final feature of writing is that all writing, including writing in a profession, is social in nature; its production is often collaborative — with peers, colleagues, supervisors, clients, community and industry stakeholders, etc.; and the writing process includes seeking and giving feedback and building and sustaining relationships (Recursivities). Because of the social, collaborative nature of writing, a strong foundation from both higher education courses and other experiences prepares students to learn context-specific writing conventions within the various communities in which they write (MMIRKL).

CONTEXT FOR WRITING MATTERS

Effective writing is context-specific, as different communities value different types and styles of writing, ways of producing documents, levels of collaborations, and genre expectations (Dream Team). Accordingly, writers' experiences with writing, as well as their ability to adapt and be successful, varies greatly according to the workplace or other writing contexts and spheres (Chameleons; Recursivities). The writing that alumni do in the workplace reflects the demands of the workplace situation, and they learn (in a broad sense) how to respond to particular writing demands in certain situations. This learning can be either helped or hindered by the support and mentoring that professionals may receive from colleagues and supervisors, which also varies greatly across workplace contexts (5.5 Scholars, MMIRKL, Chameleons). In the workplace, over time, alumni often step into such mentoring roles, either as a boss or as a mutual mentor.

Students, too, have opportunities to practice professional writing strategies and genres in a range of contexts throughout and beyond the curriculum — contexts afforded by internships, co-ops, service-learning, or work-integrated learning experiences (MMIRKL).

Writing beyond the university in self-sponsored contexts matters too, including writing for social media and for oneself. Writing in such self-sponsored contexts informs, and is informed by, writing in academic and other obligatory writing contexts as well (Green Rogues; Recursivities).

HOW WRITERS LEARN TO WRITE BEYOND THE UNIVERSITY
and Develop Rhetorical Strategies and Genre Awareness

Writers learn to appreciate that there are multiple constituents, both internal and external to organizations, for workplace writing — sometimes for the same piece of writing. By appreciating these multiple constituents, alumni can become sensitive to the impact of their writing on both intended and unintended audiences. Further, to produce effective workplace writing, writers must also consider the interplay between multiple constituents of a piece and expected textual conventions of different genres/types of writing (MMIRKL).

Student writers also can make deliberate decisions about the genres they use for different audiences, especially when prompted to think explicitly about their audience's needs.   In addition, student writers often use genre as a tool to understand and negotiate writing situations outside of school-based writing assignments (Chameleons, Recursivities, MMIRKL, Dream Team).

Writers in professional contexts engage in several varieties of self-initiated learning in order to learn how to effectively write for these contexts. A lot of their learning takes place on the job, including developing heuristics (or rules of thumb) for the writing they do within the workplace (Chameleons). Newer alumni sometimes even try to identify documents that simulate rubrics or assignment guidelines. Alumni also use "writing to learn" to help them figure out expectations for writing; however, not all of this self-initiated learning leads to success (Chameleons).

WRITERS' LIVES, IDENTITIES, AND UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT WRITING IS

When writers write and create knowledge in any context, it contributes to their identities as writers (5.5 Scholars). Writers have multiple writing lives (in workplace, self-sponsored, civic, learning, and other contexts), which can influence and inform one another, with recursive movement among those writing spheres (Recursivities). For example, the concepts of self-sponsored and obligatory/professional writing are often interconnected for writers, and engaging in any of these kinds of writing often adds to their identity development (Green Rogues, Recursivities) and expands or builds upon their prior knowledge about writing.

In professional writing contexts, writers engage in a complex negotiation of identities, power, and authority in workplace cultures, which in turn gives them a sense of agency over their professional identities and contributes to their understanding of writing as advocacy or social action. Even though people engage in lots of writing in their lives, they do not always identify with the idea of being a "writer." For instance, writers explain or show their writing products or their writing processes, but do not refer to themselves as "writers" (Green Rogues). Although writers don't always see themselves as "writers," they still find writing meaningful. How writers define and conceptualize writing, and its centrality in what they do, varies in some cases from how researchers and instructors might define and conceptualize it.

ENABLING PRACTICES

For higher education institutions that invest in preparing students for writing beyond the university, we offer the following enabling practices for faculty, staff, and administrators:

1. Students need opportunities to practice how to be both lifelong and life-wide writers, including how to productively engage the supports (or mitigate the lack of supports) they find in future contexts.

2. Faculty and university administrators should know more about the writing students do both in and outside of the classroom (for professional and personal purposes), including the writing instruction or guidance they receive, the genres they're writing, the contexts in which they write these genres, and the various writing processes in which they're engaging. Having this broad sense of their students' writing lives can drive the development of curricular and cocurricular initiatives to enhance students' learning and writing experiences.

3. University administrators should commit resources to faculty scholars to learn more about the kinds of writing alumni do for professional and personal purposes, their struggles and successes, and how their university educations are helping or hindering their successful writing experiences after they graduate.

4. To further understand the writing of their alumni, universities should facilitate stronger connections with alumni employers and faculty who study and teach writing beyond the university. These connections will help universities stay current on the demands of workplace writing and help employers understand how writers learn to write in different contexts.

5. Once faculty, staff, and university administrators have a better understanding of their students' varied writing experiences, if they want to support their students' successful writing beyond the university, they should provide students with the kinds of writing experiences that they're likely to encounter after graduation, with more opportunities to learn how to adjust to the various writing contexts they will experience as alumni. These experiences must be built into the curriculum in intentional, sustained, scaffolded, and progressive ways. Some specific ways instructors can do this are to:

- Teach students how to adapt to and interpret workplace writing cultures, including how to ask for and manage feedback and how to collaborate (5.5 Scholars; Dream Team). In the current social context where professionals often change jobs many times throughout their careers, it's essential to know how to analyze the expectations of a new writing culture; asking for feedback and collaborating on writing are essential in many workplace contexts, but the strategies for enacting these practices vary greatly from context to context.

- Use active-learning opportunities like client projects, internships, co-ops, work-integrated learning, and service learning. For students, gaining experience writing for non-academic audiences can highlight many important differences between academic writing and writing beyond the university.

- Make the functions and varieties of writing in the context of professional work more visible to students and employers. This would help alumni understand that workplace writing expectations and genres vary by context/employer (Chameleons), as well as provide alumni and employers with tools to understand and agree on workplace writing expectations (Dream Team).

- Encourage students to use informal "writing to learn" in their professional and personal lives as a way to think through issues, create knowledge, generate ideas, understand themselves better, etc. (Green Rogues).

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