

Making College “Worth It” – Season 1, Episode 3

Lifewide Writing in College

Nolan Schultheis (00:07):

Welcome to Making College Worth It, the show that examines engaged learning activities that increase the value of college experiences.

Jessie Moore (00:14):

In each episode, we share research from Elon University Center for Engaged Learning and our international network of scholars. We explore engaged learning activities that recent college graduates associate with their financial and time commitment to college being worthwhile.

Nolan Schultheis (00:28):

I'm Nolan Schultheis, a first-year student at Elon University, studying psychology with an interest in law. I'm the Center for Engaged Learning podcast producer and a legal profession scholar.

Jessie Moore (00:37):

And I'm Jessie Moore, director of Elon Center for Engaged Learning and a professor of professional writing and rhetoric.

Nolan Schultheis (00:42):

In this episode, we'll focus on how students make connections among their spheres of writing as they write for college courses, co-curricular activities, internships, work, civic or community activities, and self-motivated purposes. We'll talk to professors Alexis Hart from Allegheny College, Ashley Holmes from Georgia State University, Ide O'Sullivan from the University of Limerick in Ireland, Yogesh Sinha from Ohio University, and Kathleen Yancey from Florida State University.

Jessie Moore (01:10):

In a 2021 survey of recent US college graduates conducted by the Elon Poll in the Center for Engaged Learning, 94% of participants indicated that writing was somewhat or very important to their day-to-day lives, but only 80% had developed effective writing skills during college. In a 2019 survey, recent US college graduates who agreed or strongly agreed that their college prepared them well for work-related writing were more likely to consider going to college worth the financial and time investment. Collectively, these survey results demonstrate why college students and the people who support them need to attend to the writing students are doing in college and how those writing experiences prepare them for lifelong and life-wide writing. Let's hear from our panelists about what they're learning about college students' life-wide writing.

Alexis Hart (02:03):

So hello, everyone. My name is Dr. Alexis Hart. I am a professor of English and the director of writing at Allegheny College, which is a small liberal arts college in Northwestern Pennsylvania. I was drawn to writing studies in part because writing is difficult for me, and knowing that practice, and feedback, and engaging in writing in a community has helped me is what drew me to this work and this research with this team.

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Kathleen Yancey (02:32):

Hello, everyone. Following Alexis's lead, I'm Dr. Kathleen Yancey. I am a professor emerita, which is a fancy way of saying you're retired from Florida State University. And I've long been interested in... Like Alexis, long been interested in how students develop as writers. So we all develop as writers. But I've been involved in some other research recently that suggested that students were learning a lot about writing in places besides the classroom. That is to say, they learn about writing in the classroom, but they learn how to write and about writing in lots of other contexts. And this study gave us a chance to actually inquire into that proposition.

Ashley Holmes (03:13):

My name is Ashley Holmes. I am an associate professor in the English department at Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia, where our campus is an urban campus right downtown. And I'm also currently the interim director of teaching effectiveness at our Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and Online Education. And I have been interested in writing studies and writing practices primarily as a means for people to make change in society. I'm interested in how individuals and groups come together and use writing to address social issues, to come together around community issues, and as well as things that are important to us personally, our personal passions and motivations. So I'm interested in the way that intersects with what we do in higher education and how we can kind of draw these connections, or what our team has kind of called recursivities, across the different spaces, contexts, and spheres in which students write.

Yogesh Sinha (04:16):

Hello. I'm Yogesh Sinha, currently teaching at Ohio University. While we undertook this study, I was there at Sohar University Oman. Writing for me is the kind of evolutionary practice that evolves over time and especially when it comes to students and how do they write. We just try to see how do they gain their voice while they write. One of the features of our research was to see how they gain that kind of an advantage. While I have been teaching over here at Ohio University, I also find almost every semester students writing the reflection letters, and they attest to that kind of review where they gave some sort of a voice, some agency that they try to use in order to apply to that surroundings.

Íde O'Sullivan (05:11):

Hello, my name is Ide O'Sullivan. I work as a senior education developer at the Center for Transformative Learning at the University of Limerick in Ireland. My interest in writing began through my PhD studies, where I was investigating second-language writers and how they develop as writers. Subsequent to that, I worked and directed our writing center at the University of Limerick for many years. And more recently, I have moved into a role in curriculum design and how this informs the curriculum, and that's my new role now is in curriculum design. And what we've learned from the students is very helpful in the design of our curricula.

Jessie Moore (05:48):

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Thank you all very much, and thanks for joining us to share your research. So our first question for you in your research, and Ashley, I think you mentioned it in your introduction, you talked about spheres of writing. Could you explain what those are?

Kathleen Yancey (06:03):

So we alluded to context and to spheres, and they're not exactly equivalent, but they're very close. So a context for writing would be a set of occasions that form a kind of pattern. So in thinking about that, it was a kind of recursive process. Speaking of recursivities, that is, we thought that students wrote in different contexts, but in order to think about whether that was a question we should pursue, we had to think about what those contexts might be. And you could actually hear some of those contexts in our introductions because a couple of us referred to personal writing. So personal writing that was self-sponsored meaning that you did it because you wanted to do it. You were volunteering to write, it actually was something you wanted to do. That seemed to be a recurring context. A recurring context, meaning that it took place over time.

(06:58):

Also, that it was a context that was available to pretty much all the students and to all writers as far as that's concerned. So that was one context. We knew automatically that a second context would be the classroom context because these were all students, and so the students were necessarily in a class. That was our assumption. That's still our current assumption. So that was the second. And then we started looking at the kinds of contexts that were sponsored by schools, for instance, internships. That seems to be a very common context. And I'll say in that situation, definitely in the United States, internships and other work-related learning situations are increasingly common and valued. The workplace was another because a lot of students have jobs. I mean, they're not... It's very funny because there's a kind of truism about, well, students need to be in college and then they're going to get a job.

(07:51):

And we know that for more than half of college students, they're not waiting to get a job. They have a job, or more than one job. Not necessarily the job that they want with their college degree, but a job nonetheless. And they're learning a lot. So these contexts were recurring. They were available to most, if not all, students, and we called them spheres, partly to get around the word context, partly because we were going to ask students to engage in a mapping exercise, and sphere is a better visual word than context. We'll probably talk about that in a little bit. And then, partly because we wanted students to talk about the relationships between the spheres, it's the case sometimes that when you come up with a new word for something, students see it differently, and that was probably another reason that we thought about spheres. So that's a little bit of what our thinking was, and I hope that's helpful.

Ashley Holmes (08:41):

For those research, we ask students about six spheres and then a seventh that we labeled as other and allowed them to define and label for themselves. The six spheres that we asked them about were course-based, work-based for their jobs, self-motivated, which kind of encompassed personal social media, all of that kind of stuff, civic, community, and public co-curricular, and internship.

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Jessie Moore (09:09):

Thanks for that overview. That's really helpful. So you mentioned that you were asking students about these fears. Could you tell us a little bit about who your participants were? Who did you survey and interview?

Alexis Hart (09:23):

Yeah, so one of our considerations was writing over time. And so one of the areas of interest we had when engaging with students as writers was to have some sense of how much instruction, direct instruction in writing they were getting. And then we also were considering that as they moved on in their education, and now we were all at four-year colleges or ones with graduate programs. So none of us were at two-year schools, but we thought that our student participants would more likely be engaged in multiple co-curriculars or have internships and be engaged with community and public writing as they were a little bit more advanced in their studies. So we looked at students who were in year three or beyond, so in the US context, juniors and seniors, in the international context, year three and beyond. So that was our respondent population.

Jessie Moore (10:25):

And how many students did you end up talking to in either the surveys or the interviews? Cumulatively, how many students were represented in your research?

Íde O’Sullivan (10:35):

There were 239 respondents to the survey data.

Ashley Holmes (10:38):

And we had 24 follow-up interviews. And so the research spanned six sites, four in the US, and-

Yogesh Sinha (10:48):

Four in the US, two outside US, yeah.

Alexis Hart (10:51):

Yes, Yogesh, do you want to list our schools?

Yogesh Sinha (10:55):

So Allegheny College, Georgia State University, Florida State University, and there was one more came from Duquesne. We had two outside the US sites where we conducted our study. One was at the University of Limerick, and the other one was at Sohar University.

Alexis Hart (11:14):

I just wanted to add, Yogesh hinted at this, but I wanted to make sure we gave credit to Ana Knutson, who helped us with the design, and implementation, and data collection for the research at the time of

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the study. She was at Duquesne University. And so just wanted to make sure we acknowledged Ana's contributions to our team.

Jessie Moore (11:35):

Thank you for that. And the discussion there about mapping actually previews the next question we had for you that seemed like a really innovative research method, asking students to map the spheres of writing that they were moving among. How did that activity... Well, first actually, could you tell us just briefly a little bit more about that as a research method, what you asked students to do, and then how did that activity inform what you learned about students' college writing?

Kathleen Yancey (12:04):

Well, initially, we met on the Elon Campus in the summer of 2019. And in that moment, we imagined that we would be interviewing the students face-to-face. And we also imagined that we would color-code this for students. So each sphere would have its own color. And we also created our own maps to show what our maps look like, both a pre-mapping map, which is where you identify what you think you've done sort of in the various spheres. Some spheres might be empty. Also, you map using arrows or other symbols, try to show relationships among those spheres. And we also created some post-interview maps.

(12:54):

The theory being that we all have a lot of tacit knowledge about how we write, where we write, when we write, and who we are as writers. Tacit knowledge being knowledge that we have but that we haven't actually explained or articulated. And that through the interview process, simply the dialogue that you have in that situation, not unlike this podcast, actually, that through that dialogue, you become aware, intentionally aware, explicitly aware. That's usually the distinct, and that's made is between tacit and explicit. So you become explicitly aware of your understanding of writing, or maybe there's a place that you wrote in three years ago, but you honestly have forgotten about it, and then all of a sudden the interview helps you remember. So the post-mapping exercise was a chance to make any additions or corrections, and most students actually did make additions or corrections. So our theory about that was right. What then happened, however, was that by the time... We had to do the surveys first, that might not have been apparent, but we did the surveys first, and then, based on our survey respondents, we invited students to interview with us.

(14:02):

Well, that takes a minute, as you might imagine. You have hundreds of students and six different institutions in three continents. And so by the time we were ready to interview, COVID had arrived not only at our doorstep here in the United States but Amman's doorstep, Ireland's doorstep, everybody's doorstep. Yes, one thing we could all share was COVID. Isn't that lovely? So in that moment, we're not going to be interviewing anybody face-to-face, even with all the masks in the world. So we had to pivot to doing something online. So that's what we did. And so we made screenshots of our maps. We had to have reliance students to bring their own colors, and we sort of let the color thing go. So that was basically and it worked fine. They would do the spheres, and we would mute ourselves on Zoom, not

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unlike what we're doing here, and then students would email it to us, so then you could open up. And that was important because we used that map as a way of also talking to students about their writing.

Alexis Hart (15:03):

We had the survey data for each of our interviewees. So we would begin by prompting them saying, "Well, according to the survey, you mentioned that you wrote in these number of spheres." And more than half of our students wrote in five or more spheres. Initially, they identified that, which was really exciting for us to learn a snapshot. And so we said, "You said you wrote in these spheres. Please map them, think about the connections." And then we also had asked them to share with us a piece of writing that they had done within that sphere. And so that also helped us during the interview to kind of prompt them, "Is this a typical kind of text you would produce in this sphere? What did you learn about writing? What kind of feedback did you get?" And so through that process, when they went back to remap, there were these aha moments. "Oh, there are these connections that maybe I didn't think about before."

(15:57):

Or on the survey, I said I only wrote in four spheres, but I actually do think about that I do write in this other sphere. And it was really interesting where there were some Venn diagrams where there were overlap or there were student writers who used size. So I wrote most in this sphere, so this circle in my map is largest. This one is smallest. And so it was for many of the students, again, this idea that Kathy was talking about, about moving from tacit understanding to being able to articulate, and this is something that we think that they could take out beyond the university again. So to say, the way that I list my grocery list and the way that I organize it based on the layout of the grocery store or something, right? Could also help me in an employment environment when I'm thinking about how to organize my tasks for employment or the way that I received feedback and interacted with this employer. I could articulate to my professor that this is the way that feedback is most... I'm most able to uptake the feedback.

(17:06):

And so those kinds of ways of seeing the connections by making it visible, that really opened up space for them to then verbalize what was going on. So those were some of the things that I would say we learned through the mapping.

Íde O'Sullivan (17:25):

So I was going to say that we learned from the surveys and from the interviews that our students are writing in lots of spheres in multiple spheres, and that these spheres influence each other, and that the students see the recursivity, or they see the connections between those fears. And as Alexis said, the activity of mapping and remapping help them to see those connections. We also learned about the richness of students' writing lives. That was really important, that not only were they writing in these fears, but they were noticing features and talking about their writing in quite sophisticated ways.

Ashley Holmes (18:02):

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The mapping, which started out as a part of our research method and how we wanted to collect data and talk with students about their writing, actually became the moment where we would arrive at the end of our interviews with students. And they were like, "I really like doing this. I like mapping out my writing. I like talking about where I write, who I write to, what I write about. I like thinking about these connections among them." And so it became this moment where, even though it was part of our research data collection, we realized that this process of using circles and markers and whatever students wanted to do to kind of think and reflect about their writing lives. And just as Ida and Alexis were saying this kind of across their life, their life-wide experiences with writing, not just in school but all across their life, and led to these really rich moments of reflection that we heard.

(18:59):

Even at the end of our interview, students were like, "Thank you. Thank you for giving me an opportunity to think, and reflect, and write about this." And I think about that as students move out of the university and into continuing to see writing, drawing, and reflection as really a central part of a writing life that sustained the engagement with writing over time as being beneficial and valuable.

Alexis Hart (19:28):

And I think it also gave them an opportunity to recognize the choices that they make and the ways in which they are really discerning and thoughtful about. If I am writing to my club and the other students in my club, I have to use a lot of emojis and a lot of exclamation marks. And yet if I tried to do that, if I was writing to a professor, that would not go off well. Again, they're having these kind of aha moments that they're recognizing the choices that they're making, that they have the opportunity to make choices, and that the choices that make have impact on their audiences that they're trying to engage with. And that's something again, we as writing studies professors, I will say, take for granted, but then bringing that to the foreground of their understanding outside of the classroom was really impactful, I think as well.

Jessie Moore (20:21):

So you've offered a lot of rich information there about what you learned, and I'm already hearing some of the potential implications for students, even things like the value of pausing to think about the writing that they do across these spheres, to have this mapping activity as a tool to facilitate some of that reflection and also to help them think about how what they are doing in one sphere may or may not work in another sphere. I'm curious, are there other things that, based on your study, you would like college students to know about making connections among those writing spheres or moving among those writing spheres?

Kathleen Yancey (21:01):

Well, I think... We've emphasized connections, and students definitely do make connections, even if those connections are differential, like Alexis's observation about students who will understand that a certain move in their writing to their colleagues is not going to work in writing to their professors, right? So they'll learn about audience. So I guess I'd say three things. One is that it's interesting that those are two different spheres, but it's by comparing the two spheres that they can learn a lesson about writing, in that case about audience. That's one thing I would say.

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(21:37):

Second thing I would say is that's what I started with was that although we're emphasizing connections, some students at least were very clear that there were not necessarily connections between spheres. Sometimes the spheres were really very different, which made perfect sense to us, which leads me to my third point. Although we set the exercise up, the exercise being that interview, and as we've explained, it was based on their responses on the surveys and also writing that they shared with us, the other thing that's important here, I think, is that we understood students to be experts about their own writing, and again, where and when they wrote, how they wrote, who their audiences were, the success of what they wrote, also what counted as writing.

(22:21):

So one of our students, for instance, was very clear that spreadsheets for that students were writing. Now, I think if you asked the run-of-the-mill person the spreadsheet, a written text, they would say, "Oh no, that's a numerical text." But for this student, it was a written text, and the student actually had a very elaborate story about how important that was about what he had learned. And actually, one of his recommendations was that that should be taught in school as a kind of writing. So although we understood this interview opportunity as a way for students to make explicit what they already knew, and I think we've demonstrated a little bit, at least, about some of that work, we really do see them as experts in their own writing.

(23:02):

And I think that all people are experts about their own writing, but we have more articulated expertise when we pause and reflect. And that reflection could take any number of forms. It could be a mapping exercise. It could be a dialogue of the kind we're having now. It could be keeping a journal. It could be making mental notes. But if you want to have more control over your writing, I think developing that expertise as a kind of meta practice is one way to make that happen, and that's a good deal of what we saw in our research.

Íde O'Sullivan (23:33):

The kind of expertise and the characteristics that we identified amongst the students, I wonder, would it be useful to share those six characteristics? So the characteristics that we defined as across the interviews and the survey data was that our students were writing regularly and engaging in sustained writing. They saw a value in writing in many different ways. They enjoyed engaging in personal expression and having an opportunity to be heard across the different spheres. And they saw writing as being powerful in gaining entry into and continuing community membership and involvement. And they were aware of the challenges inherent in writing but accepted those challenges.

Jessie Moore (24:19):

Thank you. It's great to have that summary. And those are all really rich and important things to know from the study and about students' writing experiences. I'm wondering, so you shared a little bit about what college students could know. If you had to pick just one or two things that you wish your colleagues across campuses would implement based on your research to support student writers, what would you suggest? What would you prioritize?

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Alexis Hart (24:47):

The one that engaging in writing and having the opportunity to be heard, I think for me, for faculty to be open to giving students entree into the assignments. So I guess choice within structure is kind of a way of putting it. So if they have an interest, being able to bring in that interest in a way that suits the assignment, but also being able to have their own voice, so again, that idea of they are experts in their own lives and writing lives and how can they bring that into a classroom assignment is a way to help them engage and see themselves as writers in a richer way. So that would be my one would be open to some choice within structure for your assignments.

Kathleen Yancey (25:40):

And I think going along with that, even as the class begins tapping some prior knowledge, I mean, in the ideal world, you would have a lot of prior knowledge. As we know, it's not the ideal world. So the question is, what do you want to know about students' writing practices, about students' writing theories? They have theories about writing because that's what they're going to bring with them. So asking them about that, and you might ask them in a writing exercise that's in class, it could be a homework exercise overnight. It could be a mapping exercise where the students return to the map at the end.

(26:16):

There's also some research to show that when students set their own goals, that they perform better. Linking that to prior knowledge might be a good thing to do. But the salient point here is that students do, but they're not blank slates. They're bringing something to your class. So figure out what it is you would like to know that you can then build on. That will be good for students, and if it's good for students, it'll be good for you too.

Yogesh Sinha (26:41):

Our colleagues, I would say that our research has also recommended that faculty develops some sort of an institutional shift towards more student-centered curriculum and holistic teaching practices.

Jessie Moore (26:54):

Thank you. And I want to give the rest of you a chance to jump in on that if you want to, but I also want to just quickly say that, Kathy, your note about prior knowledge is so important. In one of our surveys, we asked recent college graduates how often they'd been asked to draw on prior knowledge, and it was much less frequent of occurrence than we would have hoped. And so anytime we can think about ways to invite students to share their prior knowledge and bring it into our learning spaces, I think that that's really valuable. Anything else that others wanted to add in response to that question of what would you like faculty and staff to think about?

Íde O'Sullivan (27:35):

Just to build on Alexis's point, she spoke about the assignments and more flexibility. Giving students greater choice and giving them opportunities maybe to choose types and genres of writing that bring

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joy, that they're interested in, that's part of the choice and part of the flexibility. And giving the students the freedom to do that and that it's okay to do that, that would be really helpful.

Alexis Hart (28:00):

I would also say that this idea of community membership and how writing creates community, I mean, Ashley may want to talk about community beyond the university, but helping them see that this is right. Many of us have this idea that writing is isolating, right? That it's individualized. It's isolated. But really opening up this idea that no writing is collaborative, it is a way to build community that you are engaging with readers and getting feedback. I think that that is something to really emphasize. I often share with my students, gosh, well, one, I mean, look at this. I'm in a collaborative group of five other thinkers and writers, and they have become not only collaborators but friends and have connected me in so many ways to other opportunities. And so, helping students to find that richness, I will say, "Look at this piece of writing. It says, "Thanks to Kathy for reading an early draft and thanks to Yogesh for contributing this idea for a citation." So that to me too is something that faculty can emphasize not just within their disciplines but even more broadly.

Ashley Holmes (29:10):

I think my advice would be similar actually for students, recent graduates, and faculty, which is really to pay attention to learning and writing as kind of life-wide practices. And just seeing these opportunities for putting your school learning to use in context or spheres outside of the classroom and outside of the university, but also, as Kathy and others on my team have mentioned, seeing that your life experiences, your writing experiences have important value in the classroom too. And so part of that is a shift in mindset for students to not turn off and on learning based on the four walls around them. That learning and writing happen all the time all around us. We don't always stop and kind of reflect on how that's working, but when we do and when we ask students that there were these really rich connections across them that they articulated.

(30:12):

And again, same advice to faculty, when we step in that classroom, just being mindful that the students in the space, whether it's four walls or a virtual space, have rich lived experiences outside of the classroom that have an important place and what we're trying to do with them.

(30:31):

And so inviting prior knowledge, asking them about the kinds of writing they do outside of school, these are all, I think, important lessons and takeaways from the research that we did.

Jessie Moore (30:42):

Thank you for those takeaways. Sydni Brown, who is one of my student co-hosts for this season's episode, worked to schedule this episode but then is not able to join us today because she is on her way to her study abroad site. So exciting for her. But she did have a question that she asked me to share with you. She wondered if you could share why students should be interested in reflecting on their spheres of writing. And I think some of that value is apparent in the responses you just shared, but how would you

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describe the value added to their development as writers or to their college experience more broadly of making space for this type of reflective activity about their writing?

Kathleen Yancey (31:26):

Well, I think part of it is it has to do with intentionality, to the extent that we reflect on our own writing practices. I think, especially across contexts. A couple things happen. One is that you begin to know yourself better as a writer. If you want to be a runner, you actually have to put on shoes and run. You can't just talk about it. You can't just read running magazines, can't just watch videos. You can't just cheer for other runners coming in. You actually have to do the running yourself. Sad to say. The same thing is true for writing. Want to be a writer? These are the things. And if you look at running... I used to be a runner back in the day. I'm now a walker, serious walker, actually do. But if you look at them, they actually... I mean, they talk about the running.

(32:08):

I mean, to Alexis's point, it's a community, and you're intentional about it. And the theory is if you're a little more intentional, then you'll get better at it because you'll know your own practices, you'll know what works for you, you'll know the new goals you want to set for yourself. You'll know you'll be able to say. As the one student said, emojis for peers, yes, emojis for professors, no. That comes from awareness. Awareness, we hope, is enhanced by reflection. So that's a big part of it.

(32:37):

The second thing I will say is that that intentionality gives you more control over what happens rather than just hoping things work out. It's better if you can be more purposeful, and with some reflection, you are likely to be more purposeful.

(32:52):

Last thing I'll say is that with those two pieces in place, to be able to research shows that you're more likely to be able to take what you know and can do in one context and adapt it, repurpose it if you will, for another context. And that's a really big payoff. Instead of seeing every new context as something where you're a brand new person and you don't know anything, instead you walk in and say, "Yeah, I do know something. Now, what can I use from what I know and how will I need to change it so it works?" Those are all really, really big payoffs.

(33:24):

Reflection, broadly speaking, is simply an opportunity to make meaning. And this kind of reflection gives you a lot of opportunity to make lots of different kinds of meaning, and exert more control, be a better writer at the end of the day, and maybe help your friends be better writers too.

Íde O'Sullivan (33:38):

The students' comments towards the end of the interviews also show the value of engaging in the activity. They make comments like, "Oh, I hadn't thought about that. I hadn't seen the connection. And I think the issue that Kathy raises around transfer that the value of understanding it in one context and transferring and applying it to another. And I think the fact that the majority of the students did revisit their maps and did make some changes is also evidence that the process that they had gone through

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was making them think about it explicitly. And they engaged in that change. And they were excited towards the end of the interviews. I remember some of ours were, "I wish I had thought about this before. I wish I had given this some thought or some time." So I think that shows some of the value of the reflection.

Alexis Hart (34:29):

No, no, thank you, Ida. And I was just going to say, I think our method of using visual mapping really enhanced that ability to reflect and see the connections beyond verbalizing, being able to see it on the page and be able to think about, "Oh, right, I do." I had thought about the work that I do as a student government leader. Oh, yeah, budgeting. Oh, right, that goes. Yeah, okay. I can see how that might come into play. And so I do really think there was something rich about the visualization as well as the verbal articulation of that reflection.

Ashley Holmes (35:10):

I also wanted to share in one of our findings related to students valuing writing, and I think this carries over as students think about the role of writing in their lives post-graduation is really just the way that you can receive recognition for a job well done.

(35:29):

I wanted to read a little excerpt from one of our student interviews as this student recounted sharing a successful text, and they said, "I finished it, and I sent it in, and they read it over. And you know, my bosses, who had barely spoken to me before, came in to tell me I'd done a really good job, and the way I kind of got treated in the office changed after that, after I sent in my first thing, this thing being a piece of writing." So that was really cool to know that you've kind of earned someone's respect from writing. And so I think this shows, whether students are writing for school or for work, whether they're currently students, whether they've graduated and are continuing to see writing in their lives, that there's great value added to being mindful of what works for you as a writer. As Kathy was saying, being mindful of your audience and that there are real tangible benefits to that getting recognition in your job,, and in your profession and across things that are important to you in life.

Jessie Moore (36:30):

Is there anything else you'd like our listeners to know about your research?

Kathleen Yancey (36:34):

To underscore a point that's already been made, students learn... It's really... Alexis has emphasized the role of feedback, and I was listening to, oh gosh, to the best of my knowledge, I think, which is a show on NPR, and I think it was just last Sunday, and they were talking about the Gladwell aphorism, which he actually got from somebody else that you need 10,000 hours to develop expertise in something. And they were interviewing, actually, a former colleague of mine at FSU who had passed away, whose name is Anderson, and he did a lot of work in how you develop expertise. He appreciated all the attention Gladwell got, but he pointed out that Gladwell did not include feedback. And that feedback, in addition to practice, is what contributes to expertise. And what's interesting is that the students told us that they

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were writing, that they were getting feedback, not in terms of somebody writing you well job necessarily, but just even in terms of dialogue, different conversations they would have, or they were able to meet their goals.

(37:37):

The writing actually is performative. The writing actually enabled them to achieve a goal that they couldn't otherwise. Sometimes that goal was public-facing. Sometimes that goal was personal. The point is that students really do have writing lives. And in those writing lives, they're challenged. They're having moments of pleasure. They're learning a lot, and they're learning in all those spaces. So to think about a different model of development that's not school-based, that's really the challenge, and not... I mean, there's also lifelong learning, which where the field of writing studies is spending more time on, which I think is a really wonderful thing to do. But life-wise, that sort of. And how can we support that without in any way infringing on that life? I think that's a really interesting kind of question that we haven't attended to as a field, and that perhaps with students' guidance, we'll do a good job of.

Alexis Hart (38:31):

Yeah, I think it would be wonderful if we could all just make space to talk together about our writing lives, right? As Ida was saying right at the end, the students were saying, "Gosh, it was so great to be able to do this," or the students who had those aha moments of saying, "Oh, when I did this project and I shared it with someone, and they learned something about my local community that they didn't know about. Wow, gosh, being able to talk about that," or, "oh, yeah. I do have an expertise in some sport that I shared through a blog, but I didn't really think about that as my work as a writer." Being able to just pause and engage in those conversations and help us see the richness of our writing lives and the communities that are built through that work.

Jessie Moore (39:21):

Thank you very much for visiting with me this morning. I really enjoyed learning more about your study and about the implications for our students, for us as faculty and staff, and colleges. So thank you for taking time for this morning, and thanks for taking a chance on what feels a little risky sometimes, but really appreciate that all of you were willing to participate. And it's been really fun seeing the work coming out of your research, so thank you.

Ashley Holmes (39:51):

Thank you.

Íde O'Sullivan (39:51):

Thanks, everybody.

Alexis Hart (39:51):

Thanks. Bye-bye. Take care. Bye everyone.

Jessie Moore (39:51):

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Good to see you.

Yogesh Sinha (39:51):

Thanks, everybody-

Kathleen Yancey (39:51):

[inaudible 00:39:56].

Jessie Moore (39:56):

Have a great day.

Alexis Hart (39:57):

Hope you do too.

Yogesh Sinha (39:59):

You too. Bye.

Jessie Moore (40:09):

So, Nolan, I'm really curious to hear some of what caught your attention in that interview. For me, from a faculty and staff perspective, I think it's really important to know that students are moving among multiple spheres for writing. So faculty and staff should think about how to invite students to bring that prior knowledge into other writing spheres. For instance, supervisors of student employees could ask about writing experiences not only in courses but also from students other life-wide writing, their co-curricular activities, civic writing, internships, and many other places. So that's one of the things that really stood out to me, but I'm curious, what caught your attention?

Nolan Schultheis (40:50):

I think the sphere has also caught my attention for really a different way. I never thought about my writing as a sphere-based pursuit. I always assumed my writing was whatever I had to write for the course, and that was that. I didn't realize that writing can be paired into these spheres of influence, and if we were to focus on the spheres maybe a little more in school, I feel we would be able to find tune certain areas of spheres that are slightly more important as opposed to maybe writing a paper on a fantasy story. Maybe we should focus more on the professionalism sphere or the corporate sphere, where you need to have different buzzwords, different ways you connect sentences, even a different tone and inflection in the way you write. I don't think a lot of students think about that, and it was very eye-opening to kind of just have that brought to my attention in a way I didn't even consider.

Jessie Moore (41:51):

Well, and as you were talking, I was thinking that maybe even involving students in the decisions about which spheres we spend the most time on, because there may be some that are more important for your goals than others, and yet, your roommate, for example, might have different spheres that are

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important to them. So how do we make sense or make room in our curriculum for students to have some agency and choice in which writing spheres they're spending the most time developing and practicing? I don't quite know how we get to that point, but I think it's an interesting challenge for faculty and staff to think about as we're working with our students.

Nolan Schultheis (42:30):

For sure.

Jessie Moore (42:31):

Anything else that you think students should take away from this episode?

Nolan Schultheis (42:36):

Something that caught my eye, it was spoken by Professor Alexis Hart. She had said that students nowadays, a lot of them have jobs, and I didn't really think about that. Especially being someone who has a job, I look around and my fellow students in their day-to-day lives. I know most of them don't have jobs, so I'm curious as to where one that statistic comes from, and two, how much of a representation does it have in a campus like Elon or even campuses worldwide? I think I was very lucky to have a work ethic instilled in me at a young age to want to work and attend school at the same time, which has definitely polished my writing and made it better because it's forced me to use both school sphere and the business sphere.

(43:29):

But I think that more people should consider even getting an entry-level job or something that at least keeps them engaged and gives them the idea of really what they're going to be doing in the future because you're going to have to work, you're going to have to get a job, and writing will obviously be a part of that. I mean, you could be working at a fast food chain, and you're still required to maybe text your manager, write an announcement for your work team. It's very important to have a basis of writing in terms of a job.

Jessie Moore (44:03):

Nolan, I think that's really interesting what you're observing about student employment during college, and I think that there probably is a lot of variation across different institution types. We may not see it as much at Elon, or it may not be as prevalent. It's kind of hidden in the folds or in the background. But part of what might be contributing to the high prevalence of student employment or students who work during college is that in some of our statistics, and it sends us numbers about college students, we know that in 2016, 8 million college students were 25 or older. And so that's a lot of adult students who may be working and going back to college or going to college part-time while working full-time. And that might be contributing to the high number of students who are working, in addition to just things like financial need. Lots of possibilities there, but I do think it's important to draw attention to that, and that work sphere then brings a lot of expertise in that we could draw on as we're talking about other types of life-wide writing.

(45:15):

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Once again, I'm Jessie Moore.

Nolan Schultheis (45:16):

And I'm Nolan Schultheis. Thank you for joining us for Making College Worth It from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning.

Jessie Moore (45:23):

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