

Writing Beyond the University

Preparing Lifelong Learners
for Lifewide Writing

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AN INVITATIONAL CONCLUSION

THE FUTURE OF WRITING BEYOND THE UNIVERSITY RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

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This collection offers insight into learning to write as a lifelong and lifewide process, examines the writing experiences of lifelong writers, and explores strategies for preparing students for their evolving writing lives. The research included here informs the recommendations and charges we've outlined below. Yet, just as learning to write is a dynamic, ever-evolving process, writing tools and contexts also continue to change—partly contributing to the lifelong and lifewide learning process! Therefore we initiate this conclusion with invitations for continued study.

Ideas for Future Writing Beyond the University Research

The research teams represented in this collection are generating new knowledge that enhances what universities and scholars know about writing beyond the university; their studies also give us insight into new directions for future research. Much of the research is centered on the stories and experiences of individual writers, yet more research could explicitly examine writers' experiences based on their identity, socioeconomic status, or cultural context. In other words, how is writing beyond the university different for different populations of writers?

We write during the COVID-19 global pandemic, which required many industries to shift their work online. Even as we

look ahead to a move from COVID-19 as pandemic to COVID-19 as endemic, some businesses and organizations are opting to preserve remote work strategies. How will remote work continue to change the nature of writing beyond the university? And how can higher education continue to adapt to prepare learners for this fluid writing context?

In addition, the research teams' findings are leading to new recommendations about revising curricula in order to attend to the complex and varied ways that students write while in college and that alumni write after they graduate. Future studies could examine how curricula revised based on what we've learned about writing beyond the university prepare alumni to be more effective writers in their professional and personal lives. Across universities, writing across the curriculum programs might spearhead this research—examining the impact of curricular changes across disciplines and programs, and collaborating with other educational developers, such as experts in the scholarship on teaching and learning, in order to fully understand the impact of curricular change.

Recommendations for Practice

Drawing on everything our authors are learning about writing beyond the university, we offer the following recommendations:

Take Stock of Students' and Alumni's Writing

If we want students to be successful beyond the university—and we think that's one of the major goals of higher education—faculty, staff, and university administrators should know about **the kinds of writing their alumni are doing (for professional and personal purposes)**, their struggles and successes, and **how** their university educations are helping or hindering their writing experiences after they graduate.

Prior to their students' graduation, faculty, staff, and university administrators **should also know about the kinds of writing that current students are doing both in and outside of the classroom (again, for professional and personal purposes)**, including the writing instruction or guidance they receive, the experiences they

have, the genres they're writing, and the various writing processes in which they're engaging.

And we need to understand **how these multiple writing experiences intersect**—how these contexts impact each other, especially to understand if, when, and how transfer across these contexts occur.

Integrate Writing Instruction and Practice Throughout the Curriculum

Once universities have a better understanding of these writing experiences, faculty, staff, and university administrators should consider how to provide students with the kinds of writing experiences they're likely to encounter after graduation. These experiences **must be built into the curriculum** in order to teach students about writing transfer from school to workplace or beyond the university. Some of the ways instructors can do this are to:

- Teach students how to understand the rhetorical situation for new writing contexts
- Give students practice writing for a variety of audiences and in a variety of genres
- Teach students how to adapt to and interpret workplace writing cultures, including how to ask for feedback and how to collaborate and network
- Use active-learning opportunities like client projects, internships, work-integrated learning, and service learning.

Ideally, students should get exposure to writing beyond the university discussions and experiences at multiple points during their college experience and in many ways.

Students need **multiple opportunities** to practice writing in and for real-world contexts and to make connections among the different kinds of writing they're doing, including professional and self-sponsored writing. **Classes across the curriculum** should teach for writing transfer both in and beyond the university. And all **faculty and staff** need to attend, at some point and to some extent,

to writing beyond the university—as teaching writing is *everyone’s* job.

Reflect

- *Where* in their curriculum or in cocurricular contexts are your students currently learning about the kinds of writing they might do after graduation or the kinds of skills they need to write and work collaboratively with others?
- If you’re not sure whether this instruction and practice is already happening, where might the curriculum be adjusted to attend to writing beyond the university? Early on, in first-year classes? In core or general education classes? In major and minor curriculum? In senior seminars? In student employment, writing centers, internships, and co-ops?

Finally, our recommendations lead us to a few charges that we ask you to take up at your own institutions.

First, find out what faculty, staff, and administrators at your institutions know about the writing your alumni do after they graduate, in personal, professional, and civic contexts. If you know the types of writing alumni are doing, is this being shared with faculty, so they can make decisions about attending to writing beyond the university in their curriculum? If you don’t know the types of writing alumni are doing, how can you find out? Who can you work with to gather this information? And seek partnerships with local employers, or employers who tend to hire your graduates, creating opportunities to learn more from each other about how students learn to write and about the expectations for workplace writing.

Second, find out what your institutional colleagues and administrators think about writing beyond the university. Would they agree that your curriculum should even address it? Would they agree that universities have an obligation to build in such writing instruction and practices? Most of our university colleagues would agree that educators should be preparing our students for the work and

writing they'll do after graduation, but some may be concerned that this focus might signal a shift away from a broad-based liberal arts education and towards more narrowly focused vocational training. We take the approach that a college education—from any type of institution, such as two-year colleges, small liberal arts institutions, and large land-grant institutions—is about preparing alumni who are engaged participants in their personal, professional, and civic lives. We know that a primary way people engage in these spheres is through writing. In other words, writing beyond the university isn't (only) about career training; attending to writing beyond the university helps writers stay engaged in all aspects of their lives by fostering lifelong and lifewide learning. So getting faculty and staff on board with teaching the kinds of writing that prepares students to contribute meaningfully beyond graduation is of the utmost importance.

Finally, consider where in your curriculum—and in the cocurriculum—writing beyond the university can be addressed or attended to. How can your university ensure that students have repeated and scaffolded instruction and practice with multiple types of writing they'll encounter beyond the university so that they learn adaptable strategies for examining each new context and purpose for writing and for responding effectively?

As you engage with these recommendations—or as you pursue future research on writing beyond the university—we invite you to join a conversation with our chapter authors. While traditional publications (e.g., journal articles, books) offer one venue for this evolving work, we hope you also will consider going more broadly public via outlets like higher education blogs and news sites. More specifically, we invite you to submit posts for consideration to our publisher's edited blog, which includes a category devoted to writing transfer in and beyond the university (<https://www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org/category/writing/>). We look forward to reading about your contributions to research on writing beyond the university and to learning how this research has (re)informed writing instruction and opportunities on your campus.

GLOSSARY

Cocurricular: activities pursued in addition to—and complementing—academic coursework and requirements

Disciplinary writing: a systematic way of using language, evidence, and structure that is accepted by or conventional to an academic or professional field or discipline

Discourse community: a group of people that has a shared interest in a topic and uses communication to achieve common goals

Genre: a specific category or type of writing with socially constructed conventions related to structure, language, use of evidence, etc. that distinguish it from other types of writing

Mapping: creating visual representations (of experiences, of data, etc.)

Multimodal: texts that combine multiple modalities (e.g., text, images, sound, video, etc.), rather than relying solely on alphabetic text

Networking: intentionally and critically engaging in an exchange of information and ideas among others with a common profession or interest for the purposes of learning or improving

Recursivities: the relationships between and across the contexts in which writers compose (see chapter 4)

Rhetoric: the available means of persuasion, or the art and science of using the strategies and tools available to a writer to achieve their goals for writing for a specific audience in a specific context; may also refer to the discipline of rhetoric, when used in the names of departments or programs of study

Rhetorical situation: the context in which writing is produced, inclusive of the people involved (e.g., authors and readers), the exigence for the text, and the positive and negative constraints that inform how the authors compose the text

Rhetorical training: “the coordinated curricular and cocurricular experiences that immerse students in writing for different audiences, purposes, and contexts—from writing-intensive courses, to internships, to campus jobs in administrative offices, to consulting in the writing center” (chapter 3)

Self-agency: a person’s control and autonomy over their decisions and actions; for writing, this includes a person’s control and autonomy over how they write, use writing, or apply what they have learned about writing to future writing tasks

Self-sponsored writing (SSW): writing that people pursue for their own purposes

Self-sponsored writing to learn (SSWTL): writing that people pursue to advance their learning, outside of work or school contexts (see chapter 2)

Spheres of writing: the non-time-bound and non-text-bound circumstances shaping writing, including audiences, purposes, and available writing tools

Theory of writing: a framework that integrates writers’ understanding of writing concepts and prior writing experiences to inform their production of writing (see Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014)

Threshold concept: when students learn something new and that was previously inaccessible, they cross a threshold that opens up a new way of thinking. Thus, threshold concepts are tricky or complex concepts that, once understood, give students access to new thinking about a topic or a theory.

Wayfinding: a conceptual mapping of participants’ awareness of ongoing writing development through a range of intentional and accidental encounters, processes, and experiences (chapter 1; Alexander, Lunsford, and Whithaus 2020)

Work-integrated learning (WIL): a pedagogical practice in which students engage in authentic and meaningful work-related tasks in partnership with a university mentor and a workplace supervisor, with opportunities to reflect on their experiences and to integrate their academic and workplace experiences

Writing across professions (WAP): a curricular model intended to facilitate students’ transfer of writing knowledge and practices in the context of work-integrated learning (see chapter 5)

Writing context: the circumstances shaping the production of a text, including the audience, purpose, and available writing tools for the text

Writing for “authentic” or “real” audiences: writing that has a specific audience beyond the teacher, such as a client or community partner

Writing to learn (WTL): writing to process or make meaning of new-to-the-writer concepts

Writing transfer / transfer of writing knowledge and practice: transforming or repurposing prior writing knowledge and practice for new contexts to adequately meet the expectations of new audiences and fulfill new purposes for writing

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