

CHAPTER 11.

ATTEMPTING TO CONNECT
DISCIPLINARY PRINCIPLES
OF “EFFECTIVE WRITING”
WITH STUDENTS’ PRIOR
WRITING EXPERIENCES
IN FOUR DISCIPLINES

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WAC theory supports the idea that faculty can better teach disciplinary principles of effective writing to students by attempting to connect disciplinary writing with students’ prior writing experiences. WAC theory also supports the idea that writing experiences are more meaningful to students if such experiences are personal to them. This chapter reports the efforts of faculty in four disciplines to implement these theories and to better teach disciplinary writing to their students by asking their students to connect disciplinary principles of “effective writing” with the students’ thoughts on “effective writing” and the students’ prior writing experiences. These IRB-approved activities took place at St. John’s University in New York and involved a first-year legal writing course, a second-year history seminar, a third-year chemistry laboratory and a third- or fourth-year clinical

and research writing course. Different methods were used to connect disciplinary principles of effective writing with the students' thoughts on effective writing in each course. In all of the courses, the faculty found that their efforts to connect disciplinary principles of effective writing with students' thoughts on effective writing revealed the complexity of students' relationships to writing and disconnects between the instructors' thoughts on effective writing and their students' thoughts about effective writing. Each of the faculty also valued this collaboration. Among other things, this collaboration across disciplines helped the faculty contextualize disciplinary conventions of effective writing relative to conventions of effective writing in other disciplines.

WAC theory supports the idea that faculty can better teach disciplinary principles of effective writing to students by attempting to connect disciplinary writing with students' prior writing experiences. For example, in *Naming What We Know*, Andrea Lunsford stated that “when writers can identify how elements of one writing situation are similar to elements of another, their prior knowledge helps them out in analyzing the current rhetorical situation” (cited in Adler-Kassner, 2015, p. 55). Similarly, in *Engaged Writers and Dynamic Disciplines*, Chris Thaiss and Terry Meyers Zawacki (2006) noted the importance of reflecting on the “connections and distinctions” between writing experiences and the development of students' writing abilities (p. 140). Similarly, WAC theory supports the idea that writing experiences are more meaningful to students if such experiences are personal to them (Eodice et al., this volume; Eodice et al., 2017; Kells, 2018).

We teach at St. John's University in New York, a private Catholic university in New York City with a diverse student population and a total enrollment of roughly 20,000 students. We teach disciplinary writing in our respective courses: a first-year legal writing course, a second-year history seminar, a third-year chemistry laboratory, and a third- or fourth-year clinical and research writing course. The four of us have been working together for several years on ways to implement in our classrooms what we have learned through participating in International Writing Across the Curriculum (IWAC) conferences, reading WAC literature, participating in WAC workshops and programs, and from each other. Through this work we have learned about how we each carry distinct identities as writers—identities as writers within our disciplines as well as identities as writers in other aspects of our lives—and how these identities, culturally shaped and contested, often encompass ideas and practices that carry over from one writing context to another.

Based on our knowledge of WAC theory, our experiences in our past collaborations and our experiences in the classroom, we decided to attempt to help students connect their prior writing experiences with their writing in our disciplines—as a means of helping them learn disciplinary writing. This chapter reports our reflections on our IRB-approved attempts to implement that practice in our classrooms. As faculty on the ground in the disciplines, we are simultaneously working to learn to become better teachers of writing and to teach our students to write. In that respect, we are similar to the Pre-Service Educator students discussed by Christy Goldsmith (this volume), who are asked to simultaneously develop in their disciplines and develop as teachers of writing. We're hoping to contribute to WAC discourse by offering that perspective—the perspective of faculty in dramatically different disciplines collaborating and struggling to implement WAC theory.

In our courses, we each used different methods to try to help our students connect disciplinary principles of effective writing with writing outside of our disciplines, but we each used some combination of the following activities:

- asking students what they think “effective writing” is
- asking students to bring us samples of “effective writing” in and outside of our disciplines and asking students to discuss why they think that the samples that they chose are effective
- asking students to use unmodified versions of the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AACU) Written Communication VALUE Rubric (hereafter “AACU Rubric”) to evaluate samples of writing
- asking students to evaluate writing, including the writing of other students, using locally developed course rubrics
- asking students to write about nondisciplinary topics using disciplinary writing styles

In working with our students, we used the term *effective* writing instead of terms like *good* or *standard* writing because the term *effective* writing seemed to us to better dovetail with the purposes for which our students are writing in our disciplines—to inform, to analyze or to persuade. We note that the term “effective” is sometimes used in the literature to discuss purposeful writing. For example, in *Naming What We Know*, Kevin Roozen stated that “if teachers can help students consider their potential audiences and purposes, they can better help them understand what makes a text effective or not, what it accomplishes and what it falls short of accomplishing” (cited in Adler-Kassner, 2015, p. 18). The position statement on writing assessment from the National Council of Teachers of English (2014) discusses “assessing writing on the basis of effec-

tiveness for readers.” The term effective is also commonly used in style manuals such as *The Elements of Style* (Strunk & White, 2007) and *The Sense of Style: The Thinking Person’s Guide to Writing in the 21st Century* (Pinker, 2015). We are aware that the terms good and standard writing are also used in the literature. Putting our disciplinary differences aside, at a high level of generality, we each expect our students’ effective writing to have the qualities of “standard academic writing” that Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) identified in *Engaged Writers and Dynamic Disciplines*: (a) “clear evidence in writing that the writer(s) have been persistent, open-minded, and disciplined in study”; (b) “the dominance of reason over emotion or sensual perception”; and (c) “an imagined reader who is coolly rational, reading for information, and intending to formulate a reasoned response” (pp. 5-7).

We are also aware of the controversy around AACU VALUE Rubrics. We agree with Anson and others that these rubrics are not the best way to assess student writing or the best way to communicate instructor expectations to students (Anson et al., 2012). But we do think that these rubrics can be a useful way to *begin* conversations with students about what instructors expect from student writing and what is expected of writers in our disciplines, generally. We think, for example, that discussing these rubrics with our students can be a useful way to begin applying Thaiss and Zawacki’s (2006) Seventh Practice of “teaching students . . . the general academic principles that all majors share and how to distinguish between these principles and variations” (p. 155) from these principles in different rhetorical contexts. In many of our courses, we essentially used the AACU Rubric as a statement of “general academic principles” of writing—a bridge to help our students connect their thoughts on writing with the “variations” from those principles in our disciplines. We also want to be clear that we—as instructors—did not use the AACU Rubric in assessing student writing. As advocated in WAC Clearinghouse’s (2014) statement of the principles and practices of WAC and the National Council of Teachers of English’s (2014) statement of its position on writing assessment, among other places, we agree that assessment should be tailored to the context and purpose of the assignment being assessed.

Our attempts to help students connect their thoughts on effective writing with disciplinary conventions of effective writing were, at bottom, about us as teachers of disciplinary writing. We agree with the WAC principle that writing is highly situated and tied to a field’s discourse and ways of knowing and therefore that writing in the disciplines (WID) is most effectively taught by faculty in the disciplines (WAC Clearinghouse, 2014). We are aware of our roles as teachers of disciplinary writing. We value our discourse across our disciplines as a way of increasing our teaching effectiveness (WAC Statement of Principles) and as

a means of providing us, as teachers, with “multiple opportunities to articulate, interrogate, and communicate [our] assumptions and expectations” about student writing (WEC Model, 2019). And, we value reflecting on our own teaching with writing practices as a means of improving those practices (Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006). The efforts that we discuss here were part of that process of continuous reflective improvement for us.

Below, we discuss each of our respective courses in turn—from the course that students take earliest at St. John’s to the course that students take the latest at St. John’s. In doing so, we will cover

- What each of our courses is, including the objective(s) of the course, and how the course fits into our respective disciplines and majors.
- What activities we added into our courses to attempt to help our students connect their thoughts on effective writing, generally, with disciplinary principles of effective writing.
- The extent to which we perceived these activities to be useful to our teaching.
- The extent to which our students perceived these activities to be useful to their learning. We each asked our students about this in similar end-of-the semester surveys.
- How and whether we intend to continue using these activities going forward in our respective courses.

After discussing each of our courses in turn, we will close with some modest common observations across our courses.

LEGAL RESEARCH AND WRITING I—JAMES CROFT

Legal Research and Writing I is a required course in the undergraduate Legal Studies major at St. John’s, an undergraduate law major. In the Legal Studies major, the purpose of the Legal Research and Writing I course is to teach students to communicate a legal analysis in writing in a way that is customary in the legal profession. Ideally, students take this course in the second semester of their first year, after taking an introductory course in legal analysis in their first semester. I primarily taught this course by collaboratively writing a large legal research memorandum with the students over the course of the semester. This semester, we wrote about hypothetical murders committed by our hypothetical defendant’s buddy with our hypothetical defendant’s rifle. Most of the work in the course was directly related to this semester-long assignment. But, I also asked the class to do a small legal writing assignment on the second day of class to facilitate a discussion about the qualities that we value in legal writing. And,

throughout the semester, I also asked the class to respond to and reflect on several readings on legal writing.

In addition to the assignments mentioned above, this semester I also asked my students to do several assignments connecting legal and nonlegal writing. For example, in the beginning of the semester, I asked the students to give me a sample of nonlegal writing that has the qualities that we value in legal writing—makes a clear and concrete assertion, makes that assertion up front (at the beginning of the writing), supports that assertion with evidence and does so concisely—and to discuss the extent to which the samples have these qualities. And, at the end of the semester, I asked the students to give me a sample of nonlegal writing that they think is effective but that does *not* have the qualities that we value in legal writing. I asked the students to discuss why they thought that the piece was effective and to discuss the extent to which the samples have/ do not have the qualities that we value in legal writing.

When I asked the students to complete these assignments, my goal was to get the students thinking about how the writing that we were doing in my class was similar to and different from their prior writing experiences. My hope was that helping the students to make these connections would help them become better writers. But, looking back on these assignments, I don't think that they had the desired effect. Like many instructors, I realized that I did not effectively communicate my expectations regarding these assignments to my students. When I asked the students to give me a piece that makes an "assertion," for example, I meant something like a litigation position—a position on something debatable. The fact that many students gave me news articles reporting facts or song lyrics reporting feelings suggests that many students didn't understand "assertion" the way that I meant. Similarly, the students seemed to understand "evidence" differently from me. When I asked for "evidence," I wanted support for debatable positions, but a lot of students gave me reports of perceptions or feelings. In hindsight, I should have seen this disconnect coming. When I modeled the activities described above for my students, I connected legal writing to song lyrics and essays. By pointing out the similarities between legal writing and those very different genres of writing, I may have inadvertently invited my students to identify similarities between those genres that do not exist.

In end-of-the semester surveys, my students reported a similarly tepid feeling toward these activities. While a small minority of students reported that they thought that the activities connecting legal and nonlegal writing were the most effective activities in the course and a small minority of students reported that they thought that these activities were the least effective activities in the course, a majority of the students thought that these activities contributed to their learn-

ing—but not as much as the course activities that involved direct instruction in effective legal writing.

In hindsight, I think that these activities were more valuable to me as an instructor than they were to the students. Asking the students to connect legal and nonlegal writing showed me how the students think about writing and how I can better communicate my expectations about legal writing to them. Similarly, I think that this collaboration with my colleagues has also helped me understand what is expected of my students when they are taking courses in other disciplines, which has also helped me communicate to my students how the writing we are doing in my class is similar to and dissimilar from writing that they do in other courses. In class, discussing the qualities that I value in legal writing, I find myself saying things like (a) This is like science. Your goal is to communicate your analysis in a way that can be understood and replicated by others. (b) This isn't like philosophy or theology where you build up to your point. Here, you make your point first and then support it. And (c) Here our goal is to write as simply and directly as possible. This isn't like some of your humanities courses where simplicity is viewed as a sign of lack of rigor.

Going forward, I do not plan to keep using the course activities that asked the students to connect legal and nonlegal writing. I found that more students were misled by those activities than were helped by those activities. But, as discussed above, I valued working through these activities with my students and working through this project with my colleagues because those processes helped me better understand how my students think about writing and understand what qualities are valued in writing in their other courses. That understanding helps me better directly communicate to my students how the writing that we are doing in my class is similar to and different from some of their other writing experiences—which was the goal of the project in the first place.

HISTORY SEMINAR—PHYLLIS CONN

The sophomore history seminar is a required three-credit course for history majors and minors designed to introduce students to foundational practices in historical methods, analysis, and research. It addresses how to read historical sources and prepares students for historical writing in future courses. I organized this section around the theme of immigration to New York City, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Early in the semester, I asked students to think about effective historical writing through three prisms: a definition I provided; the AACU Rubric; and their own prior writing and reading. My definition stated that effective historical writing is the result of analysis and synthesis of appropriate research, is

clearly sourced and contextualized, centers on a strong thesis or argument, and follows general conventions about mechanics and grammar. I asked them to select a piece of historical writing or any other writing they believed was effective and to rate it using the AACU Rubric, then write a few paragraphs about why they thought the piece was effective. Students identified these terms as the most important aspects of effective historical writing: well-organized, strong use of appropriate evidence (preferably primary sources), engaging style, follows disciplinary conventions, meaningful content, and clear syntax and mechanics.

During our semester-long discussion of these characteristics, there were moments when students clearly had diverse ideas of how to interpret these criteria, as well as moments when student perceptions of criteria diverged somewhat from common disciplinary interpretations. For example, the question of “engaging style” arose during student responses to complex journal articles, with some students questioning whether a dense text represented ineffective historical writing, while others stated that “engaging style” was not an appropriate criterion for historical writing after all. Student perceptions also varied about what constitutes “appropriate evidence” and what constitutes its “strong use,” and in many cases their definitions would not have met common standards in the field. For example, one student suggested that encyclopedia articles would be appropriate evidence. We had a class discussion about how their previous history professors had responded to that type of use and when it might be appropriate to cite encyclopedia articles.

The discrepancy between common student perceptions and common disciplinary conventions is not surprising, since these students were enrolled in their first seminar on disciplinary writing. Our ongoing discussions about effective historical writing returned most frequently to using evidence, the research question, the thesis, and the argument—of which only one (use of evidence) was clearly stated in all three definitions: my definition, the AACU Rubric, and the class-defined characteristics of effective historical writing.

Based on student responses to a survey at the end of the semester, our work on effective writing was clearly significant for their learning. I also learned a great deal about writing pedagogy in history. One conclusion I reached is that student historical writing develops through multiple methods of discussing, performing and evaluating all types of writing—students’ own writing, course readings, primary sources, other students’ writing, and readings from outside the course. When we repeatedly asked a set of questions about pieces of writing (what is the main argument, what are the sources, how is the piece contextualized, is it clear to the reader), our perspective on these questions evolved through the semester.

Secondly, I began to understand how ineffective my attempts were to make connections between students’ prior writing experiences and writing in my course, and perhaps how difficult it is to do so. Instead of “looking backward,” as one student said, several students were most interested in becoming stronger historical writers. Third, I noticed that students can develop their understanding and perception of effective historical writing and effective writing practices before they master historical content, a conclusion that would probably not surprise WAC scholars. Before this project, I believed that effective historical writing developed first through mastering content, analysis and synthesis, then afterwards working on aspects such as organization, logic, the thesis statement, and related matters. Now I understand that just as it might take me several months or years to master a historical topic, students need more than fifteen weeks to develop historical understanding, analysis and synthesis for a selected topic. Thus, even though students cannot master a historical topic in one semester, students can improve their historical writing in one semester through practices such as developing more effective thesis statements, stronger use of appropriate evidence, and improved application of historical conventions. Indeed, as students learn some of the conventions of writing in history, these new ways of writing help develop new ways of thinking that promote mastery of content. For future iterations of the history sophomore seminar, these practices are where I intend to focus my efforts. I plan to reduce the course attention on some aspects of historical writing (such as how to choose a research topic) and focus more on writing thesis statements and strong use of appropriate evidence.

EXPERIMENTAL PHYSICAL CHEMISTRY—JOSEPH SERAFIN

Experimental Physical Chemistry (EPC) is a required third-year, second-semester course in the traditional chemistry course sequence. The chemistry program is externally accredited by the American Chemical Society. These students have been introduced to technical communication in the form of laboratory reports in their first, second, and third years. This aspect of the course is different from the two previously discussed introductory courses. This course has a significantly more extensive writing component than their previous chemistry courses. I wanted to see what the students brought with them from their previous courses in the hope that I would better be able to use that prior understanding to assist the students in becoming more effective communicators.

A “formal” laboratory report mirrors the format used in the chemical literature. The Committee on Professional Training of the American Chemical Society (2015) offers a description of a research report that is an excellent launching

point for the disciplinary novice. In addition to the normal laboratory reports, I added a new series of assignments to the course this semester to help unpack the students' ideas of effectiveness at the start and end of the semester:

- In assignment 1 (A1), the students provided samples of an “effective” nontechnical writing and were given the following prompts: 1. Why do you consider this work to be effective? 2. Are there any elements you could adopt for your technical communications (lab reports)?
- In assignment 2 (A2), the AACU rubric was used as a lens to reflect on a piece of technical writing that the students perceived to be effective, and the students were given the following prompts: 1. Why do you consider this work to be effective? 2. Please rate the article using this rubric.
- Assignment 3 (A3) was a blind peer evaluation of a student report using the internal rubric designed for this course. This was a course rubric for the written reports, based on the needs of this group of students at this point in their academic careers.
- The fourth and final assignment (A4) was the end of semester student survey on student perception of effectiveness. Many of these questions are closely related to survey questions from the other authors in this study.

The biggest finding for me as the instructor was that I did not have sufficient information either about the students' understanding of effective writing before this course or how that understanding has evolved in this course. My initial questions at the start of the semester and final questions at the end were not specific enough to require the students to identify specific elements of their writing for analysis.

In retrospect, instead of asking broadly about what effective writing is, I should have narrowed that down to what was effective writing in their previous chemistry courses. And then, as pointed out above by James, a more meaningful task would be identifying how and why this course has different standards for effective writing. This is not to imply a higher or more demanding standard, but to recognize different aspects are given more attention and may have different formats in different chemistry courses, one size does not fit all—nor should it. Five contexts have been identified that shape individuals' expectations when they read/evaluate writing: the general academic, the disciplinary, the subdisciplinary, the local/institutional, and the personal/idiosyncratic (Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006).

While the student surveys provide useful information, a perception of improvement may not correlate with actual improvement. A better approach

would be to have the students critically reflect and evaluate how elements in later reports are different from previous reports. Having the students perform this reflective analysis is far more useful than the instructor performing the task because it is a) a formative assessment of learning for the student, and b) it provides actionable insight into how the student perceives the evolution of effective writing during the semester when corrections or discussions can occur.

I view this project as a success not because I can now identify what elements are best at making student writing more effective, but rather I have a better idea of what kinds of information I will need in order to assess that improvement in the future.

In the next iteration of the course, new assignments would be a discussion of how and why the grading rubrics for the various chemistry written reports are different, and why those differences are important. A critical student self-assessment analysis of their improvement (or lack) over the course of the semester will be performed by the student in consultation with the faculty.

In terms of the specific assignments, I would still keep A1 because it provides a useful introduction to the topic and serves as a good ice-breaker to meet the students. For A2, I would use the specifically created internal course rubric because any advantage from looking at effectiveness from another viewpoint (a “standard” writing rubric) is probably outweighed by reinforcing a common theme throughout the semester to the students. A3 remains a useful exercise, if for no other reason than for the student to look at the internal rubric from the perspective of the reader.

RESEARCH & CLINICAL WRITING—REBECCA WISEHEART

Research and Clinical Writing teaches discipline specific writing forms in Communication Sciences and Disorders with special emphasis on organization, clarity, and use of evidence. For this analysis, I focused on students’ understanding of the use of evidence as being a critical component or marker of effective writing. Evidence-based practice is a cornerstone of preprofessional training in speech-language pathology and audiology and in this course, I review ways in which empirical evidence is used in both research and clinical writing. For example, a course objective for research writing is for students to master APA format for citing sources and reporting experimental findings. For clinical writing, students learn how and where to report objective data in diagnostic reports and in clinical (SOAP) notes. Students learn that such data is the evidence clinicians use to support decisions about diagnosis and treatment. The Association of American Colleges & Universities Written Communication VALUE Rubric also includes evidence as a separate component, defined as “use of high-quality,

credible, relevant sources.” Using this broad definition as a starting point, and assuming students had been exposed to this (or a similar) rubric in other classes, I hoped to gain some insight into students’ general, “adisciplinary” view of evidence before coming into the class and to gauge what types of teaching or writing activities might impact that view.

In an attempt to bridge prior writing experiences with discipline specific forms, I added two assignments. For Assignment 1, students selected a non-research article and rated it according to the AACU Rubric with an explanation for their ratings. Though not instructed to do so, all students selected articles from electronic (online) platforms. Regarding sources and evidence, substantially more students (21/28) gave their pieces high marks (i.e., ratings of 3 or 4) than gave their pieces low marks (i.e., ratings of 1 or 2; $n = 8/28$), indicating a general trust in the sources of evidence of work published online. Overall, students demonstrated a solid understanding that multiple sources of evidence are necessary for any type of effective writing. However, students are not yet able to critically evaluate the quality of such evidence within a piece. This concept is summed up by a student’s comments on a piece on the gender pay gap: “The writer uses a multitude of linked sources throughout her article. Where some of her information may have been lacking, she supplemented it with other articles on the topic to give a deeper understanding to the reader.” Other students were more critical: “If I wanted to try to verify the information . . . I would have to look into more research.”

For Assignment 2, students were asked to rate an assigned article from the popular magazine *Scientific American Mind* about the history of autism which I considered to be very interesting and well-written, but objectively lacking in terms of sources or evidence as there was no accompanying references or citations. Most students picked up on this: using the AACU Rubric, a majority of the students (17/28) gave the piece low marks (1 or 2) for the category “sources of evidence.” Yet, when asked whether they considered the writing to be effective, only four students indicated that it was *not*, three of whom specifically stated this was because it did not include sources or evidence. Examining open-ended explanations for why students felt the writing *was* effective, many students (16/28) described either an organizational structure that “flowed” or a specific writing style that was “elegant” or “accessible.”

Overall, despite demonstrating effective use of the AACU Rubric in rating evidence, students continued to define effective writing as that which is clear, concise and generally convincing, but not necessarily evidence-based. In this way, use of the AACU Rubric did not achieve the goal of helping students adopt the use of evidence as a necessary component or hallmark of effective writing. Nevertheless, students found the use of rubrics, both the AACU Rubric and

course-specific rubrics, as valuable, based on results of the end-of semester surveys. When asked to indicate the extent to which various learning activities contributed to learning, students valued most the assignments that will impact their immediate futures rather than those that might be more challenging in terms of critical analysis. Their top two picks were writing assignments related to graduate school applications and 1:1 writing conferences whereas the effective writing assignments came in second to last, followed by diagnostic report writing.

Because the student workload is already so high in this course, I will not likely use these particular effective writing assignments again; however, this project revealed to me the importance of devoting more time to class discussion and guidance on topics related to information literacy in general and on quality or levels of evidence, in particular, as defined within my discipline. Reading, evaluating, and reflecting on both good and bad examples of clinical and research writing may provide students more opportunities to critically evaluate arguments and evidence (and not just rhetorical style) of nondisciplinary writing, as well, which, in my view, is an important endeavor. Rubrics for clinical writing may in fact help guide students through these types of reflective practices. In this class, for example, students prepare documents for their graduate school applications. This includes a resume, a personal statement, and practice essays for the GRE. While I have routinely scheduled these assignments at the beginning of the course—under the assumption that this writing practice serves as a bridge between “adisciplinary” and discipline-specific forms—it would be interesting in the future to see if practicing clinical and research writing first might lead students to write essays and resumes that are more richly supported by evidence. In this way, rubrics for clinical and research writing might provide students with a new structure or heuristic through which previous writing habits are revised.

COMMON OBSERVATIONS

While we each used different methods to attempt to connect principles of effective disciplinary writing with our students’ prior writing experiences, and while we each had different experiences with our students, we are able to make some modest common observations.

First, attempting to connect disciplinary principles of effective writing with students’ prior writing experiences is hard. It was hard for the students because we were asking them to transfer writing skills from their prior experiences and classes to new or different rhetorical situations and to know when to transfer similarities from those past experiences and when to draw distinctions between such experiences. We were asking students to draw distinctions between disciplinary writing and to apply principles of effective writing in our own discipline

while they were also doing disciplinary writing in their other courses—in other disciplines. We were surprised by how difficult this transfer was for the students. In hindsight, we realize that we could have done a better job articulating to the students when to transfer prior experiences to writing in our courses and when to distinguish their prior writing experiences from the writing in our courses. We also found ourselves remembering that our students are undergraduates who exist in multiple disciplines at once. They are not experienced professionals (or even graduate students) who have the luxury of focusing on writing in one discipline. In fact, we experienced similar challenges working and writing across our diverse disciplines for this research. We realize, in reflection, that much of the value of our WID/WAC work stems from the very act of facing the same challenges our undergraduate students face within the cross-disciplinary microcosm we have created in this group.

Second, going through this process, we each noticed disconnects with, or had miscommunications with, our students about our expectations for assignments or about disciplinary principles of effective writing. For example, when James asked his students to bring him pieces that made “assertions,” it was clear that what James meant and what many of his students understood were two different things. Similarly, discussing “evidence” with her students, Rebecca noted that she had a different expectation regarding the “quality” of appropriate “evidence” than her students. Joseph noted that many students failed to include important pieces of evidence to support their claims in their submitted work, despite the fact that he went over the course rubric with the students. Phyllis found that many of her students would have applied the AACU Rubric to an assigned blog post on immigration very differently than she would have, seemingly allowing their thoughts on the political content of the post to affect their thoughts on the quality of its content and its use of evidence. These kinds of disconnects are consistent with findings in the literature. Thaiss and Zawacki (2006), for example, point out that it is understandable for students to be confused by faculty use of common terms like “evidence,” “organization,” and “clarity” because, although such terms are common across disciplines, the way that those terms are applied in the disciplines is different. Reading our respective sections of this article for the purpose of drafting these common observations, we see that we too all use common terms like “evidence,” “clarity,” “concision,” and “organization” with our students, but that we each mean different things by these terms—these terms are applied differently in our respective disciplines. Again, in reflection, we realize that talking through these disconnects in our WID/WAC group discussions forced us as instructors to explicitly define terms or parameters to one another, which will hopefully transfer to our students. In demanding clarification from our colleagues, we ask hard questions that our

students might not know, or might not have the confidence, to ask. Without the extra layer of scrutiny from our colleagues, we could have easily attributed student-teacher disconnects entirely to the student. Essentially, this collaboration provided us, as teachers, “multiple opportunities to articulate, interrogate, and communicate [our] assumptions and expectations” about writing and writing instruction (WEC Model, 2019).

And, third, we see some potential benefits for teaching and learning in explicitly attempting to connect disciplinary principles of effective writing with students’ prior writing experiences. We recognize the complex and diverse array of experiences that inform students’ relationships to writing in our disciplines and to their understanding of the connections between their own learning and writing. Having completed these course activities from an action research perspective, we see a more intentional and measured path forward for this research. In addition to being more aware of our students’ complex relationships to writing, and to many disciplines, we also uncovered many subtle and nuanced disconnects between our ideas of effective writing and our students’ ideas of effective writing. We see an opportunity to collaborate with our WAC colleagues to accommodate these complexities and disconnects—by, for example, working with our WAC colleagues to clarify aspects of our assignments or by devoting additional time to explicitly discussing disciplinary conventions of effective writing with our students.

In “Making Connections Between Theory and Practice: Pre-Service Educator Disciplinary Literacy Courses as Secondary WAC Initiation” (this volume), Christy Goldsmith notes that the difficult, seemingly contradictory task of teaching siloed, discipline-specific writing while also maintaining porous boundaries across disciplines is often abandoned because secondary teachers are novices of both discipline and pedagogy. This rings true for us as college professors, as well, because, while we all have established expertise in our specific disciplines, we too began our WID/WAC research as novices of pedagogy. Over the past six years, our research group, which came together as alumni of a well-established WAC Fellows program, has managed to present writing research at nine conferences and produce two full-length manuscripts for well-respected writing journals. We still consider ourselves novices of writing pedagogy, but the success of our cross-disciplinary collaboration provides at least one model for how this type of work, which is slow, but steady, can begin.

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