The material reviewed in the 37 articles and papers listed here suggests that responsibility for establishing and maintaining standards for writing among college students is a college-wide burden. The articles are of two kinds: some deal directly with the questions of interdepartmental responsibility for teaching writing; others touch on the subject while addressing related questions. (Author)
Terence Collins and Suzanne Hofer
General College
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455

A Selected Annotated Bibliography of Articles on Interdepartmental Responsibility for the Teaching of Writing Skills


Baum, Joan. "Interdisciplinary Studies, the Latest Experimental Rage." *College Composition and Communication*, 26, no. 1 (February, 1975), 30-34.

Baum is antagonistic toward the "illegitimate hybrid" called interdisciplinary studies. She offers cautions worth noting, primarily that there is a real danger in losing sight of the sometimes tedious job of teaching writing when this task is placed in the more attractive surroundings of a subject-area like literature.


Brown sees the use of technical writing as a useful choice for freshmen who intend to major in technical fields. He finds that using technical material and format allows him to let "the organization of the topic organize the writing." A useful and practical paper.
Budd, William C. "An Experimental Comparison of Writing Achievement in English Composition and Humanities Classes." Research in the Teaching of English, 3, no. 2 (February, 1969), 209-221.

"The research hypothesis for this study was that expository writing can be taught as effectively by incorporating instruction into a three-quarters humanities sequence as by teaching it separately in two quarters of English Composition. (210)

"Students who enrolled for three quarters of humanities which incorporated instruction in writing performed significantly better on a final written theme than students who received two quarters of writing instruction in separate English Composition classes." (221)


Wide-ranging discussion which raises some important questions about the need to address the student's perception of his or her needs as a student and as a graduate. Describes in general terms some ways in which the University of Cincinnati writing program adapts as a "holistic program."


The authors describe a faculty-training program at Grinnell College in which instructors from subject disciplines outside English are given guidelines to improve their use of essays, reports, and other written assignments in their classes. The assumption is that "the students' compositional incompetence is not the only cause of bad writing. The single most widespread external cause of bad writing is bad assignments." (670)

Points out that writing teachers too often write course descriptions and lesson plans based on what they were taught and not on the basis of what the student needs to know. Suggests that "advisory committees" from various jobs and professions be called in to help define the content of composition courses.

Donlan, Dan. "Textbook Writing Assignments in Three Content Areas." A Research Study Conducted at the University of California--Riverside. ERIC DOCUMENT 123-635.

"It would seem that the emerging role of the English teacher is that of a writing consultant, one who helps teachers in other content fields, assign, teach, and evaluate writing."\textsuperscript{(10-11)}

Examines types of writing assignments appropriate to Math, Science, and Social Studies content courses.

Donlan, Don. "Social Studies Textbooks and the Teaching of Assigned Writing." Research Study Conducted at the University of California--Riverside. ERIC DOCUMENT 122-303.

Previous Donlan study is more to the point.


A general historical and critical study. Douglas is critical of the insistence on "standard English" but is realistic about the need to train under-prepared students to fit the occupational standards current in the dominant culture.

Proposes teaching technical writing at the high school level as an alternative to the standard composition course, suggesting that "exercises in mechanism and process description, establishing standards and specifications, and making multiple evaluations will sharpen the rhetorical skills which a composition course is, by tradition, supposed to inculcate." (1).


Looks the "service" role of the English Department squarely in the eye and concludes that with the new, varied kind of student of the future, "English Departments will have to expand their repertory of contexts; that is, to use film, videotapes, small group work, community-based experiences for the student's initial engagement with the discipline." (28)


Addresses the question of interdepartmental responsibility: "If reading, writing, and thinking are the three sides of the composition problem, then a permanent solution can come only when all post-secondary teachers care enough about good writing to require it in their classes. True, professors outside of the writing field cannot be expected to substitute for writing instructors; but they can make their students aware that inability to communicate what they know on tests produces marginal grades, that bad grammar often limits communication
and gives a poor impression of the student, that successful persuasion depends upon clear logic, that quality vocabulary enhances expression, and that the need for coming to grips with the written word does not stop with the completion of required English courses or with the completion of one such course." (14).


Essential practical essay. The Libra program—an interdepartmental remediation program involving reading, writing, and subject area teachers—is described. A full description of an ambitious program at Hostos CC, CUNY.


Practical description of a working remediation program focused on an "inquiry method." The general theme is that "interdisciplinary programs encourage students to transcend department boundaries, synthesize information, reformulate concepts, and develop writing skills in the process." (1)


Addresses the need to take seriously the specialized writing needs of students in technical majors. Rather than offer watered down literature courses, the English Departments must provide technical students with the skills they need. Notes, too, that the technical departments have a responsibility to demand high quality writing from their students.

Articulate and informed survey of those reasons which compel English Departments to "go interdisciplinary." Like the other essays in the volume, it tends to be abstract, not addressed to the question of composition as such.


The study sought to "establish whether [students] enrolled in written communication courses will achieve a higher level of proficiency in accomplishing the specific cognitive objectives when the objectives are placed in the context of the world of work or when the same cognitive objectives are placed in a liberal arts context." (8)

The study found that "data clearly indicate that the emphasis placed on careers, decision making, and community resources were not only valid objectives for this project, but also created activities which were instrumental in helping students improve cognitive skills and written communication skills." (37-38)


Describes in detail the workings of a research report course at University of Minnesota--Duluth and University of Wisconsin--Green Bay. Topics grew out of real concerns and the execution of the
plan involved close cooperation with faculty in other departments.
The results sound convincing.

(September, 1975), 3-7.

The essay looks at ways in which English can become "the central
enabling discipline in the undergraduate's first two years of study,"
primarily through the ability of English to "equip students to grapple
with the abstractions, concepts, and vague or ambiguous utterances
they encounter outside of English." (4)

The essay builds to the conclusion that we must move away from our
tendency to compartmentalize experience within the narrow limits of
departmental designations.

Laster, Ann A. and Nell Ann Pickett. "Technical Writing as an Approach to
Freshman Composition at Hinds Junior College." Technical Writing
Teacher, 1, no. 3 (Spring, 1974), 1-3.

Describes ways in which the Freshman Writing offerings at Hinds' JC
use a "multi-approach" with emphasis on practical application of
writing skills. Thirteen different versions of the course are offered
after consultation with faculty from subject disciplines.

Marder, Daniel. "The Interdisciplinary Discipline." ADE Bulletin, 45 (May,

Addresses the general question of decompartmentalization of the
humanities.

Minor, Dennis E. "An Integrated Technical Writing Course." Technical Writing
Teacher, 3, no. 1 (Fall, 1975), 21-24.

Outlines ways in which the composition material and course material
for technical students can be combined in stimulating long-term research projects suited to the students' professional goals.


Describes an integrated course at UCLA "based on the idea that students will learn to use writing best if they are exploring topics that have value and significance to them." (188) Use of a writing workshop in conjunction with four subject-area "companion courses" is delineated.


Though the tedium of day-to-day composition instruction is remote from Ong's concerns, the article provides a valuable perspective on the subtle, manifold effect that the imagined audience has on the writer at work. The implications for the composition teacher who does in fact see her students as writers are many, especially in terms of topic, subject area, audiences, purposes for writing.


Though the article does not address the question directly, the articulate rejection of "proto-PMLA" style is noteworthy—too often the focus in freshman composition is writing literary criticism.

One of the conclusions here is that "good writing is as much a function of content as technique" and that writing teachers need to "give the student something to say before fussing about how they say it." (124)
Recchia, Edward. "America on Film: A Humanities Composition Course."
A paper presented to the National Convention of the Popular Culture
Association, St. Louis, 1975. ERIC DOCUMENT 103-880:
Suggests ways in which film can be used as a model for good
writing. Sees writing, though, as an "exercise" which is "inspired
by" the content of the film.

"Recommendation to the Profession: Carnegie Conference on the State of
Undergraduate English" ADE Bulletin, 46 (September, 1975), 58-60.
As one of many recommendations, the group says: "We believe that
undergraduate students, especially freshmen, should have a choice of
several ways to come to and succeed in writing." One of the specific
ways listed is "a course that directly involves a prospective career
in a given major field (science, for example) and is perhaps jointly
taught between departments." (59)

Redman, George W. Jr. "The Philosophy of Teaching Composition Held by
Selected Teachers and Students at the University of Northern Colorado,
Winter Quarter, 1973." University of Northern Colorado Ed. D.
Notes that "students do not expect to be held to any composition
standard in a subject matter course" (25), and that interviews with
teachers revealed "agreement that the best way to teach writing is
use of individual conferences to discuss the process of developing a
topic in which the student was personally involved." (v)

Yuraita, Philip A. "A Flexible Modular System: An Experiment in Teaching
Composition." Boston University School of Education Ed. D. Dissertation,
Discusses the "content-oriented approach" to teaching composition and concludes that "little has been done in this area." (13-16)

Smith, Marion K. "What Can a Technical Writing Course Offer the Non-Technical Student?" Teaching English in the Two-Year College, 2, no. 2 (Winter, 1976), 115-121.


Articulate analysis of the need for writing in context, emphasizing a "situational" approach to designing assignments. "We must teach our students to analyze the communication situation they face, and to structure a piece of writing to serve that situation." (2)

Thilsted, Wenda H. "An Interdisciplinary Report Writing Course." Technical Writing Teacher, 2, no. 3 (Spring, 1975), 1-3.

Describes a functional, working program at Oklahoma State in which the English Department cooperates with twelve subject area departments in advanced level writing course. Subject-area instructors assist the student with selecting and developing the topic, while the writing teachers direct the writing. The emphasis is on practical skills for a critical audience.


The survey itself is not as enlightening as is the criticism of traditional composing methods voiced by some commentators on the survey. The reaction of Geneva Smitherman, Center for Black Studies, Wayne State University, is noteworthy:
It's surveys like this (and I wish to God it were not representative, though I fear it is) that make me ashamed of my profession. For the results reveal that English academics are still into the same ol' same ol': ignoring students and the imperatives of living in a complex, transnational world. If English instruction is to be useful to our students in pursuit of their immediate academic goals, it should assist them in linguistically and rhetorically conceptualizing complex ideas from a variety of academic disciplines. To many of my colleagues, this smacks too much of what they call a "service course" approach; yet from the students' viewpoint—and I base my thinking on both experience and research—such instruction is an invaluable service, making the agonizing hours of writing and rewriting worth all the trouble. If English instruction is to help our students survive in today's multi-cultural, multi-linguistic world, it must facilitate their competence as communicators in a multiplicity of modes and situational contexts and develop their understanding of communications processes and systems. As humanists, we are striving to produce ethically responsible students who are alert to the power of communication to move and direct human behavior. To return to the basics of the "good old days" (which really wasn't all that good noway, except for those in power—include English profs vis-a-vis students) is to continue insensitivity to student needs and to ignore life beyond ebony and ivory towers. (22)


Concisely, articulately, essential article for the topic at hand. Describes ways in which the writing faculty at Laguardia CC work with,
train, and provide materials for subject-area instructors with a
college-wide goal of upgrading writing skills and using writing skills
as part of the learning process across disciplinary lines.

Whitburn, Merrill. "Technical Communication: An Unexplored Area for

Argues forcefully that English Departments should exert whatever
leadership force they have in developing technical communications
programs on the undergraduate and continuing education levels, and
should do so for reasons ranging from the rhetorical to the fiscal.

White, John O. and Norman Brand. "Composition for the Pre-Professional:
Focus on Legal Writing." College Composition and Communication, 27
(February, 1976) 41-46. (See also ERIC DOCUMENT 108-220).

Describes in detail the plans and working structures of a course
developed as part of pre-professional program at UC-Davis. The
strength of the course is found in its being a "joint venture, in
which the instructor brings the expertise born of experience in
teaching writing to bear upon subject matter that students decide
is important to them." (45)