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## Fostering Research Identities in Two-Course Writing Sequences: A Curricular Perspective



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**Abstract:** Two-course writing sequences are valuable because they extend the time that students spend focused on developing as writers and researchers, yet they cannot rely on a “more is better” argument to justify their ongoing implementation, especially when general education curricula are shrinking and one course often looks much the same as the other. This program profile describes how West Virginia University is adopting a proactive stance on preserving and advocating for two-course writing sequences by recasting its second, sophomore-level course as an essential building block in the formation of undergraduate research identities. By combining axiologies of research identities with those of genre, metagenre, and metadisciplines, the program at West Virginia University is reshaping and repositioning its writing curriculum to more adequately address the diverse needs of students on pathways to many different disciplines.

Two-course writing sequences are valuable because they extend the time that students focus on developing as writers and researchers. Yet these sequences face at least two challenges. The first is to distinguish the courses in the sequence as separate, distinct, and valuable, especially if the courses are loosely defined and instructors move back and forth between teaching them (Ratliff 4). The second challenge for writing program administrators, and very much related to the first, is the external pressure to reduce the number of general education courses.

In terms of the first challenge, it is helpful to think about the prevailing structure and content for many two-course sequences. Historically, the first course in these sequences emphasizes expository skills while the second course emphasizes literary analysis (McLeod 81). Nowadays, as Susan McLeod suggests, “the subsequent course sometimes focuses on research, sometimes on argument, sometimes on other issues” (81). One recent manifestation of this evolution comes from Jenn Fishman’s and Mary Jo Reiff’s 2008 profile of the program at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. Fishman and Reiff describe the program’s move from a traditional literature focus to a research and inquiry focus with deliberate bridging between the two courses. Their work on program design offers a model and starting point for many other programs that seek to develop cogent and effective two-course writing sequences because of their emphases on inquiry and transfer.

The second challenge comes from external pressures to reduce the number of general education courses (see, for example, Walker’s and Myers’s profile of the program at Murray State). Adjustments like these may be indicative of the ubiquitous rhetoric within higher education urging instructors and writing program administrators to do more with less. According to unofficial data from the WPA census, 55% of the writing programs responding to the survey reported having two-course composition sequences, but we simply do not have the data to identify any particular trends (Gladstein). At West Virginia University, we successfully addressed questions about the continuing value of a six-credit, two-course sequence as the university strives to reduce time to graduation for undergraduate students. As pressure builds to become even more efficient in terms of both instruction and graduation rates, it becomes increasingly important to demonstrate the value of a two-course sequence.

In this program profile, I describe changes to the two-course writing sequence at West Virginia University, showing how the development of student research identities, as described by James Purdy and Joyce Walker, provides a viable means of structuring and advocating for two-course writing sequences and making it possible to shift the second course toward inquiry while reframing research pedagogy as knowledge transfer. By combining axiologies of research identities with those of genre, metagenre, and metadisciplines, the program at West Virginia University is reshaping and repositioning its writing curriculum to address the diverse needs of students on pathways to many

different disciplines. There are certainly many questions and much research to be done by individual instructors striving to help their students develop as researchers, yet the central question at the core of our curricular revisions is “How can writing programs use two-course writing sequences to help twenty-first century students develop rich and complex research identities?”

## Research Identities

Just as we might consider a person's identity to be an amalgamation of genetics, family, experiences, education, and so on, we can think of a student's research identity as an amalgamation of several different factors such as their experiential learning, formal education, and interactions with others. James Purdy and Joyce Walker define research identities as the “confluence of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and practices that combine when an individual engages in research activities” (9). They also argue for a different approach to teaching students about research by considering students' formation of research identities. They suggest that traditional methods of teaching research as a linear and academic process divorced from the research processes students already employ inhibits their formation of research identities because it keeps students in a liminal space—neither wholly outside nor inside the university. They conclude their argument with several recommendations. First, they recommend more pedagogically focused research on students' research practices (32-3). Second, they argue that

we need to find ways to help students produce robust identities that make use of all available tools, from both academic and nonacademic research experiences, and we need to do this while still giving students training in the skills and tools that are specific to the academy, including the underlying assumptions about knowledge making that these tools both express and create. (32)

Finally, they argue that composition teachers must help students articulate and evaluate their research methods (33). In sum, a complete research identity is a combination of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and practices that grow out of what students already know. The knowledge is complex. The attitudes are positive and inquisitive. The skills and practices are copious and flexible. While this list certainly is not exhaustive, it serves as a foundational heuristic for what we often value in undergraduate research identities.

The research identity concept is especially valuable for composition teachers and writing program administrators because it helps us gain a much larger and holistic perspective on something that we often only consider in piecemeal—student researchers. For example, at its inception in 1999, the WPA Outcomes Statement focused on four knowledge areas: rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, reading, and writing; processes; and knowledge of conventions. Each of these areas has value, yet the formation of research identities is more implied within these goals rather than explicitly stated. The most notable exceptions come under critical thinking, which states that students should be able to “understand a writing assignment as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing appropriate primary and secondary sources” (61-2). In addition, students should be able to successfully “integrate their own ideas with those of others” (62). Thus the emphasis on research seems to remain on skills such as using sources accurately and synthesizing research materials with one's own. In 2008, a fifth area was added to acknowledge the changing landscape of discourse—composing in electronic environments. This area makes the most explicit nod to the formation of research identities because it clearly states that by the end of first-year composition students should be able to

locate, evaluate, organize, and use research material collected from electronic sources, including scholarly library databases; other official databases (e.g. federal government databases); and informal electronic networks and Internet sources. (Council of Writing Program Administrators)

In 2014, the Outcomes Statement evolved even further to encompass more robust undergraduate research identities. The Outcomes Statement now includes references to both “primary and secondary research materials” as well as using “the methods and technologies commonly used for research and communication” within diverse fields of study. These elements of the 2014 Outcomes Statement serve as an important point of reference for composition studies. As such, these revisions may also service as an active call to re-examine research processes and pedagogies within composition courses.

## Research Pedagogy

Research pedagogy is a fraught topic within composition studies. Discourse surrounding the teaching of research within the discipline includes many persistent and diverse debates on how to teach it, why teach it, and even if to teach it. The research paper serves as one central locus of disagreement (Ford and Perry). Some scholars argue

for teaching research papers because they sufficiently model what scholars do (Schwegler and Shamon). Yet others suggest that research papers are a nonstarter. For example, Richard Larson argued that the research paper was a generic “non-form” of writing. He suggested that because the research paper was a separate activity, “instructors in writing signal to their students that there is a kind of writing that incorporates the results of research, and there are (by implication) many kinds of writing that do not and need not do so” (814). Students, he argues, infer that research is a “specialized activity that one engages in during a special course, or late in a regular semester or year, but that one does not ordinarily need to be concerned about and can indeed, for the most part, forget about” (815). Based on this argument, Larson offers two additional implications. First, he suggests that “when we tend to present the ‘research paper’ as in effect a paper based on the use of the library, we misrepresent ‘research’” (815). Second, composition teachers cannot “prepare students to engage in the research appropriate to their chosen disciplines because they are not members of those disciplines” (815). Larson’s complaints persist even to today; however, many composition teachers and writing program administrators still include research papers in their curricula.

As a result of this contention, several scholars have argued for a way forward by shifting or reframing the axiologies of research pedagogy. They push composition teachers and writing program administrators to focus on how research is, can, and should be used instead of focusing on products like research papers alone. For example, using Larson’s argument as a starting point, Joseph Bizup offers a new system of categorizing research sources by their purpose in writing (background, exhibit, argument, method) rather than their traditional designation by type (primary, secondary, tertiary). Likewise the Citation Project (<http://site.citationproject.net>) is a massive, multi-institution research project that examines how students use sources in their writing.<sup>{1}</sup> Other Scholars like Cynthia Haller have produced empirical research that suggests research pedagogy must go beyond formatting and conventions. According to Haller, it must include explicit discussion of how authors embed sources, as well as programmatic solutions articulating how students use sources in various contexts (55). Finally, in their important work on recasting first-year composition as an introduction to writing studies, Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle urge writing programs to integrate primary research into their courses to advance student thinking about writing and aid in the transfer of important knowledge-making skills. All of this scholarship suggests that research pedagogy is a vital and thriving area of discourse in composition studies deserving sustained attention. What we must continue to look for, as Douglas Brent argues, is not “simple transfer” (42). Instead, “we should be looking at the ‘productivity’ of the old skills, that is, their ability to facilitate new learning in a new situation” (42). What we must value then, in terms of research pedagogy, are the many different ways of knowing that may come into play as students develop as undergraduate scholars.

## Reframing Research Pedagogy in a Writing Program

In order cultivate robust research identities and to best prepare students for the multiplicity of rhetorical situations that they encounter, composition teachers and administrators must intentionally and explicitly develop a *copi*a of research methods—means of finding evidence to support various claims. We cannot teach all of the research methods of all of the disciplines adequately, but *we can*, as Elizabeth Wardle suggests, “help students think about writing in the university, the varied conventions of different disciplines, and their own writing strategies in light of various assignments and expectations” (82). Furthermore, by considering research identities, perhaps we can also foster an attitude or disposition toward *copi*a in terms of research methods as valuable, making students stronger rhetors. To paraphrase Cicero, good rhetors (and rhetoricians) know a little bit about a lot of stuff.

One way to make this move comes from Michael Carter’s research on writing in the disciplines. In *Ways of Knowing, Doing, and Writing in the Disciplines*, Michael Carter argues that research from sources is only one of four *metagenres* occurring within higher education. The others are academic situations that call for problem solving, empirical inquiry, and performance (394). These metagenres may consist of several individual genres, specific to different disciplines, that have the same general goal in mind. For example, Carter explains that the metagenre of problem solving

is composed of genres named by faculty that share all or most of these features of a typified response to the situation across different disciplines....These genres share the same broad motive, or purpose, which links them in an overall genre system. (396)

From here, Carter advances the idea of *metadisciplines*. He argues that “these metagenres highlight broader patterns of disciplinary ways of knowing, doing, and writing that may be thought of as metadisciplines, collections of disciplines that share an emphasis on certain metagenres and are constituted by the various genres within each metagenre” (403). These categories are yet one level higher on the classification scheme.

Even though Carter guards against overgeneralizing from his articulation of metadisciplines, they certainly resonate. For example, if we connect the WPA Outcomes Statement to the four metadisciplines that Carter names, we can see that most introductory writing courses, if they are subscribing to the WPA Outcomes Statement, may only be serving one specific metadiscipline—those that value research from sources. This is an excellent focus; however, Carter's framework does make visible the potential gaps that these writing courses might work to address—problem solving, empirical inquiry, and, in some cases, performance. Applying the idea of *copia* to these conceptualizations of metadisciplines opens up writing courses (particularly the second course in a two-course sequence) to an abundance of research methods, an abundance of ways of knowing, and as a result an abundance of disciplines while preserving the more traditional approach of gathering research from sources.

## Program Overview

The genesis of the curricular revisions at West Virginia University is multifaceted, but it stemmed from two primary factors. First, one of my responsibilities when I was hired as the Undergraduate Writing Coordinator was to create more connections between the English department's two-course undergraduate writing sequence. Though the two courses already had solid foundations in rhetoric and the WPA Outcomes Statement, they had been coordinated by two different people with two different backgrounds and approaches. Furthermore, as our eighty teachers moved back and forth between the two courses, it became difficult to sustain a coherent progression of knowledge, skills, and content in the curriculum. After reviewing the curriculum and teaching both courses, my primary concern became the establishment and support of that progression. Without it, I had concerns that it would not be long before someone asked why we even had two courses.

This concern became a reality when, during the 2013-2014 academic year, representatives from our institution's GEC curriculum committee approached the English department about revising and reducing the GEC requirements for graduation. Their stated goals were to focus on the quality of the GEC courses rather than their quantity and to reduce the number of GEC credit hours required for graduation in order to help students move successfully and efficiently through the university. It would be the stuff of a Hollywood film to claim that our writing courses were suddenly under attack and that their fate hinged on a well-articulated and innovative curriculum redesign that slowly won the hearts and minds of the teachers and administrators involved. There is, however, one problem with this dramatic narrative; it casts the GEC curriculum committee as the villain only interested in the bottom line. In reality, their goal was actually just the same as our own—a quality, student-centered undergraduate curriculum.

Nonetheless, the request from the GEC committee and the reasoning that the two writing courses suggested redundancy rather than quality served to underscore the imperative to reimagine how these courses connected and how the second course built upon the first. To provide a foundation for this reimagining, I coupled theories on the formation of research identities with Michael Carter's framework of genres, metagenres, and metadisciplines to position the second course in our writing sequence as more than "additional practice." Instead, it is an essential building block for students entering into diverse disciplines.

Developed out of the English department's Center for Writing Excellence, the Undergraduate Writing Program is situated within a supportive writing atmosphere that includes a university writing center, a thriving creative writing program that offers an undergraduate concentration as well as an MFA program, and a growing professional writing and editing program that includes an undergraduate concentration and an MA program. [\[2\]](#)

The Undergraduate Writing Program at West Virginia University currently consists of three courses. The first course, English 101, largely focuses on expository writing. In this course, students are engaged in a genre-based approach that asks them to produce a narrative, a profile, a rhetorical analysis, and a research paper that explains an issue from the vantage points of multiple stakeholders. English 102, the second course in the sequence, is a sophomore-level writing course that focuses more explicitly on argumentation. Historically, English 102 consisted of two more rhetorical analysis papers, a research proposal, an annotated bibliography, and a final research paper. English 103 is not part of the two-course sequence. It is essentially a hybrid course, combining key elements of English 101 and 102. English 103 is designed for students that have already demonstrated significant learning through standardized test scores. If they meet the required scores, they may elect to take English 103 to fulfill their undergraduate writing requirement instead of taking English 101 and 102. This course was the subject of a *Composition Forum* Program Profile because of its unique approach to information literacy pedagogy (see Brady et al.).

One key component of the program's structure is its use of a portfolio-based assessment system. In each of the courses, students complete writing portfolios that must include at least twenty pages of polished writing. These twenty pages consist of the major projects for the term as well as selections of supplemental texts (e.g. homework

or in-class writing) that help the students demonstrate their learning. In order to encourage revision, students only receive letter grades at the mid-term and conclusion of the courses. Throughout the semester, students receive formative feedback on their writing that guides them during the revision process.

A second key component of the program's structure is its teachers. West Virginia University, like many institutions, relies on many different people to make undergraduate writing happen. The teaching in the program is done by 60 graduate teaching assistants, 20 adjunct faculty, four full-time teaching faculty, as well as the coordinator and associate coordinator of the program. The majority of the graduate teachers are literature scholars at both the masters and doctorate levels. First-year graduate students teach English 101 and participate in an eight-day intensive training workshop before they teach. During their first semester teaching, they also complete a sixteen-week graduate course on composition pedagogy. Finally, they are required to complete five hours of additional composition pedagogy activities—most commonly workshops, seminars, reading groups, etc.—during each semester that they teach in the program. The graduate student instructors receive graduate credit for this work. The second largest contingent within the GTAs are creative writers in WVU's MFA program. Masters students in professional writing and editing comprise the smallest cohort within the GTA group.

A third key component of the program is the constraints that come with its placement in the GEC. Because English 101 and 102 are required for the first goal of the GEC at West Virginia University—communication—the course must help all students, regardless of discipline, develop written communication skills. For this reason, the courses must maintain a significant degree of consistency across sections, particularly in terms of curriculum and assessment. This fact is crucial to the theoretical underpinning of the undergraduate writing program's design. Some degree of consistency across sections is crucial to the program because of the ways in which we have formalized assessment practices. For example, our use of a portfolio system in order to provide students with formative feedback on their writing aims to help our students develop their writing through revision. It also helps our instructors develop their own knowledge of effective composition pedagogy including practicing how to respond to students in formative ways. Some consistency helps the program in several other ways that go beyond the classroom. For example, a consistent writing curriculum means that we can more fairly and accurately assess transfer credit from other institutions. It also means that we can more fairly and accurately assess student portfolios when they are submitted for grade challenges. Finally, the Undergraduate Writing Coordinator, Associate Undergraduate Writing Coordinator, and campus librarians can more effectively support the instructors in the program because of a shared sense of goals, means, and outcomes (see [Appendices 1 and 2](#)).

## Curricular Revision Process

The process for changing the curriculum took roughly three years from the time I arrived at the institution. In the first year, I made the curriculum an object of study. I examined the custom textbooks that were in use for both courses. I read and reread the course policies and the project descriptions. I taught English 101 and English 102. I also slowly began to involve others in the conversation. For example, I asked several graduate students working as program assistants to imagine the two courses as one, long course. The graduate student responses to my query were thorough, thoughtful, and largely based on their experience. Their ideas often reflected their own professional aspirations including more poetry in the curriculum, more creative writing in the curriculum, or more literary analysis in the curriculum. Their responses immediately made real the challenges of designing and teaching composition courses when so many of the instructors come from different disciplines. While a significant amount of composition and rhetoric discourse explores writing across the disciplines there seems to be less that considers the fact that composition courses are already interdisciplinary in nature because of not only the student population but also the varied backgrounds of most instructors. This may be especially true at large research universities where graduate instructors may be specializing in a variety of sub-fields. As the program coordinator, this created several questions for me: To what extent does the design of the curriculum become contextual—based on the people, place, and desires of teachers—and to what extent does it become disciplinary—based on what composition scholars know about writing studies and rhetoric? And, in the end, which one serves the students the best?

This first exercise with the graduate teachers proved highly generative. Even if suggestions were not ultimately integrated into the curriculum, each one created new opportunities to articulate the goals for the courses and reflect on why those goals were important. Put simply, the work initiated dialogue. It also provided the basis for how the collaborative process played out over subsequent development time. Through several roundtable discussions (at least one or two a semester) we continued to articulate and develop the curriculum. The roundtable discussions—open to all undergraduate writing instructors—provided a productive means of explaining the theory behind the revisions, answering questions, incorporating new ideas, and registering resistance. For example, during one meeting the dialogue turned toward discussion of whether or not it was even ethical for

students to conduct surveys in undergraduate writing courses because they would not be able to obtain approval from the institution's human subjects review board. Discussions like these continually held me accountable for the change process I was guiding by challenging my own assumptions and forcing ever more clear articulations of the direction the program was headed in. Likewise, I mirrored the same process with colleagues in my department and the Center for Writing Excellence. At meetings and in person, I updated the group, articulated ideas, and sought feedback. In sum, the process of curriculum design was a rhetorical one. Through dialogue and argument, some arguments more tenable and some more tenuous, the curricular shift slowly took shape. What follows in the next section is the outcome of that dialogue, that feedback, and that work.

## Curriculum (Re)Design

Redesigning the curriculum using the *copia* framework required re-envisioning the two courses in the sequence as one, cohesive whole. This approach enabled greater differentiation between the courses as well as greater scaffolding of skills and practices related to writing and research (Fishman and Reiff; Downs and Wardle). Imagining the courses this way also immediately revealed a disconnect between the first half (English 101) and the second half (English 102). The textbook for English 101 built sequentially through several assignments—a narrative, a profile, a rhetorical analysis, and an expository research report. The textbook for English 102 did not build in the same discernible manner. Instead, it categorized lessons and activities according to the articulated learning goals for the course—understanding writing as a process, arguing effectively and persuasively in a variety of contexts, exploring and evaluating ideas, integrating research effectively, and knowing the rules. Nonetheless, the historical and implied sequence of assignments for this course had been an editorial analysis, an advertisement analysis, a research proposal, an annotated bibliography, and a researched argument essay. Put together then, the two courses combined to produce something like the first column (“Original Curriculum”) of Table 1.

Table 1. Redesigning the Two-Course Sequence to Foster Research Identities

English 101			
Original Curriculum	Redesign Step 1: Rename by Purpose	Redesign Step 2: Infuse Diversity of Purpose	Step 3: Overlay Research Pedagogy
Narrative	Writing to Tell Your Story (Narrative)	Writing to Tell Your Story (Narrative)	Writing to Tell Your Story (Narrative)—Conduct research as personal inquiry
Profile	Writing to Tell Someone Else's Story (Profile)	Writing to Tell Someone Else's Story (Profile)	Writing to Tell Someone Else's Story (Profile)—Conduct research as interviews
Rhetorical Analysis	Writing to Analyze (Rhetorical Analysis)	Writing to Analyze (Rhetorical Analysis)	Writing to Analyze (Rhetorical Analysis)—Conduct research from sources
Expository Research Paper	Writing to Explain Multiple Perspectives (Expository Research Paper)	Writing to Explain Multiple Perspectives (Expository Research Paper)	Writing to Explain Multiple Perspectives (Expository Research Paper) - Conduct research as a combination of personal inquiry, interviews, and/or sources
English 102			
Original Curriculum	Redesign Step 1: Rename by Purpose	Redesign Step 2: Infuse Diversity of Purpose	Step 3: Overlay Research Pedagogy
Rhetorical Analysis	Writing to Analyze (Rhetorical Analysis)	Writing to Persuade (Editorial)	Writing to Persuade (Editorial)—Conduct research as observations

Rhetorical Analysis	Writing to Analyze (Rhetorical Analysis)	Writing to Evaluate (Criteria-Based Critique)	Writing to Evaluate (Evaluation)—Conduct research as a survey
Proposal	Writing to Propose Ideas (Proposal)	Writing to Propose Ideas (Proposal)	Writing to Propose Ideas (Proposal)—Conduct research from sources
Annotated Bibliography	Writing to Share Research (Annotated Bibliography)	Writing to Share Research (Annotated Bibliography)	Writing to Share Research (Annotated Bibliography)—Conduct research from sources
Argumentative Research Paper	Writing to Test Ideas (Argumentative Research Paper)	Writing to Test Ideas (Argumentative Research Paper)	Writing to Test Ideas (Argumentative Research Paper)—Conduct research as a combination of personal inquiry, interviews, observations, surveys, and/or sources

While everything in the original curriculum had value, the genre-based list raises some questions about assignment sequences and purposes:

1. Why do we repeat the same assignment three times? The way the courses are structured, this adds up to 12 weeks spent on rhetorical analysis papers. Is that too much?
2. If we assume that the proposal and annotated bibliography build to the argumentative research paper, then why does it take twice as long to complete the argumentative research paper? What tangible things are present in that research process that are not present for the expository research paper in English 101?
3. How does this GEC course serve metadisciplines beyond those that only emphasize research from sources? In other words, how can it serve metadisciplines that emphasize problem solving, empirical inquiry, and performance?

In order to address these questions and create greater synergy between our two courses, I engaged in a series of steps. I also had the goal in mind of fostering robust research identities.

### **Step 1: Rename the Units by Purpose**

My first step in this redesign was to rename the units to focus on aim-based writing rather than solely genre-based writing. The rationale for this change is actually pretty simple. Placing the emphasis on the aim of the writing highlights the rhetorical nature of writing and the written products. Instead of emphasizing what the thing is, we instead emphasize what it is supposed to do, which is precisely how Carter formulates his conception of metagenres—broader classifications of genres that share a motive or aim. This approach also aligns with other theories emphasizing the rhetorical use of sources (Bizup; Haller). Reframing the list this way makes it look something like the second column (“Redesign Step 1: Rename by Purpose”) in Table 1.

### **Step 2: Infuse Diversity of Purpose**

There is still redundancy in the multiple “writing to analyze” assignments, but the first shift moves towards Carter’s “ways of doing.” The goal of this next step is not simply to eliminate something like rhetorical analysis because it has already been done once and does not need to be done again. Instead, the goal is to infuse the curriculum with more ways of knowing—more ways of making meaning. Therefore, the duplicate rhetorical analysis assignments in English 102 shift to different aims of writing. For our purposes, and to align with our course goals, I chose persuasion and evaluation. What happens to rhetorical analysis? Instead of being the end product of these two writing projects, rhetorical analysis becomes part of the writing process, which now becomes one way the 102 curriculum builds from the 101 course. In English 101, the rhetorical analysis was an end. English 102 demonstrates *why* it was an end in 101 by using it as a means of producing writing for other aims in a new context. It continues to be one of our ways of knowing throughout the 102 course.

Before moving on to the third step, it is worth noting the documents in parentheses in the table represent the genres of writing that students may be asked to produce, something we are calling *archetypal genres*. I present these as an addition to Carter’s discussion of genres. Whereas Carter forms metagenres by collecting genres with similar aims into broader categories, archetypal genres represent a (more) common type of document within those

metagenres. They are, in essence, unstable yet traditional genres associated with the presented aims, and they serve a dual role. First, they infuse the curriculum with some stability that helps students, instructors, and even outside stakeholders identify and understand the types of writing artifacts the class will produce. Second, they are also intended to signal that there are many, many other possibilities. If these genres represent typical ways of writing for these aims, then there may also be atypical ways of accomplishing the same goal. For example, what if an instructor chose to have students produce research blogs in order to “share research” rather than a traditional annotated bibliography? The writing program benefits from consistency of purpose, diversity of assignments, and the added relevance of students engaged in writing in digital environments. Furthermore, the instructor retains some freedom to experiment, develop professionally, and innovate in the classroom. Finally, I would argue that the student benefits from both. Ideally then, infusing diversity into the curriculum happens on both the level of the aims of writing and in the genres produced.

### **Step 3: Overlay Research Pedagogy**

The third step in this curricular redesign is to overlay the research pedagogy that we think will lead to more robust research identities. The premises for the research pedagogy I describe here are based in Purdy and Walker, Carter, and Bizup as well as the arguments that introductory writing courses cannot sufficiently prepare for the exact writing situations they will encounter in their disciplines (Larson; Wardle 82). Yet this limitation does not mean that introductory writing is rudderless when it comes to research. As Larson argued,

Research can take many forms: systematically observing events, finding out what happens when one performs certain procedures in a laboratory, conducting interviews, tape-recording speakers' comments, asking human beings to utter aloud their thoughts while composing in writing or in another medium and noting what emerges, photographing phenomena (such as the light received in a telescope from planets and stars), watching the activities of people in groups, reading a person's letters and notes: all these are research. (812)

Taken together with Wardle's argument that we can help students think about context and convention, this definition of research creates a space for addressing Larson's original concern about myopic research pedagogy by recasting the entire two-course sequence as aimed at research. Many things count as research. Many things count as ways of knowing. Many forms of research and evidence can prove to be persuasive in various contexts. This two-course sequence can expose students to as many diverse ways of knowing as possible so that students have a *copia* of ways of knowing to draw from as they enter different contexts beyond these writing courses. Research is not something done at the end of the course and then largely forgotten. It is something done throughout both courses, building to a large research project in which students draw from all they've learned to test an idea. With these arguments in mind then we turn back to the framework provided in Table 1 and add a research methods focus for each major assignment. To be sure, the order of the research methods might be somewhat arbitrary, yet the goal remains the same—help students think about various ways of creating knowledge.

There are several things to note about this overlay. First, there is still a heavy emphasis on research from sources. While some may suggest that even more could be done to infuse the curriculum with primary research, I think retaining a solid foundation in research from sources is a good idea—for students, for teachers, and for other stakeholders. Second, this overlay opens up considerable space in the English 102 curriculum to incorporate primary research as well as more explicit discussion of how knowledge is created using many and diverse forms of inquiry. To put it another way, we are close(r) to achieving a greater emphasis on *copia* in the curriculum. Third, the second course in the sequence becomes far more than extra practice or a repeat of the first course. It becomes a space essential to fostering students as scholars engaging in primary research. Furthermore, their final project—writing to test ideas—gives them a valuable opportunity to write research that matters to them, that documents their learning, and that incorporates what they've learned throughout the two courses in terms of ways of knowing. These documents make up the major work of the students' final portfolios for English 102.

Beyond this emphasis on primary research, I argue that a vital component of this approach is requiring students to compose a methods section in their “Writing to Test Ideas” project. I argue this point based on four hypotheses. First, it creates cognitive dissonance. The few times I have required this component from students, they are initially baffled. They ask questions like these: “What do you mean? Why? How am I supposed to do that?” As a composition teacher, this is precisely what I want to happen. Each of these questions is an opportunity to talk about ways of knowing, audience, and rhetorical situations. Second, my hypothesis is that this act, like reflective writing, can help to stimulate “meta-awareness about writing, language, and rhetorical strategies” (Wardle 82). This action may support meta-awareness because when faced with what they have written on the page about their research methods, students may come to see that the ways of knowing that they employ to answer a question are



context-dependent just like tone and content. They may begin to literally see on the page how much they have put into their research, where the gaps may be, and question how to address them. Third, it can increase student accountability in terms of how they conduct research—both primary and secondary—because they now must account for what sources they've chosen and why rather than plugging in in-text citations. Fourth, conducting primary research and shaping their own research studies will provide an opportunity for students to engage with their work on a new level. Students, of course, will not master primary research methods and methodologies in an introductory writing course. But they will get started. The best example I can provide is one of my own English 102 students who is interested in fashion and design. Of her own accord, she composed a short, anonymous survey for her classmates asking if they would change their shopping habits if they knew their clothes were made in sweatshops. To her surprise, the majority of the students said no. By creating this data set, the student now had to put thought into why she received the information she did and consider the problem of unfair labor practices from a perspective beyond simply raising awareness because her primary research suggested that awareness alone wouldn't change the outcome.

## Conclusion—Sticking to the Script

To conclude, I turn to a reflection with two key components. The first component has to do with assessment, and it is important to articulate here how writing program administrators and scholars distinguish between assessment and evaluation. Assessment is most often internal to a program and seeks improvement; evaluation, on the other hand, is often for an external audience and more concerned with seeking a judgment about something (Harrington 165). My reflective thought, as strange as it may sound at first, is to foster a culture of assessment in which everyone—students, teachers, administrators—is working toward developing student writing. This sounds strange because of the conflation of assessment with accountability. The prevailing discourse about assessment is that its aim is to hold teachers accountable for their work, which leads Harrington to conclude, “no wonder faculty are hostile to calls for assessment activity when the invitation to join in such work contains an implied insult” (163). But a culture of assessment—as defined by writing program administrators and scholars—aims for something much different. As Harrington suggests, “In the classroom, assessment for students should help them understand their own work better. At the program level, assessment should help us do our administrative work better” (160). To this, I would add that at the pedagogical level, assessment for instructors should also help them innovate and understand their own work better. While my hope is that the curriculum provides opportunities for this growth at all levels, I think that part of assessing any writing program is asking “how we can make progress toward the goal of a culture of assessment?”

The second component of this reflection is what I have learned about this question. I now argue that curricular change is, itself, a form of assessment, and I want to make two important connections here. The first connection is to E. Shelley Reid's work describing process narratives for writing programs and how change should become an expectation through a thoughtful, ongoing process. The second connection is to Linda Flower's descriptions of empowerment in *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*. In Flower's work, she describes four scripts for empowerment: (1) Speaking Appropriately—Empowerment through Communicative Competence, (2) Speaking Up—Empowerment through Self Expression, (3) Speaking Against—Empowerment through Resistance, and (4) Speaking With—Empowerment through Dialogue across Difference. Writing program administrators, I argue, have much to gain by applying these scripts to their work with curricular revision.

First, on a programmatic level, it is possible to get stuck to a script. Perhaps the WPA empowers himself or herself by sticking to a script of *speaking up* about what the curriculum needs to do. Perhaps composition teachers empower themselves by sticking to a script of *speaking against* curricular changes. Perhaps there are mechanisms, like regular roundtable discussions, that do a better job of enacting Flower's goal of dialogue across difference. There may also be a way, particularly in the profile provided here, of *speaking with* (empowering) other stakeholders. I cannot help but wonder how the roundtable conversations would develop if an undergraduate student was able to participate. In the end, then, this profile does not describe a curricular change that is finished. Rather, it describes, as Reid might say, an ongoing process of change that has only just begun.

Second, on a curricular level, I argue that focusing on research identities also embodies a script of empowerment. I am struck by how closely Flower's descriptions of empowerment seem to align with the axiologies of composition studies that Richard Fulkerson has described with some frequency in the pages of *College Composition and Communication*. “Speaking appropriately” reminds me of current-traditional axiologies. “Speaking Up” reminds me of expressivist axiologies. “Speaking against” reminds me of cultural studies axiologies. (A thorough examination of these similarities is outside the scope of this profile, so I'm really just employing this for rhetorical effect and thought provocation.) In some ways, developing robust research identities that emphasize different ways of knowing reaches for a new script of “Speaking with.” What this approach seeks to do is engage students in

processes of “speaking with” various ways of knowing as a means of “speaking with” different contexts—disciplinary contexts, personal contexts, professional contexts, civic contexts.

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## Appendices

1. [Appendix 1: English 101 Course Goals](#)
2. [Appendix 2: English 102 Course Goals](#)

### **Appendix 1: English 101 Course Goals**

#### Goal 1: Know the Context

When writing teachers encourage you to understand the context of your writing, we refer to factors such as audience, purpose, and timeliness—the types of factors that you need to be aware of and respond to each time you sit to write. You may have begun to ask yourself many questions without thinking much about it. For example, for whom am I writing this? What do they/what does s/he want to know, and why? What genre—essay, short story, poem—should I choose, and why? By the end of 101, you should be able to:

- Understand what it means to write for an “audience” and be able to express how different audiences might have different expectations for your writing;
- Know how to choose various kinds of writing (i.e., genres) that will best match the purpose for your writing and will best reach your audience;
- Choose topics, ideas, and genres that are both interesting to you as a writer and that meet the expectations of your audience;
- Understand how to make choices about the content and subject of your writing as well as choices about the format (the layout, arrangement, organization, and so on).

#### Goal 2: Think Critically

Perhaps you’ve heard the phrase “critical thinking” before—it’s one that is used a lot, by various people, to mean a variety of things. In the context of first-year writing, we think it’s important for you to be able to use writing and reading as ways of thinking and reflecting on your learning. *By the end of 101, you should be able to:*

- Use writing and discussion (in class, in the hallways, online, and so on) both to digest and to interpret complex ideas;
- Analyze how you as a writer, and how other writers (whether published or not) make choices about language and form as they write;
- Use writing to figure out how a complex text is “working,” and then be able to see how there might be multiple interpretations of the same text;
- Use a variety of research strategies (field research, interviews, web research, and some library research—although you’ll do more of that in 102);
- Express your ideas in relationship to the ideas of others.

#### Goal 3: Learn Processes for Writing, Revision, and Reflection

As writing teachers, we think a lot about writing as a process. As we’ve grown as writers ourselves, and as we continue to work with our students, we see how writing is not just the written, final version you turn in to an instructor—but how writing is also a process of exploration and discovery, analysis, reflection, and revision. The task at hand contributes to the shape the process takes. For instance, we know we write e-mails differently than we write professional papers. *By the end of 101, you should be able to:*

- Use writing and other ways of communication to develop your ideas (such as thinking aloud, informal conversations with peers, oral presentations, diagramming or drawing, thinking aloud, etc.);

- Understand how writing is a process, and that one piece of writing might take several drafts, some conversations with peers or your instructor, and several revisions before it is fully developed;
- Know what processes work best for you as a writer;
- Know when you might work best with others, whether in collaborating on a text or in brainstorming ideas;
- Be able to give others useful feedback about their writing.

#### Goal 4: Know the rules

As a student, it is important that you know the underlying “rules” of writing. Part of that knowledge comes from being aware of the traits that distinguish one genre from another (say, what makes an e-mail different from a business letter or a letter different from an academic essay). Another part of knowing the rules means being able to control features such as punctuation and spelling. Finally, it’s also important that you’re aware of what resources you have to use when you *don’t* know the rules. *By the end of 101, you should be able to:*

- Understand how each genre has a different set of conventions (i.e., loose rules) that it follows, and know how to use them;
- Feel comfortable with standardized written English (the English of school) and know how to use it in writing;
- Recognize when you’ve used elements of writing incorrectly (for example, misplaced a comma, misspelled a word, or structured a piece of writing incorrectly for that genre), and know how to find those mistakes and fix them;
- Use academic citation systems (MLA, APA, and so on) for documenting work, and know where to find resources that will help you with this.

### **Appendix 2: English 102 Course Goals**

#### Goal 1: Understand Writing as a Process

The great thing about writing is the way it lets us explore and discover, analyze and question, reflect and revise. We engage in these processes almost all the time. In English 102, we hope you will become more conscious of the choices you make as a writer and the options available to you. For instance, you probably write emails differently than you write academic papers and papers differently than you write lab reports. You probably find some writing tasks easier or harder than others. But have you ever thought about what accounts for some of the differences? By the end of 102, you should be reflective about your writing processes. Specifically, you should be able to:

- Use writing to develop your ideas.
- Understand how one piece of writing might take several drafts, some conversations with peers or your instructor, and several revisions before it is fully developed.
- Know what processes work best for you as a writer.
- Continue to learn to work collaboratively with others.
- Give others useful feedback about their writing.
- Assess your own strengths and needs as a writer.

#### Goal 2: Argue Effectively and Persuasively in a Variety of Contexts

When writing teachers talk about situations and contexts, we refer to the many challenges that face you as a writer each time you sit down to write. Perhaps you have already developed effective ways of meeting these challenges. For instance, you may already be in the habit of considering questions such as: Who is my audience? What do they want to know, and why? What genre—essay, memo, researched summary—should I choose, and why? By the end of 102, you should know strategies for joining and participating in academic and public conversations. Specifically, you should be able to:

- Understand what it means to write for an “audience” and be able to express how different audiences might have different expectations for your writing—particularly for researched, persuasive writing.
- Know how to use argument as a way of responding to and shaping knowledge—especially in terms of choosing styles and formats that match your purposes for writing to your audience’s needs and expectations.
- Find and interpret resource material appropriately so that you can make choices about which sources are most authoritative and most useful.
- Know strategies for entering into and participating in academic and public conversations.

### Goal 3: Explore and Evaluate Ideas

Perhaps you have heard the phrase “critical thinking”; it gets used a lot, by various people, to mean a variety of things. In the context of English 102, we see “critical thinking” as the process of writing and reading to explore, understand, and evaluate ideas. By the end of 102, you should understand how writing can help you to discover new perspectives and arguments. Specifically, you should be able to:

- Express your ideas in relationship to the ideas of others. This may mean summarizing and synthesizing material from varied sources to provide strong evidence for your assertions or to address ideas with which you disagree in an articulate and informed way.
- Analyze how you as a writer make choices about genre, layout, arrangement, organization, and style to hold your readers’ interest and earn their understanding.
- Practice research and argumentation as a way to analyze and resolve questions or problems.
- Understand a research assignment as a series of tasks: exploring, finding, reading, evaluating, interpreting, synthesizing.
- Understand how language conveys and constructs knowledge and establishes or disrupts credibility and authority.

### Goal 4: Integrate Research Effectively

Research allows you to increase your authority on a subject. By gathering knowledge about an issue (including knowledge of an opposing side’s argument), you can create powerful, informed, and persuasive writing. By the end of English 102, you should be able to use, assess, and integrate a variety of research strategies—field research, interviews, web research, and library research—to explore, develop, and support your arguments. Specifically, you should be able to:

- Develop a research question and find background information.
- Find a variety of print and electronic resources.
- Evaluate resources in terms of authority, currency, accuracy, and objectivity.
- Use a variety of research strategies (primary and secondary sources) to explore, develop, and support your arguments.
- Cite information ethically and accurately.

### Goal 5: Know the Rules

As a student, it is important that you know the underlying “rules” of writing. Part of that knowledge comes from being aware of the traits that distinguish one genre from another (for example, knowing what makes an e-mail different from a business letter or a letter different from an academic essay). Another part of knowing the rules means being able to control features such as punctuation and spelling. Finally, it is also important to be aware of what resources you can use when you don’t know the rules. By the end of English 102, you should be able to recognize the different codes that structure the various situations in which you write. Specifically, you should be able to:

- Understand how each genre has a different set of conventions (i.e., loose rules) that it follows, and know how to use them.
- Feel comfortable with standardized written English (the English of school and business) and know how to use it in writing.
- Recognize when you’ve used elements of writing incorrectly (for example, misplaced a comma, misspelled a word, or structured a piece of writing incorrectly for that genre), and know how to fix those mistakes.
- Practice using academic citation systems, especially MLA, for documenting work.
- Understand the need for and logic of documentation systems to give credit to the work and ideas of others.
- Know where to find resources that will help you when you have questions about rules of writing or documentation.

## Notes

1. *The Citation Project* is a large-scale endeavor to produce empirical research on how students use sources. By reading, coding, and analyzing over 170 student papers from three different institutions, the researchers’ data suggests that students often only engage with their sources on a cursory level, leading to problems

with integration and citation. The goal of this research is to improve teaching and prevent plagiarism. ([Return to text.](#))

2. The Center for Writing Excellence (CWE) is a collective within the English department at West Virginia University that supports both the improvement of writing and the teaching of writing at the institution. It is housed in the English department and consists of the undergraduate writing program (English 101, 102, and 103), the creative writing programs, the professional writing and editing programs, the writing center, the center for literary computing, and linguistics. It was initiated as the result of an institutional grant seeking innovative projects at the institution. It is funded by textbook sales from the undergraduate writing program. Laura Brady documents some of the process of creating the Center for Writing Excellence in "A Greenhouse for Writing Program Change." The CWE reports to the chair of the department though its director position reports to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. ([Return to text.](#))

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