

Teaching English Literature Survey as a Writing Course—Online

Rich Raymond
Mississippi State University

Over four decades, countless colleagues and I have tried varied strategies to increase the odds that students in sophomore-level literature survey classes might learn and retain their readings in English, American, or world literatures.¹

Clearly, all faculty share this learning objective in all courses they teach, but fulfilling this objective becomes most challenging when the students ‘have to’ take the course and lack other motivations to work hard and learn. Precisely this situation faces instructors of literature surveys, typically populated by 20-plus students fulfilling a humanities requirement and by 5-10 English majors fulfilling prerequisites for upper-level literature courses. To challenge this resistance to required courses, instructors quiz students regularly on the readings; they also require examinations that ask students to define key terms, to answer background questions focused on authors and dates, to identify key passages by author/title/speaker, and to explain the thematic significance of each quotation. Additionally, most instructors require at least one out-of-class essay and/or a research paper to engage students in critical thinking on the readings. Such strategies hardly guarantee that students will become enthusiastic about the material, but they do encourage students to complete the readings and to retain the information—at least until the essays and examinations end.

But we must complement the practices listed above with writing-to-learn strategies if we want to move our students beyond grudging study to passionate engagement with the material, readings that can foster cultural understanding and help students to reflect on their own lives. In other words, literature professors should not settle for just requiring students to write essays; instead, they should prepare their students to write those essays by helping them to internalize the literature via prewriting strategies and by coaching their efforts at revision. In short, all literature courses should be writing courses. My claim rests on my work with the National Writing Project and with Mississippi State University's *Maroon Institute for Writing Excellence*.²

In the pages below, I will describe my efforts to use writing-centered strategies to engage initially reluctant students in my survey course in English Literature Before 1800. Though I have taught this course countless times in traditional classrooms, using the same strategies I will describe below—Discussion boards, journaling, multi-drafting—my descriptions here will focus exclusively on an online section of this course. I do so to support my secondary claim that, if writing-to-learn strategies motivate students and deepen their learning in the classroom, then we must employ the same pedagogies, duly adapted to cyberspace, in all online courses. Finally, to stress the significance of my claims in a broader context, I will close with a brief historical sketch of the long debate on the place of literature in the writing classroom and, more to my point, on the place of writing in the literature classroom.

Online Discussion via Discussion Boards and Journals

I provide the first motivator for my students to take journaling and the Discussion Board seriously by stressing in the syllabus and within unit modules that the online journal will determine 20% of their grade in the course, Discussion Boarding another 10%, and that their journal and Discussion Board grades will rest on just two criteria: completeness—responding to all prompts—and thoughtfulness—supporting their comments with textual evidence or with personal examples, depending on the nature of the prompt. I have found that in both traditional and online classes, grade-conscious students jump at the chance to compile journals and to discuss readings online, just to earn the points; I have also found that students’ participation quickly shifts to a more learning-centered motive, once they experience the excitement of discovering their own interpretive powers, and, in the case of the Discussion Board, of writing to their peers, either defending their interpretations of challenging passages or telling their stories, sharing their personal connections to the literature.³

To contextualize journaling and Discussion Board prompts, I embed them within unit modules that provide background information and introduce key themes in the reading. Consider, for example, this module on selections by Mary Astell and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu:

For Friday, **November 5**, please complete the reading, journaling, and discussing listed below.

1. Read the introduction to Mary Astell, 2284-2285, then the excerpts from *Some Reflections on Marriage*, 2285-2288.

2. Read the introduction to Mary Wortley Montagu, 2584-2585, then her poem “Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband,” 2587-2588.
3. Read the lecture below, and then respond to the journaling and discussing prompts below.

Lecture

Chaucer, Kempe, Spenser, Sidney, Shakespeare, Hoby, Donne, Lanyer, Milton, Behn-- many of our authors have engaged us on the issue of marriage and related matters: courtship, communication, authority, parity, affection, trust. In the eighteenth century, both Mary Astell and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu add to our conversation, stressing the inappropriate motives and the double-standards on conduct that doom so many marriages. Your book tells you that **Mary Astell**, who lived from 1666 to 1731, received her extensive education from her uncle, a clergyman who taught—in the manner of Sir Thomas Browne—that our powers to reason and to believe in God can be “entirely compatible” (2284). Having taken this lesson to heart, Astell deeply resented the “trap” that marriage too often becomes for women, her outrage growing from her conviction—a conviction rooted in faith and in reason—that women need not fall into the “trap.”

In our selection, you will see that Astell addresses why “there are so few happy marriages.” In answering this question, she examines the motives men typically have in pursuing marriage and the “qualifications” men look for in a potential wife (2285). She also examines why so many women “choose amiss,” and then she challenges women to consider “a higher design” for their lives, one that does not necessarily involve marriage

(2286). Just because a man “makes love to her” (courts her), Astell argues, a woman has “no mighty obligation” to say ‘yes’ to the marriage question (2287).

Following her friend Mary Astell’s advice about cultivating the mind, **Lady Mary Wortley Montagu** improved her education at every opportunity, including teaching herself Latin, a topic usually reserved for men in the universities. Even though Mary Wortley married Ambassador Edward Montagu “for love” (2285), the marriage failed, and her mid-life passion for Italian Francesco Algarotti also ended in betrayal and disappointment.

Like Astell, Montagu urges women to cultivate their minds and to resist domineering, hypocritical men, who insist on women’s fidelity while pursuing their own affairs. We see this defiant spirit in Montagu’s poem, “Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband.” Be sure to read the first footnote on 2587 before reading this poetic letter (epistle means letter) written in heroic couplets, just like the poems of John Dryden and of Montagu’s contemporary, Alexander Pope, the dominant male poet of the mid-eighteenth century.

Journaling and Discussing

Please respond to both prompts below, posting one to your Journal at Assignments and the other to the Discussion Board. Be sure to blend key quotes into both of your responses.

- **Comment on Astell’s views on marriage.** To what extent do her views seem appropriate today? In the USA, more women than men attend college and

achieve degrees. Do these facts suggest that many women now follow her advice on cultivating the mind? Does marriage remain a “trap”?

- **Comment on Mrs. Yonge’s self-defense** in Montagu’s poem (2587-2588).

Does she argue persuasively about the ‘double-standard’ on extra-marital affairs? Does the poem imply what kind of conduct must occur on both sides for a marriage to work?

As you will see below, such journaling and Discussion boarding serve as prewriting for essay examinations, but here, in the process of completing a reading assignment, by responding to the prompts students discover that they can, in fact, interpret the text, as we readily see in Norma’s posting on the second prompt:⁴

Lady Montagu was before her time. Her attitudes on equality within the marriage are truly on the edge on the modern western society. We still, unfortunately, have many men who believe they have more freedom than their wives, mostly because they control the money, but I digress. Lady Montagu's *Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband* apparently was considered a threat to the established roles of society, as it was not published until the 1790's (footnote 1).

From the very beginning, she realizes and admits that she has no hope of winning the case: "No softening mercy there will take my part, Nor can a woman's arguments prevail" (3-4). She realizes it is a man's world and in line 14 talks about the judging world expects our (women) constancy. Lines 19-24 detail how others that are offended may be

reconciled: even "a wounded slave regains his liberty" (22) but, "for wives ill-used no remedy remains" (23).

Just as important as practicing close readings, by writing to discover personal connections, students discover linkages between eighteenth-century England and twenty-first century America, as shown in Erica Bridwell's response to the first prompt:

"If marriage be such a blessed state, how come it, may you say, that there are so few happy marriages" (2421). Astell opened with this in *From Some Reflections upon Marriage*. I believe this was Astell's way of expressing that in her opinion marriage was something that would hold women back from living their life to the fullest and reaching their full potential. She was a firm believer in women being treated unfairly. She thought that women should focus more on getting an education than on getting married. Relevant to what some women think today, women in this period thought that men did not really appreciate their true beauty within but would rather focus on what women would give to them. "Thus, whether it be wit or beauty that a man's in love with, there's no great hopes of a lasting happiness..." (2424). She later proclaimed that marriage was a trap for some women. Men trap women to gain power and to cause women to fully submit to them. Astell wanted to encourage women to go through all the options at hand before considering marriage. I agree with Astell. I am a young adult, 23 years old. I see others getting married and starting a family before or while getting an education. For them, that is fine, but for me, I want to finish school, become settled on my own, and then hopefully

find someone. I was very inspired by Astell and encourage other women to be open to Astell's point of view on marriage.

To my delight, Erica's analysis has helped her to understand her heritage and to gain insight to her own identity.

One more example of a Discussion Board response will bolster my claim about such prompts helping students to analyze the text even as they explore personal connections to the work. The following prompts come at the end of the module on Thomas Gray and Oliver Goldsmith. After describing Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" and Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village," the last readings in the course, as thematic precursors to Wordsworth's poetry and its Romantic interest in common humanity, the module lecture encourages students to remember earlier readings and to rediscover the craft of poetry and its power to stir our imaginations:

We have read several elegies in this course, most notably the Anglo-Saxon poem "The Wanderer" and Milton's "Lycidas," both lamentations over the loss of a particular person. Do you see the *multitude* that Gray laments in lines 13-16?

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,
Each in his narrow cell forever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

To set the mood for praising these nameless country people, Gray masterfully uses **assonance** (repetition of long vowel sounds) and soft **alliteration** (repetition of initial

consonants) to suggest the somber peace: the curfew bell “tolls,” the herds ‘low’ “slowly,” as the “plowman” “plods” his weary “way” home at the end of the long work “day,” and only the “droning” beetle and the “moping owl” gently break the “solemn stillness.” Do you remember the anguished question in “The Wanderer”? “Ubi sunt?” ‘Where have they gone?’ Gray’s speaker sounds the same sad note when he cries that the rooster “no more shall rouse them from their lowly beds” (line 20).

Then in lines 29-44, the speaker shifts tone from sadness to angry defense against the “disdain” of the rich and powerful, who mock those who can’t afford expensive tombs: “Let not Ambition mock their useful toil....The paths of glory lead but to the grave” (ll. 29, 36).

After this famous reminder to the rich that they share a common earthly destiny with the poor, the speaker then makes his bold claim in lines 45-60, that the poor have untapped genius. If these country people had escaped “chill Penury” (lack of money), they could have achieved greatness: “Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,/ Some Cromwell guiltless of his country’s blood” (ll. 59-60). Do you hear the social commentary here?

He suggests that untapped greatness lives in commoners **barred from education**.

Ironically, as the reference to the country’s “blood” suggests, the rigid class structure that prevents the poor from developing their potential also prevents their sinning greatly.

Then after similar analysis of the early sections of Goldsmith’s epoch-ending elegy, the module ends with these Discussion Board prompts, the first inviting further close reading, the next two

coaxing reflection on thematic linkages between these late-eighteenth century elegies and our own social problems:

1. After you have read the rest of Goldsmith's poem, **select one** of the following sections and write a 250-word **summary and analysis**, stressing what has been lost to 'progress' and how, precisely, people have suffered:
 - Lines 97-192
 - Lines 193-286
 - Lines 287-362
 - Lines 363-430
2. Both these elegies stress the lot of poor and working-class people in cultures honoring wealth and power near the end of the eighteenth century. To what extent do these eighteenth-century problems remain with us? Do you think that Gray correctly implies that social inequities have much to do with access to education?
3. In condemning enclosure, Goldsmith criticizes what he considers the misuse of land and water; he also stresses the effect of misused resources on the working class. Think about current conflicts over logging, whaling, drilling for oil, and access to water. Does Goldsmith's poem reinforce or challenge your thinking on one of these issues?

Lyndsey Beech's response to prompt #3 follows here:

Oliver Goldsmith's poem "The Deserted Village" reinforces my thinking on these issues. He wrote this poem as an objection contrary to the situations in rural England that were brought about by the Enclosure Act and the early effects of the Industrial Revolution. In

the poem, the village of Auburn is an ideal image of rustic life before the previously mentioned events had driven the country people into the towns or to America. In the poem, Goldsmith writes, “Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey, / Where wealth accumulates, and men decay: Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;/ A breath can make them, as a breath has made;/ But a bold peasantry, their country's pride, / When once destroyed, can never be supplied”. Goldsmith saw the effects these events were having not only on the people, but on the earth and its resources. He also talks about how corrupt people can become. The village is first described as good and united by common purpose, integrity, and society; and all lived in accord with nature. As the resources grew so did the corruption of the people. We often hear of issues such as logging, whaling, and drilling for oil, but the discussion never really deepens. I have often thought what will happen when we have consumed all of these resources. What happens when there is no more oil to be found? Will we move on to another resource? And when we have made whales extinct, how will that affect ocean life, and in return effect our life? The greed of humans is destroying the earth and Goldsmith perfectly sums this up in his poem.

Responding to Lyndsey, Jennifer Loden wrote that she “enjoyed reading ‘The Deserted Village’ and your concerned response. We also have small towns and businesses that people have forgotten about.”

Clearly, Lyndsey and Jennifer, in “conversation” with the literature, have developed the “critical self-reflexivity” that Mariolina Salvatori, writing in 1996, describes as “one of the most fundamental human activities” (452). Such “conversation,” facilitated through the Discussion

Board, has long persuaded me to follow Salvatori's lead and to agree with Ann Bertoff, who in 1999 describes the teaching of this self-reflexive critical process as "the chief mission of any and all English departments" (680). In 2014, hoping to reverse the decline in English majors over the two decades since Salvatori and Bertoff advocated using writing-to-learn strategies with literature assignments, Jean Ferguson Carr has urged literature professors to feed students' hunger for relevance by opening "a more generous conversation with composition" (440) and its writing-to-learn strategies.

Essays and Multi-drafting

As noted above, writing-to-learn strategies, such as journaling and Discussion boarding, help students to develop their analytical skills and to find motivation for such analysis in having discovered the relevance of the reading to their own lives. Such work, students discover, also becomes pre-writing, helping them to generate ideas for more traditional academic writing, such as mid-term and final examination essays, mainstays in literature survey courses.

In the online course, my students took mid-term and final examinations, both including objective sections requiring them to identify—by author, title, and speaker—key quotes from the literature and to explain the thematic significance of each quote; the exams also included sections requiring students to identify key dates and to define key terms. Additionally, each exam called for essay responses to the literature: the final exam required two essays, one on Johnson's *Rasselas*, another on *Oroonoko* or *King Lear*. The mid-term called for just one essay on one of the following topics:

Part I—240 points: Write an essay (3-4 double-spaced pages, 12-point type) on **one** of the following topics drawn from our reading, journaling, and discussing. Be sure that your essay includes a **thesis**, a claim about your topic; be sure, too, that you provide **specific examples and quotations** from the literature to support your claim. Please include parenthetical page references or line references, too. Correctness counts as well. See the Guide to Evaluating Writing on our homepage and proofread your essay.

1. In *The Defense of Poesy*, Sidney writes that mimetic poetry should create “a speaking picture—with this end, to teach and delight” (1051). Focusing on *Everyman* and *Gawain and the Green Knight*, **or** on *Everyman* and *The Fairie Queene*, explain which work, in your judgment, best illustrates Sidney’s notion of entertaining didactic literature.
2. Using *Beowulf* and *Gawain and the Green Knight* as sources of examples, develop an idea of heroism that seems useful to someone living in the twenty-first century. What qualities make a credible, admirable hero? What can we learn from heroic flaws?
3. Discuss Chaucer’s “The Miller’s Tale” and “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue” **and** “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” as useful commentaries on the institution of marriage.

With the essay counting for a maximum of 240 points on this 300-point test, students, of course, took the essay seriously, and by encouraging them to draw from their journals and/or Discussion postings, I signaled that they had already done significant pre-writing on their chosen topic, as illustrated by the following journaling prompts, each keyed to the exam topics above and embedded in their respective unit modules:

Beowulf—**choose one**

1. At the end of the poem, the narrator describes Beowulf as “the most gracious and fair-minded” of kings, the “kindest to his people and keenest to win fame” (108). List key evidence from Part I (the Grendel story) and Part II (the dragon story) that supports the narrator’s claim. Does this evidence prove Beowulf’s status as an epic hero and as a tragic hero (see glossary)? Explain.
2. If Beowulf is so strong, so loving, so thoughtful, why does he fail? Hint: See Hrothgar’s speech on pages 78-80. List examples from Parts I and II that reveal Beowulf’s limitations and his victimization by the very heroic code he has always striven to uphold.
3. State the significance of each of the following ‘digressions’ from the two tales of Beowulf:
 - The forecast of the destruction of Heorot (page 43)
 - The poet’s story of “Sigemon’s exploits” (pages 59-60)
 - The saga of Finn (pages 63-67)
 - The poet’s story of evil King Heremod (page 78)

“The General Prologue”—**choose one**

1. Chaucer’s Canterbury pilgrims come from the aristocracy, the middle class, the merchant class, the working class, and the clergy. What do you learn of Chaucer’s life (238-241) that qualifies him to describe these varied classes with such authority?

2. Readers have always savored Chaucer's love for earthy humanity and his satirist's insights to the weaknesses of human nature; they have also seen Chaucer's profound spiritual perspective: by ending his *Tales* with "The Parson's Tale," he calls us all to make more loving pilgrimages through our lives, less focused on the temptations of the flesh, more focused on the truth of Christ's Kingdom. What images in the first 12 lines of "The General Prologue" reveal this dual emphasis on the longings of the flesh and the longings of the spirit? What contemporary holiday yokes these same ideas of seasonal and spiritual renewal?
3. Focusing on **descriptive details** used to introduce **three** of the following characters, explain what these portraits suggest about the range of human nature and the range of motivations for making a pilgrimage to a holy shrine: the Knight, the Squire, the Prioress, the Monk, the Friar, the Franklin, the Wife of Bath, the Parson, the Plowman, the Miller, the Reeve, the Pardoner.

"The Miller's Prologue and Tale"—**choose one**

1. The drunken Miller tells a bawdy tale to insult promiscuous women as well as the Reeve (carpenter), his enemy. Consider sources of humor here, other than the obvious slap-stick humor of falling bathtubs and rather nasty kisses at the window. Why do we laugh at the Carpenter, the victim of his wife's adultery, rather than feeling sorry for him?

2. Though the Miller himself has no moral intent, what serious messages does Chaucer suggest when we contemplate the Carpenter's religion, Nicholas' witty 'handiness,' Absalom's courtly love, and Alison's relationships with men?

“The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale”—**choose one**

1. What are the Wife's arguments justifying multiple marriages and healthy sexuality over virginity?
2. How does the Wife feel about her five husbands? Which did she like the most? Why?
3. Where does the Wife get her ideas on the nature of women? What consequences flow from those ideas?
4. How does the Wife's tale illustrate her views of men and marriage?

Everyman—**choose one**

1. Focusing on lines 772-920, explain the moral/theological significance of Everyman being abandoned by Beauty, Strength, Discretion, and Five Wits.
2. Write a paragraph in response to the Doctor's (theologian's) speech at the end of the play. Restriction: Write your paragraph **in the voice of Beowulf or Gawain**.
3. Write a paragraph commenting on the thematic value of *Everyman* for a person who does not hold the Christian faith or who has no faith in God at all.

Fairie Queene –choose one

1. Spenser intends his poem as an **epic**, the first true epic in early modern English.
Based on your reading of cantos 1-4 of Book 1, in what ways does the Red Crosse Knight qualify as an epic hero? See glossary to review definition of “epic.”
2. Spenser’s epic also can be described as an **allegory** similar to *Everyman*. Focusing on Red Crosse Knight and two other characters that seem allegorical, discuss what moral lessons these four cantos teach. See glossary to review definition of “allegory.”
3. Following the lead of Chaucer, Spenser writes poetry with startlingly **vivid imagery**. Support this statement by discussing **one** of the following scenes: the dragon Error in canto 1, stanza 20; the defeat of Sans foy (which means ‘without faith’) in canto 2; the killing of Una’s lion by Sans loy (which means ‘without law’) in canto 3; or the parade of the Seven Deadly Sins in canto 4. Why does vivid description seem so important in the scene you have chosen?
4. Discuss similarities and differences you observe between Red Crosse Knight and Sir Gawain.
5. Discuss how Spenser uses Una and Fidessa/Duessa to develop his theme on appearances and reality.

Additionally, I required students to submit a rough draft via the Assignments drop box before submitting a final version for a grade. When I received the draft, I praised analysis that seemed to be working and raised questions to coax their reconsidering organization and/or to add-and-explicate more relevant quotations; I then returned their drafts with my comments but

with no grade, giving them at least three days before having to submit their revisions for further comments and a grade. Further, I scheduled multiple real-time Chat sessions, encouraging students to ask questions about improving the content of their essays.

Many professors, of course, object to allowing (much less requiring) revisions of essays in a literature class, and their objections have some validity: ‘I have too many students to handle multi-drafting’; ‘they’ve had Comp; they should know how to revise’; ‘I have too much material to cover to waste time re-teaching revision.’ I certainly appreciate arguments centered on load and burn-out; still, I side with Ken Bain: “In ordinary classes, instructors might create assignments, but they rarely use the class to help students do the work” (114). I also agree with writing-to-learn specialist John C. Bean, who responds to the coverage argument by saying that “in my experience, integrating writing and critical thinking components into a course increases the amount of subject matter that students actually learn” (11).

I found persuasive evidence of such ‘actual learning’ in many of my student’s essays, represented here by an excerpt from Sam Gould’s mid-term essay on Chaucer:

Stepping back and looking at the whole picture of this marriage with the choices and decisions that are made, it is quite easy to assign blame to many participants in this story. First, we see John marrying a much younger wife which exacerbated his intense jealousy and even controlling behavior towards her: “*Jalos he was, and heeld hire narwe in cage.*” Also, we could question the wisdom of renting out rooms to a young man around the age of his wife especially given his frequent absences. Alison could be faulted for marrying such an older man perhaps due to his wealth: “*a rich gnof, that gestes heeld to boorde...*”

We would call Alison in today's world, a “gold-digger.” Then of course Nicholas, who makes incessant pleas towards Alison, even going so far as to grab her by her genitals: “*And prively he caughte hire by the queinte*”! In our last presidential race, this very kind of behavior was made an issue between the candidates and sparked quite a social debate about what is appropriate behavior between men and women. What might be considered by some to be “locker-room chatter” was offensive to many. Apparently, even in Chaucer’s day, some men committed what we call sexual assault and sexual harassment without any real consequence. In fact, she does very little to dissuade him and eventually acquiesces to his advances.

Sam demonstrates here his ability not only to explicate the Middle English but also to connect these characters’ foolish choices to the causes of dysfunctional marriages in our culture. In short, he has thought and written critically, and his analysis here grows from responding in his journal to the second prompt above on “The Miller’s Tale.”

The Long Debate on the Place of Writing in Literature Classes

Professors in English studies have long debated the validity of the pedagogy described above. In 1982, Maxine Hairston published in *College Composition and Communication* her seminal piece titled “The Winds of Change,” which makes a passionate case for shifting the paradigm used to teach writing from product-centered to process-centered pedagogy. Hairston traced the first breezes of change back to the Dartmouth Conference of 1966, when participants jointly called for moving the teaching of English away from obsessions with grammatical

correctness and prescriptive models toward a pedagogy that defines writing as the best way to learn—anything (8). Hairston argued, too, that change has come slowly because, too often, faculty teaching writing held advanced degrees in literature but knew little about the history of rhetoric and less about composition theory; each year, these faculty could be found at the MLA conference but not at the Conference of College Composition and Communication (6).

Resistance to Hairston’s paradigm shift continued through the next decade, but the “winds of change” began blowing more fiercely, as evinced by Erika Lindemann’s 1993 essay in *College English*, arguing that PhDs in literature with no training in rhetoric and composition have no business teaching writing and, further, that the composition classroom is “no place for literature” (311). Lindemann’s colleague Gary Tate famously responds to her in the same volume of *College English*, agreeing that literature should never supplant rhetoric in the writing classroom but arguing that composition should not become a service course to other disciplines and that we should “find a place for literature” in composition courses (319).

Since the early 1990s, the Lindemann-Tate debate has carried English Studies in two different directions, leading to departmental splits between literature and rhetoric, divorces that have often generated acrimony and pain but also positive changes in pedagogy. For example, in 1995, I moved from a literature department at Armstrong State University in Savannah to chair the Department of Rhetoric and Writing at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, where my new colleagues had split from English three years earlier. As my colleague Barry Maid often argued, the split had healthy results, freeing Rhetoric and Writing from having to compete for funding with literature faculty, freeing them, too, to develop their own curriculum and

programs—so much so that today, Rhetoric and Writing offers not only BA and MA programs in technical communication and nonfiction writing but also a PhD in digital rhetoric. But three years after the split, some faculty in both departments remained filled with resentment and pain, feeling betrayed by the Other and, in some cases, cut off forever from part of their professional identities: English faculty could not teach UALR’s writing courses, and Rhetoric and Writing faculty could not teach literature courses, a painful segregation for those faculty who had training in literature and in writing, who loved to teach both, and who used to have dear friends in the Other department.

A few years later, 1998, James Zebroski explains that he has given up his hopes that literature and writing could reunite, as literature faculty too often express condescending approval of writing specialists and sometimes hostile critiques of what they considered composition’s formulaic pedagogy and their alleged lack of postmodern theoretical sophistication, notions that Zebroski famously rebuts in his “Toward a Theory of Theory for Composition Studies” (31-32). As Zebroski shows, the pain of splits notwithstanding, separating Writing from Literature at departmental levels has usually produced positive results in the key, interrelated areas of theory and research, curricula, and pedagogy, as evinced by the success of UALR’s Rhetoric and Writing programs, noted above, as well as that of other independent writing units, such as those found at Syracuse, Iowa State, and Arizona, just to mention a few.⁵

While rhetoric and composition secured its disciplinary independence,⁶ English Studies also moved toward reuniting literature and writing. Sometimes, we see this unity within large, ‘full-service’ English departments, such as that at Auburn University, which offers discrete BA,

MA, and PhD programs in professional writing and in literature. We also see the unity movement in Stephen North's "fusion model" for MA and PhD programs in English departments, calling for hybrid programs blending professional communication, literature, and English education. We find such a program, for example, in the MA in Literature and Writing at Utah State University, a program praised by compositionists Kevin Brooks, Kathleen Yancey, and Mark Zachry (93). Such programming fulfills Robert Scholes' 1998 prophecy in *The Rise and Fall of English* that "the future will belong" to English departments "wise enough" to cease feuding over theory and "embrace rhetoric" (161).

Scholes' prophecy also receives fulfillment in numerous articles and books calling for making English studies relevant to students via pedagogical reunions of writing and literature. In 2002, for instance, Derek Owens and Pancho Savory contributed essays to Downing's *Beyond English Inc.: Curricular Reform in a Global Economy*, both arguing, as I have noted elsewhere, that "learning the rhetorical strategies that shape literary texts provides students with the tools and the will to effect constructive social change" (Owens 101, Savory 118, Raymond 66). The following year, Jessica Yood praised compositionist Sharon Crowley for "creating a pedagogy that would...implement the connection between literature and composition" to foster students' literacy (531). In the same vein, in 2006 Linda S. Bergman and Edith Baker published their collection of essays titled *Composition and/or Literature*, and in 2007 Judith Anderson and Christine Farris published another collection of essays, *Integrating Literature and Writing Instruction*, both collections stressing the value of literature in writing courses to help students acquire the empathy and language skills they will need to solve enormous social problems.

But these powerful publications argue primarily for using literature in writing classes; the case I make above argues for using writing-to-learn strategies in *all* literature classes, including online survey classes. Doing so creates what Norm Friesen calls the interface between the student and the text, between the student and the module lecture, between the student and the professor, as oral and written exchanges—via Chat, journaling, and Discussion boarding—create the sites of conversation where learning happens.⁷ Teaching literature as a writing course—complete with journaling, online discussion, and multi-drafting, processes that empower students with analytical skills and with meaningful insights to culture and self—will also help to reverse the nation-wide decline in the number of English majors, the consequence, says Carr (440), of the perceived irrelevance of literature courses, particularly those courses that kill students’ “love for literature” with hyper-critical theories that preach “the relativization of all positions,” none worthy of embrace, precisely the argument that Mark W. Roche asserts in 2004 in *Why Literature Matters in the Twenty-First Century* (85). In other words, teaching literature as a writing course will do more than preserve the English major; it will also feed students’ hunger, as Abram Van Engen puts it, for reading literature that “makes claims” on them, that opens their eyes to their own truths and, as Sam testifies above in his mid-term essay, to empower their shaping of a more humane world.⁸

Notes

¹ Over these four decades, I have taught literature courses as well as writing courses and have done so as a teaching assistant at the University of Wyoming and Miami University, as an instructor in two-year colleges in Wyoming and Georgia, and as a professor at Armstrong State University in Savannah, at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, at Mississippi State University, and as a Fulbright professor at the University of Shkodra in Albania and at the University of Pristina in Kosovo.

² With Pat Fox, I co-directed the Coastal Georgia Writing, 1991-1993; from 1997-2003, I directed the Little Rock Writing Project. At each site, during our five-week summer institutes for K-13 teachers, we read learning theorists, such as Jerome Bruner and Lev Vygotsky, who used developmental psychology to warrant writing-centered pedagogies. We also read composition theorists, including seminal work by Donald Murray and Janet Emig as well as contemporary work, such as Erika Lindemann's *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*, all advocating interactive learning driven by discussion, journaling, drafting, and revising. More recently, 2013-2014, I offered three-week summer institutes for professors across the humanities, social sciences, and STEM curricula at Mississippi State University. The center-piece for MSU's "Quality Enhancement Plan," this institute, dubbed "The Maroon Institute for Writing Excellence," engaged professors in reading learning and composition theorists, including not only those listed above but also Ken Bain's *What the Best College Teacher Do* and John C. Bean's *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in*

the Classroom. Participants processed this reading by journaling and by joining in focused small-group discussions, strategies they would soon employ in their own courses. To prepare for applying writing-to-learn strategies in their own courses, participants also revised existing syllabi, embedding strategies such as journaling, peer-response groups, and report writing in their respective courses—courses ranging from music, to algebra, to management, to biology, to sociology, and to introduction to literature. Further, participants couched their revised syllabi in reflective essays, explaining the writing-centered changes they planned for their courses, and grounding their revisions in their theoretical readings.

³ Wanting his students to discover this same connection between literary texts and their own stories, David Bell explains that he teaches his literature students to challenge claims made in and about literary works so that they can internalize the literature and “gain perspective” on their own lives” (489). Similarly, Christina Crosby writes that she wants her literature students to become “educated readers” who...learn to “analyze and interpret the signifying practices that make up the texture of human lives” (494). See *PMLA*, vol. 117 (2002), pp. 487-95.

⁴ The Institutional Review Board at Mississippi State University approved this study. All five students quoted in this paper expressed enthusiasm for my citing their work. Four of the five students asked me to use their whole names.

⁵ See James T. Zebroski, “Composition and Rhetoric, Inc.” Downing, 2002, pp. 164-80.

⁶ See also Maureen Daly Goggin’s *Inventing a Discipline: Rhetoric Scholarship in Honor of Richard E. Young*, 2000.

⁷ See Norm Friesen's *The Textbook and the Lecture: Education in the Age of New Media*, 2017.

Friesen's book argues for the continuing relevance of books and lectures in "the age of new media." This relevance grows from electronic "innovations" such as e-books and videos, and from the interactive strategies discussed here, which prevent lectures from becoming "an information dump" and textbooks from becoming "inert content" (pp. 7-8).

⁸ See Peter Elbow, "The Culture of Literature and Composition: What Could Each Learn from the Other?" In *College English*, vol. 62 (2002), pp. 533-46; James Berlin, *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*; Simon Gikandi, "This Thing Called Literature...What Work Does It Do?" *PMLA* vol. 127 (2012), pp. 9-21; Leigh Gilmore, "'What Was I?' Literary Witness and the Testimonial Archive," *Profession 2011*, pp. 77-84.

Works Cited

- Anderson, Judith H. and Christine R. Farris, editors. *Integrating Literature and Writing Instruction: First-Year English, Humanities, Humanities Core Courses, Seminars*. Modern Language Association, 2007.
- Bain, Ken. *What the Best College Teachers Do*. Harvard UP, 2004.
- Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*, 2nd edition. Josey-Bass, 2011.
- Bell, David F. "A Moratorium on Suspicion?" *PMLA*, vol. 117, 2002, pp. 487-89.
- Bergman, Linda S. and Edith M. Baker, editors. *Composition and/or Literature: The End(s) of Education*. National Council of Teachers of English, 2006.
- Berlin, James. *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*. National Council of Teachers of English, 1996.
- Bertoff, Ann. "Reclaiming the Active Mind." *College English*, vol. 61, 1999, pp. 671-80.
- Brooks, Kevin, Kathleen Blake Yancey, and Mark Zachery. "Developing Doctoral Programs: New Models." *Profession 2002*. Modern Language Association of America, December 2002, pp. 89-103.
- Bruner, Jerome. *The Process of Education*, Harvard UP, 1960.
- Carr, Jean Ferguson. "Composition, English, and the University." *PMLA*, vol. 129, no. 3, May 2014, pp. 435-41.
- Crosby, Christina. "Why Major in English—What Do We Tell Our Students?" *PMLA*, vol. 117, 2002, pp. 493-95.

- Downing, David B., Claude Mark Hurlbert, and Paula Mathieu, editors. *Beyond English Inc.: Curricular Reform in a Global Economy*. Heinemann, 2002.
- Elbow, Peter. "The Culture of Literature and Composition: What Could Each Learn from the Other?" *College English*, vol. 62, 2002, pp. 533-46.
- Emig, Janet. "Writing as a Mode of Learning." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 28, no. 2, May 1977, pp. 122-28. Villanueva, pp. 7-15.
- Friesen, Norm. *The Textbook and the Lecture: Education in the Age of New Media*. Johns Hopkins UP, 2017.
- Goggin, Maureen Daly, editor. *Inventing a Discipline: Rhetoric Scholarship in Honor of Richard E. Young*. National Council of Teachers of English, 2000.
- Lindemann, Erika. *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*, 4th edition. Oxford UP, 2001.
- _____. "Freshman Composition: No Place for Literature." *College English*, vol. 55, 1993, pp. 311-21.
- Murray, Donald. "Teach Writing as a Process, Not Product." *The Leaflet*, 1972. Villanueva, pp. 3-15.
- North, Stephen. *Refiguring the PhD in English Studies: Writing, Doctoral Education, and the Fusion-Based Model*. National Council of Teachers of English, 2000.
- Owens, Derik. "Curriculum for Seven Generations." *Beyond English Inc.: Curricular Reform in a Global Economy*. Downing. pp. 118-38

Raymond, Rich. "Overcoming Crises in English Studies: A Case for Hope." *Lamar Journal of the Humanities*, vol. 16, no. 1, Spring 2016, pp. 61-80.

Roche, Mark M. *Why Literature Matters in the Twenty-First Century*. Yale UP, 2004.

Salvatori, Mariolina. "Conversations with Texts: Reading in the Teaching of Composition." *College English*, vol. 58, 1996, pp. 440-54.

Savery, Pancho. "'No Chains Around My Feet, But I'm Not Free': Race and the Western Classics in a Liberal Arts College." *Beyond English Inc.: Curricular Reform in a Global Economy*. Downing, pp. 93-106.

Scholes, Robert. *The Rise and Fall of English: Restructuring English as a Discipline*. Yale UP, 1998.

Tate, Gary. "A Place for Literature in Freshman Composition." *College English*, vol. 55, 1993, pp. 317-21.

Van Engan, Abram. "Reclaiming Claims: What English Students Want from English Profs." *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture*, vol. 5, no. 1, Winter 2005, pp. 5-18.

Villanueva, Victor, and Kristin L. Arola, editors. *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory*, National Council of Teachers of English, 2011.

Vygotsky, Lev. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard UP, 1978.

Zebroski, James Thomas. "Composition and Rhetoric, Inc.: Life aft the English Department at Syracuse University." Downing, 164-80.

_____. "Toward a Theory of Theory for Composition Studies." *Under Construction*.

Christine Farris and Chris M. Anson, editors. Utah State UP, 1998, pp. 30-48.