

Writing Beyond the Curriculum: Transition, Transfer, and Transformation

Heather G. Lettner-Rust, Longwood University, Pamela J. Tracy, Longwood University, Susan L. Booker, Longwood University, Elizabeth Kocevar-Weidinger, Longwood University, and Jená B. Burges, Humboldt State University

Abstract: The authors describe how their institution revised its general education writing curriculum and how that change not only affected the university's approach to advanced composition but also transformed the roles and relationships among teachers, librarians, literacy practices, curricula, students, and the community. Part service-learning, part civic engagement, part student-directed research, and part interdisciplinary senior seminar, the course at the heart of the change combines a variation of writing-as-process with a substantial shift in writing-across-the-curriculum practices. The authors outline the course's establishment, discuss what various constituents have experienced, and argue for the transformation of higher education's mission from an instructional paradigm to a learning paradigm.

Picture a recent college graduate, one who has been living beyond the academy for a year or two. A fully-fledged professional and member of a distant community now, he has also become a dedicated daily runner. Lately, he has become alarmed at the paucity of traffic signals along his running route. The recent growth in his community's traffic has clearly outstripped its master plan, with the result that many intersections are dangerously unregulated. "Somebody needs to do something before some kid gets killed," he thinks. As a community-minded, responsible citizen, he writes a passionate three-page letter to the editor of the local paper, urging the town council to install traffic lights at dangerous intersections. The first paragraph of the letter appears in the paper two weeks later ("edited for length," according to the paper's policy). Nothing happens, and the graduate concludes that civic action accomplishes nothing. Worse, the intersections grow more dangerous every day.

Obviously, he cared about his community and took action. His heart was in the right place, but did he ask the right questions and perform the necessary research before undertaking this civic endeavor?

Was there a better way to communicate with the town council or with a different agency or department more appropriate to contact?

What criteria were used to determine where traffic signals were placed?

Who has the authority to install traffic signals in a locality?

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Who else holds a stake in this situation, and what have they already done?

And what about that three-page letter to the editor? Did he have the skills to implement his good intentions? Did he have the tools he needed in order to engage the problem effectively or to know where to find those tools or how to use them?

Our citizen-runner defaulted to a genre that would have earned a C+ in his major's senior capstone course. Was he aware of other genres or formats for writing?

Who typically uses the letter to the editor for thoughtfully, critically expressing the concerns of the larger community?

How are letters to the editor perceived by the members of the town council? As opportunities for uninformed rants? As vehicles for true change?

Finally, whose responsibility was it to prepare him for discourse with the community as a citizen? Could his instructors—or should they—have prepared him for this type of discourse?

The following is the story of how one institution made a modest, mission-oriented adjustment to the general education writing curriculum that not only changed how it framed general education writing but also transformed roles and relationships among teachers, librarians, literacy practices, curricula, students, and the community. Part service-learning, part civic engagement, part student-directed research, and part interdisciplinary senior seminar, the course at the heart of the change combined a variation of writing-as-process with a ninety-degree rotation of writing-across-the-curriculum practices. Why and how it happened, and what we learned along the way, exemplifies the transformation of higher education's mission from an instructional paradigm to a learning paradigm (Barr & Tagg, 1995).

Acknowledging the Problem of Transfer

For most of their history, universities have assumed that literacy skills were "basic" and would transfer automatically from one arena to any other; recent work in composition studies has shown us, however, that there is little about writing that travels so seamlessly (see, for example, Carter, Miller, and Penrose, 1998). Even so, as David W. Smit notes in *The End of Composition Studies* (2004), "[i]t is rare in college and universities that we explicitly teach the transfer of knowledge and skills from one course to another or from one discipline to another" (p. 134). As we began imagining the possibilities for a revamped writing curriculum at Longwood University, then, one of our main goals was to maximize transferability, to ensure that the skills students learned would be applicable in multiple contexts and situations. A course that incorporated service-learning and civic, public writing, that required instructors and students to be actively reflective about rich, embedded social and rhetorical contexts, would accomplish this end.

It was our aim to recognize the very rigorous work of past and current service-learning programs (Coogan, 2006; Weiser, 2001; Jolliffe, 2001; Adler-Kassner, Crooks, Watters, 1997; Peck, Flower, Higgins, 1995). We saw our program as joining the scholarship that seemed to have fulfilled the goal of Flower and Heath (2000) to make the "act of learning . . . a public act of shared knowledge making [by] transform[ing] service into collaboration with communities and learning into a problem-driven practice of mutual inquiry and literate action" (p.43). Tracing the work of Cushman (1996) who asked for a "deeper consideration of the civic purpose of our *positions* in the academy, of what we do with our knowledge, for whom and by what means" (p.12) and the efforts of Herzberg (2000) to make

civic discourse theory applicable to students' study of the community issues, the work of the academy in our communities was ever closer to literate action. This revelation could help facilitate the push for writing and rhetoric courses to be central in general education programs. As Herzberg suggests, instead of the writing curriculum serving primarily a service role for the institution, it could be an integral part of the knowledge-making paradigm. It's certainly what we wanted our proposed new course to initiate on our campus.

Developing 'Active Citizenship' by Linking Theory to Institutional Needs

In the spring of 2001, Longwood University's multi-year general education review culminated in the adoption of a plan that included a new arrangement of the composition program. The existing two-semester sequence of traditional freshman composition courses was split into a three-credit freshman and a three-credit senior component. Defining the new freshman course was relatively easy: It would prepare students with the rhetorical skills to enter the range of academic discourse communities that they would encounter in their academic programs.

Defining English 400, the senior-level course, required more creativity. There was broad agreement that establishing a general education writing course near the end of students' academic programs was a good idea, for a number of reasons. Practical considerations included providing composition instruction for the growing number of transfer and dual-enrollment students who bypassed Longwood's freshman writing courses. Placing a course that developed students' civic engagement skills into one of students' last semesters seemed like an informed way to support their transition to the world beyond college. More idealistically, the director of composition sought to achieve the institutional mission of developing citizen-leaders prepared to contribute to the common good of society. This motive also had its pragmatic aspects, as the regional accrediting organization had recommended that the mission be more explicitly built into the curriculum. Perhaps more significant, pedagogically, was that students were more likely to be developmentally prepared to address the complexities of writing in the public sphere as seniors than they were as freshmen and to appreciate the importance of effective writing (Haswell 1991, Light 2000).

There was also an experimental reason for shaping the course in this way: Pulling newly-developed student-specialists out of their disciplinary silos and combining them in diverse groups would allow them to see how they might draw upon each others' developing disciplinary expertise to address complex problems beyond the academic community. Soon enough, they would be working and living among people whose disciplinary training differed from their own. The homogeneity of their senior-level majors' classes was unlikely to be replicated either in the workplace or in their neighborhoods; it made sense to deliberately orient students to the varieties of disciplinary expertise, values, and perspectives represented in most complex organizations and communities.

Exactly how this would all work was not at all defined when the policy was approved, but it would be three years before freshmen students were eligible to take the senior course. Several conditions, however, were established from the beginning and slowly came to fruition (with varying degrees of success). Themes shared by all sections on a year-by-year basis were supported by campus-wide events and conversation. Faculty development programs encouraged and prepared instructors across the curriculum to teach the course if they desired. Most importantly, students were asked to shift their frame of reference away from the typical academic purposes (writing about curricular information) and toward writing as a means of acting on the civic world, exercising their literacy skills as acts of responsible citizenship ("writing in order to" do something beyond the curriculum). Teachers faced the corresponding need to transform their own classroom personas. They would need

to do what many of us understand are "best practices" and that is to move beyond our own curricular expertise and into the realm of demonstrating what expert learners do when they don't know an answer. We were reminded that McLeod and Maimon (2000) "[proposed] a profound change in pedagogy and curriculum [for WAC], one based not on the 'delivery of information' but on theories of learning that propose active engagement with ideas and content knowledge" (p. 578). In this sense, English 400 was a continuation of the idea that we deliver our course objectives best when we teach process as well as content (Beaufort, 2007; Carter, Miller, Penrose, 1998; Petraglia, 1995).

Since 2004, the work to find instructors willing to take on such a course has been on-going. As of 2007, we've only had five sections of English 400 staffed outside the English Department—three in Communication Studies, another in Business Administration, and the fifth in Environmental Sciences. Another on-going struggle has been how to articulate the value and utility of the course to seniors who find themselves back in an English class again.

Taking English 400

In the first year we offered English 400, we spent a considerable amount of time on the first day explaining the title: "Active Citizenship: An Advanced Writing Seminar." We said that students were to engage in communities outside of the academy, trying on the cloak of citizenry and acting on rhetorical opportunities in 'real time.' This was their time to experience speaking up within a civic issue outside the academy, organizing a new body of knowledge, and writing in order to gain or influence a public, civic audience they sought to join or influence.

As the semester progressed, we asked students to practice reading and analyzing public documents before engaging an issue of public significance on their own. They conducted a rhetorical analysis of a public document—essentially engaging in the kind of academic writing that David Russell (1997) identified as a "school" genre—but soon gained enough familiarity with the precepts of rhetorical situations (Aristotle, 1991; Bitzer, 1968) to use this approach in researching on-going problems of concern in communities they cared about. Contending with the complexities that Bitzer (1968), Vatz (1972), Consigny (1974), and lately Grant-Davie (1997) suggest when trying to locate a rhetorical situation, the students investigated the exigencies of the situation and the rhetors (themselves included), selected points of entry (and in some cases re-selected and re-selected) and then developed rhetorical, textual, or oral performances in order to gain entry, be heard, and perhaps influence an audience.

Framing and Reframing English 400

As encouraged as we have been in recent semesters at the success of our students' engagement with the processes of public writing, we have continually sought to understand the pedagogical and political implications of this course more fully and to develop strategies for addressing those implications with students and the wider publics of instructors and administrators across campus. As we saw it, this was a course that initiated their rhetorical experience as citizens and as citizen leaders, employing all the tools their degrees had given them, not merely a capstone course that tied up the loose ends of an academic curriculum. To help students and administrators see this course in the same way – as a place where civic action, good writing, and active learning took place – we found George Lakoff's notion of *framing the debate* especially useful.

In his 2004 text *Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate*, Lakoff advocates understanding how political strategists employ rhetorical devices in order to control the terms and conditions of current public debates. Perhaps one of the more familiar examples is the linguistic

maneuvering we see when one set of politicians refers to a piece of legislation as a "death tax" while another calls it an "estate tax."

Similarly, Linda Adler-Kassner (2006) and others encouraged the use of "framing" within the academy and beyond, out into the community, as a way to establish the terms of currently debated issues. For example, attacks on students' inability to write grammatically correct sentences can be framed in terms of their ability (or inability) to focus on engaging a number of rhetorical strategies to meet an ever-widening array of discourse communities. In this manner, perceived increases in plagiarism can be reframed, and thus reasonably understood in many cases, as "citation errors."

Framing—and reframing—can be used to accomplish other types of academic goals as well. Elizabeth Ervin, who developed a senior composition course at UNC-Wilmington titled "Writing for Diverse Publics" and whose text *Public Literacy* we have used for this course, discussed the need for framing (2003; 2006). While she saw framing the course as a means for students to understand and move through particular discursive or rhetorical communities, we suggest that our own framing of English 400 supplied administrators and colleagues with crucial pathways to a clearer understanding of its goals, processes, and products. In doing so, we borrowed conspicuously from two tenets of Lakoff's notion of framing: the first was to frame the discussion about the course in terms of values, "where [our] position exemplifies a value everyone holds," (2004, p.116) values of the university, and values of the student experience and student learning. The second tenet was to "tell a story," where our frame fit and was delivered by the story. The goal here was that "once [our] frame [was] accepted into the discourse, what [we said would] be common sense" (p.116) and the campus would be united under the values of student learning and good writing. Allowing students to tell the story of their rhetorical experiences in the civic domain has been one of our most powerful means of framing. They speak in terms of good researchable questions, knowledge gained through research in the community, copious revisions of rhetorical strategies, and application of new tools.

Currently, we have attempted to reframe student work and the composition course by organizing an outdoor open house, showcasing the students' research and writing processes. The event has functioned to "[f]ind stories where [our] frame is built into the story. [And] build up a stock of effective stories" (Lakoff, 2004, p.116). We required our English 400 students to develop a three-panel display board that explained to a campus audience which public issue these citizen-scholars have investigated and then entered. Together, we rehearsed the language they used to explain the processes they experienced as they distinguished between personal and public issues, as they selected appropriate public genres, and as they identified relevant stakeholders in the public sphere.

Because this course offered faculty and students alike such an unconventional learning experience, its critics have offered up frames of their own that we wish to counter. Did students really spend an entire 15-week semester to produce "only a couple of letters to a senator"? How could it take students eight weeks just to "select a topic"? Where critics might view the course through a frame of consumption of content and production of words on paper, we sought to reframe the view: The letters to a senator were, in fact, exemplars of careful attention to a reader's expectations and level of expertise, of multiple revisions to achieve a moderate tone in the face of impassioned engagement, of considering effective organizational strategies, of editing, of proofreading and formatting. "Selecting a topic" involved learning new contexts for research tools, intense soaking up of information—enhancing one's ethos through demonstrating knowledge of a subject—and mapping the relationship of stakeholders to the issue. Those processes were rarely linear, as experienced researchers know. When novice researchers attempt those same processes, the time needed to process the experience also increases.

The open house was attended by the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, the vice president of academic affairs, our department chair, and the president of the university. They all expressed positive responses. However, we were always most interested in how they framed what they saw. Following one such open house, we scheduled a meeting with the dean, asked him to tell us what he had seen, and then carefully filled in what was less visible to his eyes from the students' display boards, reframing student work in term of civic action, good writing, and active learning.

Reaching Out Across the Campus

We continued to face issues of staffing and development for the construction of a learning experience that changed the traditional faculty role so thoroughly. We estimated that when the course was fully up and running, we would need to offer at least 15-20 sections of 21 students each semester. One key question that arose very early in the course's development was "how?": How could we make the prospect of teaching this course attractive to teachers across the university in order to staff this course as truly cross-disciplinary? How much help would they need to understand and use the principles of rhetoric that formed the foundation for the course? After the initial pilot class in Spring 2004, we invited colleagues from many departments who were often present at WAC brown-bags or teaching workshops to join our meetings. We thought they'd be more likely to practice in the classroom an authentic concern for student learning, and would act as 'carriers' of our understanding that this was a course about not knowing the answers but about being willing to ask the important questions alongside students.

Unlike WAC's usual approach of traveling where the writing is happening—doing a brand of writing "outreach"—we invited faculty from beyond English to join us. We hosted breakfast and lunch work sessions, continually repeating the mantra that this was a course that had writing "in order to do work in the world" at its core. We supported those faculty with a summer workshop led by North Carolina State University's Chris Anson, who provided attendees with an overview of writing contexts, articulated our message in a way that those attending could hear and apply in their own classrooms, and generously shared resources that interested faculty could carry away and integrate into existing courses. Such collaborative discussions about writing and about teaching writing in a new context are rare on our campus, so the fact that a contingent of colleagues met periodically to talk about the challenges and successes of English 400 proved unexpectedly to be a reframing of what it meant to be in a community of teacher-scholars.

Two years ago, we felt successful sitting around the breakfast table with colleague-teachers of English 400, warm and happy with the curiosity and general enthusiasm we received from faculty in departments as disparate as health, kinesiology, and recreation; art history; and management. Many of our colleagues expressed a genuine interest in learning how to approach public writing from a rhetorical standpoint. The constraint to their actually developing such courses came from their home departments. Each would have to hire an appropriate adjunct instructor to take the tenure-line faculty member's place as that faculty member engaged in teaching public writing. In any institution where resources are stretched in order for departments to meet minimum requirements, class size caps rise, and funds for development or travel fall, few department chairs could spare the resources or relieve their tenured or tenure-line people for what gets perceived as an add-on. One department did, however, make those resources available for one of us to become a regular "visitor" from Communication Studies to teach English 400. The Business and Environmental Science departments have only been able to afford one course at the time of this writing.

Transforming Pedagogy

In addition to reframing writing for the students, we also reframed instruction and writing pedagogy on our campus. We adhered to Larry D. Spence's assertion when he wrote in "The Case Against Teaching" that we deceive ourselves and devalue our students when we remain wedded to practices that emphasize "teaching and talking." He writes: "We won't meet the needs for more and better higher education until professors become designers of learning experiences and not teachers" (p. 18). When it functions at its best, English 400 does just that, providing individualized, engaging, and complex learning experiences—not only for its students but also for its instructors. With this course, we imposed serious questions on ourselves and on our colleagues about the nature of writing instruction and about the roles, responsibilities, and requirements of its teachers. The answers we discovered led us to conclude that writing for public action, for some sort of social good, meant that teaching and learning must take on very different forms. Simply, teachers stand alongside their students, transformed from expert disciplinary knowers armed with answers to convey, to expert learners with excellent and varied questions.

Transforming Students for Public Engagement

We started out assuming that junior- and senior-level students would know the vocabulary of civic engagement and even a bit about the ways in which local governments work. We thought they might be able to differentiate between public writing and journalism, although sometimes those two differently-focused contexts blur. We assumed that we could talk about how we might frame general topics into more specific issues with which we might wrestle. But we found, initially, that those assumptions were incorrect. As we reflected on the first time we taught this course, we all realized that our students were novices at writing within a public context, at thinking critically about public issues, and at conducting research for these unfamiliar purposes and audiences. As a result of that reflection, we incorporated even more examples of responsible citizenship in action, focused less on teaching *about* rhetoric and the genres of public literacy and more on creating opportunities for writers to *do* rhetoric by focusing on each other's projects.

If we imagined WAC as outreach, this course in its current configuration invited others to reach in or to reunite. In the English 400 classroom, students learned with others across a variety of disciplines where as many as ten different majors might be represented in a classroom of 21 students. Further, such multi-disciplinary representation encouraged learners (both teachers and students) to bring with them discipline-specific knowledge in order to begin a dialogue about how to be active citizens. The course invited students to explore their own expertise in order to visualize how their years of study in a particular discipline could inform how they approached community problem solving. It provided the opportunity for an economics major to teach a communication studies major a different lens through which to explore a problem. Therefore, the instructors needed to be intentional about drawing on this knowledge. Such attention to student expertise was another example of epistemological reframing we found important in English 400. Further, such attention marked a crucial movement toward students' realizing the collaborative and cooperative nature of civic engagement.

Transforming Research Sites and Strategies

In addition to preparing students to write *beyond* the college curriculum, we were also ready to help students *adapt their research or investigatory processes* beyond the college curriculum. Although we might not be able to prepare our students for all of the challenges they would face in their professional, civic, and personal lives, we would have failed our graduates if we "[had] not

empower[ed] them to be independent lifelong learners who [could] access, evaluate, and effectively use information to address the needs or questions which confront them in their communities" (Brevik, 2000). Through Longwood's English 400 course, faculty and librarians collaborated to teach a process of writing and research that prepared students for writing for their communities beyond the academy.

Students learned that the scholarly resources that they had become proficient in using for research-based assignments generally were not appropriate for the kinds of specific public readers they now had to engage. While they might write for some readers with advanced degrees and high levels of professional expertise, others might have a basic literacy level, defined by The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 as "an individual's ability to read, write, speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual and in society" (National Institute for Literacy, 2006).

Librarians at Longwood provided course-related instruction in support of faculty research assignments. In English 400, librarians adjusted their learning objectives to meet the research needs of writing for specific audiences and purposes that students identified. Indeed, the Competency Standards constituted by The Association of College and Research Libraries "stress that information literacy 'forms the basis for lifelong learning. ... It enables users to master content and extend their investigations, become more self-directed'" ("Objectives," 2001). Concentrating research instruction on sources that were typically written for and only available to the academic audience does not necessarily prepare responsible lifelong learners. In English 400, the librarian's goal was for students to learn research skills that enable them to find and use resources that are generally freely accessible in the public sphere and that close to 100% of the population can access. As a result, we heard students articulating sound informational questions about their projects and inquiring about effective search strategies for finding answers. We worked together to locate legislative and statistical information through government web sites, to evaluate web sites for reliability, to find local government entities and contact information for personal interviews—sources they will have ready access to in their post-university lives.

Is 'Active Citizenship' Making a Difference to Students?

Two students successfully raised awareness among several stakeholders in a languishing curbside recycling program. Although the program has been operating for years in our town, the students were unaware of its existence and presumed—correctly—that many other residents were similarly unaware, too. The work these students did to confront the program's invisibility was not about creating a *solution* but in creating a *situation* wherein community officials could begin to see the invisibility of their own initiative. By targeting specific community figures—the director of public works, the town's general information manager, the editor of the local newspaper, and the chairperson of the local Earth Day festivities—these students carefully renegotiated the understanding these public figures had of a quiet, simple city recycling program to seeing their efforts as an inefficient use of resources.

Another example involved a student who eventually found himself addressing a substantial gathering of Richmond-area residents at a metropolitan town square meeting, taking the unpopular position of advocating the relocation of the local Atlanta Braves farm team from its current home near downtown to a more suburban location. The sequence of events that led to this public-speaking debut began after John introduced the class to his idea for this project. The class asked challenging questions about what he would need to know in order to more fully understand the issue and helped him develop a comprehensive plan: They concluded that John needed to know the economic motives

and the effects of the relocation. He needed to understand both the city's and professional baseball's budgets and those budgets' interrelationship. He needed to locate various stakeholders at work on the issue and their public positions. Finally, he needed to understand which public and private venues were accessible to the public. When the opportunity of a Public Square meeting came up with only two days' notice, John attended and spoke clearly and confidently when given the chance.

He knew well his lessons from the Bitzer and Grant-Davie, having researched the situation's defects. He knew the urgency for various constituents involved, the constraints of the audience, and the issue; he considered others' perception of his age, and spoke. While many in the audience were of retirement age, complaining that the team's move out of the city would affect their ability to access public transportation to attend games, John asked that those in the room think of the underrepresented young parents with families who offered significant economic potential in years to come. The Braves should move to the suburbs, he said. John and a class colleague each constructed separate letters appealing to the mayor (who had gotten involved in the issue and was featured often in news accounts), to the team's general manager, and to a local citizens' group tracking the relocation efforts.

And finally, a fellow student focused attention on a problem shared by two communities: our university and the town of which it is a vital part. He spoke to the local town council regarding the lack of what he perceived as safe transportation for both university students and local citizens during late evening hours. He and two other students followed up with letters and a well-researched proposal pitching their idea to the council's chair, the town planner, and the university president. This effort resulted in a joint meeting between town leaders and university officials with the transportation issue the sole item on the agenda.

Each of these projects was semester-long, conceived, developed, and repeatedly revised over the course of 15 weeks of deliberating, discussing, and planning rhetorical strategies. Not only were the projects individualized and complex, they demanded that both teacher and student step out of their specialized area of expertise and begin the process of engaging with issues as an uncertain endeavor. We think of English 400 as a brand of positive disruption to traditional teaching and learning as all course participants move beyond comfort zones. We found that as instructors, our disciplinary knowledge can serve us only to a certain point; beyond that point, we need to transfer that knowledge into what we identify as a form of "rhetorical literacy"—knowing in any given case the available means of reading, of inquiring. In doing so, we developed the habit of questioning that inherently shifts focus away from what we know of content to how well we can wonder what needs to be asked, what needs to be known.

As most WAC coordinators will acknowledge, few of the outcomes we described here in their ideal form were easy to achieve. As a communication studies teacher and scholar, Pam was the first "visitor" from outside the Department of English and Modern Languages to teach English 400. Much like her students, she was a novice in thinking about how her own disciplinary training had prepared her to be an active citizen. While students and professors are probably most familiar with writing about "people," "places," and "things," we may be less familiar with writing in order to create change and writing in order to stimulate interest and activity in a public, civic audience. Pam took on this new experience asking how what she knows as a communication and media scholar could inform how she teaches writing as civic engagement. In many ways, English 400, with its classical rhetorical foundation was somewhat familiar to a scholar trained in reading media, body language, and public speaking as texts. Nevertheless, as she took her place alongside the students, the goals of this course stretched Pam's knowledge of persons, places, and things. She had to become an expert in helping students learn a process, and she had to resist the temptation to teach about "stuff." This shift required a considerable epistemological reframing. The answer to "Who is the knower?" in English

400 became much like the answer we would expect from a successful WAC initiative: it depends upon the context.

In the case of English 400, the task taken on by a student might be to motivate local surfboarders to petition for the right to park in beach access lots usually reserved for visitors. Or, it might entail persuading the local town council to provide funds for a traffic light in a busy residential neighborhood, or convincing the superintendent of schools to work with the school board and PTA in banning soft drink machines in the local high school. Pam was an expert at approaches to media production, media consumption, and media interpretation; she knew very little about specific community political structures, the nutritional content of most school lunches, or why surfers were entitled to parking rights in the first place. Furthermore, English 400 was and is a busy course, and teaching complex processes takes time. There was little room for formal instruction on various public writing genres. Nor was teaching about genres necessarily the most effective way for students to understand how to select a format and produce a document appropriately; we found instead that drafting, practicing, discussing, and exploring effective public literacy genres created valuable opportunities for students to make critical writing-to-learn decisions in terms of which genre was appropriate for the rhetorical situation. When instructors stepped aside, "students listen less and learn more" (Griffin, 1985, p. 402-03). In the context of a course aimed at preparing college citizens to write in order to be more active and effective community citizens, this student-centered learning was imperative.

Pam reported that the framing and reframing of English 400 she experienced has provided a valuable collaborative teaching experience for her. Indeed, she has even transferred this learning-centered approach to her other courses. The qualities that set English 400 apart from many other courses in the university's curriculum make it an ideal interdisciplinary experience for both students and teachers who are learning "content" through process alongside each other. English 400 created the opportunity for interdisciplinary exploration and made possible the kind of disciplinary boundary breaking we have described here. We found a professional and personal sense of exhilaration in the unpredictability that comes from learning in an environment that validated authentic inquiry, acknowledged the difficult work that often revealed itself through "error," and honored the processes of complex and new sites and strategies for research and for rhetorical situations for writing.

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Contact Information

Heather Lettner-Rust, Lecturer
 Department of English and Modern Languages
 Longwood University

201 High Street
Farmville, VA 23909
Voice: 434.395.2178
Email: lettnerrusthg@longwood.edu

Susan L. Booker, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of English/Director of Composition
Department of English and Modern Languages
Longwood University
201 High St.
Farmville, VA 23909
Voice: 434.395.2528
Email: bookersl@longwood.edu

Pamela J. Tracy, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Communication Studies
Director, Longwood Seminar
Longwood University
201 High Street
Farmville, VA 23909
Voice: 434-395-2238
Email: tracypj@longwood.edu

Elizabeth Kocevar-Weidinger
Instruction/Reference Services Librarian/Associate Professor
Greenwood Library, Longwood University
201 High Street
Farmville, Virginia 23909
Voice: 434.395.2445
Email: kocevarweidingerea@longwood.edu

Jená Burges, Ph.D.
Vice Provost
Humboldt State University
1 Harpst Street
Arcata CA 95521
Voice: 707.826.3511
Email: jb139@humboldt.edu

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