

## CHAPTER 3.

# FOLLOW THE SOURCES: NOTES TOWARD WEC'S CONTRIBUTION TO DISCIPLINARY WRITING

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*WEC has received considerable praise for its transformation of writing curricula, its engagement of faculty, and its curricular enhancement through assessment. To date, however, the idea of the faculty writing plans as epistemological statements about disciplinary writing values and practices hasn't received as much attention—in spite of the plans' potential to show us what is valued in different contexts across a campus, what is valued in the aggregate across a campus, and what is valued in disciplinary contexts. Do parallel departments at different institutions engaging in WEC activities define their disciplinary discourses similarly, and if so, how might such activity contribute to mapping disciplinary discourses? This chapter pursues this question by drawing on WEC instantiations at three institutions—focusing on history as a kind of prototype—in order to demonstrate that an analysis of inter-institutional disciplinary WEC materials can articulate disciplinary discourses, defined as practices, texts, and values. This project thus has as a premise that WEC materials, in addition to their curricular and pedagogical value, have epistemological value; that is, they make visible disciplinary writing values, practices, and genres as expressed by faculty in those disciplines, and in so doing, they illuminate defining features of writing in specific disciplines. Moreover, through reflecting upon such patterns, assuming they do exist, we can speak more authoritatively about the nature and defining characteristics of a given discipline, in this case the discipline of history. Not least, in taking up this question, this chapter also outlines a more general process, available for use for other disciplines, of engaging in a comparative reflective review of inter-institutional departmental materials developed with a common goal of articulating writing for the same discipline. Taken together, such portraits of disciplinary writing can begin mapping the world of disparate disciplinary writing genres, practices, and values.*

Several years ago, I visited the University of Minnesota's writing enriched curriculum (WEC) program, in part to work with Pamela Flash and some of her colleagues, in part to attend a symposium highlighting the good work that participants in the WEC program had engaged in. At one point, after a presentation by the then-director of first-year composition (FYC), I raised a set of questions that has haunted me ever since. Given what we are seeing in this symposium about the diversity in college writing, I wondered, what if any overlaps and through lines might exist across the writing processes and texts documented in these multiple and different contexts. As the symposium presentations demonstrated, the WEC-intensive departmental investigations into disciplinary discourse revealed much about the different questions, kinds of evidence, and genres privileged in each of these different discourses; at the same time, if we read *across* them, what might they collectively point to as common processes and textual features of college-level writing? We know that there are differences, but do any common writing processes and features exist, and if so, what are they?

I began taking up these questions in a limited way in a study I completed in 2015, focusing on writing plans from three very different departments at the University of Minnesota WEC program—history, geography, and mechanical engineering—for two purposes. First, I wanted to identify the contrasting features, like observing the ethical use of visual information in geography and creating multimedia texts as members of global teams in mechanical engineering, that distinguish these three disciplinary discourses from each other. Second, based on this analysis, I also inquired into whether or not shared practices, discursive features, or values in these three very different disciplines could be observed.<sup>1</sup> The findings were fairly straightforward: as different as the three departments and their discourses are, there are “patterns of similarity—chiefly, an attention to writing process, a valuing of evidence, and a concern for audience . . . the writing cultures represented here are different, but they have common points of reference.” Based on this analysis, my argument also was that identifying these shared values—writing process, evidence, and audience—could provide something of a through-line or pathway for college writers.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, a limitation of this study was that each of the disciplinary discourses was defined by only a single department in a single institution, which raises an(other) interesting

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1 Michael Carter's Braddock-Award-winning article asks a similar question, but toward a different end: identifying discursive features and values that, he argued, constitute four meta-genres.

2 There are other ways to identify or create commonalities across disciplinary discourses as well. For an approach linking two courses through threshold concepts, see Adler-Kassner, et al. (2012). For an approach linking writing and disciplines (in this case, chemistry) through overlapping key terms, in this case influenced by the Teaching for Transfer (TFT) writing curriculum, see Green, et al. (2017).

question: do parallel departments at different institutions engaging in WEC activities define their disciplinary discourses similarly, and if so, how might such activity contribute to mapping disciplinary discourses?

The WEC approach, of course, has received considerable praise for its engagement of faculty and subsequent transformation of writing curricula, which is appropriate given that the WEC approach is understood and promoted as a curricular and pedagogical enhancement activity. At the same time, however, given the faculty conversations it facilitates—conversations that are not always natural or easy, as Anson (Chapter 2), Flash (Chapter 1), and Sheriff (Chapter 6) of this volume note—and the writing materials it creates, the WEC approach offers another rich opportunity: to examine and uncover the epistemologies of disciplinary writing values and practices, be they different or similar. More specifically, while the purpose of WEC, especially from the perspective of departments and disciplines, is curricular and pedagogical, for those interested in *studying* writing in higher education and in defining the characteristics of different disciplinary discourses, the curricular materials produced as part of the WEC process present a thus-far untapped resource.

In this chapter, I take up this question about whether or not parallel departments at different institutions engaging in WEC activities define their disciplinary discourses similarly. To pursue it, I draw on WEC instantiations at three different institutions—focusing on history as a kind of prototype—in order to demonstrate that an analysis of inter-institutional disciplinary WEC materials can articulate disciplinary discourses, defined as practices, texts, and values. This project thus has as a premise that WEC materials, in addition to their curricular and pedagogical value, have epistemological value; that is, they make visible disciplinary writing values, practices, and genres as expressed by faculty in those disciplines, and in so doing, they illuminate defining features of writing in specific disciplines. Of course, one challenge in this project is to navigate between what seem to be more general insights from the data and the particulars that are the product of specific departments with all their idiosyncratic ways of working with student writing. Still, given the shared philosophy supporting the WEC-discipline/departmentally oriented approach engaging faculty in articulating questions, genres, and kinds of evidence, it's reasonable to think that patterns will obtain. Moreover, through reflecting upon such patterns, assuming they do exist, we can speak more authoritatively about the nature and defining characteristics of a given discipline, in this case the discipline of history. Not least, in taking up this question, this chapter also outlines a more general process, available for use for other disciplines, of engaging in a comparative reflective review of inter-institutional departmental materials developed with a common goal of articulating writing for the same discipline. Taken together,

such portraits of disciplinary writing can begin mapping the world of disparate disciplinary writing genres, practices, and values.

To take up this mapping task as a kind of proof of concept, I focus here on definitions of writing in the discipline of history as developed at three institutions, each with a WEC focus, but each working with somewhat different materials and taking different points of departure and rhetorical stances. Although the three departments whose work I am drawing on here are in somewhat different stages of activity, they have all taken up the same kinds of questions and have articulated historical writing curricula in response, and as the analysis shows, the three curricula express a common set of values. I begin with the Appalachian State WEC program, what I call a “coordinated translation model” program, whose primary goal is to inform students more broadly about disciplinary discourses in the context of all the campus disciplines.<sup>3</sup> I then turn to the North Carolina State University WEC program, which addresses disciplinary discourse through the lens of outcomes as it focuses on writing in the history major. With these two programs as context, I then consider the University of Minnesota WEC program, which takes up disciplinary writing with a somewhat wider lens, including disciplinary writing as it is made available for students in both general education and the major. I conclude by reviewing what this analysis tells us about writing in history specifically as well as about what this kind of analysis can tell us about the contribution of WEC to our knowledge of disciplinary writing more generally.

## **APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY: A COORDINATED TRANSLATION MODEL**

The WEC program at Appalachian State University is a comprehensive program that intends to bring together multiple contexts for writing; it coordinates among those contexts, and it seeks to translate the writing in one context to others. In that sense, it is transcontextual and broadly so. Contexts include community colleges where students who will later transfer to Appalachian State first learn about college writing; the general education college composition program context, which includes a sophomore-level WAC-oriented class; and disciplinary contexts where students complete two writing in the disciplines (WID) courses at the junior and capstone levels. Taken together, these contexts are both horizontal, including general education and community colleges, and vertical,

<sup>3</sup> The Appalachian State writing across the curriculum (WAC) program, although less elaborated than either the North Carolina State University or University of Minnesota WEC programs, is WEC-like in its attention to the identifying features of specific disciplines as articulated in conversations with the disciplinary faculty; its commitment is thus also to articulation of disciplinary writing by members of the disciplines themselves.

oriented to students' progression through and culmination of their academic majors. Interestingly, the sophomore-level course, which was created in 2009, is in some ways the lynchpin of the program since it provides the interface between general education writing and WID:

The Intro to WAC course was conceived as an intersection course requiring knowledge of writing situations in the disciplines and anticipating future academic writing assignments, a natural site for continuing conversation between Composition and WID faculty. For example, a common assignment asks students to write about writing in their majors in a social studies report format using APA documentation, interviewing a student, a professor, and another professional in the discipline about writing. The cooperation of WID professors is key to the success of this assignment, and Composition faculty are allowed to gain increasing knowledge about other disciplines through their work on student projects. (Bohr & Rhodes, 2014, p. 3)

In addition, the leaders of the program, in a coordinating role, host conversations among various faculty throughout the year, deliberately bringing together composition faculty and WID faculty to talk with each other so that they might enhance their own teaching, of course, but also to contribute to three related efforts: translating what they do for a larger audience of students; building a coherent vertical writing curriculum; and contributing to a campus-wide culture of writing.

To help facilitate this coordinated approach, the WAC leaders have created what they have called "The Glossary Project," which as its title suggests, is a compilation of writing terms representing campus writing efforts. It is useful for composition faculty, allowing them "to anticipate writing tasks for students in the disciplines" while also "encourag[ing] WID faculty to refer to basic, familiar terms in new writing contexts" (Bohr & Rhodes, 2014, p. 1). The *Glossary*, created by WEC leader Dennis Bohr in consultation with disciplinary faculty, benefiting from cross-contextual campus conversations, functions as a boundary object seeking to translate into both composition and WEC disciplinary contexts. In addition, the *Glossary's* common language, as the website explains, can contribute to students' transfer of writing knowledge and practice:

The WAC program holds regular conversations with Writing in the Discipline teachers through its WID consultant program, workshops, class visits, and consultations, both to enrich the English 2001 Intro to WAC course with information about writing in the disciplines and to encourage WID faculty to

build on writing experiences students have had in Composition. These conversations help us to build a *common vocabulary* for writing pedagogy that strengthens the unified writing curriculum and encourages transfer of skills and genre knowledge. Therefore, in order to facilitate conversations about writing and to have a common vocabulary when we talk about writing, we have created the *WAC Glossary of Terms*. (WAC Program, Appalachian State University, *WAC Glossary of Terms*, 2021, p.1)

The *Glossary* includes eight categories of terms, among them WID terms, writing process terms, and terms related to writing assignments. In addition, the *Glossary* links to two student-oriented projects designed both to inform students about disciplinary writing generally and to introduce them to field-specific terms. The first of these projects is “Who Writes What: A Look at Writing in Your Discipline,” a website listing genres and rhetorical strategies for different fields as those have been identified by disciplinary faculty. As the image in Figure 3.1 suggests, each genre is potentially available to all fields, but the display, in the context of the full university, shows how such genres and strategies vary *across* disciplines. For example, a student can see that analysis is valued by all the disciplines on campus; that case studies are included in many fields, though not in film or geology; and that briefs are used by a very few fields.

In addition, by cross-referencing this list with the *Glossary*, students can see how even a universally valued rhetorical strategy like analysis in fact refers to very different kinds of materials and procedures. As the *Glossary* explains, in business, “analysis is a systematic examination and evaluation of data or information, by breaking it into its component parts to discover interrelationships, the opposite of synthesis”; in linguistics, “analysis is the use of separate, short words and word order rather than inflection to express grammatical structure”; in literary studies, analysis “examines the elements of a novel, play, short story, or poem (such as character, setting, tone, theme, imagery), what the author wishes to achieve using those elements, and how well he/she does it”; and in mathematics, “analysis is concerned with the theory of functions and the use of limits, continuity, and the operations of calculus. Analysis is a proof of a mathematical proposition by assuming the result and deducing a valid statement by a series of reversible steps” (WAC Program, Appalachian State University, *WAC Glossary of Terms*, 2021, pp.2-3). What is apparent here, then, is that while analysis may be a strategy all fields employ, what analysis *means* in terms of materials and processes differs rather radically across disciplines, from ascertaining the intention of a literary author to mathematics’ “use of limits, continuity and the operation of calculus” (WAC Program, Appalachian State University, *WAC Glossary of Terms*, 2021, p.3).

**Who Writes What:  
A Look at Writing  
in Your Discipline**

(Majors A-Da)

Produced by  
Writing Across the  
Curriculum  
*wac.appstate.edu*

	Advertising	Agribusiness	Anthropology	Apparel Design	Appalachian Studies	Art	Automotive Studies	Broadcast Journalism	Building Science	Business	Chemistry	Commercial Photography	Communication Sciences & Disorders	Communication Studies	Computer Science	Creative Writing	Criminal Justice	Culinary Arts	Dance
Analysis	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Annotated Bib/Lit Review											X		X	X					
Argument	X		X		X	X							X	X		X	X		X
Briefs	X						X					X					X	X	
Brochures/Newsletters	X			X		X												X	
Case Studies			X		X						X		X	X			X		
Digital Pres. (e.g. PowerPoint/Prezi)								X		X		X							
Essays			X		X	X							X	X		X	X		X
Journals	X		X		X	X					X					X	X		X
Lesson Plans/IEPs													X	X	X				
Memos/Emails				X			X		X	X		X					X	X	
Narratives					X											X			
Personal Responses	X				X	X	X					X			X				X
Portfolios					X	X				X		X		X		X			
Presentations		X	X		X	X		X	X	X			X		X		X		X
Press Releases				X		X		X	X			X		X				X	

Figure 3.1. A portion of Appalachian State's genres by majors.

The second student-oriented project tapping WID faculty expertise is a set of “Writing About” Guidelines; each set of guidelines provides a quick synopsis of writing in a field, with fields ranging from advertising and agribusiness to religious studies and sociology. Each guide includes six sections functioning as a portal for all the fields: Purpose and Audience; Types (or Genres) of Writing; Types of Evidence; Conventions, which tend to be practices other than documentation; Terms; and Documentation Style. The “Writing About History Guideline,” which follows this same format, outlines the contours of historical writing at Appalachian State, its primary purpose to translate them for students’ use.

In the first category, General Purpose and Audience, the focus is on what historians do and who their audiences are. As the “Guideline” says,

Historians analyze data to develop theories about past events, ideas, experiences, or movements; to explain why or how something happened; and to place events in larger contexts. They are expected to use both primary and secondary sources, to do thorough, authoritative research, and to make a clear and con-

cise argument in the correct format. Audiences include peers, teachers, students, and the general public<sup>4</sup>. (WAC Program, Appalachian State University, *Writing about History*, 2019, p.1)

As to genres, the “Guideline” identifies four—critical essays, book reviews, research papers, and historiographic essays, this last defined as a genre focusing on how history is written and including an examination of “assumptions, biases contexts, or methods of other historians” (WAC Program, Appalachian State University, *Writing about History*, p.1). The genres of writing as represented in the “Guide” are thus more specifically disciplinary than those cited in the “Who Writes What” list, which for history includes analysis, annotated bib/lit review, argument, essays, presentations, portfolios, proposals, reports/lab reports, research, and reviews/evaluations. The difference between these two accounts of historical writing seems located in identity. The “Guideline” lists genres specific to history like historiographic essays, which the faculty themselves might compose, while the “Who Writes What” lists includes genres—like portfolios—that history faculty are unlikely to write themselves, but that they may assign to students.

As to types of evidence valued in history, a distinction is made between primary sources, defined as “material from the period being studied,” including government documents, public records, diaries, and maps, and secondary sources, defined as “material that analyzes, synthesizes, or evaluates an event,” including books and articles (WAC Program, Appalachian State University, *Writing about History*, 2019, p.1). At the same time, the “Guide” also helpfully observes that the source types are ambiguous and that sources can be primary, secondary, or both:

Some sources, such as newspapers and magazines, can be both primary *and* secondary sources. For example, if a historian were writing about the war in Iraq, she could use a newspaper article from that period as a primary source by citing it as an example of how journalists write about the war. But if she supported her paper’s argument by referring to the author of that same article as an authority on the war, she would be using the

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4 It’s worth noting that this guideline is aligned almost perfectly with the history department’s description of historical method: “At the heart of history is historical method. History involves locating, evaluating and using evidence to reconstruct and understand the past. It entails asking useful questions and being critical of the evidence found—are the sources genuine and, even if they are, is the information valid? Honest answers can still be wrong. Once the credibility of evidence is determined, information must be organized into a larger whole that can be clearly communicated.” See <https://history.appstate.edu/students> (Department of History, 2019).

newspaper as a secondary source. (WAC Program, Appalachian State University, *Writing about History*, p.1)

And as not-quite an afterthought, the significance of peer review relative to certain kinds of materials is stipulated: “*In general, newspapers and magazines don’t make good secondary sources because they are not peer-reviewed*” (WAC Program, Appalachian State University, *Writing about History*, 2019, p.1).

What we learn about writing in history here from the interlocking efforts at Appalachian State—the *Glossary Project*, the Who Writes What account, and “Writing Guide to History”—includes the genres defining history as identified by faculty—critical essays, book reviews, research papers, and historiographic essays—and the two kinds of sources that historians draw on, primary and secondary. Because the materials are intended for students, more explanation is included than might otherwise be expected, for example about different kinds of analysis in different disciplines and about the ways that a primary source in history can also be drawn on as a secondary source. Put more generally, in this account of writing in history, sourcing, and primary and secondary sources in particular, are definitive of history. In addition, again because of the explanatory intent of the Appalachian State approach, we also learn about the writing that students do *in* history; such writing goes beyond historical writing to include a larger range of genres, including portfolios and presentations, that students compose in.

## **NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY: AN OUTCOMES-ORIENTED MODEL IN THE MAJOR**

The North Carolina State University WEC program is located in a larger Communication across the Curriculum (CAC) program and includes both speaking and writing. The origin of this CAC program, occurring in the late 1990s, was quite different from that of Appalachian State: rather than conceive of a horizontal and vertical WAC program, NC State came to a university CAC program through outcomes-based assessment, specifically by implementing a university requirement that all departments create outcomes for their majors, which would also provide the foundation for assessment activities. Key to this approach, then, was department outcomes-based assessment, which, as Michael Carter explains in “A Process for Establishing Outcomes-Based Assessment Plans for Writing and Speaking in the Disciplines,”

typically seeks answers to three questions: (1) What are the outcomes—skills, knowledge, and other attributes—that

graduates of the program should attain? (2) To what extent is the program enabling its graduates to attain the outcomes? and (3) How can faculty use what they learn from program assessment to improve their programs so as to better enable graduates to attain the outcomes? (Carter, 2003, p. 6)

Writing and speaking, which were included in the outcomes-based assessment activities for all departments, were supported by a new Campus Writing and Speaking Program (CWSP), whose mission was to “provide guidance to departments for assessment and . . . offer faculty and course development related to writing and speaking” (Carter, 2003, p.7). Working with departments over a five-year period to “generate writing and speaking outcomes and procedures for evaluating those outcomes,” the CWSP later also “provided additional support for faculty through an extensive program of faculty development workshops, seminars, and grants” (Carter, 2003, p. 7).

In history, the departmental outcomes were presented in a two-part format: the Program Objectives provided context for the Program Outcomes, which included three categories: (1) Historical Awareness, Perspective, and Understanding; (2) Historical Research Skills; and (3) Historical Expression. As the categories suggest, the outcomes are discipline-specific, a defining feature responding directly to the kinds of questions, largely about the uniqueness of the discipline, that faculty were generally asked to consider in creating outcomes:

Imagine an ideal graduate from your program. What kinds of skills, knowledge, or other attributes characterize that graduate? What is it that attracts students to this program? What value does this program offer a student? How do you know whether your students possess the kinds of abilities, knowledge, skills, and attributes you expect of them? What kinds of assignments or other activities do people in this program use to encourage the kinds of abilities, knowledge, and skills you have identified? What is it that distinguishes this program from related programs in the university? Is there anything about your program that makes it stand out from other similar programs? . . . What sorts of speaking and writing do professionals in this field do on the job? What sorts of speaking and writing do students do in their classes? Are there any particular types of communication that people this field are expected to master? (Carter, 2003, p. 15)

Using such questions as a heuristic, faculty in history, like their colleagues in

other departments, completed four steps culminating in a review and plan for improvement:

- (1) determine writing and speaking outcomes for its majors,
- (2) create plans for assessing those outcomes, (3) implement those assessment plans, and (4) report its assessment findings to the Council on Undergraduate Education periodically and show how those findings have led to the improvement of students' writing and speaking through changes in courses or curricula. (Anson et al., 2003, p. 29)

As important, the materials collected and methods employed for assessment purposes were diverse and rich, among them surveys of faculty, surveys of students' research skills, senior exit interviews, and portfolios of student writing.

Given the NC State WEC program's emphasis on assessable disciplinary departmental outcomes, it's probably not surprising that the objectives and outcomes for history are specifically historical and targeted to the major. The Program Objectives speak to both the student-as-major and to the department's role in contributing to the development of the student-as-major, specifically constructing this student as someone who has developed "historical awareness, perspective, and understanding"; the department's role in this model is to help majors apply "sound historical research skills" (History Department, 2001, p.1) so as to critique others' arguments and create historical arguments themselves. Here, then, the analysis in history emphasized by Appalachian State is part of a larger interest in historical argument.

The commitment to historical sources expressed by Appalachian State, however, is also one shared by NC State, in the latter case focusing quite specifically on activities writers conduct *with* sources in order to make historical knowledge. Under the heading of Historical Awareness, Perspective, and Understanding, the role of knowledge and understanding is emphasized, with graduates expected to explain the historical development of events, institutions, and social values in western and non-western cultures and to identify "historical continuities and discontinuities." Understanding is also important for Historical Research Skills, the second outcomes category, which identifies writing activities history majors will undertake:

Graduates of the history program should understand the nature of historical interpretation, the variety of historical sources, and the structure of historical argument and be able to apply that understanding to answering historical questions. Specifically, graduates should demonstrate that they can:

- a. pose a significant research question about history
- b. locate relevant primary and secondary sources for investigating a research question
- c. critically evaluate primary and secondary sources in terms of credibility, authenticity, interpretive stance, audience, potential biases, and value for answering the research question
- d. interpret the sources fairly and accurately in an answer to a research question
- e. marshal the evidence from the research to support a historical argument for an answer to a research question (History Department, 2001, p. 1)

This statement about writing in history links the *significant research question about history* to *evidence*—identified here as *primary and secondary sources*—that can be *marshaled to support a historical argument for an answer to a research question*. These sources, referred to in three of the five practices, are the key materials of the research process oriented to, and culminating in, answering a significant historical question. As important, the sources need to be worked with: both *evaluated*—in terms of *credibility, authenticity, interpretive stance, audience, potential biases, and value for answering the research question*—and *interpreted* so as to *answer* a research question *accurately and fairly*. Put more generally, sourcing is important, but as important is what a student of history, as student or faculty, *does with* the sources, especially in the context of answering a significant question. Likewise, under Historical Expression, the third outcome, students are identified as “informed and critical consumers and producers of history” able to work with sources—their “quality,” “the validity of the interpretations of those sources, and the soundness of the argument’s use of evidence to support a historical interpretation” (History Department, 2001, p.2). In terms of genres, much like students at Appalachian State, students at North Carolina State write in genres specific to history like “the critical book review” and the “historical narrative based on sources” (History Department, 2001, p.2) as well as in more generalized classroom-texts like a summary of readings.

The history department at North Carolina State University thus expresses values closely aligned with those of Appalachian State University’s history department, especially regarding sources: for both history departments, sources are critical for writing in history. It’s worth noting as well that in developing his meta-genres approach to disciplinary discourse based on the WEC activity at NC State as published in a Braddock Award-winning CCC article, Michael Carter drew on histo-

ry's commitment to sources precisely to illustrate one meta-genre, what he called "Responses to Academic Situations that Call for Research from Sources":

The two primary distinguishing characteristics of this meta-genre are (1) the kind of research that is done, that is, not based on data gathered from independent observations but largely on sources that have their origins elsewhere; and (2) the goal of the research, which typically does not have extrinsic value, such as solving practical problems or investigating hypotheses, but value that is intrinsic to the discipline . . . . (Carter, 2007, p. 398)

In addition, the NC State History Department identifies and underscores how sources, through critical examination and evaluation, contribute to the making of knowledge in historical arguments. In other words, in more fully defining the role of sources in history-making, the NC State history program approach echoes and adds to the approach articulated by historians at Appalachian State University.

## **UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA: A DEPARTMENTALLY ORIENTED MODEL OF GENERAL EDUCATION AND DISCIPLINARY WRITING**

The point of departure for the University of Minnesota writing enriched curriculum (WEC) was different yet again: an earlier writing intensive program that wasn't thriving. According to WEC Director Pamela Flash, focus groups with faculty, conducted over several years, pointed to many problems with the writing intensive program, among them that faculty resisted incorporating writing into their classes, that their definitions of writing and the teaching of writing were surprisingly narrow, and that the approach to the teaching of writing, even within the same department, was disorganized and chaotic. In this context, effective writing was defined as "clear writing," and because student ability was perceived as declining, writing instruction was defined as remedial, emphasizing "clear structures" and reducing time available for "content." In addition,

[s]ympathy was offered to those recruited to teach the writing intensive courses, and resistance was aimed at the bureaucratic procedures required to certify them, but little consideration was given to developing alternative methods for ensuring that students graduated as able writers. Faculty members within departments had not identified harmonious or divergent writ-

ing values or outcomes they expected students in their majors to be able to demonstrate by the time they graduated and had only the sketchiest of ideas about who was requiring what in which course down the corridor. (Flash, 2016, p. 232)

As a remedy, Flash, in developing the subsequent WEC model of WAC, “changed points of contact,” focusing not on instructional practices as the earlier program had, but rather on “faculty conceptions of writing and writing instruction. These become the *trigger points for change* rather than the inevitable and ignorable *reactions to change*” (Flash, 2016, p. 232). Operationalized, the trigger points are departmentally focused, year-long reflective discussions about disciplinary writing—what its questions, evidence, and genres are—informed by multiple kinds of data documenting departmental writing efforts and perceptions of those efforts, including “meeting summaries, survey data, curricular maps, and writing samples.” By the conclusion of the year-long investigation, departments create “First-Edition Writing Plans” articulating outcomes and expectations for their courses, both general education courses, much like Appalachian State University, and courses in the major, like both Appalachian State and North Carolina State University.

Like other units at the University of Minnesota, the history department has developed writing plans iteratively.<sup>5</sup> An early adopter of the WEC model, the department created its first plan in 2007–2008; a second plan in 2009; and as a consequence of several factors including declining funding, declining majors, and instructive assessment data, a third plan in 2014. In the 2014 plan, the department also commented on the changes between the first and third plans; in the third plan, for instance, the outcomes for general education history courses as compared to expectations for upper-level courses for the major are more clearly delineated. At both levels, as the 2014 writing plan notes, “Doing history means writing history,” but both writing practices and genres also vary across this vertical curriculum.

The history department offers a “flexible” curriculum, with considerable opportunity for students to elect their courses, with each course helping “all students in history courses become well-informed and thoughtful about historical knowledge, familiar with at least the basic processes by which historical knowledge is produced, and practiced in the multiple functions of writing involved in that production” (Writing-Enriched Curriculum Program, University of Minnesota: History Writing Plan, 2019, p. 3). Interestingly, then, both historical writing processes and the functions of writing are emphasized, and much as

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5 After a year of implementation, writing plans are revised and include proposed next-step activities. Second edition plans, implemented for two years, are followed by third-edition plans and so on.

at both Appalachian State University and North Carolina State University, the genres these students will write in include school genres as well as those specific to history: “Virtually all History courses require students to write in genres ranging from informal in-class ‘free writes,’ blog entries and short response papers to substantial scholarly essays based on original research” (Writing-Enriched Curriculum Program, University of Minnesota: History Writing Plan, 2019, p. 5).

The writing curriculum in history is divided into four parts: 1000-level Foundation courses; 3000-level Foundation courses; 3000-level lecture courses; and the senior research seminars. The Foundation courses are four-credit writing-intensive courses with lab or discussion sessions attached, their purpose to “combine the delivery of historical content with small group activities that expose students to the fundamentals of working as practicing historians, thereby serving as introductory courses for non-majors as well as courses that prepare majors” (Writing-Enriched Curriculum Program, University of Minnesota: History Writing Plan, 2019, p. 5). The 1000-level Foundations courses include six outcomes, two of which are conceptual—“Introduction to the concept of historical interpretation and scholarly argumentation” and “Distinction between appropriate reference to scholarship and plagiarism; concept of scholarly citation concepts and practices”; one of which is genre-oriented—“Short response papers and/or analytic essays that make an argument”; and three of which are process-oriented—“Analysis of primary sources,” “Development of a thesis statement,” and “Revision in response to feedback.” (Writing-Enriched Curriculum Program, University of Minnesota: History Writing Plan, 2019, p. 7).

In this early-in-college model of historical writing, then, there is a mix of general and historical writing activity, much as at Appalachian State University and North Carolina State University: both majors and non-majors, for example, compose texts that are oriented to writing to learn, like fairly generic “response papers,” and as part of engaging in writing processes, they revise. At the same time, however, students also begin writing as historians; in composing texts including historical interpretation and scholarly argumentation, students rely on and analyze primary sources. The University of Minnesota history outcomes for the first year, then, combine the analysis of Appalachian State with the argument of North Carolina State, but they differ from Appalachian State in their exclusive focus on primary sources.

The 3000-level Foundations and 3000-level writing intensive lecture courses share the same outcomes; when those are compared to outcomes for the 1000-level Foundations courses, the beginnings of a more sophisticated notion of historical writing, even for non-majors, appears. Seven outcomes are included, some of them repetitions of the 1000-level Foundations outcomes (e.g., revision; plagiarism), others new. For example, historical interpretation is included,

as is the “Concept of historiography”; and the “Distinction between primary and secondary sources” is added to “Analysis of a primary source.” Generally, the shifts in this set of outcomes, however, seem more conceptual (e.g., concept of historiography) than practice-oriented, in effect helping students *see* how history is written rather than asking them to write it themselves.

That changes with the 4000-level research seminars designed for the major. Based both on faculty experiences teaching the course and on assessment data, the history department designed a new 4000-level research seminar to replace the earlier two-semester 3000–4000 level sequence, which they also had trouble staffing and which produced assessment results that concerned them.

The outcome of this review was the determination that the Hist 3959–Hist 4961 sequence fell short of our desired outcomes for student writing in several critical respects. In particular, the results suggested that students had problems with formulating their research question clearly, with building an argument based on multiple primary sources, and with critical engagement of the sources. (Writing-Enriched Curriculum Program, University of Minnesota: History Writing Plan, 2019, p. 10)

Eleven outcomes govern the new research seminars, six of which differ from the earlier outcomes. Some of them, like “Concept of historical interpretation, including the complexity of an author’s standpoint and what can be at stake when writing history” and “Concept of evidence-based argumentation, including the varied uses of sources and the relationship between object and context in the writing of history,” are more disciplinary-specific elaborations of earlier outcomes. Especially interesting here is “what can be at stake when writing history,” signaling that the writing of history has consequences, and “the varied use of sources,” indicating that while distinctions between primary and secondary sources are important, making an argument requires “varied [source] use.” Other new outcomes stipulate historical writing processes oriented to the making of historical knowledge:

- Formulation of historical research questions that are feasible, and meaningful identification of appropriate primary and secondary sources
- Synthetic review of historical scholarship on an aspect of the seminar topic, such as an article, chapter or book summary that assesses the argument and use of evidence
- Development and writing of a historical research proposal, including a synthetic literature review, a research plan, and an annotated bibliography

- Research paper (20-30 pp.) on an issue relating to seminar topic and utilizing both primary and secondary sources

The research question here takes center stage; to write like historians, students must identify a *feasible* project that can be developed through the use of *meaningful* primary and secondary sources. Critical to the success of such writing for the University of Minnesota is working with “multiple primary sources”; indeed, the work with sources is so important that it focuses two of the four new outcomes. More generally, what this set of outcomes does, in terms of defining historical writing, is to qualify it yet again: historical projects must be *feasible*, their sources *multiple* and *meaningful*.

What successful writing in history requires, as documented across all three WEC history departments, can be defined: its critical, fundamental practice is sourcing, and the issues accompanying it. How sourcing plays out—when primary and secondary sources are introduced, for instance, as well as what practices, such as establishing credibility, sources should be subjected to—differs some across these programs, as we have seen. Both primary and secondary sources are incorporated early in a student’s career at Appalachian State and North Carolina State, the purpose at North Carolina State University and the University of Minnesota to make a historical argument. In this sense, the WEC approach as engaged in by faculty in history highlights not what characterizes all college writing,<sup>6</sup> but rather what characterizes writing in history—sources, work with sources, and use of sources for historical argument. Also critical to success in historical writing is “formulating . . . a research question clearly” (Writing-Enriched Curriculum Program, University of Minnesota: History Writing Plan, 2019, p. 10), as identified by North Carolina State and as more clearly specified by the University of Minnesota. Historical writing, as defined by these three WEC programs, thus takes up well designed feasible research questions (UMN), relies on sophisticated analysis (Appalachian State), and makes varied use (UMN) of both primary and secondary sources (all), in order to make knowledge (UMN) typically developed through an argument (North Carolina State; UMN).

## CONCLUSION

Sam Wineberg, a scholar who has studied the way history is taught in high schools and colleges, identifies what he claims are the three primary research practices contributing to the making of history. Historians, he says, call on many

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6 Although some historians, at least, believe that their approach to evidence has implications for the critical thinking of all college students: see Flaherty and Wineberg, et al.

strategies: chief among them are sourcing, contextualizing and corroborating historical information. In this chapter and drawing from Wineberg's definition, *context* for how historians in WEC programs have identified disciplinary writing features has been provided and *sources* for this interpretation cited. Continuing to think as historians, we could ask, what *corroboration* regarding the definition of historical writing provided by these three WEC programs, especially with their emphasis on sourcing as defining practice, might be available?

One source of corroboration, in fact, might be the continuing research conducted by Wineberg himself, although his primary focus targets less the writing in history, more the ways history should be taught. Looking elsewhere, we might consult organizations representing scholars in history like the American Historical Association (AHA), whose purpose is to serve as "a trusted voice advocating for history education, the professional work of historians, and the critical role of historical thinking in public life" (AHA Website). Recently, the AHA has expressed official concern about a practice important to historians, students' critical thinking skills, especially in response to some evidence indicating that history courses are not enhancing such skills.<sup>7</sup> In an effort to remedy this situation, the 2019 annual AHA conference highlighted several panels focused on the distinguishing features of history-making as a kind of critical thinking. In the context of the WEC discussion here, one panel in particular stands out for its corroboration of the WEC-generated conclusions about writing in history.<sup>8</sup> That session, "What Are We Learning? Innovative Assessments and Student Learning in College-Level History Classes," included two presentations relevant to writing in history, "I Got It!': Primary Source Analysis and Formative Assessment in an Introductory-Level Classroom" and "Sourcing Is Damn Hard to Learn." As their titles suggest, these talks directly refer to the role of sourcing in history: what their authors say about history and the making of history aligns with the claims made about history by the WEC programs documented above.

One panelist, Augustana College professor Lendol Calder, who believes that sourcing is sufficiently important that it serves as one of history's threshold concepts, conducted a study of student sourcing with results he described as "disappointing": "In general . . . students either take any historical source at face value or—when they discover it was created by a human being—dismiss it outright as 'biased'" (quoted in Flaherty. NP). To address this concern, he and his colleagues in the history department at Augustana discuss historical sourcing in "every single class." In addition, they have created something of a campaign around histo-

7 Much like perceptions of writing, which some see as universalized, perceptions of critical thinking can take similar form.

8 The information reported here on the AHA panels is synthesized from a story on the conference in *Inside Higher Ed*. See Flaherty (2019).

ry-making, captured in the acronym LASER: “Love history, Acquire and analyze information, Solve difficult problems, Envision new explanations, and Reveal what you know.” Panelist Catherine Denial, Bright Professor of American History at Knox College, agreed, arguing that the “invisible processes at work in learning history,” including observation and careful analysis of primary source materials, need to be taught. To support students in this endeavor, she too has created a scaffolding tool, in her case “a primary source analysis template” called SOCC, which “asks students to examine a primary-source document for sourcing (its origins), to observe it, to contextualize it based on existing knowledge and draw hypotheses about its meaning, and to corroborate it with other primary and secondary materials and test their hypotheses.” Denial emphasizes primary-source analysis because, as she says, “students who engage in primary-source analysis get to become historians, piecing together the past for themselves. It’s tremendously empowering and gives them a new perspective on secondary sources, as well as setting them up for the research they’ll do in higher-level courses.”

Admittedly, the claims presented at this AHA panel address history-making, not history writing per se, but writing in history, as defined in the WEC programs profiled here, is a practice of history-making that history writing articulates and represents: history making is part and parcel of history writing. Moreover, for the WEC faculty at three institutions described here, history writing, as it is for their colleagues at AHA, *is* sourcing; a practice of working with primary and secondary sources to make historical arguments. Such sources, furthermore, provide the centerpiece for research questions framing historical arguments. The delineation of historical thinking at the three institutions profiled here, then, aligns with that presented at AHA: to write in history, one begins with and follows the sources.

As important, numerous WEC documents—among them, Writing Guides at Appalachian State University; outcome statements at, and scholarly reports emerging from, North Carolina State University; and successive writing plans at the University of Minnesota—build from the epistemology of history to articulate what successful writing in that discipline requires.

Motivated to support student writers in the field of history and supported themselves by WEC facilitators, faculty focus on what makes writing in history work, on what genres define history, on what practices historical writers engage in, and on how those practices can be scaffolded such that students write with greater nuance and sophistication. As a rhetorical strategy, argument is a centerpiece; the materials it relies on are always and already multiple—multiple sources and multiple kinds of sources that are rich, authentic, contextualized, evaluated, and interpreted. Thus, while the WEC documents expressing these practices were designed for other purposes, chiefly curricular and pedagogical,

they nonetheless encapsulate the foundational principles, logic, and features of history's writing.

This chapter has explored and named the principles and features of writing in history by reading the discipline's writing practices and values as represented in different institutions hosting WEC; based on this reflective analysis, we can confidently make claims about writing in history. But this approach isn't limited to history, of course: by applying this approach to other disciplines, we can identify their principles and features as well. Put another way, as WEC leaders engage disciplinary faculty in articulating the writing in their fields for curricular purposes, they also create documents—among them, writing guides, outcomes statements, transcripts of conversations, assessment reports, and writing plans—collectively identifying and defining the key features of such writing. Through engaging in a similar inter-institutional review of each of the many disciplines as represented in such WEC documents, we can create a larger, more detailed, and more comprehensive map of various kinds of disciplinary writing, one informed by the practitioners of the disciplines themselves. Such a project is valuable in two intertwined ways: first, as a Boyer-like scholarship of discovery research project, it can document, for the first time, as exemplified here, the practices and genres of disciplinary writing as articulated by faculty constituents at different campuses; and second, it provides a mechanism to design disciplinary writing curricula and pedagogy that is important to all of us—WEC programs; faculty; students; and higher education writ large—who care about student writing.

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