



# Crossing Academic Territorial Borders: writing skill development in a cultural studies program in an EFL environment

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# ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL)

- ❖ Non-native speakers of English are estimated to currently outnumber native speakers of English by three to one (Crystal, 2003).
- ❖ Estimates of how many people speak English, including second language speakers, vary from 470 million to over a billion depending on how literacy or mastery is defined and measured. (<http://exploredia.com/how-many-people-in-the-world-speak-english-2013/#t86CxBufeFW6HQOV.99>)
- ❖ Because of globalization and internationalization of higher education, English medium-universities and programs offered in the English language have significantly increased worldwide (Coleman, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2011).

Mediterranean  
Sea

Tripoli

Biblos

LEBANON

Beirut

Sidon

Tyre

SYRIA

ISRAEL

Golan  
Heights

UNDOF  
Zone







# GENERAL INFORMATION

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- ❖ 2 university required English courses run by the English department (remedial courses are offered to get students up to the level of the required courses if needed.)
- ❖ English Language Center started in 2008 considered an “English” resource and has yet to evolve into a Writing Center
- ❖ No academic provost; council of deans runs the university.





Nicolas, M.O. & Annous, S. (2013). Assessing WAC elements in business syllabi, *Business Communication Quarterly*, 76, 172-187.

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- ❖ Written communicative competence is absent in the ILOs of the 30 courses.
- ❖ The formal assessment of writing is minimal in most of the courses.
- ❖ Writing is only formally incorporated in 30% of the courses.
- ❖ When writing is required, page requirements are unknown and the required writing genre is generally unidentified and process writing is absent (no opportunity for drafting, revising, and editing).



Nicolas, M.O. & Annous, S. (2013). Assessing WAC elements in business syllabi, *Business Communication Quarterly*, 76, 172-187.

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- ❖ FOB instructors are unaware of the potential of writing as a learning strategy
- ❖ FOB instructors' lack awareness of their responsibility to train students in the writing conventions of their discipline including author stance and audience perspective.



Annous, S. & Nicolas, M.O. (2015). Academic Territorial Borders: A Look at the Writing Ethos in Business Courses in an Environment in which English is a Foreign Language ,*Journal of Business and Technical Communication*

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- ❖ These teachers ultimately do not believe it is their job to teach or focus on language acquisition in any of the language skills;
- ❖ This Faculty of Business relies on a heavy use of L1 (Arabic);
- ❖ The teaching methodology and assessment employed in this college is not conducive to including writing in the discipline tasks
- ❖ The teachers in this college place top priority on subject content
- ❖ This university appears not to be a cohesive camp with all disciplines and colleges working for a common end product which includes very competent communicators in English.





Nicolas, M.O. & Annous, S. (in process). *Crossing Academic Territorial Borders: writing skill development in a cultural studies program in an EFL environment*

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- ❖ 1. The methodology of these courses does not promote skill/literacy enhancement in English, explicitly or implicitly.
- ❖ 2. Neither students nor teachers believe these courses serve to nurture English language skills
- ❖ 3. Students either fail to understand the importance of reading for the development of their communicative skill or the readings do not lend themselves to this function due to their level of difficulty

**1. The methodology of the cultural studies courses does not promote skill/literacy enhancement, explicitly or implicitly.**

*'Inconsistent and ineffective group work'*

*'lack of research designed activities'*

*'use of L1 in class'*

*'uneven or ineffectual feedback given to students'*



# **THEME: INCONSISTENT AND INEFFECTIVE GROUP WORK**

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- ❖ *“In small groups they could take the discussion anywhere. I want the discussion to be purposeful.” P3*
- ❖ *Rarely use group work because there is a lot of material to cover – lecture and class discussion P1*
- ❖ *No group work-sometimes discussion but not always. P4*
- ❖ *All lecture and discussion. P5*
- ❖ *What happens in class depends on the “doctor” if there is group work or lecture. FG*



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*'lack of research designed activities'*

*'use of L1 in class'*

*'uneven or ineffectual feedback given to students'*

# **THEME: UNEVEN OR INEFFECTUAL FEEDBACK GIVEN**

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- ❖ *I tried to do what the teacher wanted me to on the next exam but I got the same grade. FG*
- ❖ *We don't know how grades are arrived at and how we can improve FG*
- ❖ *Some professors just want length so you can write a recipe in the middle of your answer and they'll never know since they don't read closely anyway FG*
- ❖ *Instructors are interested in content; how much we know. They should ask us direct questions and we give direct answers (not require essay answers on exams) FG*

**CONTINUED ON NEXT SLIDE**

# ***THEME: UNEVEN OR INEFFECTUAL FEEDBACK GIVEN***

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- ❖ I give feedback on speech and writing P2*
- ❖ I offer feedback on short assignments and presentations P3*
- ❖ Why do I have to worry about their English skills?  
Do I have to become an English teacher? P1*
- ❖ I will underline language errors P4*
- ❖ I have a reputation for pointing out mistakes P5*
- ❖ I give group feedback after the first exam and then  
I mark the language pretty extensively P7*



**2. Neither students nor teachers believe these courses serve to nurture English language skills.**

*'instructor's academic role'*

*'Purpose of CS is not language/skill acquisition'*

*'purpose of the courses is to develop critical thinking'*

*'content courses/content coverage as the primary ILO'*



## **THEME: INSTRUCTOR'S ACADEMIC ROLE**

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- ❖ *“I am not teaching English; it’s not my purpose in these classes” P7*
- ❖ *“I will try to teach them words, but it’s not my job.[teaching students how to write]” P1*
- ❖ *“Maybe the English courses need to be tougher, English dept. needs to fail more.” P8*
- ❖ *“these are not English courses after all” FG*



## SOME RESPONDENTS FELT DIFFERENTLY ABOUT THEIR ROLE BUT NOT ENOUGH TO NEGATE THE THEME

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- ❖ “I bear some responsibility to guide these students in their language acquisition – there is a language focus in my class...” P2
- ❖ “Students are reminded of what they’ve learned in ENGL203...I draw their attention to specific language and how philosophy expresses itself, what language they should use.” P6



**2. Neither students nor teachers believe these courses serve to nurture English language skills.**

*'instructor's academic role'*

*'Purpose of CS is not language skill acquisition'*

*'purpose of the courses is to develop critical thinking'*

*'content courses/content coverage as the primary ILO'*



**THEME: CONTENT COURSES/CONTENT COVERAGE IS PRIMARY ILO ALTHOUGH PROFESSORS CLAIM DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER ORDER PROCESSES IS THE AIM.**

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- ❖ *“We are interested in educating them in opinions and ideas and history.” P7*
- ❖ *“Critical thinking is the absolute objective.” P5.*
- ❖ *“Critical thinking is an ILO and is measured by how they engage with the text.” P6*
- ❖ *‘These courses enhance our general knowledge’ FG*
- ❖ *‘Four courses are not needed to accomplish this goal’ [enhancing general knowledge] FG*

**3. Students either fail to understand the importance of reading for the development of their communicative skill or the readings do not lend themselves to this function due to their level of difficulty**

*'the texts are too difficult for the students'*

*'students generally do not read the assigned readings and/or do not understand what they've read'*

*'students rely heavily on Spark notes for comprehension'*

*This is not a reading culture*



# THEME: TEXTS ARE TOO DIFFICULT FOR THE STUDENTS

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- ❖ *“I even wonder if they understand the text we ask them to read.” P5*
- ❖ *“We should have students read less of these difficult texts and give them more interesting, short texts.” P2*
- ❖ *“The texts are very complex (philosophical) and someone like Nietzsche requires you to read between the lines and they can’t do that.” P3*
- ❖ *Some admit to not reading the assignments because they are too difficult and resort to Spark Notes. FG*
- ❖ *These are not major courses so we can’t give the readings as much time as they need. FG*

**3. Students either fail to understand the importance of reading for the development of their communicative skill or the readings do not lend themselves to this function due to their level of difficulty**

*'the texts are too difficult for the students'*

*'students generally do not read the assigned readings and/or do not understand what they've read'*

*'students rely heavily on Spark notes for comprehension'*

*'This is not a reading culture'*



# ***THEME: THIS IS NOT A READING CULTURE***

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- ❖ *“Plus, these are people who don’t read” P2*
- ❖ *“Students don’t read”. P8*
- ❖ *“Difficult to get them to read; many don’t try”  
P4*
- ❖ *We never read because it is difficult and it is not our major we only read before exams FG*



# GENERAL CONCLUSIONS FROM STAGE 3

- ❖ Academic territorial borders are strong in this program as well as the School of Business;
- ❖ The function of these university required courses and their place in every students' degree requirements is nebulous.
- ❖ These courses could be a vehicle for the nurturing of students' English language acquisition.



# A FINAL THOUGHT FROM ONE OF THE RESPONDENTS

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“Unfortunately our courses are so compact that we can’t add any other strategies to help with their English but I think all teachers have the responsibility to stress on [students’] language use. It’s every teacher’s responsibility since this university has chosen to prepare students to participate in the English speaking world.”

P5

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**CONTACT INFORMATION**

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