

TIME TO WRITE

The Newsletter of the L&S Program in Writing Across the Curriculum
University of Wisconsin-Madison

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MAKING WRITING PUBLIC: UNDERGRADUATES WRITING FOR PUBLICATION

By Rebecca Lorimer,
Writing Across the Curriculum

When pre-med undergraduate Jen Stone published an article last semester in a peer-reviewed journal, she was both thrilled and inspired: "By writing about the health care system and sharing my ideas through publication, I hope to become a better doctor myself and influence changes in culturally competent medicine." Stone had published a research paper on bilingual health pamphlets in *Xchanges*, an interdisciplinary journal in writing and communication studies.

Stone's insight—that publishing one's writing can spread ideas and affect other people—echoes a growing impetus for making undergraduate writing more public. Following what writing studies scholar Paula Mathieu calls "the public turn" in writing, writing instructors across the disciplines are encouraging their undergraduates to write for off-campus audiences through service learning projects or by publishing their work in journals or newspapers.

Mathieu says such a "move outward" can connect student writing to "real-world" texts, events, or exigencies." Given the amount of student writing labor taking place on college campuses, it only makes sense to make this work public, both for the benefit of outside communities and the student writers themselves.

Publishing as Conversation

Faculty have certainly overheard, and

sometimes identified with, the resigned chuckle of a student who identifies as "a math person, not an English person." But no matter the setting or profession, once beyond college, students will be communicating their ideas beyond themselves, in ways that matter and potentially bring about change. Pointing students toward publication is one way instructors in any discipline can preview how writing has meaning after college.



Professor Sandy Magaña,
Chicana@Latin@ Studies and
School of Social Work

As faculty know well, publication is a distinct form of public writing in that the peer review process creates a conversation around writing. Reflecting on the publication process, Stone says, "I have always found it very interesting to see how people's writing affects others, and being able to share my writing and receive their feedback was probably my favorite part." The circulation of feedback among peer reviewers, editors, and undergraduate writers gives students access to current thinking in a field and models the academic research process in which ideas are shaped through the input of collaborators. For Stone, this process made her writing more consequential and brought home the idea that writing can matter beyond a classroom grade.



Jennifer Stone,
Recent UW-Madison graduate

Publishing as Instruction

The publication review process also functions as a kind of writing instruction. Journals that publish undergraduate work, many of which exist on the UW-Madison campus (see list on next page), offer opportunities for a different kind of

IN THIS ISSUE:

Making Writing Public:
Undergraduates Writing
for Publication
pages 1-2

Writing in FIGs:
Encouraging Integrated
Thinking
page 3

Writing for Citizenship in
Journalism 662
pages 4-5

Thanks to Comm-B
TA Fellows!
page 6

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(Continued on page 2)

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(Continued from page 1)

conversation about writing. Professor Sandy Magaña, co-editor of one of these campus journals, *Conscientización: A Journal of Chican@ & Latin@ Experience and Thought*, says that published undergraduates “improve their writing skills by submitting to and receiving feedback on their papers” even as they “take pride in their research and writing, and show their accomplishments in a concrete form.” Sharing writing with the reviewers of a journal is simply different than writing for a class—one’s audience is unknown and is responding as an invested reader.

In this way students develop confidence in their writing while simultaneously receiving writing instruction from outside readers who are not their teachers. While publishing as an undergraduate certainly looks good on a resume or CV—both Magaña and Stone note this is a major motivator for student writers—the “concrete form” of publication inspires a certain kind of pride for students. Published writing is permanent and lasting, can be passed around and pointed to as evidence of work done well. As Magaña says, “The experience can be invaluable for students. They have a sense of accomplishment.”

Mentoring Writing for Publication

Of course encouraging undergraduates to publish their work could have less positive consequences. One could predict a publish-or-perish creep in undergraduate education, and a round of rough feedback could potentially deflate a novice writer. Further, the publication process takes time: “Sometimes students give up because they have so many competing assignments in their classes that take priority,” says Magaña. “To take the time to

prepare their paper for a journal” can seem a daunting task. Stone agrees, saying, “The only drawback of the whole process for me would probably be how long it took. It took quite a while to hear back sometimes, and I had a hard time being patient.”

In order to mitigate these challenges, the CLS program incorporates publishing in *Conscientización* into many of its courses and provides mentoring throughout the process. Magaña explains that representatives from the journal visit CLS courses and invite students to submit their course papers, and professors encourage students to meet with the journal’s editor to discuss their submission. “Students may feel demoralized when they receive the reviews (don’t we all),” says Magaña. “We [encourage] them to come in so we can go over the reviews and let them know that the revisions are doable and that they are not personal critiques.” CLS has also offered a one-credit course that meets throughout a semester, guiding students through the submission and revision process.

Publication as Public Writing

For Jen Stone, at least, having her paper declined by a journal still led to a formative writing experience. She explains, “the feedback from both places was very useful. Even if you don’t get published, you tried and learned a lot about yourself and your writing while doing so.” This is certainly a different angle on failure in undergraduate writing. Undergraduate publishing is paradoxical: the writing is low-stakes because it is not tied to a course grade, but is simultaneously high-stakes because it is written for a larger, unknown audience. But in this paradox, failure can be productive for students, helping them realize how writing can change, and be changed by, public audiences. ♦

UW-MADISON OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNDERGRADUATES TO PUBLISH

This is only a partial list of the opportunities on campus, so please email rlorimer@wisc.edu to have your journal added to this list on our website.

Archive: A Journal of Undergraduate History — <http://uwarchive.wordpress.com/>

Conscientización: A Journal of Chican@ & Latin@ Experience and Thought — www.chicla.wisc.edu/publications/concientizacion/

The Digital Salon — www.college.library.wisc.edu/digitalsalon/

Equilibrium: The Undergraduate Journal of Economics at UW-Madison — <http://uwequilibrium.com>

Illumination: The Undergraduate Journal of Humanities — <http://illumination.library.wisc.edu/news.html>

Journal of Undergraduate International Studies — <http://juis.global.wisc.edu/>

Lubar Institute for the Study of Abrahamic Religions Undergraduate Journal — http://lisar.lss.wisc.edu/projects/Undergraduate_Journal.html

The Madison Review — <http://www.english.wisc.edu/madisonreview/index.php>

For comprehensive lists of national undergraduate journals in all disciplines, see these sites:

http://www.bridgew.edu/OUR/publishing_opportunities.cfm or <http://www.gvsu.edu/ours/all-publication-opportunities-94.htm>

Does your program want to start an undergraduate journal? The WAC program is happy to consult with you about how to get started. Please email Brad Hughes at bthughes@wisc.edu or Rebecca Lorimer at rlorimer@wisc.edu.

WRITING IN FIGS: ENCOURAGING INTEGRATED THINKING



By Leah Pribbenow and Patrick Johnson,
Undergraduate Writing Fellows

As Writing Fellows for First-Year Interest Group (FIG) courses, we saw students writing in ways we hadn't expected. Students seemed to be drawing on diverse content areas in order to support their

arguments. Pribbenow, in fact, remembers sitting back one night while writing comments on student papers and smiling because she could see these writers using information they had learned in multiple courses in a single paper.

Further, when we read students' papers and met with them to talk about their writing, it seemed that these students were connecting information from different fields to make their arguments more compelling. We felt encouraged that the abstract conversations we often have about the value of interdisciplinary work could be made concrete in the analytical essays of first-year writers. We wondered—could writing in FIGs offer a unique opportunity for students to synthesize material from multiple disciplines?

In ten years, the FIGs program has grown from about 20 course clusters into a large program of 58 course clusters that supports both academic and social interaction. Each FIG is composed of a small core class, taught by a faculty member who is the FIG coordinator. He or she selects two or three other courses that are compatible with the core course. In these course clusters, professors aim to facilitate a sort of "cross-pollination" between different academic disciplines and foster interdisciplinary thinking.

Greg Smith, director of the FIGs program, explains that FIG faculty are "using writing assignments in very integrative ways," saying they often explicitly encourage interdisciplinary thinking in their writing assign-

ments. Smith cites as an example Professor Erica Halverson's writing assignment in which students use material from one course—an education course on adolescence and the media—to create a radio broadcast for another course in the FIG cluster.

Smith also points to Professor Tess Arenas' FIG, in which students take three courses—a political science course, a service learning course, and the core course—and are assigned reflective papers and formal presentations in the core course that ask them to synthesize these courses. In this way, students read about and discuss political theory in one course, experience some of those issues first-hand off-campus, and then make connections across the theory and practice in their writing.

We observed students synthesizing in similar ways as writing fellows in Professor Lynn Keller's FIG, "Nature and Culture: How Humans Interact with the Natural Environment." In papers for their core course, students were using facts from their environmental studies class to support the arguments they were making in an essay about modern American literature. In other words, FIG writing assignments seem to challenge students to make connections between courses that they otherwise may not have made.

FIGs coordinator Kari Fernholz believes the small size of the core class could be another reason why FIGs encourage students to integrate their linked courses in writing. Fernholz notes that because "a smaller setting allows for more feedback about writing," faculty and fellows can ask more questions that prompt interdisciplinary thinking. Many of the FIGs also incorporate Communication A or B and Ethnic Studies requirements in order to frame these requirements as connected to and supportive of other college coursework.

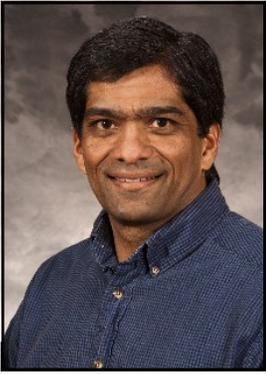
FIG writing assignments seem to challenge students to make connections between courses that they otherwise may not have made.

In a university that stresses academic inquiry from an interdisciplinary perspective, it seems to us that FIGs can facilitate that inquiry through writing. By giving students an opportunity to articulate a synthesis of these ideas in their writing assignments, FIGs provide students with an experience that can prove important and meaningful for the rest of their undergraduate careers. ♦

Leah Pribbenow is a senior majoring in English and Educational Policy Studies.

Patrick Ryan Johnson is a senior majoring in English.

UW-Madison Writing Fellows are undergraduates assigned to writing-intensive courses in which they work closely with professors as well as student writers. Fellows read and critique drafts of two formal papers and write extensive comments to guide students' revision. Fellows then meet individually with each writer to discuss revision possibilities and strategies.



Hemant Shah, Journalism and Mass Communication

By Rebecca Lorimer,
Writing Across the Curriculum

In end-of-semester evaluations, students in Professor Hemant Shah's Journalism 662 course, "Mass Media and Minorities," have written, "I'll never watch a film the same way again." Shah is gratified by this evidence of changed perspectives. In fact, he's built his course, and particularly its writing assignments, to bring about

just this kind of altered understanding of media portrayals of minorities in the United States.

Journalism 662, which Shah has been teaching since 1990, examines popular culture and news portrayals of American minority groups. The four-credit course, which satisfies the ethnic studies requirement, enrolls 125 students from a variety of majors across campus. Professor Shah and one TA teach two 75-minute lectures and a discussion each week.

Shah stresses that the course is not after simple evaluative judgments of news or media portrayals of minorities. He hopes students won't stop at deciding "whether [an image] is good or bad." Instead, Shah explains that the course pursues the history and construction of an image: "Why does it appear that way? What does it mean that we have that image in 2011? How has it departed from and been consistent with images in the past?" Moving, as Shah says, "from the image backwards" helps students reconsider how multiculturalism is constructed in the U.S. and the role de-construction can play in "good citizenship."

The two major writing assignments in the course are designed with these aims in mind (see assignments, page 5). Both encourage students to break down broad concepts like "minority" or "race" and then use course readings and their personal experiences to rebuild new understandings of race and representation and their links to democratic citizenship.

For Shah, assigning writing is essential to this process. He explains that having students write "forces them to slow down . . . go back, see what they've read, listen to what I've said in lectures . . . stop, to integrate, to synthesize." The assignments are opportunities to put back together concepts the course lectures, readings, and discussions had worked so hard to pull apart.

The first assignment asks students to relate to and then analyze course concepts like race, ethnicity, assimilation, and melting pot. Students choose passages from two of the five autobiographical essays they've read for the course, explain how the passages are significant in their own life experiences, and then use course concepts to analyze their experience as well as those narrated in the readings. The purpose of the assignment is for students to "understand what individual experiences represent conceptually."

In completed papers, Professor Shah sees students using the concepts to "bind together the experiences" by "thinking in both directions," with students writing their way from large concept to the specificity of the personal as well as from the personal to a common cultural or social experience. These careful connections are made through writing and allow students to rethink their place in a large, diverse democracy.

Assignment 2 similarly asks students to rethink their cultural roles by taking a position in a debate: whether it is problematic for a member of one racial or ethnic group to portray another group on film. Shah explains that this writing assignment is challenging because "it's an ethical question, but it's also an economic question, a production question . . . it has many layers of complexity." Students are asked to make a case for their position using readings and ideas from the course, but also to respond to potential counter-arguments. In this assignment, Shah sees students writing "beyond popular arguments" they could have relied on before taking the course.

Even with Professor Shah's careful work in creating writing assignments that invite students to think critically about minorities and media, challenges remain. After 20 years of teaching the course, Shah still encounters the "entrenched attitudes" that are a result of students having "taken for granted ideas like fairness and a level playing field." He explains that when exploring ideas like white privilege in a largely white state like Wisconsin, students can feel as if they are under attack. Shah says that "rather than challenging me back or asking questions, [some students] shut down."

Shah continues to use writing to push students' critical thinking because, he says, the course explores "such a vitally important set of ideas." He explains that because of his own experience "growing up as a minority in America," these ideas are "personally important," but also important for our students to understand their roles as citizens: "If we claim to be a democracy," students need to understand "how important it is for those who are minorities to be included in that process." He says "we haven't always done that"—and he is deeply committed to designing a course that provides an opportunity for students to move toward that understanding. ♦

Writing Assignment 1: Concepts and History/Experiences (750-850 words)

The purpose of this assignment is to demonstrate your ability to move between levels of analysis. That is, while it is important to comprehend and even empathize with the emotional and poignant personal-level drama of displacement, discrimination, and prejudice, it is also important to understand what individual experiences represent conceptually. This is an assignment that helps assess analytical skill.

The first set of readings for class included five accounts describing the experience of being a racial or ethnic minority in the United States (the pieces by Bulosan, Baldwin, Rodríguez, Geronimo, and Bayoumi). Please think about what aspects of the experiences you found particularly moving or memorable. From among the five readings choose one phrase, anecdote, or passage from two different readings that provided some insight for you into how minorities view their social, political, or cultural position in a white-majority country.

In your paper:

1. Provide the phrase, anecdote, or passage.
2. Explain how and/or why the phrase, anecdote, or passage is moving or memorable for you. Did it evoke childhood experiences? Have you been through something similar? Were you surprised by someone's actions or thoughts?
3. Explain how any of the concepts describing more general social, political, or cultural dimensions of race and race relations we have discussed in class, such as melting pot, diversity, ethnic pluralism, racial hierarchy, social construction of race, etc. (as discussed in, for example, WGC, Steinberg, Cornell & Hartmann, and/or in lecture) help you to connect and understand the *general* importance or significance of the *specific* experiences reflected in the phrases, anecdotes, or passages you selected. A majority of your paper should focus on these explanations. You will need to link two different phrases, anecdotes, or passages to two different concepts.
4. Provide a bibliography of all sources you consulted. You must consult at least one source outside of class materials.

These examples, Writing Assignment 1 and Writing Assignment 2 from Hemant Shah's course, Journalism 662, are abridged in the interest of space. For the full assignments, please contact Professor Shah at hgshah@wisc.edu.

Writing Assignment 2: Cross-Racial/Ethnic Representation in Film (750-850 words)

This assignment asks you to take a position on one side or the other of an on going argument regarding casting choices in Hollywood films. Students should think carefully about where they stand and why. The assignment helps assess the ability to state a logical argument supported with reasonable evidence.

In the U.S. cinema, there is a long history of actors portraying people from another racial or ethnic group. Mainly, it has been whites playing non-whites, but there have been examples of members of one minority group portraying people from another minority group, and, rather infrequently, minorities portraying whites.

This phenomenon of cross-racial/ethnic representation has generated a debate between those who say "Actors shouldn't portray a person from another race/ethnic group" and those who say "It's perfectly acceptable for an actor to play a person from another race/ethnic group."

Drawing on class readings, class discussions, and other materials, make a case supporting one side of this debate *and* refuting the other side of the argument.

You must consult at least one source outside of class materials, which should be listed in a bibliography of all sources you consulted.

Thanks to Comm-B TA Fellows!



Honored for their outstanding teaching in Comm-B courses, these four TAs helped plan and lead the January 2011 Writing-Across-the-Curriculum training for 30 new Comm-B TAs from across campus.

From left to right:

Heather Sonntag, Languages and Cultures of Asia

Jennifer Kaiser, Biocore

Sarah Niebler, Political Science

Ramon Vasquez, Curriculum and Instruction

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