STUDENT EXIT INTERVIEWS: SPRING 2012

Introduction

On May 2, 2012, the Writing Committee conducted the second round of annual exit interviews with a panel of graduating seniors on their writing histories at UNH. These interviews consisted of brief student presentations followed by Q&A with committee members. It is the Writing Committee's hope to expand the audience for this event in future. Faculty are encouraged to contact the either the Director of the Writing Program or a member of the Writing Committee if interested in participating.

The following general prompt was given to each panelist several weeks before the event:

Please describe your personal writing history. Tell us where you were as a writer when you arrived at UNH, and where you believe you are now, upon graduation. In your estimation, what, if any, UNH experiences influenced your present status?

In addition, panelists were given the following supplemental considerations:

- How did you navigate the University Writing Requirement? Which courses did you take and why did you select those courses?
- Tell us about your most challenging writing projects and why they were challenging for you.
- What do you consider to be your strengths and weaknesses as a writer? Have these changed during your time at UNH? If so, how?
- What have you learned about writing in your discipline, field and/or chosen career? What seems unique about it – that is, not necessarily similar to writing in other settings?
- Where and how have you received substantial help in learning to write or becoming a better writer at UNH (e.g. specific instructors, peers, assignments, courses and/or UNH support like the Writing Center)?

2012 Student Panelists:

Student #1: Health Management and Policy major; Associates Degree in Business Management  
Post-graduation plans: employment in the Health field; may return to graduate school.

Student #2: English Major (emphasis on creative writing), Russian minor  
Post-graduation plans: employment in literacy education and/or community organizations; may return to graduate school for an MFA in writing.

Student #3: History Major, Education Minor  
Post-graduation plans: beginning teaching internship in Master of Education at UNH (the 5 year program in which you begin taking Masters courses during your senior year).

See Reverse For Findings
Findings, 2012: Common Themes

Bold entries indicate common themes between 2012 and 2011 [item #'s referenced in brackets]

The Undergraduate Panelists…

in 2012…
1. valued feedback from instructors during the writing process [8]
2. appreciated instructors articulating their expectations during the writing process [2]
3. never knew that there were WI guidelines
4. felt that there were inconsistencies among faculty in their approach to writing and the writing requirement [4]
5. felt prepared after high school to write academically at UNH
6. learned after starting UNH that there was much more to the writing process and academic writing than they realized
7. felt that E401 is of value as an intro-to-writing course, especially in terms of making the writing process explicit [1]
8. didn’t think E401 should attempt to mandate or guide how writing is taught at UNH
9. appreciated the diverse types of writing they encountered in their WI courses [5]
10. liked it when WI instructors explicitly taught students how to write (especially discipline specific genres)
11. cited the writing center as the one of the most valuable resources they had in developing as writers
12. appreciated informal and reflective writing, especially when it helped them define their own career goals and philosophies
13. would have appreciated more hands-on and real-audience/real-purpose writing activities to help prepare them for the workforce, such as grant writing or service course writing [7]
14. valued peer feedback, especially in the form of workshops [8]
15. would have appreciated more instruction in oral presentations in WI courses
16. would have appreciated more writing samples/examples in their WI courses; this only happened in E401
17. [dissenting opinion] Student #2, as a creative-writing major, felt her WI classes weren’t diverse and she didn’t feel challenged as a writer; she felt her non-English WI courses didn’t have any real-world audience or purpose beyond writing to the instructor

in 2011…
1. valued EN401 as a service course (bypassing was seen as handicap) [7]
2. appreciated explicit instructor attention to writing (expectations & guidance) [2]
3. suggested a “wish list” that would include a tech-writing course in discipline/major (pre-senior, post EN401)
4. noted an uneven application of writing standards/attention to writing, especially among TAs in large or lab courses. [4]
5. appreciated the different demands of science vs business vs. other writing [9]
6. had experience with collaborative writing projects.
7. were cognizant of "real world" writing (proposals, applications, service learning) as a form of extra-curricular learning [13]
8. valued instructor feedback over unguided peer feedback [1, 14]
Summary Transcript

This section is not an exhaustive accounting, but is intended to give a sense of the major points made by the panelists, which were often seconded by others. Nevertheless, it should be understood that these observations are reflective of student-perceptions, and as such are best read for insights that might apply to teaching methods and not as course or instructor evaluations.

Student One: Health Management and Policy major; Associates Degree in Business Management
Post-graduation plans: employment in the Health field; may return to graduate school.

- Graduated from Pinkerton, a private academy in Mass
  - had a writing-intensive program
- Felt her A.S. in business was more structured with writing while her B.S. (HMG) offered more diversity with styles, genres, etc.
- Her weaknesses at the start of UNH:
  - citing sources
  - analyzing and writing about data (such as graphs and charts)
  - writing without a specified length
- Strengths (now): better analytical writer
- Found helpful:
  - instructors who were willing to work with students;
  - seeing writing as a process (cited Marc Hiller’s class which involved drafting and writing as a semester-length effort/process);
  - writing center & OWL
- WI Courses: Japanese culture had 2 papers
  - feels WI courses aren’t well defined at UNH
  - Japanese teacher’s definition of WI was that the instructor would be available to help students with writing if they want it
  - Feels HMP are more specific to the type of writing she’ll do
- Recommends a more diverse panel from throughout the colleges, with incentives and more advertising, invite sophomores and juniors to participate

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Student Two: English Major (emphasis on creative writing), Russian minor
Post-graduation plans: employment in literacy education and/or community organizations; may return to graduate school for an MFA in writing.

- attended small Catholic high school in Mass
  - lots of research papers, book reviews
  - received lots of attention from teachers
  - not much feedback on writing
  - took one creative writing course
- felt most of the time at UNH like she had a “full proof” writing process and it wasn’t until the last semester that she felt like she was forced to step outside of her writing comfort zone
- found writing workshops to be the most beneficial with their combination of instructor and peer feedback
- As an English major, didn’t worry about the writing requirement
- Regrets not taking more diverse WI courses
- WI courses
  - Still feels like she’s only writing for the instructor in non-English WI courses
  - Feels instructor’s feedback wasn’t helpful and was based too much on the instructor’s own predilections; instructors didn’t open the student to her own voice and creativity
- From her experience at the CWC, feels too many students worry too much about pleasing the instructor and don’t use their own voice. Too much focus on satisfying the instructor’s requirements and not thinking of the paper as a whole.
- She suggests exposing students to diverse disciplines sooner, such as lab reports, science research papers, etc (sooner than later)

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**Student Three:** History Major, Education Minor

*Post-graduation plans: beginning teaching internship in Master of Education at UNH (the 5 year program in which you begin taking Masters courses during your senior year).*

- She defines her development at UNH by her attitude and by her skills
- Attended Smith College in Mass
- Didn’t think of writing as something she needed to develop—felt she understood academic writing, such as grammar and style
  - She saw grammar and form as divorced from content
- Until she took 401, she had never taken an explicit how-to-write course
  - Writing became more than a checklist
  - She appreciated teacher feedback
- WI courses:
  - History -- shorter analytical essays and longer research papers
  - Saw lots of inconsistency with expectations in the department
  - WI in the Education department:
    - Research papers, similar to history, more personal and reflective writing (ie writing about one’s own philosophy and goals), which she found to be engaging and fun
      - Saw it as less rigorous but more useful for her career development as a teacher...prepared her ethically
  - UNH has taught her that there is always something to be improved in her writing
  - Feels maybe there’s something specific to her career she hasn’t learned, such as grant writing
  - No complaints

**Follow-up Questions**

What did you do in high school to prepare you for writing at UNH?

- **Student One** –
  - Jr year wrote a 15-page essay; Sr year wrote a 25-page essay (both researched)
  - Frequent writing and producing longer essays helped prepare her for UNH
- **Student Two** -
  - Lots of teacher feedback and 1-on-1
  - Research papers
  - Responses
no lab reports
- lots of long-term papers
- senior paper was a dual English and Anatomy course (20 pages)
- access to teachers during drafts = most helpful
- Student Three -
  - mostly CNF courses
  - no literary analysis (felt unprepared in this sense)
  - 5-6 page essays in history

Did UNH instructors provide sample writing?
- Student Two - Yes, in 401. Nowhere else, though.
- Student Three - Ditto
- Student One

[Student #2 had to leave at this point]

What can be done to help what you learned in 401 stick with you in future courses?
- Student Three -
  - Wary of university-wide writing standards enforced via 401
  - likes it when instructors assume the student doesn’t have that background and teaches writing
- Student One -
  - good to have a solid foundation but likes the discovery of writing in different classes from other instructors

What specifically applied from 401 to your other courses?
- Student One - It was an easy A. Doesn’t remember much
- Student Three - Thinking through the paper

Where else did you get a chance to write for an audience (other than instructor) besides informal writing?
- Student Three -- Education classes
- Student One - peer review (never did blogs)...she likes writing for classmates
  - Cited a class that had journal publication potential

Suggestions for the writing program
- Student Three -
  - Doesn’t have a good sense of what the program is
  - knows it exists, but doesn’t know much about WI before these exit interviews
  - would have liked more explicit awareness of writing program and WI
- Student One - ditto, no idea what defines a WI course

Should a syllabus say something about WI and/or the writing requirement?
- Student One : feels an explicit statement of what WI is on each syllabus would be helpful
- Student Three: ditto

Did you find it bothersome if a course not listed as WI had a lot of writing?
- Student One - Yes. She loved a certain course but was annoyed that there was no WI credit for it
Student Three: she's perceived this frustration but not felt it herself...she expects writing in courses no matter what.

Has your writing improved at UNH?
- Student One -
  - yes. improved vocabulary. matured as a writer since high school. developed a passion for her major which makes writing feel like less of a task
  - diverse course load and writing for diff audiences, genres, and purposes has helped improve her writing vs. high school where she mostly wrote reflection
  - writing has given voice to her passion
- Student Three -
  - not as much as I had expected.
  - more deliberate about structure and holistic approach
  - values drafting now
  - thinks better on paper (rather than trying to formulate thoughts and then accurately transcribing them)

Do you feel ready for the next step?
- Both: Yes

How has the CWC benefited you?
- Student One -
  - appreciated the 2nd set of eyes, having readers experienced w/ various genres
  - satisfied w/ use of CWC and OWL
    - shocked by the extent of feedback she got from OWL submission
- Student Three -
  - Wish the CWC could be better about hooking students up w/ tutors more knowledgeable in that particular genre or discipline

What other forms of writing should we be promoting at UNH?
- Student One -
  - Oral presentations
  - social media
- Student Three: presentations