Writing to Learn in a Mutt Course: How Writing Functions in a Social Justice Living Learning Program Seminar

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WRITING TO LEARN IN A MUTT COURSE:
HOW WRITING FUNCTIONS IN A
SOCIAL JUSTICE LIVING LEARNING PROGRAM SEMINAR

by

Jennifer K. Reid, B.S., M.F.A.

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Graduate School, Marquette University,
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Learning communities, first-year seminars/experiences, writing intensive courses, and diversity/global learning programs are among the high-impact practices (HIP) shown to influence college student learning, retention, and overall experience (Kuh, 2008). Colleges and universities are creating programs and courses that incorporate these and other HIPs. Some of these courses do not fit neatly into particular disciplinary or interdisciplinary categories. The current research refers to such contexts as “mutt courses.”

Writing is often used to facilitate learning in mutt courses, yet virtually everything that is known about how writing promotes learning comes from research on writing in traditional disciplinary settings (e.g. history, engineering, psychology, etc.). The current research sought to understand if writing in a mutt course facilitated learning in similar ways as writing in other disciplinary courses.

The context was a credit bearing seminar part of a first-year residential living learning community focused on privilege and oppression. This seminar was not housed in any of the academic colleges at the university at which the research took place, but students received academic credit for the course, and it satisfied the university’s core curriculum diversity requirement. The seminar was taught by instructors in student affairs and non-teaching academic divisions of the university. Students engaged in great deal of writing in this seminar (12 weekly response papers, an identity reflection, and an analysis paper).

Through an ethnographic study writing in this context, the current research sought to understand how writing facilitated achievement of course goals. Activity Theory (Engeström, 2015) and the revised Bloom’s Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) were used as theoretical frameworks to understand what learning occurred and how.

The research found three functions of writing similar to those in traditional disciplinary settings (a demonstrative, learning, and discursive function). The discursive function was nuanced in that students conceptualized writing as a sort of conversation with peers. Additionally, instructors used writing to inform their practice. Furthermore, writing was found to influence students’ desire to work toward inclusion. Implications for using writing in similar contexts is discussed as well as implications for theory and future research.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Jennifer K. Reid, B.S., M.F.A.

I have been a writer for as long as I can remember. It’s no coincidence that this dissertation is on writing, for writing has always been for me a way to make sense of the world. There have been many influences on my writing, and it is only fitting that I acknowledge the people who have made this writing endeavor possible.

First and foremost, I need to acknowledge my partner, Dan, and my dear basset hound, Higgins (who recently crossed the Rainbow Bridge). For seven years, they each have given me the time and space to pursue this project and have inserted themselves into my writing space at junctures when I clearly needed to detach from it. I am eternally grateful for all the support, companionship, and love they have given me throughout this process. I could not have done this without them.

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As a final note, I want to acknowledge my family and extended family. I am grateful for the support everyone gave me as I pursued this endeavor. This research took
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | i  |
| List of Tables  | vii |
| List of Figures  | viii |

## CHAPTER ONE
**Introduction**  ................................................................. 1

## CHAPTER TWO
**Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature**

- A Sociocultural Approach...................................................... 9
  - Sociocultural Learning Theory .......................................... 10
  - Activity Theory .................................................................... 16
  - Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning ............................................. 21

**Writing to Learn........................................................................ 28**

- The Development of Content Area Knowledge through Writing .......... 29
- The Development of Writing Proficiency within Disciplines ............... 32
- Pedagogical Practices that Affect Students’ Writing Development and/or Learning of Disciplinary Knowledge ........................................... 35
- Students’ Negotiation of Writing Tasks ...................................... 63
- Prior Writing Knowledge............................................................ 64
- Students’ Self-Concepts and Identities ........................................ 71

**Writing in Non-academic and Non-traditional Academic Settings ............ 74**

- General Scholarship on Writing Outside Traditional College Settings ...... 75
- Writing in Service Learning Courses.......................................... 77
- Writing in Interdisciplinary Settings ......................................... 90

**Living Learning Community Research......................................... 97**

**Summary...................................................................................... 102**

## CHAPTER THREE
**Study Design And Methodology**

**Overview.................................................................................. 104**

**Context....................................................................................... 105**

**Study Design and Methods......................................................... 107**
Participant Selection ........................................................................................................ 110
Data Sources .................................................................................................................. 112
Observation Tools .......................................................................................................... 117
Data Analysis and Coding ............................................................................................... 120
Protection of Human Subjects ....................................................................................... 126
Trustworthiness of Data ................................................................................................. 127
Researcher Subjectivity ................................................................................................. 128

CHAPTER FOUR
Interaction of Subjects and Objects in the Welead Activity System
Overview .......................................................................................................................... 133
Students and Instructors: The “Subjects” of the WeLead Activity System .................. 134
   Students ..................................................................................................................... 135
   Instructors ............................................................................................................... 155
Objects of the WeLead Activity System: Functions the Tool of Writing Performed .... 204
   How Writing Functioned for Students .................................................................... 205
   How Writing Functioned for Instructors ............................................................... 226

CHAPTER FIVE
How Writing Functions as a Tool Toward Activity System Objects and Outcomes:
What Are Students Learning From their Writing in Welead?
Overview .......................................................................................................................... 234
Outcomes: What Are Students Learning from Writing in WeLead? ............................ 235
   Course Goals as Objects of the WeLead Activity System ...................................... 236
   Cognitive Processes Employed in Student Writing .............................................. 240
   Other Activity System Factors that Influenced Students’ Writing ....................... 275
   Knowledge Domains .............................................................................................. 313

CHAPTER SIX
Discussion and Implications
Overview .......................................................................................................................... 326
Summary and Discussion ............................................................................................... 328
   How Does Writing Function for Students in this Living-Learning Community Seminar? .......................................................... 329
   How Do Instructors Use writing in the Seminar? .................................................... 333
What are Students Learning about Course Content (and Perhaps Writing Itself) through their Writing in the Seminar? ............... 335

Implications for Theory .......................................................... 340
Implications for Practice .......................................................... 346
Implications for Future Research .............................................. 350
Conclusion ............................................................................. 357

REFERENCES ........................................................................ 359
APPENDIX A – Agreement of Consent for Research Participants (Instructors) ............... 372
APPENDIX B – Student Demographic Survey ............................................. 375
APPENDIX C – Agreement of Consent for Research Participants (Students) ............... 377
APPENDIX D – Instructor Interview Protocol ............................................. 380
APPENDIX E – Student Participant Interview Protocol ..................................... 381
APPENDIX F – Course Syllabi ................................................................ 383
APPENDIX G – Identity Worksheets ..................................................... 401
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Student Participant Demographics ............................................................... 114
Table 3.2: Collected Writing Assignments by Category ................................................. 117
Table 3.3: Codes for Student Interview Data.................................................................. 125
Table 5.1: Distributions of Cognitive Processes in Student Writing Across Sections ... 242
Table 5.2: Week 4 Cognitive Processes by Student ......................................................... 280
Table 5.3: Writing Resources .......................................................................................... 296
Table 5.4: References to Class Readings/Activities
as a Writing Resource in Interview Three ........................................................................ 301
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2: General Model of an Activity System .......................................................... 18
Figure 3.1: Model of Case Study Design with Data Sources ................................ 109
Figure 3.2: Activity System Model of the WeLead Course ...................................... 110
Figure 4.1: Instructor Y’s Analysis Paper Grading Criteria ...................................... 165
Figure 4.2: Social Identity Wheel Exercise ................................................................. 177
Figure 4.3: Example of Commentary Section in D2L, the Online Course Management System ............................................................... 187
Figure 4.4: Sample Excerpts of Section Y Graded Papers with Feedback ............... 192
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of higher education has undergone a great deal of change within the last few decades. Students are no longer satisfied with a postsecondary education focused solely on developing particular disciplinary knowledges. In “Diversity Courses Are in High Demand: Can they Make a Difference?,” Brown (2016) reports a growing desire among college students for courses focused on diversity and inclusion. Though many institutions have some type of diversity requirement in effort to develop students’ skills to interact in a global society, Brown notes that more recent racial tensions on campuses and in communities have spurred critique over which courses should be designated to fulfill this requirement and what those courses should cover (2016). Students want to be well rounded in their education and able to function in a global, multicultural world. Employers desire this of college graduates as well.

In the introduction to Kuh’s “High Impact Practices” (2008), Schneider (then president of the Association for American Colleges and Universities) outlined essential learning outcomes for college students, which included global knowledge, social responsibility, intercultural skills, writing, oral communication, and teamwork. Employers reported students were somewhat well prepared in terms of social responsibility (35% well prepared vs. 21% not well prepared), intercultural skills (38% vs. 19%), oral communication (30% vs. 23%) and teamwork (39% vs. 17%)¹. However, 46% of employers reported graduates were not well prepared in global knowledge, and

¹ Ratings were assessed on a 10-point scale, with 10 = “graduates are extremely well prepared on each quality to succeed in an entry level position” (Schneider, 2008, p. 5).
37% reported students were not well prepared in writing (Schneider, 2008). While some research illustrates that diversity courses foster civic engagement and cross-cultural understanding (Broido & Reason, 2005; Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Kuh, 2008; Rowan-Kenyon & Inkelas, 2007), students recognize that they need more competence. Greater attention is needed on other outcomes of diversity courses, including writing outcomes such as knowledge transfer.

Research has shown that student learning is impacted by experiences that are not limited to the classroom and a traditional college curriculum. The Association for American Colleges and Universities recommends a number of high impact practices shown to positively affect student learning and retention (Kuh, 2008). Among those high impact practices are first-year seminars and experiences, learning communities (intentionally designed programs in which students enroll in two or more classes together and may reside together); writing intensive courses; courses that include community-based projects, such as service-learning; and diversity/global learning programs. According to the National Survey of Student Engagement’s 2007 annual report, such practices are educationally effective for a number of reasons, including increased contact with faculty, advisers, and diverse peers. When students have more contact with faculty and advisers, they are likely to get sustained feedback on their educational endeavors and better transfer the practices of particular disciplinary communities. Additionally, writing studies indicate that ongoing feedback on written texts facilitates successful writing (Bean, Carrithers, & Earenfight, 2005; Galer-Unti, 2002; Harris & Twomey, 2008; Haynes, 1996; Hellman, 2000; Soliday, 2011, Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006; Walvoord & McCarthy, 1990). Advisers might also help students reflect on what they are learning in
their courses and co-curricular involvements. Scholarship on learning reports the benefits of metacognitive activities and reflection (Bransford et al., 2004; Driscoll, 2005; Mezirow; 2009). Mezirow’s theory of transformational learning also suggests the need for students to encounter diverse perspectives that will invoke a “disorienting dilemma,” which will move students toward dualistic thinking and beyond their current understandings. This suggests a link between interaction with diverse others and learning.

In response to students’ demands as well as efforts to increase learning and retention, colleges and universities are creating programs and courses that incorporate high impact practices—methods/pedagogies by which content is delivered. Learning outcomes vary in such courses and programs. Some courses and programs may be designated as interdisciplinary, but some do not fit neatly into particular disciplinary or interdisciplinary categories. These programs/courses, which I will refer to as mutt courses, create both opportunities and challenges for institutions. Mutt courses are those for which students receive academic credit but that fall outside of traditional academic disciplines and may include first-year experience courses (required at many colleges and universities), resident assistant training courses, or courses required as part of a living-learning community program. Some of these courses (such as first-year experience courses and living-learning community programs) are high impact practices in and of themselves, while others (such as resident assistant training courses) may utilize high impact practices.

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2 The term “mutt” is taken from Elizabeth Wardle’s (2005) study examining the writing students in first-year composition courses. Because first-year composition courses are not set firmly within a discipline and since writing varies among disciplines, Wardle refers to the genres students write in first-year composition courses as “mutt genres.”
While mutt courses may draw on content from different disciplines, they cannot be categorized as disciplinary/interdisciplinary courses per se. Their purposes and goals stretch beyond traditional academic learning outcomes. For example, first year experience courses/programs and living-learning programs (LLPs) may include goals for interpersonal interaction and community building; student retention; preparing students for the rigors of college academically and socially; civic, community and/or academic engagement; or creating an integrated curricular/co-curricular experience (Barefoot, 2000; Inkelas, Soldner, Longerbeam & Leonard, 2007). The objectives for such courses/programs take into account how the social context influences learning. Some research indicates a relationship between supporting students socially through living-learning programs and academic performance and/or persistence (Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Kurotsuchi Inkelas, Johnson, Lee, Daver, Longerbeam, Vogt, & Brown Leonard, 2006; Pike, 1999; Wawrzynski, Jessup-Anger, Stolz, Helman, & Beaulieu, 2009). In addition to having goals more inclined to social development, mutt courses are different from traditional academic courses in other ways. They are often taught by staff who serve in student affairs/services areas rather than by faculty who have traditional disciplinary groundings. They also may be resourced collaboratively (financially and in terms of staffing) between academic and student affairs units (Inkelas, Soldner, Longerbeam & Leonard, 2007). These courses often receive generic credit designations of a particular college but do not firmly employ the disciplines housed in the college. One benefit of mutt courses is that they can allow new ways of meaning-making to surface and different ways of viewing the world. If well designed, opportunities for
learning transfer exist. However, the way learning is fostered and assessed is often tied to disciplinary ways of making meaning.

My research sought to explore if writing functions as a tool for learning in a mutt course. Writing intensive courses have been identified as a high impact educational practice, and with good reason. Writing has been shown to be an effective tool for learning and assessment in disciplinary settings. Studies have shown teaching writing can improve disciplinary understanding (Carter et al., 2004; Poe, Lerner & Craig, 2010; Soliday, 2011; Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006); conversely, when educators use writing as a tool for learning, students also tend to improve writing proficiency within a course/discipline (McGuire & Peters, 2009; Moor et al., 2012). Writing can also be used to assess what students have learned, not just demonstrating acquisition of content, but showing students’ ability to contextualize and apply content appropriately (Bean et al., 2005). In a mutt course, writing may be used in such capacities as well, but little is known about how writing functions in settings outside traditional disciplines. More needs to be known about how the writing in mutt courses is used and assessed as well as what students are learning from the writing in such courses. Further complicating the effective use of writing in mutt courses is the likelihood of these courses being taught by instructors who have little to no writing pedagogy knowledge. Writing studies have shown writing to be an effective tool for learning when writing pedagogies are employed. If universities continue to give rise to mutt courses and writing continues to be used as a tool in such courses, more needs to be known about how writing functions and is taught in these settings.
My study investigated this problem through an ethnographic case study exploration of a mutt course situated within a first-year living-learning community (LLC) and explored what the functions of writing are in such a setting. Midwest Jesuit University’s (MJU) WeLead Social Justice Community is an LLC open to 70 freshmen who live on the same wing of a residence hall and are required to take a two-semester seminar titled “Dynamics of Privilege and Oppression,” for which they receive three academic credits and which also counts as students’ diverse cultures requirement, part of MJU’s Core Curriculum. Writing is a significant component of the seminar, which is taught by staff from around the university (staff who have varying levels of teaching experience and pedagogical knowledge). Specific questions for investigation included:

1. How does writing function for students in this living-learning community seminar?
   - How do students view the writing they do in terms of what they are learning, and how does writing enable or perhaps hinder that learning?
   - To what extent do students draw from resources typically drawn from in disciplinary writing settings, and are there other resources on which they draw?
   - What connections to other writing do they make as they engage in the writing assigned in the seminar?
   - How do class activities aid writing to learn (or learning to write) in this setting?

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3 Midwest Jesuit University and WeLead Social Justice Community are pseudonyms for this research context, given to protect the identities of students and instructors as outlined by the IRB protocol governing this research.
4 Dynamics of Privilege and Oppression is also a pseudonym given to this research context per IRB protocol.
2. How do instructors use writing in the seminar?
   - What value do they see in the writing that students do?
   - To what extent do they consciously or unconsciously draw from writing to learn pedagogy?
   - On what other pedagogies do they draw?

3. What are students learning about course content (and perhaps writing itself) through their writing in the seminar?

Writing studies scholarship within disciplinary contexts explicates how writing functions as a tool for learning and the resources on which students draw to negotiate novel and familiar writing tasks. There are some studies of writing in interdisciplinary settings. Nowacek (2011), for example, explored the challenges students experienced transferring disciplinary content and writing knowledge in an interdisciplinary program that linked three courses. This interdisciplinary program differed from mutt courses, however, in that each class was distinct and situated within a discipline with the intent for interdisciplinary transfer to occur. Recognizing that students enrolled in interdisciplinary programs may have ways of meaning making that do not fit neatly into disciplinary boundaries, Wolfe and Haynes (2003) discussed the creation of an instrument to assess interdisciplinary writing. The creation of such an instrument acknowledges the challenges of assessing learning and writing in non-traditional curricular settings; however, it does not provide any insight into what interdisciplinary writing among undergraduates actually looks like. A recent study by Voss (2016) examines the relationship between first-year writing courses and residential learning communities and illustrates how students may draw on residential learning communities as a resource for their writing in first-year
composition and other disciplinary writing contexts. However, I was unable to find any research on writing in living-learning programs or other mutt course spaces. If these new additions to the curriculum are to enhance and extend learning outside of traditional disciplinary courses, more needs to be known about what learning takes place there. Writing is a product of these settings that can be assessed. Additionally, if writing is to be used as a tool for learning in these settings, understanding how students conceptualize this writing and what they learn from it helps to better prepare instructors with limited writing pedagogy knowledge to use writing effectively to this end. Lastly, understanding what learning takes place in mutt courses aids in the future design of such courses.

In Chapter Two, I provide an overview of sociocultural learning theory and outline Activity Theory and Bloom’s Taxonomy as conceptual frameworks for the study. I then review literature on the following: writing to learn and learning to write in traditional college curricular settings; effective writing pedagogy; the resources on which students draw in negotiating writing tasks; and studies of writing in non-traditional settings. Lastly, I examine literature on living-learning community outcomes in order to contextualize my research setting. Research in the area of writing studies and living-learning communities both emphasize the social nature of learning, an occurrence that supports a sociocultural framework for this study. Chapter Three discusses the study design and methodology, which is also guided by a sociocultural framework. Chapters Four and Five discuss findings from this study, and Chapter Six discusses the implications of this research.
CHAPTER TWO
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A Sociocultural Approach

Many studies of writing focus on writing as a social act situated within particular discourse communities. Within this view, writing is not a single, generalizable skill but is dependent on the context in which it occurs, the identities of writers, and how writers relate to intended audiences who are part of students’ activity systems/communities of practice. Relating to intended audiences requires a range of writing related knowledge, including subject matter knowledge, discourse community knowledge, genre knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, and writing process knowledge (Beaufort, 2007), all of which are acquired and developed socially as well. As such, a theory that situates learning as social (as opposed to merely cognitive) is useful for understanding how writing functions within particular contexts as well as how students learn through writing or learn to write in those contexts. A theory that describes learning as social (such as Activity Theory), therefore, is a fitting framework for this study. First I provide some characteristics of sociocultural learning theory as a way to contextualize Activity Theory. Then I outline Activity Theory as a framework for understanding learning that utilizes writing as a tool and Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning as a means of unpacking the object and outcomes of this LLC activity system. Following the discussion of framework, I review relevant writing studies scholarship and literature on living learning communities.
Sociocultural Learning Theory

Lev Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of learning posits that the development of intelligence is a product of the internalization of cultural tools, that thinking is context bound, and that learning takes place as a result of practicing with one’s social peers (Driscoll, 2005). The theory also posits that there is a zone of proximal development between a person’s developed and undeveloped capabilities toward which instruction should be aimed. Vygotsky’s theory is helpful in framing how students develop writing knowledge, for writing can be viewed as a cultural tool. Vygotsky (1986) noted that:

The relation of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought. In that process, the relation of thought to word undergoes changes that themselves may be regarded as development in the functional sense. Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them. Every thought tends to connect something with something else, to establish a relation between things (p. 218).

A relation by its very nature is social for it occurs external to the self. Even in thought, which might be considered internal, if one is relating one thing to another, the locus of the relation is outside of the mind, coming from some experience or set of experiences the thinker has had. Experiences can be considered social in that people make sense of experience through language, which Dewey (1980) proposed is a social instinct. Dewey further posited:

Experience does not go on simply inside a person. It does go on there, for it influences the formation of attitudes of desire and purpose. But this is not the whole of the story. Every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had (Dewey, 1986, p. 39).

Writing can be considered external speech, and Vygotsky contended that external speech is directed toward others. In other words, it is a social act. One counter argument to writing as social arises through particular genres of writing that are more personal,
such as diaries or journals. While writers enacting these personal genres may have no intention to share their texts with others, the act of writing itself is social, for its medium is language. Embedded in language are the constellations of meaning that have been developed through social interactions over time. For example, if one takes a single word as the unit of analysis for language, the meaning of a particular word has undergone change via the ways it has been used to communicate meaning over time. Furthermore, every act of writing carries with it a writer’s former experience in using written text to convey meaning in some other context, be it a letter, an academic essay, a lab report, or even a medical history form filled out at a doctor’s office. Writers repurpose how they use language in written form for every writing situation they encounter. Therefore, even if a writer does not intend to share a text with a particular audience (such as with a personal journal), the sociality of language use is always embedded in constructing a text.

Additionally, writing always has some purpose. In an academic context, it may be used to display knowledge, to reflect on what is known, or to extend knowledge beyond its current conceptions. If a writer is writing for oneself, the self is the audience and becomes somewhat external to the act of writing. The text as the product of the writing act becomes a way for the writer to see and understand what she/he is feeling and thinking. Because it has a purpose, writing is always directed. Vygotsky (1986) argued that “Directed thought is social. As it develops, it is increasingly influenced by the laws of experience and of logic proper” (p. 16).

Scholarship on writing supports the view that writing is external and therefore social. Reviews of sociocultural studies of writing (Bazerman, 2008; Beach, Newell, & VanDerHeide, 2008) point to a number of ways writing is social as well as situated
within particular social contexts. Bazerman (2008) found that “writers write to participate in social situations” (p. 11) and build “relations with readers” (p. 12). Through participating in these social situations, “writers gain voice and identities within forums” (p. 13). Voice is often conceptualized as a unique attribute of an individual writer, the way the self manifests through a text. This is partly true; people are unique individuals, but voice is influenced by the identity one develops in a community of practice. Bazerman notes that the voice writers develop is determined by readers. His review also found that writers develop skill by “solving problems in particular situations and becoming articulate in those situations,” which means “learning the knowledge, forms of reasoning, criteria of evaluation, and forms of actions within those domains” (p. 16).

Thus, a writer’s “unique” voice is always influenced by the ways meaning is made within particular domains. In line with Dewey’s view of experience, Bazerman also pointed out that moving between domains requires adjustment on the part of writers who must transform previous writing knowledge and experiences. Additionally, he noted that schools create “specialized writing activities within specialized activity systems with specialized school genres” (p. 16). Furthermore, Bazerman found that the ideologies of schools influence students’ writing experiences and “trajectories of learning to write” (p. 17).

The review of writing studies framed in sociocultural theory Beach, Newell, and VanDerHeide (2008) conducted also notes the influence of classroom settings as well as the broader institutional context in which those settings occur: “Within the context of classrooms […] teachers and students address the institutional contexts in which they find themselves, and they collaboratively construct classroom rhetorical contexts for writing
to and for familiar audiences” (p. 88). Writers contextualize writing within certain situations, be it a discipline or particular course and develop through acquiring the knowledge, genres, and conventions of particular discourse communities. Thus, writers need to understand audience expectations, which is a social act. They also found that writers learn to write collaboratively “working with each other on writing tasks with a shared sense of roles and responsibilities” (p. 94). Lastly, writers adopt alternative perspectives in their writing, an act that takes them beyond their own understanding and engages them with others’ viewpoints. For example, making a successful argument in a text requires anticipating and responding to possible objections. In sum, a sociocultural view of writing “examines how participation in a particular activity mediated by uses of social practices leads to employment of certain composing processes,” and “how both teachers and students construct these contexts, given the vast differences in classrooms and the different writing practices made available to students within different contexts” (p. 90).

Socio-cultural theory also provides guidance in terms of assisting students in developing writing knowledge and proficiency. Scaffolding, a term associated with the research of Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976), refers to the instructor or more advanced peers serving as “a supportive tool for learners as they construct knowledge” (Driscoll, 2005, p. 257). Lave and Wenger’s scholarship on situated learning in communities of practice, another social view of learning, also lends support for studying writing through a social lens.

Lave and Wenger viewed learning as a social process in which the “agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other” (p. 31). Learning is situated within
the context that it occurs and is tied to the social action within that context. The defining characteristic of learning within this framework is legitimate peripheral participation (LPP). LPP is the process by which learners become part of communities of practice, moving from observing the social action within the community to participating fully in that action. In terms of learning to write, for example, students might first read texts and then construct their own texts in response to what others before them have written. This theory of learning rejects the notion of generalizability or abstraction of knowledge because learning and “knowledge cannot be divorced from the community in which it is used” (p. 37). Lave and Wenger also rejected the view of learning as a process of internalization in which knowledge is merely transmitted and absorbed. Learning occurs through participation in the social practices of a given community. Lave and Wenger noted that learning in terms of participation “focuses attention on the ways in which it is an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations” (p. 50).

This framework of learning is supported by writing studies, for writing practices and ways of making meaning are specific to the disciplinary/social contexts in which they occur. Lave and Wenger posed that “activities, tasks, functions, and understandings do not exist in isolation” but are part of wider systems of relations in which they acquire meaning (p. 53). Such systems of relations arise from and are reproduced and expanded upon within communities of practice: “Learning, thus, implies becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by those systems of relations” (p. 53). In this view, writers develop identities through the act of writing in particular domains.

Writing studies have noted identity as a factor influencing students’ learning to write and writing to learn (Nowacek, 2011; Poe, Lerner, & Craig, 2011; Soliday, 2011;
Walvoord and McCarthy, 1990). Genre theory (Askehave & Swales, 2001; Bawarshi, 2000; Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Miller, 1984)—a framework often referenced and employed in writing studies (Nowacek, 2005 and 2011; Poe, Lerner, & Craig, 2011; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 2000; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011; Soliday, 2011; Walvoord & McCarthy, 1990)—also positions writing as social action within a given context/community. Writing can be considered social action because a writer does not simply invent a text; a text is influenced by the social relations and understandings a writer has within a given context and by the motives a writer has for composing a text. Especially within disciplinary communities, but also in other discourse communities/activity systems, writing performs particular functions, be it adding to the discourse of a discipline (in the case of an academic discourse community) or communicating certain facts or occurrences (as is the case with a health history form at a medical clinic, for example). Furthermore, writing carries with it the collective understanding of a particular discourse community at large. In a classroom context, for example, particular audience expectations are embedded in the texts students compose, expectations that may include particular terminology that has come about through the practices and activities of a discourse community. In the case of a health history form, for example, the audience expectation is that the patient divulge previous health issues that may affect the diagnosis and treatment of the particular issue for which the patient has come to the clinic.

In academic discourse communities, students must see themselves as part of the community in which that social action occurs in order to engage fully within that community. According to Lave and Wenger’s theory, this can only occur through
legitimate peripheral participation in that community, of which writing is likely a part. In this sense, writing serves a dual role: it both enables individuals to participate in the social action of the community and carries within it the knowledge, skills, practices, and identity of the community itself. This view is in line with Vygotsky who argued that language does not merely express thought but is the thing that makes it come into existence.

Lave and Wagner’s theory can explain a great deal about how students may use writing to participate in a community of practice and how they move from being apprentices to full participants, but it does not unpack the full complexity of all factors that influence learning in a social context as well as how those factors interact toward a particular outcome. How participants conceptualize the outcome within a particular context in a community of practice will vary and will be shaped by the individuals within a community and other communities of which they may be a part. The outcome is no doubt influenced by the activities within a particular context as well as the tools used within that context toward the outcome, but participants bring with them their previous ways of knowing and understanding that also shape the learning that takes place within a given community of practice. Therefore, a more robust theory that takes into account all factors of a context is necessary to unpack not only the learning that takes place, but also how that learning takes place. Activity theory is useful in this regard.

**Activity Theory**

While not a theory of learning per se, Activity Theory (Engeström, 2015) falls under the sociocultural theory umbrella, for it takes into consideration how individuals collectively act toward a shared purpose within a particular context. Its purpose is to
describe (not predict) human activity. It is a fitting framework for an exploratory study because it operationalizes the factors embedded in a particular activity context.

Activity Theory considers how all aspects of a context (e.g. people and their experiences, histories, goals and motivations; the environment; objects within that environment; and cultural norms) interact with each other and influence the activity within that context (hence, activity system). Figure 2 displays the general components of an activity system. As indicated by the arrows in the figure, the components of an activity system are not hierarchical per se. The arrows flow back and forth between components, indicating a relational structure. All components lead toward the outcome but in general are directed toward the object. The arrows are a way to indicate both direction and interaction. In considering a classroom as an activity system, for example, there are multiple components acting in relation to each other that impact the learning that transpires. It is not just the actors (i.e. students and teacher) that lead to learning. Learning occurs as a result of the interactions among the actors with the materials and content of the course as well as the experiences actors bring with them to the learning context (e.g. how actors have experienced other classroom settings, their prior knowledge of the content, the larger world from which the content has been drawn, the tools that are used in the classroom to deliver content as well as how the tools provide a means to engage with the content, and what comes out of those interactions).
Figure 2. General Model of an Activity System (from Engeström, 1987, p. 78, cited in Greeno and Engeström, 2014, p. 131.)

The order of component definitions that follows, thus, does not move around the perimeter of the triangle model but bounces back and forth to provide a general directional interpretation of this model.

- **Object** refers to the goal or intended outcome of activity.

- **Subject** refers to the individual actors within a system. Subjects could be single persons or groups of people acting toward the object. However, a subject is not the collectivity of all individuals who are in some way related to the system.

- **Instruments/tools** are the instruments and artifacts, both existing and produced, that are used toward an intended object in a system.

- **Outcome** is what happens as a result of all the mediating factors in an activity system.

- **Community** refers to the collectivity of individual people and groups embedded in a system. In a living learning community classroom activity
system, for example, the community includes the school itself, the disciplinary communities that inform the course content, and the residential community in which students live and engage.

- **Division of labor** encompasses how activity is distributed across the community.

- **Rules** are the expectations and accepted ways of acting (cultural norms).

In terms of a college classroom setting, one can view the community as students and the instructor as primary actors (i.e. the subjects), but that community can also encompass larger communities (a disciplinary community, the school, the institution and the other communities with which individuals are affiliated). The division of labor can be seen as the roles of those within the community (e.g. students complete assignments, and the instructor evaluates those/assigns grades). The rules are the expected/determined ways of acting in a class (e.g. ways to engage with others in discussion, when to turn in assignments, the particular criteria for assignments). The subjects are the students and teacher in that class. The object would be learning both broadly and toward specific course outcomes. The tools are the instruments used toward that learning as well as the artifacts produced in that process (written assignments, for example). The outcome is what occurs as a result of the interaction of those other components.

In an activity system in which writing is a tool/artifact, there are particular ways to make meaning within a particular discipline and classroom (i.e. rules). Writing related knowledge plays a crucial role in such a system. Students as subjects are asked to produce particular kinds of texts that not only demonstrate their learning, but also are intended to assist them toward that learning. They must draw not only on their knowledge
of the content, but also on their knowledge of how to write a particular text within an activity system (what the prompt requires as well as how they negotiate that prompt within their already defined spheres of writing—i.e. previous genre and rhetorical knowledge). But they filter that previous knowledge within the current social context in which they find themselves (the activity system). This act of filtering previous knowledge into a new form is an act of invention on subjects’ part, and this invention occurs as a result of the object/goal toward which the activity of writing is aimed, a goal that is situated within a particular activity system.

An Activity Theory framework is congruent with scholarship on living learning communities as well. Inkelas, Longerbeam, Owen, and Johnson’s (2006) scholarship on living learning communities cites Astin’s (1993) inputs-environments-outcomes college impact model as the conceptual framework for developing the National Study of Living Learning Programs (NSLLP). In Astin’s model, inputs are the experiences and characteristics students bring with them to college. The environment is the combination of programs, policies, faculty, peers, and educational experiences with which students interact while in college. Outcomes are the experiences and characteristics students have after being enrolled in college.

Through the lens of Activity Theory, inputs are embedded in the students as subjects and are also a product of the community. Knowing more about what students bring (i.e. input) to a mutt course that is part of a LLC helps to unpack how students view the writing they do in that context as well as helps in understanding how their previous writing knowledge and experiences influences their negotiation of writing in that course. It also helps to unpack what connections they make to other writing contexts/tasks, which
in turn are part of the larger community/ies of practice/s students move in and out of as they write. The *environment* in Astin’s model can be seen as the rules, division of labor, and tools in an activity system triangle, but also the interaction of all points of the triangle. Understanding the activity system (i.e. *environment*) helps to better understand how class discussions and activities aid writing to learn (or learning to write) in this setting as well as how instructors use writing toward intended learning outcomes (i.e. the object in an activity system). Astin’s *outcomes* (while referring to students’ characteristics and experiences after being exposed to college) can be seen as the object and the outcome in an activity system triangle. If learning is indeed social and if writing is an effective tool through which learning can occur, Activity Theory gives us a means to understanding “how.” What it does not provide an explicit means for understanding “what” learning occurs. Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning, however, does just that.

**Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning**

In order to better understand an activity system triangle whose objects and outcomes include student learning in a classroom setting, Anderson and Krathwohl’s *Revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Education Objectives* (2001) is useful. This framework views learners as active participants in their own learning. It aligns with sociocultural theories of learning and specifically with Activity Theory because it assumes learners “construct their own meaning based on their prior knowledge, their current cognitive and metacognitive activity, and the opportunities and constraints they are afforded in the setting, including information that is available to them” (p. 38). In terms of Activity Theory, prior knowledge is brought into the system by subjects and is also informed by the community. Current cognitive and metacognitive activity is part and parcel of
subjects’ ways of proceeding in activity. Constraints are present both in the rules and division of labor in the system, and opportunities can become available through instruments/artifacts as well as manifest in objects and outcomes.

As such, Anderson and Krathwoh’s framework is particularly applicable to a mutt course setting in which there are no firm rules for what constitutes content as there are in disciplinary classroom contexts. Content is an amalgamation of different disciplinary ways of making meaning, so students must be doubly active in constructing their own learning. While there are intended course goals defined by instructors, students pick and choose what is most relevant to the setting. Their choices are influenced by previous understandings of classroom settings and disciplines, their motivations for taking the class, and their social interactions within the class context. In a mutt course tied to a LLC, students’ social interactions outside the classroom setting also figure into the experiences they draw on, which become part of the course content. This aspect of integrating curricular and co-curricular experiences is part of LLC design as research has indicated that college learning is “enhanced when activities outside the classroom complement formal instruction (e.g., Astin, 1993; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991)” (cited in Kurotsuchi Inkelas, Johnson, Lee, Daver, Longerbeam, Vogt, & Leaonard, 2006, p. 116).

Anderson and Krathwoh’s revised taxonomy outlines four types of knowledge: (1) factual (“basic elements” of an academic discipline, including terminology, and details and elements—events, locations, dates, etc.), (2) conceptual (“categories and classifications and relationships between and among them,” including classifications/categories, principles/generalizations, theories, models, and structures), (3) procedural (“knowledge of how to do something,” including subject-specific
skills/algorithms, subject-specific techniques/methods, and knowledge of criteria for when to use appropriate procedures), and (4) metacognitive (general knowledge of “one’s own cognition,” including strategic knowledge for learning/thinking, knowledge of cognitive tasks—contextual and conditional, and self-knowledge (knowing one’s strengths and weaknesses with regard to thinking and learning and awareness of one’s motivation) (p. 45-60).

According to Anderson and Krathwohl, these knowledge domains manifest through particular cognitive processes. That is, meaningful learning is understood to take place if particular types of thinking are demonstrated. Explanation of these cognitive process follows.

**Remember.** Remembering has to do with retrieving information from the long-term memory. It is the most basic cognitive process and is necessary for other higher order cognitive processes. Remembering can take the shape of recognizing (“locating knowledge in long term memory that is consistent with presented material”—that is finding knowledge that is comparable to presented material) or retrieving (recalling knowledge stored in long term memory) (p. 66-70).

**Understand.** Anderson and Krathwohl note that understanding is necessary to promote transfer. It goes beyond recognizing and recalling information and has to do with constructing meaning and does not rely on memory alone. There are several forms of understanding:

- **Interpreting:** converting information from one form into another (e.g. paraphrasing a text).
- **Exemplifying**: giving a specific example of a concept (e.g. finding examples from one’s own life that demonstrate a concept).

- **Classifying**: recognizing categories or patterns. For example, if students are given a specific example of a concept, they would be able to understand what concept was in play.

- **Summarizing**: abstracting a general theme or major points. For example, when students have to give the major points of an assigned reading in a writing assignment.

- **Inferring**: finding patterns within a set of examples and determining relationships among those examples. Anderson and Krathwohl make a point that inferring is different than attributing (which falls under “apply”): “attributing focuses solely on the pragmatic issue of determining an author’s point of view or intention, whereas inferring focuses on the issue of inducing a pattern based on presented information […] Inferring […] occurs in a context that supplies an expectation of what is to be inferred” (p. 74). Other verbs that indicate inferring are predicting, concluding, extrapolating, and interpolating.

- **Comparing**: finding similarities and differences among things (concepts, objects, problems, ideas, etc.). “In comparing, when given new information, a student detects correspondences with more familiar knowledge” (p. 75). An example might be finding similarities in different kinds of oppression (e.g. racism and sexism).

- **Explaining**: constructing and using a cause and effect model and understanding “how change in one part of a system […] affects change in
another part” (p. 76). An example would be explaining the causes of a type of oppression.

**Apply.** Applying means “using procedures to perform exercises or solve problems” (p. 77). This involves either executing (carrying out a procedure on a familiar task— commonly associated with using algorithms or skills) or implementing (selecting and using a procedure to perform a novel task— commonly associated with using techniques and methods) (p. 78).

**Analyze.** Analysis means “breaking material into parts and determining how those parts are related to the overall structure” (p. 79). Anderson and Krathwohl note that analyzing is an “extension of Understanding” and a “prelude to Evaluating and Creating” and may include tasks such as determining unstated assumptions in a text or determining how ideas are related to each other. Forms include:

- **Differentiating:** “distinguishing the parts of a whole structure in terms of their relative importance” (p. 80). It differs from Understanding in that it concerns “structural organization.” In understanding/summarizing finding main points in a reading might be an example, but differentiating concerns a structure or system. For example, an author may have main points in a text about sexism, but differentiating would concern determining the main factors embedded in sexism as a concept.

- **Organizing:** “identifying the elements of a communication or situation” and being able to explain “how they fit together in a coherent structure” (p. 81). This usually occurs in conjunction with differentiating. Organizing involves identifying “the systematic, coherent relationships among relevant elements,”
for example, extrapolating evidence from a text and structuring it into an argument or determining elements of a text that do not support an argument.

- **Attributing**: determining the point of view, biases, values, or intentions in a communication (p. 82); deconstructing a text, so to speak. When students engage in rhetorical analysis of a text, for example, attributing is involved.

**Evaluate.** Evaluating means making “judgements based on clearly defined standards and criteria, such as efficiency, consistency, quality, or effectiveness” (p. 83). Evaluating includes two cognitive processes: *checking* (“testing for internal inconsistencies or fallacies in an operation or product,” such as determining whether an author’s conclusion follows from the text’s premises and supporting evidence and *critiquing* (“judging a product or operation based on externally imposed criteria and standards,” such as judging the merits of a particular solution” to a particular issue/problem) (p. 84).

**Create.** Creating means “putting elements together to form a coherent or functional whole” (p. 84) to form something new. This could include posing a solution to a particular issue/problem based on synthesizing ideas from multiple texts on the topic. Creating involves three phases:

- **Generating**: “representing the problem and arriving at alternatives or hypotheses that meet certain criteria” (p. 86). The goal is to arrive at various possibilities.

- **Planning**: developing a plan to solve a problem, but not carrying out the steps to enact the plan. An example may be to generate an outline for a research paper that details what the paper will include.
• *Producing*: carrying out the planned solution to an issue/problem (p. 87). The focus here is on the product itself.

This framework, thus, allows for a deeper understanding of a classroom activity system because student learning (object/outcome) can be conceptualized in tangible ways. Activity Theory also views an activity system as a situated system. While situated, the system is not fixed but is fluid since subjects bring with them community ways of thinking and knowing as well as their own prior knowledge and experience. However, each system is unique (and thus situated) in its own way both because of its rules/division of labor (somewhat fixed) and its fluidity. When writing is a tool/artifact in a classroom activity system (and it almost always is), the situatedness and fluidity of that tool and that system is only further reinforced as scholarship on writing shows.

The review of literature that follows lends support to writing as a situated, social act within communities of practice, but one that is also fluid. Research on writing to learn, learning to write, writing pedagogy, and the resources on which students draw in writing tend to point to how writing cannot be divorced from the context in which it occurs. However, writers do draw on prior writing knowledge and experience, which informs how they negotiate a writing task in a particular context (either new or familiar). This is true in traditional, disciplinary settings (in which the majority of writing research is set) as well as in settings such as service learning courses or interdisciplinary programs. Additionally, research on LLCs provides evidence for learning as social rather than merely cognitive in nature.
Writing to Learn

Writing to learn is the pedagogical practice of using writing as a tool for learning. According to the WAC (Writing Across the Curriculum) Clearinghouse, writing to learn assignments consist of “short, impromptu or otherwise informal writing tasks that help students think through key concepts or ideas presented in a course.” (WAC Clearinghouse, 2016). The literature on writing to learn began with three seminal works: Britton’s and colleagues’ (1975) The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18), which called for a closer integration of writing and the disciplines; Emig’s “Writing as a Mode of Learning” (1977), which drew on Bruner’s theories of learning and argued that writing encompasses the enactive (learning by doing), iconic (learning by seeing), and representational/symbolic (learning “by restatement in words”); and Flower and Hayes’ “Cognitive Process Theory of Writing” (1981), which also demonstrated a relationship between writing, thinking, and learning.

Since the time of these earlier studies, scholarship on writing to learn has been plentiful across disciplines. In a recent literature review, Anson and Lyles (2012) conducted a content analysis of articles in pedagogical journals from 1986-2006 (excluding journals focused on composition studies) and found 537 articles published on writing to learn in various disciplinary settings. Not only did they conclude that “faculty and scholars in the disciplines represented by these journals have dramatically increased their interest in writing over the past 40 years,” (p. 10), but they also noted an increasing interest in the embedding of writing into other learning activities.

Research on writing to learn falls into three broad categories: 1) the development of content area knowledge through writing (Balgopal, Wallace, & Dahlberg, 2012;
The Development of Content Area Knowledge through Writing

Most college courses include writing assignments with an assumption that writing will aid students’ learning. Studies do indicate a relationship between writing and learning course content, some showing a stronger impact (Bangert-Drowns, Hurley, & Wilkinson, 2004; Bargate, 2015; Galer-Unti, 2002; Jaafar, 2016; McGuire, Lay, & Peters, 2009) and others showing mixed results (Balgopal, Wallace, & Dahlberg, 2012; Fry & Villagomez, 2012), but evidence overall leans toward the positive. For example, Bangert-Drowns, Hurley, and Wilkinson (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of writing to learn studies from 1966-1999 spanning disciplines and grade levels (elementary through college). Excluding studies that were not comparative investigations of writing to learn,
these researchers identified 46 studies that sought to demonstrate “content-related academic achievement” (p. 38). Of these studies, 75% demonstrated a positive effect of writing on learning. The researchers noted that while “the mean effect of writing-to-learn interventions on content achievement was rather small,” it was statistically significant. The mean effect of writing to learn was also higher in studies of college populations than it was for other grade levels studied. Other more recent studies support the findings of the analysis of Bangert-Drowns et al.

McGuire et al. (2009) examined five years of course evaluations as well as student focus group data (n=13) to investigate how reflection papers (a writing to learn strategy) facilitated learning among social work students. Course evaluations frequently mentioned the reflection papers as beneficial but did not yield evidence on how or why this was the case. Focus group data revealed that reflection papers helped students to be more engaged in courses, aided in the development of professional identity, deepened critical thinking, and improved students’ abilities to integrate theory to practice. One limitation of this study was that data was based on student perceptions of learning and not on empirical measures such as grades and/or student coursework itself, but there are studies that look at more empirical measures of learning.

Balgopal, Wallace, and Dahlberg (2012) studied the understanding of ecological knowledge among three populations of college students after participating in writing to learn activities (42 biology students and 47 elementary education majors at a four-year college and eight students enrolled at a tribal college majoring in Native studies). The writing to learn activities required students to both reflect on what they understood and demonstrate how they would apply course content. Essays were analyzed solely on
content and not on mechanical features of writing and coded as superficial (no meaningful affective or conceptual connections present), subjective (affective connections present), objective (demonstrated comprehension of ecological concepts) and authentic (displayed connections between course material/discussions as well as application of concepts). While the sample size was small, half of the Native Studies students demonstrated improved understanding of concepts. Among the four-year college students studied, 30% of students’ essays demonstrated “more ecologically literate understanding” of course content. This shows some gain in students’ knowledge as a result of the writing to learn activities. However, students whose papers fell into the superficial or subjective categories did not move into the authentic category after the writing to learn activities, a finding that makes writing to learn effects questionable in this case. Furthermore, without a control group who did not engage in writing to learn activities, it’s hard to determine if growth was a product of the intervention or not. There are likely to be other factors that enhanced or impeded knowledge development among the population studied.

Jaafar’s (2016) study provides stronger empirical evidence that writing to learn strategies facilitate student learning of academic content and skills. Jaafar examined a sample of 80 students across three sections of an introductory calculus course at a community college between 2012 and 2013 and found that writing to learn strategies helped students (many of whom were not native English speakers) deepen their understanding of concepts, develop appreciation for mathematical language, and develop essential learning skills applicable to any field. He noted improved grades overall as well as better comprehension of content (as evidenced through the writing assignments). An
end of course survey also revealed perceptions that the writing aided in learning as well as helped students in their communication skills. In fact, research on the development of writing proficiency indicates that instruction in how to write also has an impact on student learning.

**The Development of Writing Proficiency within Disciplines**

The line between learning to write and writing to learn is a blurry one, for each focus impacts the other. Scholars who have studied writing development in particular courses/disciplines tend to view writing as part of disciplinary knowledge. Writing is how disciplinary experts make meaning and cannot be separated from subject matter knowledge; it’s part of the social context of a community of practice. Many scholars have noted how disciplinary knowledge impacts writing proficiency (Bayer, Curto, & Kriley, 2005; Bean, Carrithers, & Earenfight, 2005; Beaufort, 2007; Poe, Lerner, & Craig, 2010; Soliday, 2011). When students have better understanding of disciplinary content, their writing tends to be stronger. Beaufort’s (2007) often-cited longitudinal study documented one writer’s movement across disciplines throughout his college career as well as in the workplace post-graduation. Beaufort found subject matter knowledge to be a crucial aspect of writing proficiency within each discipline in which the student wrote. The student had difficulty transferring writing knowledge across disciplines (from first year composition to history and from history to engineering) in part because he needed to acquire the ways of making meaning within each discipline, but also because his subject matter knowledge was underdeveloped. Through ongoing practice of writing within the disciplines, the student was able to develop his disciplinary knowledge. For example, when one of the student’s engineering professors went through an essay with the student
and instructed him in how to construct knowledge in the field, the student began to understand what counts for evidence in an engineering text, an act that signals acquiring disciplinary knowledge.

Bean, Carrithers, and Earenfight (2005) found similar results in a documentary account of faculty at Seattle University who were trying to improve their assessment methods in a systematic study of student performance on course-embedded assessments. For their study, faculty analyzed students’ writing samples, made observations of teaching methods, and examined syllabi and assignment prompts in two history courses (required for majors) and a senior capstone course for finance majors. Their analysis of the data suggested that students’ lack of writing proficiency in the finance course was due to underdeveloped critical thinking in content knowledge. The weaker papers in the history courses demonstrated similar challenges: writers were unable to apply theory and demonstrated weak understanding of historical content. Analysis of a video recorded class discussion confirmed these challenges. Five of twelve students in the history course were unable to talk like historians or identify major historical thinkers. The authors concluded that better design of writing assignments and more guided instruction of how to write within these disciplines would aid students’ learning. In fact, when the history writing assignments were redesigned the following year using writing across the curriculum approaches (scaffolding assignments, being explicit in expectations, requiring multiple drafts, and providing ongoing feedback through instructor and peer review), students’ writing improved and grades overall were higher.

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5 Student writing was evaluated by several professors in the history department.
Other studies have shown that a focus on learning to write can improve disciplinary understanding both in terms of content knowledge and how to make meaning in particular disciplines (Bayer, Curto, & Kriley, 2005; Beaufort, 2007; Defazio, Jones, Tennant, & Hook, 2010; Johnson & Krase, 2012; Moor, Jensen-Hart, & Hooper, 2012; Poe, Lerner, & Craig, 2010). For example, Moor, Jensen-Hart, & Hooper (2012) conducted an ethnographic study of a collaboration among social work faculty (three of five faculty participated) and a writing center consultant to improve student writing through pedagogical development at one state university in the northwest. Data included video recorded Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) faculty development and analysis of assignment prompts and syllabi. In the faculty development workshops, instructors were asked to develop a list of criteria for writing in social work. They were then guided to revise their course writing assignments, explicitly incorporating these criteria and providing instruction in how to use professional language in the field of social work. After their assignment revisions (which included more explicit expectations), faculty indicated that student writing improved. They felt that students were better able to relate their experiences to the field of social work and that, unlike students’ texts from previous years, current students’ writing demonstrated a better understanding of the program at large.

Galer-Unti’s (2002) study also provides some evidence that teaching writing within a discipline helps to develop content area knowledge. The researcher collected data from four semesters of students enrolled in a writing intensive health education course (taught by the same instructor) via a post-course survey of student perceptions of learning (n=103). The course utilized many writing across the curriculum strategies,
including ongoing instructor feedback on writing, submission of multiple drafts, and in-class writing assignments. The instructor of the course was also required to participate in writing across the curriculum training (which was required of all instructors teaching writing intensive courses at this university). On the post-course survey, students reported improved writing skills (a mean of 4.05 on a 5-point scale) and critical thinking (mean of 4.44) in health education. Galer-Uneti found statistically significant correlations between student perceptions of improved writing skills and perceptions of improved critical thinking skills (.33, p<.01). Additionally, students who perceived that this course improved their writing skills were also more likely to believe that writing assignments contributed to their learning (.54, p<.01). While such results are compelling, the study has some limitations in that it examined only student perceptions of learning and not empirical measures of learning. The author also acknowledges that data was drawn from courses taught by a single instructor and that improvement in student writing and learning could be attributed to the experience and practices of that instructor and not necessarily to the inclusion of writing pedagogy itself.

**Pedagogical Practices that Affect Students’ Writing Development and/or Learning of Disciplinary Knowledge**

Using writing as a tool for learning is dependent on the way writing is utilized. While students may learn how to write or learn disciplinary content simply through writing itself (Carroll, 2002), research supports the use of particular strategies in writing to learn or learning to write that better facilitate student learning (Artemeva & Logie, 2003; Carter, Ferzli, & Wiebe, 2004; Downs & Wardle, 2007; Harris & Twomey, 2008; Melzer, 2009; Russell, 2001; Soliday, 2011; Walvoord & McCarthy, 1990; Wolfe, 2011).
Strategies most commonly advocated in the literature on writing to learn include: 1) increasing the intensity of writing assigned, 2) scaffolding writing assignments, 3) using exemplars and rubrics, 4) focusing on authentic writing in a particular discipline, 5) providing clear and explicit prompts, and 6) engaging students in metacognitive writing.

**Increasing the intensity of writing.** Research indicates that when students write more, they learn more (Anderson et al., 2015; Galer-Unti, 2002; Poe, Lerner, & Craig, 2010; Soliday, 2011; Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006). Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) conducted a study of how students learn to write within the disciplines and examined data from student surveys (n=183), student focus groups (n=36), and students’ essays (n=40) and found that students need to do a lot of writing to develop proficiency as writers within a discipline and also need knowledge of and experience with writing in different genres. Experience in writing can be gained through writing intensive courses, which are one of the high-impact practices advocated by Kuh (2008), and which research shows impacts students’ learning (Anderson et al., 2015; Galer-Unti, 2002; Shea, Nolan, Saccoman, & Wright, 2006; Soliday, 2011; Sterling-Deer, 2009). What constitutes a writing intensive course varies among institutions, but some general characteristics are common. Farris and Smith (1992) examined a number of universities’ writing intensive courses and outlined a rationale for such courses. They identified several characteristics of writing intensive courses, including a smaller class size (no more than 25 students); faculty instructors (who have often participated in writing across the curriculum training), a required number of papers or words (often around 5,000 words), multiple paper revisions, sequenced/related writing assignments (i.e. scaffolding), and “assignment-related instruction” (i.e. explicit instruction in how to write for a particular assignment/genre) (p.
They also noted that the institutions’ programs they reviewed shared a belief that writing aids learning. This belief is supported by studies of writing intensive courses.

For example, Soliday’s (2011) research included case studies of writers in several disciplines (art history, education, architecture, biology, psychology, and anthropology) and found that students perceived that they learned more in their writing intensive courses that were supported through the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program than they had in other courses. Galer-Unti’s (2002) research, mentioned previously, found similar results in students’ perceived learning through writing intensive courses.

Additional research notes gains in learning beyond students’ perceptions. Sterling-Deer (2009) examined the impact of writing across the disciplines and writing in the disciplines methodology in a writing intensive capstone course for childhood education majors and found that the course and particular writing assignments in it “bolstered deeper levels of reflection essential to disciplinary grounding and interdisciplinary understanding.” The course emphasized learning through writing and professional preparation. Students’ writing (e-portfolios) was analyzed as data. Additionally, Shea et al. (2006) documented the impact of writing intensive courses at Seton Hall through case studies of faculty who participated in the “Writing-Intensive Courses Project” at this university, a program that trained faculty in writing pedagogy. Faculty included in this study reported better drafts of student’s papers and better understanding of course content than they had seen prior to participating in the “Writing-Intensive Courses Project.” This indicates that increased and more pointed writing within a discipline coupled with instructional supports have an impact on student learning.
It is important to note, however, that the amount of writing alone does not necessarily lead to increased learning. Writing intensity has more to do with the kinds of thinking students in which students engage in their writing (Anderson et al., 2015).

Anderson et al., (2015) conducted a multi-institutional study using data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which examines students’ perceptions of the impact of their behaviors and institutions’ practices on “desired outcomes of college” (NSSE, 2018). In particular Anderson and colleagues (2015) looked at the relationship between students’ writing and two constructs on NSSE: “Deep Approaches to Learning,” and “Perceived Gains in Learning and Development,” and sought to ascertain whether “more writing (number of pages)” and “certain kinds of writing” as well as “instructional practices” had impact on students’ learning (defined as “desirable” college learning outcomes) (p. 204). In order to determine such a relationship, a writing scale was developed (a set of questions on writing) and added to the NSSE for participating institutions. On this writing scale “deep approaches to learning” included “higher order learning,” “integrative learning,” and “reflective learning.” Data included survey responses from over 70,000 seniors and first-year students across 80 institutions.

Findings from Anderson and colleagues’ study indicate that the amount of writing assigned had no significant impact on students’ perceptions of “deep learning experiences” (p. 220). Experiences that did impact students’ perceptions of learning included 1) interacting “meaningfully” with others (e.g. classmates, other peers, and

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6 These constructs align with Bloom’s Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). “Higher order learning,” for example, reflects the cognitive processes outlined in Anderson and Krathwohl’s framework, which progresses from remembering to understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. “Integrative learning” can be found in the cognitive processes of understanding (exemplifying, comparing, explaining) as well as applying, evaluating, and explaining. “Reflective learning” embodies the cognitive processes as well as the conceptual and metacognitive knowledge domains.
instructors) during the writing process; 2) being “challenged by writing tasks that required meaning-making”—such as integrating knowledge (e.g. relating knowledge from one course to another and/or applying concepts learned in class to new/other situations/experiences), thinking critically (e.g. supporting a claim with evidence and/or evaluating content/knowledge), and 3) receiving clear expectations for their writing tasks. (Note: clear expectations/prompts are discussed later in this review.) Thus, intensity of writing should be understood to mean writing that engages students in the kinds of cognitive processes outlined in Anderson and Krathwohl’s (2001) revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy as well as how that writing develops knowledge domains.

**Scaffolding Writing Assignments.** Scaffolding techniques in writing instruction allow students to successively approximate the writing processes and practices that lead to successful writing. They help students immerse themselves little by little into the ways of knowing and meaning making in a discipline. In other words, they engage in legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Writing studies scholarship suggests that one way to do this is to break assignments into smaller parts. Rather than assigning a long-term research project, for example, instructors successively assign the different pieces of writing that lead up to a larger final report. These pieces might include a literature review; field research/laboratory experiments; applying theoretical research to field research/observation/experiments; and then drafting, peer review, teacher feedback, and revision. Studies have shown that when students engage successively in these parts of a final, longer essay, student writing is more successful (Artemeva & Logie, 2003; Bayer et al., 2005; Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004; Bean, Carrithers, & Earenfight, 2005, Carter,
Carter et al. (2004), for example, conducted a study (n=80) of a web tool called LabWrite that taught the genre of a lab report through a series of sequential steps. They describe the tool as a structured “guide to the lab experience, organized as a chronological process paralleling the lab activities” (p. 400), which include pre-lab (questions that engage students in the scientific understanding of the experiment), in-lab (tools that help students gather and organize data), post-lab (a guide to composing the lab report), and lab-check (“a heuristic for revising the written report”). The researchers found that the treatment group performed better in terms of learning scientific content (p<.003) and in ability to apply elements of scientific reasoning than did the control group (p<.0001). Carter et al. attributed the success of LabWrite not only to explicitly teaching genre, but also to the fact that this teaching was done in context of the lab experiments (not disconnected from the lab itself). In other words, the LabWrite tool was a scaffold, “a supportive tool for learners as they construct knowledge” (Driscoll, 2005, p. 257).

The documentary case studies Shea et al. (2006) included in their examination of instructors incorporating WAC pedagogies into their courses also support the use of scaffolding techniques. A psychology professor, for instance, noted that she had always broken the assigned research paper into successive parts (introduction, methods, results, and discussion), but she had not incorporated writing activities that would assist students in writing those particular sections. After participating in the WAC development workshops, she “created multi-stage writing assignments in which prewriting exercises
and informal writing assignments […] preceded the drafts of each of the sections of the major paper.” This scaffolding strategy led to better drafts of sections of the research paper and helped students to understand the importance of a detailed methods section. The professor also reported that making such changes to the writing assignments had an impact on student learning. For example, requiring students to articulate statistical analysis in their own words demonstrated students’ understanding of statistical concepts. One limitation with the accounts included in the research of Shea et al., however, is that it relied on instructors’ perceptions of student learning rather than empirical evidence.

Soliday (2011) also documented how scaffolding played a role in developing writers’ proficiency in various disciplines. In one case study example, a professor of education worked with a writing fellow to scaffold the research paper assignment required in her course. The professor reported that in prior years, students had difficulty using the language typical of educational research, often writing book-report like papers, and failed to synthesize research and apply it appropriately. The assignment was broken down into two parts, one in which students critically reviewed research and another in which students applied theory to what they observed in classroom field placements. Students received feedback on drafts of the assignments and were given workshops in APA citation, which were contextualized within the writing assignments. This scaffolding resulted in stronger papers than the professor had seen in previous years of teaching the course. Like the research of Shea et al. (2006), the limitation of the evidence presented by Soliday is that it only includes instructors’ and students’ perceptions of learning. However, given that instructors are ultimately responsible for assessing student
learning through the assignment of grades, their perceptions of student learning should be considered trustworthy.

**Using exemplars and rubrics.** Another strategy that literature suggests may assist developing writing competency and promoting learning is the use of models/exemplars of competent writing (Carter et al., 2004; Downs and Wardle, 2007; Poe, Lerner & Craig, 2010; Soliday, 2011; Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006; Zumbrunn & Krause, 2012) or writing rubrics (Colvill, 2012; Dawson, 2009; Harris & Twomey, 2008; Wald, Borkan, Taylor, Anthony, & Reis, 2012). When students are given examples of successful models and when these models are discussed in terms of how they are successful, students come to better understand expectations for their own writing. Furthermore, models of actual writing in a field can help students understand the place writing occupies in discourse communities, which in turn assists in the acquisition of disciplinary content. Rubrics, which are tools for assessing writing and providing feedback to students, can also serve this function if they make clear the expectations for writing and contextualize the writing as social activity within the discipline.

Zumbrunn and Krause’s (2012) research supports the use of models in writing instruction, particularly instructors using their own writing as models. They conducted a qualitative study of what underlies effective writing instruction and interviewed seven leading scholars in the field of writing studies. Participants included Linda Flower, Steven Graham, Karen Harris, Jerome Harste, George Hillocks, Thomas Newkirk, and Peter Smagorinsky.\(^7\) Findings from these interviews indicated that effective writing instructors realize the impact of their own writing beliefs, experiences, and practices and

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\(^7\) Flower and Hayes’ (1981) research was seminal in writing to learn scholarship and Smagorinsky’s scholarship is cited elsewhere in this review.
communicate those to students. Harste, for example, explicitly suggested that instructors share their own writing with students. While these findings are based solely on opinions of scholars, they are trustworthy in that participants have conducted noteworthy research on writing themselves.

Instructors’ awareness of their own writing processes and practices can be helpful in employing scaffolding techniques where instructors serve as supports for students learning the ways of making meaning in a discipline. Thaiss and Zawacki (2006), whose research is referenced earlier, concluded that students need to see a purpose for their writing outside of just earning a grade in order to develop competency in writing in a discipline. When students engage with models and discuss and analyze them in class, they engage in activities authentic to the discipline itself (e.g. critiquing research, making meaning of content, and acquiring disciplinary writing convention knowledge). In other words, they participate in the community of practice.

Additionally, Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) noted that when teachers talk about their own professional writing and their expectations for student writing, they “demonstrate how “their writing practices, products, and often-unacknowledged preferences derive from a complex mix of variables” including “generalized standards for academic writing, disciplinary conventions, ‘subdisciplinary’ conventions, departmental cultures and policies, and personal goals and idiosyncratic likes and dislikes” (p. 95). Data from student surveys, focus groups, and proficiency essays showed that students perceived instructors to be “the most important sources of knowledge about writing in their disciplines” and that this knowledge came not only from lectures and instructor’s feedback on students’ writing, but also from “the teachers’ own writing” (p. 108). Focus
group data also showed that instructors’ passion for their own academic projects “was a significant contributing factor to the student’s ability to internalize disciplinary motives, goals, and genres” (p. 117). Several focus group respondents reported reading their professors’ own books or articles and how those models helped them make sense of expectations, acting as a guide for their own writing. These findings, too, demonstrate the social nature of writing development, a negotiation between writers and their audiences.

Like models, rubrics may guide students through a writing task as well as assist in the assessment of students’ writing. When instructors develop rubrics for assessing writing, grading practices become more consistent and students better understand the expectations for their writing. However, research on the use of writing rubrics is mixed in results of effectiveness. Rubrics may facilitate learning for some students in some cases (Colvill, 2012; Harris and Twomey, 2008; Jonsson, & Svingby, 2007; Wald et al., 2012).

Jonsson, and Svingby (2007) conducted a review of studies in peer-reviewed journals, dissertations, and conference papers on the use of scoring rubrics (n=75). They identified two categories of rubrics: holistic (in which the evaluator makes an overall assessment of the quality of performance) and analytical (in which a score is assigned to each criteria or task outlined on the rubric). The researchers also found that the literature promotes the use of rubrics for consistency of grading, making expectations clear, and promoting student learning. Studies of rubrics did tend to support their effectiveness for the consistency of grading. Additionally, about a third of the studies they reviewed reported “some kind of educational consequence of rubric usage” (p. 138) by means of actual student improvement or by means of perceptions of improvement by teachers.
and/or students. However, they noted that it’s not possible to draw definitive conclusions about the effect of rubrics on student learning from their review.

Results of studies specifically on the use of writing rubrics report similar results. Rubrics appear to be most effective in terms of making grading consistent, but less is known about the effects on learning. For example, the research of Wald et al. (2012) documented the development of a rubric for evaluating reflective writing in medical education and noted that reflective capacity among students in the medical field develops critical thinking, informs clinical reasoning, and develops professionalism among students. The researchers developed their rubric based on reflective writing literature, “including theoretical models of reflection, reflective writing pedagogy, elements of reflective practice, and existing assessment modalities in health professions education” (p. 42). They then developed the rubric in three iterative stages and applied the rubric to student's writing from various courses in order to assess its effectiveness. Writing samples were scored independently, and inter-rater reliability was found to be consistent at acceptable levels. Thus, the effectiveness of rubrics for making grading consistent is supported by this study. The study also noted positive feedback from students and teachers who used the rubric, but it did not report on the effects on student learning outside of what the literature on reflective writing purports to be its benefit.

Covill’s (2012) study looked at the effects of assigning a rubric to college students to assess their own writing and found that the rubric had no effect on writing improvement. Students in this study were divided into groups, each of which was provided with a different writing rubric: a long-rubric (which contained assignment specific criteria), a short-rubric (containing less detailed criteria), and an open-ended
assessment (which asked students general questions such as “what are the strongest aspects of your paper”). Overall statistical analyses of students’ writing showed no significant effects of any of the three rubrics (most grades were in the B-/C+ range). Covill did find significant effects, however, in students' perceptions of how the rubrics helped them write better rough and final drafts as well as how to self-assess their writing in other courses. The majority of students in Covill’s study who were given either the long or short rubrics reported referring to them throughout their writing process. This seems to support that making expectations clear via a rubric is helpful, but the fact that students’ writing quality did not improve with the use of rubrics in this case challenges that view. Additionally, there was some evidence that users of the long rubric perceived it to help them more than users of the other two tools. Covill noted: “long rubric users believed more strongly than open-ended assessment users that assessing heightened their awareness of what to do to write a good paper. Also, long rubric users saw assessment with a tool like the long rubric for writing more generally for other papers in other classes.” These findings suggest that a detailed rubric may help students define the rhetorical situation and be clear on expectations (even if the results did not yield improved writing in this case).

Rubrics that engage students in more authentic inquiry and analysis appear to be more effective in promoting learning. Harris and Twomey’s (2008) study of the ITAC rubric supports this contention. ITAC (Issues, Theory, Analysis, Conclusion) is a process-oriented rubric for planning, drafting, revising, and assessing writing that makes use of scaffolding techniques. Each phase of the rubric breaks the larger research report into subsequent parts. Students also receive feedback through peer and instructor
discussion in each phase. This model, thus, situates writing as a social act among participants in a community of practice. The authors also noted that ITAC created authentic writing contexts because it modeled the process professionals engage in when writing reports, for example “identifying problems and weighing potential approaches to solution identification” (p. 22). Looking at both university-wide writing assessment data and student/faculty testimonials, the authors found that before ITAC was used, less than 50% of the College of Business and Economics (CBE) students wrote at a satisfactory level. Two years later, when ITAC was piloted in the senior capstone policy courses, approximately 60% of CBE students wrote at a satisfactory level, just below the campus average. In year five, 74% of students were assessed as satisfactory in their writing, well above the campus average. Students and faculty additionally “reported high levels of satisfaction in improved written clarity, improvement in explicit and accurate application of theory, and more effective efforts at theory synthesis” (p. 24). Furthermore, students reported less uncertainty in approaching their writing tasks and a reduction in time and angst in drafting assignments. Basic writing skills such as grammar, word choice, and sentence structure also improved with the use of ITAC even though these were not the focus of the rubric.

Harris and Twomey’s study supports that the use of a rubric improves student writing. A rubric, however, needs to engage students more fully in the authentic processes of writing in a disciplinary community. It should not focus on surface-level features of writing (such as organization, structure, and word choice). Instead it should assist students in analyzing and applying content. Since writing is a way of meaning

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8 Writing is noted to have been evaluated with use of a holistic assessment for writing. The assessment is not described, however.
making within a discipline, improved writing leads to disciplinary learning. Furthermore, when students see their writing as authentic, they become more invested in their work, which also assists in disciplinary learning. Hidi and Boscolo’s (2006) scholarship on writing motivation suggests that being more invested in one’s work increases motivation to write and that interest is one of the motivational variables that can have positive effect on cognitive performance. Classroom discourse and activities can be motivating in that they are processes of making meaning. Meaningfulness depends not only on the relevance of activities that require and justify writing, but also on the link between writing and other school activities and disciplines. Therefore, if a writing rubric allows students to see the usefulness of writing, it can be an effective way to foster both content learning and writing development. It should be noted, however, that more research in how students engage with rubrics and how rubrics affect individual students’ writing success would reveal a great deal more with regard to how effective rubrics really are.

**Focusing on authentic writing in a particular discipline.** A theme that emerges in studies of how students write in disciplines is the need to engage students in writing that is authentic to a discipline. There appears to be a connection between writing and learning when students engage in assignments that closely mimic the kind of writing practitioners in a particular field do (Artemeva & Logie, 2003; Bayer et al., 2005; Bean et al., 2005; Beaufort, 2007; Defazio et al., 2004; Fraizer, 2010; Parks & Goldblatt, 2000; Poe, Lerner, & Craig, 2010; Russell, 2001; Soliday, 2011; Wardle & Downs, 2007). From this perspective, students learn the work of a discipline by writing in the discipline. Thus, teaching students how to write within a discipline by assigning authentic writing tasks can help students gain subject matter knowledge. However, empirical studies that
focus specifically on employing authentic writing within a discipline are not prevalent in the literature. My search for studies of authentic writing tended to yield studies of authentic learning contexts that incorporate writing in some way (Guilkens, Bastiaens, & Martiens, 2005; Nail & Townsend, 2010). These studies provide some insight in the role authentic writing plays in learning even if their focus is not specifically on authentic writing.

A good number of writing in the disciplines studies in which authentic writing is referenced do, however, indicate that teaching students how to write in a discipline also aids in students’ developing disciplinary knowledge. In fact, Writing Across the Curriculum has been defined as “writing to learn and learning to write in all disciplines” (McLeod, 1992, p. 5), and in their review of writing studies, from 1986-2006, Anson and Lyles (2012) found that beginning in the 90s, the lines between a focus on “learning to write” and “writing to learn” began to blur so that articles could not be neatly separated into either category.

Russell’s (2001) often-cited review of over 100 naturalistic studies of writing in a 15-year period—ranging from writing in the disciplines to writing in the workplace—found that naturalistic studies dominate the field. He noted that attempts to perform quantitative studies yielded confusing results and were unable to tease out the complex nature of writing because writing is situated within particular activity systems and uses genres and conventions that differ among contexts. Quantitative studies that have attempted to test the claim that writing improves or enhances learning have found that writing doesn’t automatically improve either and often has no effect or a negative effect, but these studies have failed to take into account how social contexts influence what
students learn. This limitation in quantitative studies suggests the need for more qualitative/ethnographic studies of writing in different contexts. Russell also found that experimental studies supported the contention that the kind of writing students did made a difference in what and how students learned. His review of studies indicated that when writing assignments mediated further involvement with the activity of the discipline, they were more successful in promoting disciplinary learning.

One example of students engaged in the authentic writing of a discipline is Nail and Townsend’s (2010) study of students in a teacher preparation program. Participants of the study (n=5) were enrolled in a writing methods course in which they also mentored high school students in writing using online communication technologies. The study itself did not focus on authentic writing but instead sought to investigate how a practicum experience would assist pre-service language arts teachers to see themselves in the role of a professional teacher through an authentic experience. Participants’ writing included reflective journals of their experience as well as the actual written feedback that mentors provided to mentees. (Each participant was paired with one high school student.) Both data sources were used for the study as well as a series of participant interviews (four semiformal, recorded interviews with each and a number of informal non-recorded interviews) and email correspondence between the participants and their mentees. While the reflective journals may not necessarily fit the criteria of authentic writing, the actual written feedback and emails to mentees were authentic in that they were writing that a teacher in the field actually does.

The study found that participants experienced difficulty viewing themselves in the role of a professional. While they expressed confidence in their abilities to provide
feedback to their mentees, they were simultaneously conscious that their feedback was also being evaluated as an assignment. This factor made the writing (i.e. written feedback to students) somewhat inauthentic in that teachers in the field do not receive grades on the feedback they provide to students (though they may be assessed in some way in practice). However, participants did report learning disciplinary knowledge through the act of providing feedback. For example, one participant commented that her feedback on the grammatical elements of her mentee’s papers caused her to realize she needed to refresh her own knowledge of grammatical conventions. Another participant expressed that the online nature of communication helped her to be more specific in her feedback as she could not rely on nonverbal ways to communicate. Providing specific feedback on students’ writing is noted in writing studies literature as a means to better develop students’ writing skill. Thus, this participant appears to have developed a disciplinary skill through an authentic writing situation.

In the same study, another participant expressed the opposite, that the online format did not allow her to be as specific in her feedback as she might be in a face-to-face conversation with a student. However, I would argue that this participant actually was developing disciplinary knowledge because she came to understand more deeply what teaching writing entails (a combination of direct instruction and written feedback). There are some limitations with this study, however. The researchers were also the course instructors, which they acknowledged may have influenced them to view findings in particular ways. The sample size was also small, which makes it difficult to generalize findings.
Another study not explicitly focused on but inclusive of authentic writing was conducted by Gulikers et al. (2005). This study compared the learning of students (n=34, 20 psychology students and 14 technology students from two different universities) assigned to two different electronic learning environments, one authentic and one in-authentic. The authentic environment, “Buiten Dienst,” made use of multimedia “to improve the realistic nature of simulation” (p. 513). The other environment consisted of a website that included only textual information. Both groups of students were asked to assume the role of consultant who was given the task of writing a report “about the causes for the high sick-rate in a bus company” and make suggestions for how to lower the sick-rate. “Buiten Dienst” simulated a more authentic environment because students conducted interviews with virtual employees and engaged in simulated observations of bus rides. They were also provided a virtual secretary to help them with administrative tasks and who served as a kind of coach in the process. Students in the control group simply read information to compile their report. Data sources used to assess learning included a multiple-choice test, a student questionnaire, and the final reports. Reports were assessed on the basis of the number of content statements made and the number of words written.

Results of an ANOVA showed that students in the control group made more content statements than those in the experimental group (M= 20.88, SD=6.48 vs. M=14.12, SD=3.44), \((F(1, 32)=14.45, \text{MSE}=26.92, p<0.01)\). Students in the control group also wrote more words. The number of words strongly correlated with the number of content statements \((r=0.87, p<0.01)\). An ANCOVA on the number of content statements was also conducted but did not show a significant difference between the
control and experimental groups (estimated means of 17.49 vs. 17.50 (F(1, 31)=0.00, 
MSE =12.76, ns.). The researchers noted that “what students wrote in the reports did not 
seem to differ qualitatively between conditions, while the length of reports and the 
number of correct content statements did differ” (p. 517-518). The results of the multiple-
choice test showed no significant difference in acquired factual knowledge by the 
students in each group, and there were no significant differences between groups on the 
subscales of the questionnaire either.

The researchers concluded that the authentic learning environment in this case did 
not improve performance on the final report and that students basically experienced both 
environments as identical. However, these results are questionable. The number of words 
written or the number of content statements made does not necessarily demonstrate 
understanding of the content. Additionally, multiple-choice tests are not indicative of 
understanding, for students can guess the correct answers. Furthermore, while the study 
found students to experience both environments as identical, the authentic nature of the 
task itself may have been the key factor in students’ learning (if the researchers’ criteria 
for demonstrated learning is accepted). Perhaps because students were asked to write a 
report that they would have had to write in an actual context of a consultant firm, the 
learning was identical (though identical is a somewhat problematic term in this case 
because the study doesn't fully unpack what students learned). In any case, the study is 
also limited in that it did not investigate the quality of the writing beyond words written 
and content statements included.

Writing studies research may be a better source of evidence that more authentic 
writing tasks promote learning. Several studies referenced earlier hint at this contention.
For example, Carter’s (2004) research of LabWrite noted the success of the tool because it immersed students in the context of performing a lab experiment while writing the report. Harris and Twomey’s (2008) research on rubric use also considered the authenticity of writing assignments as a factor in what made the ITAC rubric successful.

In a book of studies examining students learning to write in science and engineering, Poe, Lerner, and Craig (2010) noted that “communication helps shape scientific and engineering practice by constructing how knowledge is articulated” (p. 3). Different populations of students are examined in each chapter. In Chapter Three of the book, the researchers examined graduate students (n=15) enrolled in a course focused on writing professional research grant proposals to investigate how authentic writing activities contribute to student learning. The course modeled the peer review process research grants undergo in the professional field. Data sources for this study included pre- and post-course student surveys and post-course interviews. Three cases of students demonstrated successful writing in different ways. One received a high grade on his proposal; another received suggestions from her mentors to submit her proposal for funding from the Autism Foundation; and a third student was able to make large scale changes to his organization as a result of the peer review he received on his proposal. It was noted, however, that this student struggled with grammar, and his mentor ultimately was unconvinced to take an active interest in his proposed research. Poe et al. also found that students grew in their abilities to respond to others’ writing as professionals in the field would do: “Students took away from this experience a deeper understanding of the constructed nature of the scientific peer review” (p. 111). Being able to critique others’ scholarly writing is, indeed, an example of disciplinary knowledge. This activity also
demonstrates the social nature of writing in a community of practice. Poe, Lerner and Craig conclude their book by noting “In our findings, having students engage in the authentic work of science and engineering, including the communication tasks associated with that work, was an important condition for student learning” (p. 188).

**Providing clear and explicit prompts.** Writing Across the Curriculum scholarship suggests that clear expectations on an assignment prompt are an important factor in facilitating students’ writing success and learning (Bean et al., 2005; Beaufort, 2007; Galer-Uni, 2002; Moor et al., 2012; Nowacek, 2005 & 2011; Soliday, 2011, Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006). When students understand expectations, they are better able to meet them, and when expectations are less clear, students may draw on prior understandings of writing tasks or written genres in ways that may not be appropriate to a particular discipline. Beaufort’s (2007) longitudinal study of one writer, mentioned previously in this review, supports this contention. The student she studied had trouble shifting between disciplines because he applied prior writing knowledge inappropriately to the writing in his majors.

Among the expectations instructors can make clearer are helping students understand who the audience is; helping students realize that writing is a process of invention, drafting, and revision; and helping students understand the generic conventions of particular types of disciplinary writing. Awareness of all these factors occurs over time and is better facilitated when teachers make explicit the ways of knowing and meaning-making within their disciplines, which are often tacit to disciplinary experts teaching courses.
For example, Nowacek’s research (2005, 2011) examined students’ writing in an interdisciplinary program at Villanova University in which she observed 18 students enrolled in the program in every classroom session over a 15-week semester (all sessions were tape-recorded and some were video recorded). She also conducted a series of interviews (30-90 minutes each) with ten “focal” students at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester, and a series of shorter interviews before and after each paper students wrote. Additional data sources included students’ papers with peer review and professors’ comments, interviews with the professors teaching the linked courses, and focus group interviews with students in which they watched clips from video-recorded class sessions. Nowacek identified “four discourse-based resources that participants in an interdisciplinary classroom draw on to identify disciplines and make interdisciplinary connections: content, propositions, classroom genres, and ways of knowing” (2005, p. 178). She additionally found that students’ success in selling connections was better facilitated when students felt that the expectations for their writing was clear (2011).

Moor, Jensen-Hart, and Hooper’s (2012) research on the effect of WAC faculty development (also mentioned previously), likewise found that awareness of expectations and how those are communicated can enhance student writing in the discipline of social work. Other research shows that when expectations are not clear, students are less successful in their writing. In the discussion of the finance students’ writing examined in their study, Bean et al. (2005) attributed students’ lack of proficient writing not only to underdeveloped content knowledge, but also to the fact that students had not been taught explicitly the conventions of writing in that discipline. Soliday’s (2011) research, moreover, found that teachers often gave students mixed messages about expectations for
writing assignments that subsequently resulted in students’ lack of success on writing assignments. A specific example included in Soliday’s research is an assignment prompt in a psychology course in which students were asked to write definitions of psychological concepts but were also expected to approach the writing as a case study in which they offered diagnoses of a fictional case. Many students had trouble negotiating the dual purposes of the assignment and could not define the concepts without listing them. Students who employed the listing approach received negative feedback and lower grades for doing so. Teachers were looking for a fluid integration of the concepts and for students to diagnose the imagined client in the case and suggest treatment based on psychological concepts. Because many students were unclear on the rhetorical situation and audience for the assignment, they wrote what they considered to be a typical college essay, but the instructors were looking for something different. This case, among others included in Soliday’s research, supports the contention that explicit assignment expectations facilitate better writing. On the other hand, Carroll’s (2002) study of students writing across disciplines provided some evidence that students can and do gain an awareness of different discourse community/genre conventions without being explicitly told these are in operation. Overall, however, writing studies scholars overwhelmingly agree that being explicit about expectations and disciplinary conventions facilitates writing development much more efficiently than hoping/expecting students will come to this knowledge on their own.

**Engaging students in metacognitive writing.** Metacognition is defined as “the ability to monitor one’s current level of understanding and decide when it is not adequate (Bransford et al., 2004, p. 47). In this vein, metacognitive writing asks students to reflect
on what they know and apply knowledge to their own experiences (or perhaps new situations). Scholarship on learning in general supports the use of metacognitive strategies in instruction to improve student learning. In reviewing scholarship on learning from a multitude of approaches (cognitive, behavioral, socio-cultural, and others), Bransford et al. (2004) advocate metacognitive approaches to teaching but caution that such activities need to be aligned with the subject matter students are learning—a suggestion in line with Britton and colleagues’ (1975) work. Additionally, Mezirow’s (2009) theory of transformative learning notes the importance of critical reflection in order to move beyond current conceptions (i.e. to be transformed or to learn). Emig (1977), too, implies the importance of metacognition in noting how writing provides an opportunity for writers to see their knowledge and reflect on it. One might also argue that writing by nature is metacognitive in that it’s representational and symbolic (Emig, 1977), forcing one literally to engage with what one knows, and is, thus, a mediation that creates higher mental processes (Vygotsky, 1962).

There may be an inherent link between writing and metacognition, but research also indicates that writing alone does not lead to metacognition (Garner, 1990 cited in Papadopoulos et al., 2011). Metacognitive writing to learn strategies should be intentional and engage students with the content of the course (Papadopoulos et al., 2011). Often, metacognitive writing strategies take the form of reflective writing (Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004; Chick et al., 2009; McGuire et al., 2009; Nail & Townsend, 2010; Wald et al., 2012). As was mentioned previously, Bangert-Drowns’ and colleagues’ meta-analysis of writing to learn studies found that writing to learn was shown to produce “small, positive effects on schools’ achievement” (p. 49) and that metacognitive writing (prompts that
asked students to reflect on their understanding and learning processes) was particularly effective in this regard. McGuire et al. (2009) found that reflective writing improved students’ learning in the field of social work and suggested that reflective writing is a sound pedagogical strategy for educators in other professional disciplines. Chick et al. (2009) used reflective writing to explore what students (n=91) perceived they were learning about race in four different diversity-related courses at four different campuses. Students in all courses were asked to post anonymous online journals about what they were learning. These posts were then read by other students in the course, who were in turn asked to respond to the journals and analyze “how the class was learning about race and how they were responding emotionally” (p. 5). Data analysis of these journals indicated that students most often identified readings and class discussions “followed by particular assignments” to be most helpful in their learning about race (p. 6). This finding demonstrates the social nature of learning. In the journals, students often reflected on how to create change in society (an indication of application of knowledge). Students from one course particularly cited an essay assignment that asked them to reflect on “how their families had been shaped by different types of oppression and privilege” as being particularly helpful in their learning. This finding indicates the effectiveness of metacognitive, reflective writing. On the other hand, the researchers also found that class discussions were most often cited as being the means through which students learned as opposed to written assignments.

While this study was not specifically about the effects of reflective writing, writing was shown to have been perceived as being helpful to learning for some students. However, the researchers concluded “that engaging students in metacognitive and meta-
affective activities supports learning about race” (p. 15) and that students benefitted from paying attention to their thoughts and feelings about the content with which they engaged. Students were also given the Color Blind Racial Attitudes Scales inventory (developed by Neville et al., 2000) to assess their awareness of racial privilege at both the beginning and end of the course. Results from this measurement showed that most students grew in their awareness and understanding of racism and privilege, indicating that the metacognitive strategies employed in the course may have been helpful in knowledge acquisition. However, with no control group, it’s impossible to attribute students’ growth solely to the metacognitive activities.

A study conducted by Papadopoulos et al., (2011) provides stronger evidence that metacognitive strategies (specifically written activities) improves learning. This study was grounded in scholarship on prompting and writing to learn strategies, both of which, the authors noted, increased “students’ engagement and deeper processing of the material” (p. 72) and “offer[ed] both cognitive and metacognitive support to students” (p. 73). The study specifically investigated two variations of a prompting technique in an online learning environment, one in which students responded in writing to question prompts and one in which they were asked only to think about the answers to the questions in the prompts.

Fifty-nine computer science students (27 male and 32 female in their third and fourth years of study) were divided into three treatment groups: 20 in a non-prompted group, 19 in a writing-mode prompted group, and 20 in a thinking-mode prompted group). Each group was asked to respond to the same three case scenarios of “various installations of Enterprise Resource Planning systems” (p. 77) in a web-based
environment in which students were presented with a problem and asked to pose a solution. Prior to approaching the web-based case studies, all students were asked to read “advice-cases” that included similar and relevant features of the cases they were asked to solve. Students in the no-prompt group received no questions during the advice-case phase. Students in the writing-mode were required to respond in writing to a series of question prompts during the advice-case phase that asked them to identify salient features of the cases, recall similarities to other cases they had studied, and identify useful implications of the advice cases. Students in the thinking-mode group were asked the same questions as the writing-mode group but were only encouraged to think about answers to the questions.

A pre-test post-test experimental research design was employed to compare the performance among the three groups. The pre-test assessed students’ prior knowledge through a set of six open-ended questions. The post-test included two sections that assessed acquisition of “domain-specific conceptual knowledge” (p. 77) and students’ ability to transfer acquired knowledge to a new situation. Each group proceeded through the same phases of the study (pre-test, preparation, case scenarios, post-test) in a successive but staggered manner so that no groups were on the same phase of the study simultaneously to attempt to control for interactions between groups during the phases of the study.

Students’ prior knowledge (pre-test) was found to be comparable among groups. The writing group spent significantly more time on the learning task than the other two groups (F(2,56) = 7.604, p = .001, η² = .214). Students in the two treatment groups performed better on the post-test both in conceptual knowledge acquisition (F(2,55) =
3.688, p = .031, \( \eta^2 = .116 \)) and ability to transfer knowledge (F(2,55) = 3.539, p = .036, \( \eta^2 = .112 \)) than those in the control group. Post hoc tests were also conducted to assess the differences between students in the two treatment groups and found “that the students in the writing mode outperformed the non-prompted (Conceptual: p = .023; Transfer: p = .014) and thinking mode students (Conceptual: p = .020; Transfer: p = .054) in both measures of the post-test. On the contrary, no significant differences were found between the non-prompted and the thinking mode groups for the conceptual or the transfer scores” (p. 81). Student interviews revealed that students in the writing group felt that responding to the question prompts helped them better understand the material, though six of the 19 reported that they did not. However, nearly all in this group also reported that answering the question prompts was tedious. Most students in the thinking-mode group (12/20) admitted that toward the end of the preparation phase, most had skipped answering the question prompts though initially they had reflected on the questions. They also felt that the questions were not helpful or necessary to answer the questions in the case scenarios. Like the writing-mode group, they too felt that the questions were tiresome. Eight of the twenty did admit to spending some time answering the question prompts; however, T-tests revealed no significant difference between the post-test scores of students in this group who answered the questions and those who had skipped them.

The researchers attributed the better performance of the writing-mode students to the written metacognitive component of the treatment. They also noted that ability to transfer knowledge requires greater abstract understanding “which provides a bridge between contextually dissimilar situations” (p. 83). The researchers felt it was reasonable to attribute this deeper understanding in the writing-mode group to the writing to learn
prompting strategies given that all groups were comparable in prior knowledge. They also attributed gains in learning to longer time on task. The small sample size for a three-group comparison was noted to be a limitation to the study, so findings cannot be generalized, but this study does support that metacognitive writing specifically tied to course content can promote student learning.

**Students’ Negotiation of Writing Tasks**

Since mutt courses are similar to disciplinary courses in some ways, understanding how students conceptualize writing in disciplinary settings provides a context for how writing may function in a mutt course. Writing studies have shown that students do draw on prior writing knowledge in negotiating new writing situations (Beaufort, 2007; Carroll, 2002; Fraizer, 2010; Johnson and Krase, 2012; Nowacek, 2011; Poe et al., 2010; Reiff and Bawarshi, 2011; Soliday, 2011; Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006; Walvoord and McCarthy, 1990). It is possible that students may conceptualize the writing they do in a mutt course in much the same way they approach writing in disciplinary courses, and it is likely that they draw on writing knowledge they’ve gained from other courses. It is also possible that they may simply write to earn a grade, an occurrence common also in disciplinary settings. Insight into students’ writing products and processes in disciplinary settings, therefore, helps shape the questions to ask students about their writing in a mutt course. Two key themes emerge from writing studies literature on how students negotiate writing tasks: prior writing knowledge (subject matter, rhetorical, and genre knowledge) and students’ self-concepts and identities within a context or discipline.
Prior Writing Knowledge

Research has shown that prior writing experiences shape how students approach new writing situations. Writing related knowledge appears to transfer among contexts in both useful and problematic ways. A number of studies have investigated learning transfer and writing related knowledge transfer (Perkins & Salomon, 1988; Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Beaufort, 2007; Downs and Wardle, 2007; Nowacek, 2005 and 2011; Smagorinsky & Smith, 1992; Soliday, 2011; and Wardle, 2007). Prior writing knowledge/experience sometimes aids and sometimes frustrates students’ writing successes. Because writing knowledge and conventions are disciplinary and context specific, students often transfer writing related knowledge inappropriately, attempting to employ the writing conventions learned in one context to writing in other disciplines. Noted previously, Beaufort’s (2007) longitudinal study of a single writer, for example, found that her informant had a great deal of difficulty transitioning from first-year composition courses (in which he did quite well) to writing in history (his major) and then from history to chemistry (his second major) since writing conventions across disciplines vary. Such a finding is in line with Laughlin and Barth’s (1981) study of group-to-individual and individual-to-group problem-solving (n=330), which found no evidence for general knowledge transfer from group to individual, but strong evidence for specific knowledge transfer from group to individual. In other words, specific content knowledge transfer was more likely to occur than general knowledge transfer in this case and was dependent also on group dynamics, evidencing the social nature of learning.

The specificity of disciplinary contexts, in fact, influences how students approach writing tasks and the transfer writing knowledge. Socio-cultural theory provides the basis
for much writing studies scholarship and lends support to the influence of context on acts of writing. Prior (2006) notes that sociocultural theory (based on the work of Vygotsky, 1978, 1987) views writing “as a mode of social action” rather than as communication: “Writing involves the dialogic process of invention. Texts as artifacts in activity […] are parts of streams of mediated, distributed, and multimodal activity” (p. 58). When a writer constructs a text, he or she draws from a multitude of “socio-historically provided” resources (e.g. language, technology, genres, knowledges, motives, etc.) that extend beyond the moment of transcription. Writing within a particular discipline, thus, not only relies on the context of those resources within that content area, but stretches beyond that context as well.

Subject matter knowledge is one contextual resource on which students draw in an act of writing. As was mentioned previously, research shows that when students have a stronger command of subject matter knowledge, the better able they are to write competently in a discipline. Research by Artemeva and Logie (2003); Bayer et al. (2005); Bean et al. (2005), Beaufort (2007); Nowacek (2011); Poe, Lerner, & Craig (2010); and Soliday (2011) support this contention. The research of Bean et al. (2005), mentioned earlier, for example, attribute the lack of writing proficiency among finance students in their study to a lack of development of critical thinking skills in the field of finance itself. Because students didn’t fully understand the content, they were unable to write about it in a way their intended audience would understand. Soliday (2011) also noted students’ difficulties in finding a stance in their writing, for in order to become proficient, students must appropriate the ways of seeing and making meaning typical in a discipline.
Understanding course/disciplinary content was found to be a factor necessary for students to find an appropriate stance.

However, research also suggests that students can and do transfer writing knowledge with various degrees of success (Carroll, 2002; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011; Nowacek, 2005 and 2011; Soliday, 2011). Carroll’s (2002) study indicated that students do internalize the specific tools within writing process constructs and come to realize that different writing tasks in college require different strategies of process. Writers pick and choose and develop processes most efficient to themselves. One of the resources that can enable successful transfer is genre.

In much writing studies scholarship, genre is thought of as typified responses to recurring situations rather than merely categories of texts. Genre is something enacted, a social action continuously being negotiated within discourse communities (Askehave & Swales, 2001; Bawarshi, 2000; Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; and Miller, 1984). Bawarshi (2000) notes that genre is simultaneously the situation and the textual manifestation of that situation, “the site at which the rhetorical and the social reproduce one another in particular types of texts” (p. 357). Genre also triggers how people respond to writing situations, what motivates a person to negotiate a writing task a certain way, including the role of the author in relation to readers’ expectations for a text.

Reiff and Bawarshi’s (2011) study surveyed 85 students across 48 sections of first-year composition at two different institutions to investigate how students use prior genre knowledge to negotiate new writing contexts in first-year composition. Surveys, student interviews, and student writing were analyzed as data. The researchers found that some students were able to break down prior genre knowledge and repurpose it usefully.
into new writing tasks, while other students maintained prior genre knowledge regardless of the new and different task. Interestingly, students in this study who reported having greater confidence in knowledge of particular genres were less successful in repurposing that genre knowledge than those students who were willing to accept themselves as novice writers in particular genre tasks. And while prior genre knowledge had influence on transfer, students who exhibited high road transfer drew more on prior writing strategies than on prior genre knowledge. Nowacek’s (2011) study also found that some students were able to repurpose genre knowledge successfully through using genres in novel ways or combining genres. However, genre confusion also inhibited writing success for some students.

Wardle (2009), too, found genre to be a resource conducive to developing students’ knowledge and writing skills. However, teaching students how to write specific genres is problematic if students are not actively engaged in the work of a discipline. Wardle gathered data from 23 instructors and 462 students across 25 sections of a second semester first-year composition course. Data included interviews and focus groups with teachers and students, surveys, assignment prompts, and students’ essays. She found nine genres common in first-year composition courses (such as argument, reflection, and observation papers), which resembled genres in other disciplinary courses; however, the purposes, audiences, and characteristic of the assignments were quite different from how these genres operate in different disciplinary settings. For example, students were

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9 Perkins and Salomon (1988) differentiate between two types of transfer. Low road transfer refers to the automatic application of similar knowledge to similar contexts. Learning how to drive a car enables one to drive a truck also. In contrast, “high road transfer depends on deliberate mindful abstraction of skill or knowledge from one context for application to another” (p. 25). High road transfer implies consciousness of both the knowledge and the transfer.
assigned an observation paper in which they were asked to write about their observations of a thing or event (a piece of art or a career fair, for example). The purpose of the assignment was to help students develop the skill of observation. However, while many disciplines make use of observation in writing, the purpose is not to develop observation skill but to gather evidence toward some other purpose. Argument papers were found to have similar challenges. The evidence students were asked to include in these papers consisted of personal observations and experience as well as interviews. Personal experience and observations are not acceptable evidence in many disciplines. Wardle noted, “Within the broader university, arguments are complex and encompass a range of genres, from documented essays arguing for conclusions based on research, to lab reports arguing for results, to essays arguing for a student scholarship. However, within the broader university, “The Argument” is not a genre in and of itself” (p. 775).

Interview data revealed that students did not see any connection between the writing they did in first-year composition and what they would write in courses later on. Students were also asked to complete a short rhetorical analysis sheet for their essays that required them to identify the topic, purpose, audience, and genre of their essays. These revealed that students felt as though they were being asked to demonstrate particular skills on their papers rather than write in authentic disciplinary ways. This finding suggests that while students are aware of genres, they have trouble transferring genre knowledge to new writing situations. Transfer research has shown that concepts must be abstracted and students should be asked to reflect on what they are learning in order for transfer to occur (Bransford et al., 2004; Perkins & Solomon, 1988). The students in Wardle’s study were not asked to do either. Wardle’s study does not follow students
beyond their first-year composition course, so it’s unknown if their genre knowledge transferred in any way to other contexts, but writing studies on transfer generally does not offer strong evidence that it did, at least in the ways first-year composition courses intend.

A factor that influences genre knowledge, and thus successful transfer, is rhetorical knowledge. Awareness of audience expectations, purpose of a text, the social context in which a text is constructed and disciplinary conventions for writing, as well as how to organize information toward expectations and purpose, all fall into the realm of rhetorical knowledge. Rhetorical knowledge is additionally influenced by subject matter knowledge, for the ways of making meaning in a discipline rely on knowing what to include as evidence. How to repurpose genre knowledge, in turn, relies on subject matter and rhetorical knowledge, for a writer must understand what an audience knows and needs to know. Research confirms these intertwining relationships (Bean et al., 2005; Beaufort, 2007; Nowacek, 2011; Soliday, 2011; Walvoord & McCarthy, 1990; Wardle, 2009).

For example, Bean and colleagues’ (2005) research showed that when students did not understand who the audience was for their assignments, they did not do well on those assignments. Students in this study tended to use disciplinary jargon that the intended, imagined audience for the assignments would not have understood.

Complicating rhetorical understanding and audience awareness is the tendency for students to see their instructors as their audience (Bean et al., 2005; Beaufort, 2007; Carroll, 2007; Nowacek, 2005 and 2011; Poe Lerner, & Craig, 2010; Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006) and conceptualize the purpose of their writing to be demonstration of knowledge in
order to earn a grade. When students write for a grade, they do not fully engage in the authentic social activity of a disciplinary community, rhetorical situation, and genre. Furthermore, instructors themselves tend to conflate intended audiences. While many faculty will explicitly or implicitly identify a more authentic audience, they still expect students to demonstrate what they have learned in class for evaluation, an act that makes the instructor the real audience for whom the students are writing despite instructors’ intentions. In fact, Melzer’s (2009) study of over 2,000 college writing assignment prompts found that the teacher-as-examiner was the most common audience identified in college writing assignments, that writing-to-inform was the most common purpose for assignments, and that nearly a quarter of all college writing assignments were of the genre most lacking in rhetorical and social context: the short-answer exam.

If the most common college writing assignment is the short-answer exam with the teacher as examiner as the audience, it seems that students are rarely asked to engage in the kind of authentic writing one would expect in disciplinary discourse communities. Writing studies scholarship continually calls for immersing students in authentic writing situations as a strategy for developing writing competency and using writing as a tool for learning. As was discussed in the section on pedagogy, when students see their writing purposes as authentic, they tend to be more successful in their writing (Artemeva & Logie, 2003; Bayer et al., 2005; Beaufort, 2007; Carter et al., 2004; Defazio et al., 2004; Fraizer, 2010; Parks & Goldblatt, 2000; Poe, Lerner & Craig, 2010; Russell, 2001; Soliday, 2011; Wardle & Downs, 2007). In authentic writing situations, authors are expected to make a claim, support it with evidence, convey the context of evidence appropriate to an audience of peers (or an audience outside the disciplinary community.
perhaps), and work collaboratively with peers/colleagues to construct knowledge and convey meaning. These are acts requiring rhetorical knowledge, one prior writing resource on which students can draw in negotiating new writing situations. While Wolfe’s (2011) study of 400 writing prompts does show that across the curriculum, thesis-driven arguments dominate college writing assignments and that argumentation is widely encouraged and expected of college students in their writing, the amount and type of argumentation students are expected to engage in varies considerably by instructor. Wolfe’s and others’ findings point to the link between instructors’ expectations and students’ acquisition/use of writing related knowledge (see Walvoord & McCarthy, 1990; Soliday, 2011; Poe, Lerner & Craig, 2010; and others cited above).

**Students’ Self-Concepts and Identities**

Understanding the role subject matter, rhetorical, and genre knowledge play in how students negotiate disciplinary writing allows insight into how students conceptualize the writing they do in particular contexts, but identity and self-concept also influence how students approach writing in disciplinary settings. Students’ self-concepts and identities as writers in a particular discipline are affected not only by their subject matter, rhetorical, and genre knowledge, but also by the sense of community they feel within a classroom or discipline itself.

Research indicates that when students identify themselves within particular disciplinary communities, their writing tends to be more competent because they can better assume authority based on their content area knowledge (Poe, Lerner & Craig, 2010; Beaufort, 2007; Nowacek, 2011; Fraizer, 2010; Soliday, 2011). Soliday (2011), for example, discusses one student’s success in an educational theory course. Many students
in the study had difficulty applying theory to their classroom observations, writing book-report-like papers instead of competently synthesizing research and applying it to what they observed. One student who was cited as successful in his writing was a master’s student and practicing teacher. Since he could identify himself as someone in the field, he was better able to negotiate the writing tasks, and he saw in the theories something he could apply in practice whereas the undergraduates in the course were not yet engaged in the act of teaching. Therefore, they could not identify themselves as teachers yet, and this inhibited their ability to apply theory to practice and write proficiently.

The relationship between students’ learning to write (and writing to learn) and their identities within a discipline is supported by scholarship on learning itself. Lave and Wenger’s (1991) apprenticeship theory of learning, for example, notes that “learning and a sense of identity are inseparable” (p. 115). They contend that learning is a process of participation in a community of practice in which one becomes a full member of the community through continued social action within that community. In other words, students become scientists, historians, engineers, etc. by engaging in the action of these disciplines, of which writing is a part. Walvoord and McCarthy’s (1990) research on students writing in four different disciplines supports this link between developing a disciplinary identity and engaging in the social action of the discipline. Role-taking was found to be an important aspect of students’ writing success in this study. Instructors in all the disciplines examined expected students to take on the role of professionals in training in their writing tasks (i.e. apprentices). The students best able to adopt this role were those engaged in more authentic disciplinary inquiry. (Instructors’ guidance and feedback were also influential.) Students gained disciplinary knowledge through doing
the work of the discipline with guided feedback from the instructor. On the other hand, students who adopted what Walvoord and McCarthy call a “text-processor” role in their writing seemed to confuse declarative knowledge with procedural knowledge; that is, they didn’t see themselves engaged in inquiry but saw themselves as having to explain knowledge. For example, students enrolled in a biology course in two different years were studied. The later cohort of students demonstrated stronger writing, the authors contended, because their experiments were better designed, they collected better data, and they received more guided feedback on both their experiments and their writing than students in the earlier cohort studied. Because they were engaged in authentic inquiry, they were better able to assume the role of professional in training.

Genre knowledge was also shown to be a factor in students’ writing successes and role adoption in Walvoord and McCarthy’s study. The researchers found that students employed models of writing they had learned elsewhere. Sometimes, however, this did not serve students well, and their writing was not successful. Nowacek (2011) reported similar findings. Some students were unable to sell their interdisciplinary connections due to genre confusion or uncertain disciplinary identities. Walvoord and McCarthy called for further research to investigate students’ use of previous models of writing, but other research framed from a genre approach indicates that students’ identities may be at work in how and when students draw on previous genre knowledge. Nowacek (2011) noted that identities and genres cue each other. In her study of students writing in an interdisciplinary program, one student is cited as having firmly seen herself as a history major and doing well in selling the connections she made to history knowledge/course content in writing for other courses in the interdisciplinary program. However, others
who were less sure of their future pursuits had more difficulty reading their audiences and selling their interdisciplinary connections. Another student, who identified herself as a non-Catholic, found herself conflicted in her religious studies course because she felt she was being asked to take on the role of a Catholic in writing a particular essay that required a defense of Aquinas’s theology. This student reconciled the identity conflict by writing the essay as a dialogue between Aquinas and a “deferential student” (p. 57), a strategy/genre she had used in a philosophy course as well. Both of these students serve as examples of how students’ identities and senses of being part of a community affect how students negotiate the writing they do in disciplinary settings.

**Writing in Non-academic and Non-traditional Academic Settings**

Based on what is known about the way students perceive and experience writing across disciplinary contexts, it is likely that prior experiences and perceptions of writing affect the way writing functions for students in a mutt course. How students (and instructors) conceptualize the writing done in college courses is an ongoing area for investigation in writing studies scholarship because writing by nature is context specific and contingent on multiple factors, including students’ identities and self-concepts, subject matter knowledge, previous writing experience (genre and rhetorical knowledge), and the writing pedagogies employed within particular contexts. The way writers behave in disciplinary college contexts is bound to have impact on college writing contexts that do not neatly fit into strict disciplinary settings. Therefore, it is also prudent to consider how writing functions in non-traditional academic settings and contexts outside the academy. Scholarship in these areas is somewhat limited and varied. I’ve selected literature that has the most logical relation to writing in a mutt course: general scholarship
on writing outside traditional college classroom settings, writing in service learning courses, and writing in interdisciplinary courses.

**General Scholarship on Writing Outside Traditional College Settings**

Literature examining writing outside of traditional classrooms seems to indicate that this is a largely untapped area for research although scholarship in this area is growing (Williams, 2010). By and large, rhetoric and composition scholars have focused their inquiry on college writing. A meta-analysis conducted by Hillocks (1984), which reviewed over 500 experimental treatment studies of writing conducted from 1963 to 1982, has shown this to be the case. After applying specific criteria, Hillocks narrowed his corpus of studies to 75 experimental/control treatments, 32 of which were in secondary school settings, 31 in first-year college settings, 20 in elementary settings, and two mixed (secondary and elementary). Academic contexts tend to dominate writing studies research in this category in this particular time period.

In reviewing scholarship included in *The Norton Book of Composition Studies*, Williams (2010) cited notable scholarship focused on writing outside college classrooms, such as Ruggles Gere’s (2008/1994) examination of the “extracurriculum,” which she defined as contexts in which people “seek to improve their own writing” (p. 1085) outside traditional academic boundaries. She looked specifically at women’s writing workshops whose purposes included strengthening community relationships, expression and affirmation of voice and experience, and improvement of writing craft. Williams also cited Gee’s (2008/1999) scholarship on the “New Literacies Studies (NLS)” movement, which, too, is included in the Norton anthology. Gee characterized NLS as one of many movements that focused on writing/discourse as a socially mediated activity rather than
something that occurs solely within individuals’ minds. He noted that “NLS is based around the idea that reading, writing, and meaning are always situated within specific discourses” (p. 1301). Such a view has implications for studying the written discourse of a mutt course because the discourse within such a context is bound to be an amalgamation of other discourses, including disciplinary/academic discourses and less formally defined discourses. However, Gee’s text included discourse analysis of an interview with a university anthropologist, so even in his examination of a non-academic discourse, academic writing comes into play. This shows that writing in a setting that may be somewhat tangential to academic writing, such as in a mutt course, cannot be neatly separated from academic discourse.

The examinations of writing outside the academy Williams (2010) cited from the Norton anthology do not provide a great deal of detail about how participants negotiated the writing within such settings, on what resources they drew, or how instructors or peers might have influenced writers’ understanding of their writing processes and purposes as well as what writers learned from their writing. One text within the anthology, however, provides some insight into how the social context influenced writers in a setting outside a traditional classroom. This text, “Community Literacy,” by Campbell Peck, Flower, and Higgins (2008/1995) examined Pittsburgh’s Community Literacy Center (CLC), which brought together writing mentors from the university and community residents. The authors noted that when the center was launched, its goals were to connect “action and reflection—as literate acts that could yoke community action with intercultural education, strategic thinking and problem solving, and with observation-based research and theory building” through writing “public, transactional texts” (p. 1098). Such a goal
demonstrates writing through a social lens framework. It’s also applicable to my research of a mutt course whose goal was to move students toward praxis.

Essentially, the CLC used writing as a means of developing community engagement and social justice action. One example discussed by Campbell Peck et al. was a group of teenagers at the CLC who engaged in a writing project to examine the reasons for increased student suspensions in public schools. The group composed and presented a text (which included a variety of non-academic discourses such as rap) to city policy makers and the media. The group also produced a document on suspension that became required reading for all teachers and students at a local high school. Other examples of how CLC participants used writing to interrogate social issues toward social change are documented as well. While limited in its scope, this study indicates that writing can function toward social justice goals and isn’t limited to learning academic, disciplinary content. It also shows how writing is social in nature, dependent upon collaborating with other writers, contextualizing writing activity, and taking on alternative perspectives (Beach, Newell, & VanDerHeide, 2008).

**Writing in Service Learning Courses**

There is a fair amount of scholarship on writing in service learning courses. While the mutt course examined in my research was not a service learning course, it did engage students in exploration of social justice topics that can also arise in the course of service learning experiences. Like a living-learning program seminar, service learning courses blur the lines of academic and social contexts, placing students at a particular community agency as volunteers who engage in activities such as tutoring and/or other work the agency may need done. In turn, writing is a part of the experience in various ways. In his
often-cited examination of service learning in composition courses, Deans (2000) identified three categories of writing in service learning courses: writing about the community, writing for the community, and writing with the community. A synthesis of literature documenting a sample of these three types of writing follows.

**Writing about the community.** Writing about the community has two forms: reflective and analytical/critical. Reflective writing asks students to make sense of their service learning experiences in terms of self and community perceptions, requires students to relate their experiences to course readings and content, and/or asks students to reflect on what they are learning. Analytical/critical assignments ask students to examine underlying causes of social issues impacting the community—in essence the reasons the community agencies exist (Deans, 2000).

Reflective writing dominates the writing done in service learning courses, even those courses that are deemed composition, writing, or communication courses. Many instructors utilize reflective journals and essays as a means for students to integrate their service experiences with their own self-knowledge, perceptions, and experiences as well as course readings (i.e. metacognitive writing). Writing is also used to demonstrate learning. The majority of studies (six out of seven) I reviewed on writing in service learning courses with a writing about the community focus discussed what students learned from their service experiences, and writing served as the mechanism through which students both made sense of their experiences and demonstrated their perceptions of the experience and what they learned (see Borron, Loizzo, & Gee, 2015; Deans, 2000; Hullender et al., 2015; Leon & Sura, 2013; Richards, 2013; Zimmerelli, 2015). In these studies, however, there is little to no examination of how students perceived their writing...
as contributing to their learning. Furthermore, few studies explicitly discussed the instructors’ intentions for using writing—what they hoped students would learn through acts of writing. That is, writing to learn was not the explicit focus of studies of writing in service learning settings—the service itself was the focus.

One exception is Wurr’s (2003) research that sought to determine if service learning improved students’ writing in first-year composition courses. The writing students did in the courses fell into more traditional academic genres: a rhetorical analysis, a persuasive essay, and a reflective essay. Wurr’s sample was one of convenience and included students enrolled in four different sections of a second semester first-year composition course (N=73). Two were service-learning courses, two were traditional first-year composition courses, and one in each pair was comprised of non-native English speakers. Students’ essays were evaluated by independent raters along four different scales through both holistic and primary trait analyses to determine if service learning contributed to improved writing. Three of the four scales were empirically developed and tested: rhetorical appeals; analysis of reasoning (Connor and Lauer, 1985); and analysis of coherence (Bamberg, 1983). The other scale, an analysis of mechanics, was conducted by using the built-in grammar check in Microsoft Word 2000 and hand-checked by raters for accuracy. Inter-rater reliability was noted at acceptable levels for all scales. The study found that those students enrolled in the service learning sections performed better on all four scales in both the primary trait and holistic analyses. Wurr was able to conclude that service-learning positively impacted students’ writing according to these quantitative measures. However, because the study did not seek to unpack what exactly prompted better writing for the students enrolled in the service
learning courses, it’s difficult to know for sure that service learning was the only factor affecting the students’ writing development. Nothing is reported about the delivery of instruction, teacher feedback on writing, and the day-to-day characteristics of the courses studied. Neither is anything reported about the students themselves outside of being native or non-native English speakers nor if/how writing contributed to students’ understanding of content.

More common in studies of writing in service learning are those that focus on the impact of service experience itself, rather than how writing was used as a learning tool or how students developed as writers. For example, Borron, Loizzo, and Gee (2015) examined students’ writing in an agricultural communication service learning course (n=7). Their study focused specifically on using critical reflexive analysis (CRA) as a method for student learning and employed CRA through student reflective journals, which were then examined for evidence of course learning outcomes (learning outcomes included cross-cultural communication and engagement). Student focus groups were also conducted. In this case, the intentions for the journal writing included allowing students to examine “personal assumptions and actions in creating reality and knowledge” (p. 286), helping students formulate questions for discussion and inquiry, and “gaining a deeper understanding of subjective reality from existential, relational, and praxis points of view.” Reflective writing was found to assist students’ growth in self-knowledge and knowledge of others as well as in understanding of the complexities of the social issues embedded in the course content (poverty, food insecurity, and homelessness). In this case, reflective writing seems to have aided student learning by providing a means to make sense of service experiences. However, there was no examination of how the
students conceptualized the writing they did for the course, that is if they viewed writing as useful in their learning.

Other studies of reflective writing in service learning courses confirm the phenomenon of the service experience being the focus of the course and not the writing. Richards (2013) discussed the use of reflective writing in a graduate level service learning writing course for education majors but focused on students’ development of a care ethic as evidenced through course writing (n=28). Again there was no discussion of how the writing enabled students to develop a care ethic, how the writing functioned within the course, or how it was conceptualized by students. Zimmerelli (2015) also used students’ reflective writing to examine the learning that transpired in a service learning course, whose goal was to prepare students to become writing center tutors. In this case, too, the service learning experiences are reported to have aided student learning as evidenced through their writing, and the writing seems to have provided a means for students to make sense of their learning and experiences, but the writing itself served a demonstrative function rather than a writing to learn outcome. The research of Hullender et al. (2015) is another example of a study that examined students’ reflective writing in a university honors service learning course with a focus on transformative learning and reflective practice (n=16). Writing appears to have functioned as the means for reflective practice in this case, but it was discussed in terms of an assessment tool rather than a writing to learn tool. To be fair, in each of these examples, research questions were not focused on writing, so the lack of discussion of writing is not necessarily a flaw in the research. However, that writing is not discussed explicitly as a tool for learning in
settings of writing/communication courses points to a gap in the service learning/writing research.

Analytical/critical approaches to writing in service learning courses are less common than reflective writing and often are employed in conjunction with reflective writing. Deans (2000) examined a course at Bentley College for his discussion of the writing about the community methodology. In this examination, he drew upon data from student and instructor interviews, course materials, and the instructor’s own scholarship on his service learning courses (Herzberg 1991, 1993, 1994, & 1996, cited in Deans).

Students in this course were part of a learning community program through which students took two semesters of linked courses in first-year composition (both semesters), philosophy (first semester), and sociology (second semester). Students focused on academic writing in the composition courses, researching and analyzing literacy issues related to students’ service sites. Deans reported that Herzberg, the composition professor, attempted to “nudge his students toward critical consciousness […] bridging the gap between the academic and public spheres” (Deans, 2000, p. 93). Students in this study reported having a better command of academic writing. Deans noted that students engaged in “major research projects” as part of the learning community program “that require[d] them to integrate primary, secondary, and popular media sources” (p. 96). Such meaty research assignments are not necessarily common in first-year composition courses. This suggests that the course helped to develop students’ rhetorical knowledge of academic writing, but the study does not fully unpack how the service-learning component assisted in this endeavor. Deans also noted that the professor felt students’
papers showed improved understanding of the complexity of social issues; however, the study did not empirically examine students’ writing for evidence of learning.

Regan and Zuern’s (2000) study of service learning in a computer-mediated advanced composition course (which used analytical/critical writing about the community approaches in conjunction with writing for the community assignments) also reported on students’ improved rhetorical knowledge (audience awareness, clarity, organization and argumentation). However, overall, students’ understanding of power and privilege dynamics was reported not to have improved much. This knowledge area was assessed through an end of course survey, and the authors noted that the assessment tool was limited in unpacking students’ understanding of power and privilege more fully.

In both Deans’ (2000) and Regan and Zuern’s (2000) studies, the service learning seems to have had an impact on student learning and development of writing skills, but neither study looked at how the writing in the courses explicitly may have influenced that learning.

**Writing for the community.** Some service learning writing courses employ a writing for the community methodology (Deans, 2000) in which students produce texts aimed to benefit the community agency in some way. Stevens (2014) and Hellman (2000), for example, documented students writing grant proposals for community agencies. Similarly, Deans (2000) documented students in a sports management writing course with a service learning component. Writing assignments in the sports management course included producing brochures, handbooks, and coaching manuals for the agency “clients.” All three of these scholars reported similar benefits of a writing for the community approach, including students’ satisfaction with the writing assignments and
courses, development of rhetorical knowledge (most notably audience awareness), improved writing proficiency, improved critical thinking, and improved motivation toward writing. Stevens (2014) also reported that students felt the writing skills they acquired would be useful in other college courses. Hellman (2000), too, noted that the grant writing project in his study helped prepare students for their second semester writing class. That writing for the community approaches benefit students in these ways supports writing to learn literature that advocates engaging students in authentic writing contexts in which they have contact with their audiences and produce texts for purposes outside of earning a grade.

Despite the reported benefits of writing for the community approaches, there are some challenges in implementation. To develop audience awareness, students need to have sustained contact with their audiences. That is, they need to understand the social action their writing is to perform (Soliday, 2011) and become part of the community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1998). Often students do not have enough time at a service learning site to adequately develop audience awareness (Deans, 2000; Stevens, 2014). In their review of literature on service learning and writing, Leon and Sura (2013) also noted the challenges in developing audience awareness in writing for the community projects. Often the audience of a particular text is external to the agency itself. A brochure, for example, is not crafted for the agency but for the community, potential donors, or potential volunteers. Students often do not have contact with these audiences, which makes writing for them difficult. Instead Leon and Sura suggested writing projects in which the audience is the agency itself. They advocate that students work with the agency “to make visible the infrastructure that supports the community partner’s
rhetorical work” (p. 64). While their approach is aimed in helping to make students aware of writing as embedded in the social contexts in which it occurs, such an approach also assists the community partner to better identify their audiences and rhetorical purposes.

Another challenge lies in finding a good match between students and the agencies in which they are placed, both in terms of students’ interests and abilities (Deans, 2000). Writing projects should not be overly difficult. Hellman (2000) noted that it was beneficial for assignments to be broken into smaller parts. Furthermore, students needed instruction in writing in particular genres and ongoing feedback. As was noted in a previous section of this review, such practices are consistent with good writing pedagogy. However, such practices can be labor intensive for an instructor whose students are working on different kinds of writing projects simultaneously.

**Writing with the community.** Deans (2000) characterizes the writing with the community approach as one in which students and community partners use writing to “collaboratively identify and address local problems” (p. 17). The writing in such contexts may include literacy work, action research, or proposal writing. Writing with the community texts are unique in that they draw on a multitude of discourses and allow for blending them. As such, the writing within this paradigm is probably least like writing in academic disciplinary settings (which is characterized by particular disciplinary writing conventions). Writing with the community conventions are negotiated among participants and take many shapes and forms, working “from experience toward theory, rather than apply[ing] theory toward experience,” making “tentative claims” as opposed to asserting firm theses, employing “a diverse range of sources (especially observations on-site)”
rather than using “only traditional ‘authoritative’ texts,” and “mingling […] the academic with the nonacademic” (p. 137).

However, research examining such writing is not plentiful in published literature, and it seems, not widely employed in service learning courses. Searches in academic databases for “writing and service learning” yielded results of studies in which writing-for or writing-about the community approaches were employed as opposed to writing-with approaches. Even a search for “writing with the community” yielded no empirical studies of this kind of writing in service learning courses. The literature is overwhelmingly theoretical in nature and not always solely about writing-with the community but largely examinations of service learning writing approaches (see Bickford & Reynolds, 2002; Hessler, 2000; Schutz & Gere, 1998). My search did yield one anecdotal account of a writing-with sort-of approach (Kincaid & Sotiriou, 2004). Additionally, both Deans (2000) and Flower (2002) include case studies of students writing within a writing-with paradigm of service learning courses.

Scholars who advocate a writing with the community approach view this as a means toward developing activism and civic engagement among students. This approach is also touted as a way to enable students to examine their own beliefs and biases and open them to new perspectives in a way that other service learning writing approaches cannot fully do. Bickford and Reynolds (2002), for example, argued that while other approaches can be activist, they are “too often infused with the volunteer ethos, a philanthropic or charitable viewpoint that ignores the structural reasons to help others” (p. 230). Flower (2002) critiques service-learning approaches because short stints at community agencies often only “reinforce the distance” between those served and the
students who engage in service. She notes that many approaches attempt to combat this problem by “embedding personal and social consciousness in academic work,” (p. 181). Such projects may include writing-for or writing-about the community approaches that Deans (2000) identifies. However, Flower argues that such approaches are problematic because students “find their academic agendas for service and action leave them standing isolated from the alternative expertise of the community and from its own resilient cultural agendas” (p. 182). Instead, she advocates “for intercultural inquiry that not only seeks more diverse rival readings, but constructs multivoiced negotiated meanings in practice.”

Flower’s scholarship includes evidence from three case studies that showed students came to deeper understandings of their own perspectives and biases through their collaborative inquiry projects with the teens they mentored. One student, an industrial management major (Scott), for example, sought to determine what enabled the success of African American male teens in the classroom and workplace and informed their work ethic in the absence of strong male role models. Flower notes, rather than merely interviewing his mentees, Scott asked them to deliberate a question with him. He sought their “rival hypotheses” in order to “situate” his “emerging image of role models and work ethics” within and among the perspectives of his mentees. As a result, Scott’s initial conceptions did not necessarily “add up” and allow him to reduce his inquiry to a tidy thesis supported by authoritative quotations. Rather, these multiple perspectives enabled Scott to construct more complex meaning around the topics of his inquiry—and a “newly negotiated understanding of his own place in the story of mentoring and modeling” (p. 189). Flower paints Scott as a success story and concludes that he came to
a “negotiated understanding” of the issue he examined not only through his own lenses but also through glimpses of his mentees.

Deans (2000) also included case study accounts of student mentors at the same Community Literacy Center Flower discussed in her scholarship. He noted similar observations of mentors examining their own perspectives and beliefs. However, Deans’ account documented evidence that inquiry projects assisted mentors in developing writing-related knowledge as well. Dean noted that one mentor expressed that the process of incorporating mixed discourses made her “think about writing strategy…how the audience enters into it—things I did [in my own writing] but never realized I did before” (p. 128). Deans concludes that such a realization on the part of this mentor evidences a metacognitive awareness of writing processes. Therefore, there is some evidence that a writing with the community approach can develop a skill crucial to both learning to write and learning in general: the ability to think about and examine one’s own knowledge. Deans additionally noted that this mentor and her mentee “grappled with genre,” which demonstrates an awareness of genre knowledge as well. The mentor and mentee had to negotiate what form the writing would take and how to blend discourses, an endeavor that evidences the transfer of genre knowledge akin to what Nowacek (2011) reported students in her study often were tasked with doing. Additionally, this finding points to the social nature of writing, that one learns to write (and learns through writing) by engaging with a community of practice.

Kincaid and Sotiriou (2004) offer a documentary account of their service learning course, which paired English-speaking first-year composition students as mentors with students in an ESL composition course. The course is a derivation of a writing with the
community approach to service learning in that mentors and mentees were both enrolled in composition courses. Writing projects were not collaborative in the same sense as the inquiry projects discussed in the scholarship of Deans (2000) and Flower (2002), but because the mentors and mentees were engaged in similar writing tasks, they were able to negotiate a kind of shared discourse. Kincaid and Sotiriou noted that since mentors were first-year students, “There’s no illusion that an expert is handing down knowledge to an apprentice. The learning that occurs is two-way, more naturally a part of the specific assignment they are exploring and more easily transformed by the knowledge that both mentor and mentee share as they make sense of the assignment” (p. 251). This mentoring relationship, the authors reported, resulted in better writing skills among both sets of students. Furthermore, both mentors and mentees expressed that the relationship was valuable in terms of improvement of writing and of cross-cultural understanding. The limitations of this account are that it’s not an empirical study of learning with regard to either writing development or intercultural understanding/acceptance, but it does offer some evidence that writing with the community approaches may accomplish both of these goals.

While writing with the community approaches and specifically the inquiry projects discussed in Deans’ (2000) and Flower’s (2002) accounts may help students develop understanding of writing as socially negotiated and constructed and allow students to broaden their genre knowledge through employing multiple and mixed discourses, such accounts are constrained by the limited contexts they examine. The few accounts of writing-with approaches to service learning share a common context: the students enrolled in such courses served as tutors or mentors to other students
(community teenagers or other students at the university). Such accounts provide a glimpse into the impact writing with the community approaches have on both mentors and mentees, but because the tutor/mentors’ writing is embedded in university courses, it may carry with it the trappings of how college students typically conceptualize the writing they do; that is, students may view it as a means toward a grade rather than as situated social action within a particular discourse community, action geared toward ways of negotiating and making meaning with the community at large. Evidence from writing-with approaches seems to indicate that students came to deeper understandings of community issues and their own biases and perspectives. Indeed, students seem to have learned something of the social contexts beyond their own and beyond the walls of the academy, but to what end is largely unknown. Much more needs to be known about this approach if it is to be promoted as a means of developing both intercultural understanding and writing related knowledge.

**Writing in Interdisciplinary Settings**

In their discussion of developing a tool to assess interdisciplinary writing, Wolfe and Haynes (2003) noted “that interdisciplinary writing is qualitatively different from disciplinary writing. Interdisciplinary writing tends to feature a more critical look at the disciplines, more original approaches to research methods and topics, and a more self-conscious and reflective awareness of the strengths and limitations of the author and the project at hand” (p. 14). However, there’s not a great deal of research published in this area. In her dissertation, Nowacek (2001) noted that while interdisciplinary courses are advocated by many scholars as a means to foster student learning within many domains, “interdisciplinary scholars have rarely taken up the question of how ‘mediational tools,’
such as writing and speaking, influence interdisciplinary learning” (p. 23). Drawing on the scholarship of genre theorists, her research argued that writing within such contexts is complex because students draw on a myriad of writing experiences and knowledge. She further suggested the need for those teaching in interdisciplinary settings to ask what genres they wish their students to write in and in what ways do they want these particular genres to function differently in interdisciplinary classrooms.

In terms of empirical studies of writing in interdisciplinary contexts, not much has been undertaken even since the time of Nowacek’s own research. My search for such research produced one recent study (Barnhisel et al., 2012). Scholarship in this area is comprised mostly of theoretical literature (Dintz et al. 1997; Haynes, 1996; Mansilla et al., 2009; Wolfe & Haynes, 2003) or documentary accounts (Allen, Floyd-Thomas, & Gillman, 2001; Dunn, 1994; Thompson & Kleine, 2014).

The theoretical scholarship cited above provides some insight into what interdisciplinary writing entails and the challenges it presents to both students and instructors who evaluate the writing. Haynes (1996) outlined developmental stages through which interdisciplinary writers pass and suggested appropriate assignments for each stage. “Stage I—Reading and Writing for Interdisciplinarians” describes students’ proficiencies in reading, writing, and thinking in their first year in college. Because students have not yet developed strong disciplinary understandings and writing skills in their first year of college, they must be introduced to the ways of making meaning within disciplines. This stage is aimed at developing awareness and advocates a scaffolded approach in which the complexity of writing assignments is gradually increased. The goal is to enable students to respond thoughtfully to texts that range in disciplinary
orientations and genres. Students begin with narration and description and move toward analysis. Within this stage, writing is not interdisciplinary per se; that is, students are not expected to integrate multiple disciplinary ways of knowing. They do so gradually as they pass through the remaining five stages in which they first develop disciplinary writing comprehension and move toward interdisciplinary inquiry. According to Haynes, such development cannot be accomplished in a single course of study but takes years of continual practice. Studies of writing within the disciplines note this to be the case for developing disciplinary writing proficiency as well. Therefore, it can be expected that students in interdisciplinary writing contexts will encounter similar challenges as students writing in particular disciplines. That is, students’ writing is less successful unless they have developed adequate content knowledge, genre knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, and discourse community knowledge. Students also need ongoing feedback on their writing, and assignments should be authentic in nature.

However, interdisciplinary writing contexts present some unique challenges. Most interdisciplinary programs/courses are co-taught by instructors from different disciplines. As such, instructors must agree on what constitutes proficient interdisciplinary writing and what evidence is acceptable within such texts. This does not often occur because students within such programs are asked to write for the individual courses that comprise the interdisciplinary program (Barnishel et al., 2012; Dintz et al., 1997; Nowacek, 2011). This complicates the integration of interdisciplinary content and ways of making meaning. Knowing this to be the case, some scholars have developed and empirically tested tools to assess interdisciplinary writing (Mansilla et al., 2009; Wolfe & Haynes, 2003). The more recently developed Targeted Assessment Rubric for Interdisciplinary
Writing discussed by Mansilla et al. identified four dimensions within which student writing can be assessed: 1) purposefulness, which “examines the degree to which students exhibit clarity about the aims and audience of their interdisciplinary writing” (p. 342); 2) disciplinary grounding, which “examines students’ understanding, selection, and use of the bodies of expertise that inform their work;” and 3) integration, which assesses students’ ability to integrate disciplinary perspectives; and critical awareness, which, “calls attention to students’ capacity to take a meta-disciplinary perspective on their interdisciplinary work and reflect explicitly about the craft of weaving disciplines together” (p. 345). This rubric was empirically tested for reliability using inter-rater reliability measures and found to be acceptable (IRR=83.5%). Additionally, an ANOVA was conducted to assess validity along the four dimensions. It was found that seniors scored higher on the rubric than other students, a finding that seems to confirm Haynes’ (1997) contention that interdisciplinary writers move through stages in developing interdisciplinary writing skills. However, unless instructors of interdisciplinary programs understand the complexity of writing through the lenses of multiple disciplines and accept the connections students make across disciplines, assessment tools for interdisciplinary writing fail to serve a purpose. Research of writing within interdisciplinary contexts seems to indicate that instructors often adhere to disciplinary ways of making meaning and that students are left struggling with how to integrate the knowledge they gain from interdisciplinary programs.

For example, Nowacek (2005 and 2011) and Barnhisel et al. (2012) both look at writing within learning community programs. Nowacek’s research detailed the transfer of both writing related knowledge (predominately genre knowledge transfer) and content
area knowledge within an interdisciplinary learning community in which students were enrolled in a series of linked courses as part of the program. Barnhisel et al. studied how writing process pedagogy was employed in first-year learning communities (themed around particular topics such as community and governance or cultures and societies) that also employ a linked course strategy in order to embody students with the ability to see how different disciplines view a particular topic. Noteworthy in the learning community Barnhisel et al. studied was the inclusion of a course specifically on writing—the standard first-year composition requirement embedded in the interdisciplinary program. In both Nowacek’s and Barnhisel’s studies, however, the writing students did was situated within specific disciplinary domains. That is, students wrote papers for their history, religious studies, philosophy, and writing classes, for example, solely for those specific courses. While students were expected in each case to make connections among the disciplinary ways of seeing, their writing was evaluated in the context of disciplinary domains.

Both Nowacek and Barnhisel et al. find similar results. Nowacek noted that students by and large made connections in their writing among disciplinary ways of knowing. Some were more successful in “selling” those connections to instructors within disciplinary domains than others for a variety of factors including instructors’ knowledge of what students were studying in other linked courses, students’ abilities to adhere to disciplinary writing conventions and ways of making meaning, students’ content area knowledge, and students’ identities as well as abilities to repurpose genre knowledge. Barnhisel et al. reported that students saw connections in writing process knowledge among linked courses; however, instructors reported connections among disciplines to a
far lesser degree. One limitation to the Barnhisel et al. study, which the authors acknowledged, was that data consisted of student and faculty perceptions on what was learned rather than on writing samples themselves.

Noteworthy in the research by Barnhisel et al. is that instructors of the writing courses reported limited integration of writing process pedagogy in the other disciplinary linked courses and perceptions of the writing course as being in service to the disciplinary courses rather than a legitimate course of study in and of itself. Such perceptions point to how situated writing is as well as to a gap in knowledge of writing pedagogy across the curriculum and a perception among disciplinary faculty that teaching students how to write is not part of their jobs.

The documentary accounts of interdisciplinary writing cited in the second paragraph of this section do not provide a great deal of insight into how interdisciplinary writing functions in interdisciplinary contexts. Dunn’s (1994) account described an interdisciplinary communication course she taught that was linked with a first-semester Western Cultures course and the writing to learn techniques she employed to teach writing in the course. She argued for employing such techniques more widely in psychology courses based on what she learned from teaching the writing course. However, she did not discuss whether such techniques actually improved students’ writing or learning in the Communication course (although presumably it did or else she would not have suggested employing them further). Allen et al. (2001) also discussed a Family Studies interdisciplinary writing course they taught, which was aimed at having students view content through multiple disciplinary lenses (feminist, religious, and ethnic studies). The account itself focused on the xenophobia of students enrolled in the course
as evidenced through student surveys and their writing to some degree as well as made suggestions for assisting students in critically examining their own perspectives and employing a transformative pedagogy. Again, the writing is not discussed in terms of what students were learning or how they developed as writers.

On the other hand, Thompson and Kleine (2015) described their development of an interdisciplinary rhetoric and composition course that they co-taught. The course utilized a dialogical pedagogy in which students and instructors engaged in dialogue across perspectives and ways of making meaning. Thompson and Kleine differentiated discussion from dialogue: “Dialog [sic], we agreed, implied a larger value, an attitude of creating an atmosphere of virtual equality, of wholeness of persons, an atmosphere in which we could investigate and create knowledge” (p. 175). Creating such an atmosphere in the classroom reportedly improved the quality of students’ writing and speaking. Student testimonials were offered as evidence that students perceived they learned more because of the mutual relationships among the instructors and students. Thompson and Kleine also reported that they were in agreement about course goals and instructional methods. It could be that this agreement enabled students’ success because students were not struggling to figure out what each instructor expected from their writing and were not attempting to write in one discipline or another. However, the instructors’ disciplinary backgrounds (communication studies and rhetoric/composition) are related areas of study, so ways of making meaning in each discipline probably share many features. This likely assisted students’ writing success as well.

The existing scholarship on writing in interdisciplinary settings demonstrates a gap in the understanding of how writing functions outside of strictly disciplinary settings.
The scholarship and research examined in this review gives a glimpse of how writing may impact learning across, between, and inter-disciplines, but a great deal more research should be undertaken to understand how writing may function as a tool for learning outside single disciplinary settings.

**Living Learning Community Research**

Learning communities are one of the high-impact practices advocated by Kuh (2008) that influence student learning. Goals of learning communities include engaging students in inquiry of “big questions” that go beyond the scope of a classroom and integrating learning across courses and disciplines. A sociocultural view of learning is implied by such programs as students take courses that are linked as a group and “work closely with one another and their professors,” (p. 10) co-constructing the learning experience. Kuh notes that high impact practices “put students in the company of mentors and advisors as well as peers who share intellectual interests” (p. 15). Learning communities in particular are noted to assist students in developing “new ways of thinking about and responding immediately to novel circumstances as they work side by side with peers on intellectual and practical tasks, inside and outside the classroom, on and off campus.”

Living learning communities take the high impact practice of learning communities one step further by requiring students to live in the same residence hall with a cohort of peers enrolled in the same program (often on the same floor or wing, depending upon the total enrollment in the program). Such a construct further emphasizes the social nature of learning, particularly with regard to the influence of students’ peer groups, which Astin (1993) found to be the most important influence on students’ growth
and development in college (Barefoot, 2000). The International Residential Learning Communities Registry (Association of College and University Housing Officers – International (ACUHO-i), 2014) noted that the concept of living-learning communities was introduced in the 1980s “as an avenue for facilitating meaningful interaction between peers, faculty, students, and staff” and that such communities impact student learning, retention, and satisfaction. Examination of the 200+ living-learning programs listed on this registry shows a range of living-learning community programs, some academically themed by disciplinary major, some by first-year experience, and others around a particular theme (e.g. wellness, civic engagement, service, or leadership). Many emphasize goals of experiential learning, integrating disciplinary content, and increasing sociocultural awareness. In general, living-learning communities “seek to make the academic experience more learning-centered” (Inkelas, Soldner, Longerbeam, & Leonard, 2008, p. 496) and aim to connect the “academic and social spheres of college life, providing an environment that supports peer learning.”

Although the ACUHO-i registry contains living-learning communities from 88 different colleges/universities, by no means is it inclusive of all living-learning communities in existence. In order to help guide the design of living-learning communities, Inkelas, Soldner, Longerbeam, and Leonard (2008) developed an empirical typology of living-learning community programs. Using data from the 2004 National Study of Living-Learning Programs (NSLLP), which examined programs at 34 institutions and responses from 23,910 resident students from these institutions, the researchers identified three clusters of programs: “Small, Limited Resourced” programs with emphasis primarily on residential life and with an average of 43 students enrolled;
“Medium, Moderately Resourced” programs with collaboration between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs with an average of 100 students enrolled; and “Large, Comprehensively Resourced” programs with Student Affairs and Academic Affairs collaborations and an average of 343 students enrolled (pp. 502-503). Themes and outcomes of these programs vary, but the goal was to develop a typology that would include “organizational and structural facets” of these programs as previous typologies did not include these. Two typologies are referenced but neither includes classification by learning outcomes or themes. In another study conducted by Brower and Inkelas (2010) using the same NSLLP data set, however, 17 living-learning community program themes were identified, including civic and social leadership, disciplinary, fine arts, cultural, honors, programs by class standings (first-year, sophomores, or upper class students), research, or wellness/health.

Research assessing the learning that takes place in living-learning communities is often based on students’ perceptions of what they learned (Brower & Inkelas, 2010; Inkelas, Soldner, Longerbeam, & Leonard, 2008; Kurotsuchi Inkelas, Johnson, Lee, Daver, Longerbeam, Vogt, & Leaonard, 2006; Pike, 1999; Rowan-Kenyon, Soldner, & Kurotsuchi Inkelas; 2007; Wawrzynski, Jessup-Anger, Stolz, Helman, & Beaulieu, 2009). For example, Inkelas, Soldner, Longerbeam, and Leonard’s study (2008) also aimed to explore if participation in different types of living-learning communities was related to three broad collegiate learning outcomes: growth in critical thinking, overall cognitive complexity, and appreciation for liberal learning (p. 501). Data analysis showed no difference in critical thinking growth between participants in small, residential life centered programs and medium-sized programs, but students in large living-learning
community programs yielded higher scores in perceptions of critical thinking. In the case of overall cognitive growth and appreciation for liberal learning, students in both large, well-resourced programs and small residential life centered programs outperformed peers in medium sized programs. Again, however, these findings are based on students’ perceptions of learning and do not include more empirical measures of learning.

A study by Rowan-Kenyon, Soldner, and Kurotsuchi Inkelas (2007) sought to find a relationship between participation in living-learning communities and college students’ sense of civic engagement. Their sample used a subset from the 2004 NSLLP and included participants in civic oriented living-learning communities (n=474), participants in other, non-civic oriented living-learning communities (n=500), and residential students not involved in living-learning communities (n=500). Results showed that students who participated in civic living-learning communities had higher senses of civic engagement than those in other living-learning communities or those not in living-learning communities. Participants in other living-learning communities also showed higher senses of civic engagement. Because co-curricular involvement has been shown in previous studies to have an impact on students’ senses of civic engagement, analysis was conducted controlling for students’ attitudes about the importance of co-curricular involvement prior to entering college. Students participating in civic living-learning communities exhibited higher senses of civic engagement. However, co-curricular involvement was demonstrated to be a better predictor of students’ sense of civic engagement than participation in a living-learning community. The authors reasoned that students who enter civic living-learning communities may already be predisposed to civic engagement and/or co-curricular involvement and thus, “it may not be participation in a
living-learning program itself that results in higher levels of sense of civic engagement, but instead students’ preexisting dispositions toward civic engagement that are in play” (pp. 768-769). They also reasoned that it is possible that because students participating in civic living-learning communities are more involved in civic co-curricular activities, “the relationship between civic engagement living-learning programs and sense of civic engagement is erased” (p. 769).

Brower and Inkelas (2010) drew on data from several years of the NSLLP (2001, 2003, 2004, and 2007) and assessed the experiences of students in living-learning programs along Astin’s (1993) Input-Environment-Outcome framework. They took into account inputs such as demographics, high school achievement, and pre-college attitudes; environmental factors, such as majors, peer and faculty interactions, and residence hall climate and resources; and outcomes, such as perceptions of intellectual growth, appreciation for diversity, and sense of civic engagement. The study found that living-learning programs contribute to student learning in a number of ways. Living-learning program students perceived that they used critical thinking more often than traditional residential students and were more likely to transfer learning from one course context to another (transfer in terms of application). Living-learning program students also exhibited more commitment to civic engagement and acted on this perception of civic engagement by volunteering or enrolling in service learning more than students who did not participate in living-learning programs (p. 40). However, no statistically significant difference was found between groups in development of personal philosophies. On one hand, it seems as though living-learning program students develop a sense of civic
engagement, but in terms of developing their personal philosophies, students did not perceive that involvement in a living-learning program helped them to do so.

Among the practices (environmental factors) within living-learning programs that helped to develop a sense of civic engagement were peer study groups, academic discussions with peers, social discussions with peers, course related interaction with faculty, and an academically and socially supportive residence hall climate. What’s interesting is that there’s no data on the academic activities within courses linked to the living-learning programs. This data was likely not examined in the NSLLP because a broad range of living-learning programs was included, some of which had no academic components. This gap in living-learning program research warrants looking at the academic contexts of these programs more closely and unpacking what academic activities have an impact on learning outcomes. However, it should be noted that students in these studies often point to the more social aspects of living-learning programs as having an influence on what they perceived they were learning and how that learning occurred. These findings support the use of a sociocultural framework for understanding the learning that takes place in living-learning program contexts.

Summary

A good deal is known about how students write to learn and learn to write in traditional disciplinary courses. Some research has been undertaken of writing in non-traditional academic contexts (such as service learning courses and interdisciplinary programs) and also demonstrates a relationship between writing and learning. However, mutt courses do not fit neatly into those categorical contexts. Because mutt courses are part of the institutional context as colleges and universities seek to employ more high-
impact practices, studying the learning that takes place in such courses is warranted. Furthermore, there is no research specifically on writing as a learning tool in such courses even though writing is utilized in these settings to promote and assess learning. Additionally, many studies of the learning in living-learning programs and writing in non-traditional settings is based on students’ or instructors’ perceptions rather than on more empirical measures, such as the examination of the writing itself. Certainly students’ and instructors’ perceptions of learning are important as they evidence the social nature of learning (understanding learning by relating it to one’s experiences). Therefore, my study incorporated both perceptions and examination of students’ writing to further unpack what learning transpires in these unique contexts. Study design and methodology is outlined in the next chapter.
Overview

Writing Across the Curriculum scholars overwhelmingly view writing as situated, social action that requires ongoing practice and develops over time with continued involvement in a community of practice. Writing is not a single, generalizable skill that can be taught in isolation from the social context in which it occurs. As such, individuals develop writing proficiency and content comprehension differently, even within the same contexts, as they bring with them previous writing knowledge and experiences as well as identities. What students learn through writing is further impacted by their writing processes and practices within particular contexts, which are in turn influenced by the social actions/interactions within those contexts. Quantitative studies of writing have failed to fully unpack writing development and learning. Case studies, widely used in writing research, allow a more in-depth look at the factors that contribute to writing development and overall learning. However, most writing research occurs in traditional disciplinary settings. This chapter describes the context and research methods for exploring how writing functions in a mutt course. No studies, to date, have studied writing to learn in this unique context.
Context

This study is set at Midwest Jesuit University (MJU)\textsuperscript{10}, a private, Catholic, Jesuit university located in the Midwest. The university has an overall enrollment of approximately 11,000 students including graduate and professional studies programs. About 8,000 of those students are undergraduates. The undergraduate population is predominately residential (students are required to live in residence halls the first two years of study unless they qualify as commuter students). The institution also falls into the category of being a predominately white institution (PWI), with 70.9\% of undergraduates identifying as white, and 24.6\% of undergraduates identifying as other races/ethnicities or multi-racial\textsuperscript{11}. As with other Catholic, Jesuit institutions, social justice is embedded in the university’s mission.

Research on PWIs indicates that students who identify outside of the racial/ethnic majority experience their campus climates quite differently than those in the dominant group, reporting higher rates of harassment and perceiving the campus as more racist and less inclusive than their white peers (Harper, 2013; Rankin & Reason, 2005, Vaccaro, 2014). Students from underrepresented groups, particularly those who identify as African American, also have lower rates of retention and persistence (Hunn, 2014). A sense of belonging is among the factors that increase retention among underrepresented groups. Learning communities (a high-impact practice) are one way to develop a sense of belonging among students.

\textsuperscript{10} MJU is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the college and the participants of this study.

\textsuperscript{11} MJU’s Office of Institutional Research and Analysis website (url redacted as per IRB protocol).
The specific context of this study is the WeLead Social Justice Community\textsuperscript{12} (hereafter referred to as WeLead), a residential living-learning community open to 70 first-year students who live in the same wing of a residence hall. The aim of the program is to develop students’ cultural competence and leadership skills through two credited academic seminars (titled Dynamics of Privilege and Oppression I and II), retreats, and other educational programs.\textsuperscript{13} The content of the course focuses on privilege and oppression, and learning outcomes for this seminar include both identity understanding and development of communication skills. Writing assignments are an integral part of the curriculum and include reflective reading response papers, a personal identity inventory reflection, and an analysis paper in which students are required to formally reference course readings, draw on other literature, and connect texts to their own knowledge and experiences. Writing assignments are noted in the course syllabus to “provide opportunities to demonstrate achievement of course goals” (WeLead Course Syllabi, 2016). The WeLead program has been in existence for over a decade at MJU and is the kind of diversity program students nationwide are calling for (Brown, 2016), one that examines privilege and oppression with the ultimate goal that students will develop advocacy skills and move toward being change agents in their communities.

Typically, three sections of Dynamics of Privilege and Oppression are offered each semester and are open only to participants of WeLead. The course is classified as a “MJU Sponsored Course” in the catalog of courses. The course is not housed in any of the academic colleges. Completion of both semesters of the seminar fulfill MJU’s Core of Common Studies Diverse Cultures requirement, and students receive three credits (1.5

\textsuperscript{12} WeLead Social Justice Community is a pseudonym.\textsuperscript{13} MJU’s Office of Residence Life website (url redacted as per IRB protocol).
for each seminar). The living-learning program can be classified as a “Small, Limited
Resourced, Primarily Residential Life Emphasis” LLP according to the typology of living
learning programs developed by Kurotsuchi Inkelas, Soldner, Longerbeam, and Leonard
(2008) in that it is staffed and resourced through Student Affairs. Instructors of the
seminar are often staff in the Division of Student Affairs, though this is not always the
case. There have been instructors whose professional roles are in other areas of the
university as well.

**Study Design and Methods**

My review of literature and theoretical framework provide warrants for having
implemented an interpretive design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and case study methodology
(Yin, 1984). Interpretive designs are used when researchers seek to uncover what is going
on in a setting without a priori knowledge. Writing has not been studied in a mutt course
prior to the undertaking of this research, and few studies have been conducted of writing
in contexts that bear similarity to my research setting (e.g. interdisciplinary courses). Yin
notes that “case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are
being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on
a contemporary phenomenon with some real-life context” (p. 13). Additionally, case
study methods are commonly employed in contemporary writing studies research
(Beaufort, 2007; Downs and Wardle, 2007; Galer-Uniti, 2002; Johnson & Krase, 2012;
Nowacek, 2011; Poe, Lerner, & Craig, 2010; Soliday, 2011; Walvoord & McCarthy,
1990). Because my research questions explored how writing functions in a mutt course as
well as what students learned in that particular mutt course through their writing
endeavors, and because mutt courses are a relatively new phenomenon in
colleges/universities, a case study strategy (Yin, 1984) was useful in unpacking the function of writing in this context, providing insight into how writing might be usefully employed in other similar contexts.

Two sections of “Dynamics of Privilege and Oppression I” served as the overarching cases, and students and instructors from each of these two sections served as participants (i.e., referred to as subjects in the Activity Theory framework) to explore and identify patterns in how instructors used writing (a tool) to achieve course goal (objects), how students conceptualized writing in this setting and how that writing assisted in their learning course content (objects) as well as developed a desire among students to be change agents (outcome). (See Figure 3.1 for a model of the study design with data sources.)

The community (students and instructors—including their values and beliefs, the institution, disciplinary communities that informed course content, and students’ high school communities) formed the base of the activity system triangle. All of these factors impacted how students engaged in the course. This community was then governed by rules (assignment criteria, instructors’ expectations, and the sense of informality/familiarity that characterized the course). The division of labor (instructor’s pedagogical practices, students completing assignments, and instructors grading these assignments) also impacted the object (the course goals and how writing function toward these) as well as the outcome (what actually transpired as a result of the interactions of components in this activity system). (See Figure 3.2 for a model of the WeLead activity system and all its components.)
To understand how this activity system operated toward the outcome and particularly how writing functioned toward the outcome, two main units of analysis were used to unpack the relationship between writing and learning/development: 1) the students (interviews and writing samples), and 2) the instructors (interviews, course documents, and pedagogical practices as evidenced through fieldwork observation, interviews, and feedback on student writing). The interpretive design and case study methodology allowed themes to emerge throughout the course of study and enabled the exploration of relationships between writing and learning/development.
Figure 3.2. Activity System Model of the WeLead Course

Participant Selection

The two sections of Dynamics of Privilege and Oppression I offered in the fall 2016 semester served as the overarching cases to this study. One section was taught by a staff person in student affairs and the other section was taught by a staff person who worked in a non-teaching academic department of the university. A sample of ten to twelve students was sought (five to six from each section), and participation was voluntary. There were a few options for participation offered to students enrolled in the course. Full participation allowed me to 1) observe and record the student in class and use any and all of that observational data; 2) interview the student on three separate occasions; and 3) collect all written assignments for analysis. Other levels of participation
included consent to collect and analyze students’ papers, consent to record students in class and use recorded data, and/or consent to record students in class but not use what was captured in that recording. Six students from one section and four from the other initially consented to full participation. Only four from each section followed-up with me to schedule interviews. Two students from one section completed one interview with me and then did not show for the second interview and did not return my email requests to reschedule the missed interviews.

In past years, the WeLead program offered three sections of the course. In the fall of 2016, enrollment in the program was extremely low, only 23 students total, and by the fourth week of the semester, three students originally enrolled had dropped out of the program. Because of this low enrollment, only two sections of the course were offered, one enrolling eight students, and the other twelve. The students enrolled in WeLead for the 2016-17 academic year were all in their first year of college, came from a variety of backgrounds, and had a variety of majors. Therefore, each section was both random and fairly representative in its composition. Because writing studies have shown identity to be one factor that influences how students write in particular contexts (Nowacek, 2011; Poe, Lerner, & Craig, 2011; Soliday, 2011; Walvoord and McCarthy, 1990), my intention was to attempt to select participants who represented different majors, backgrounds, race/ethnicity, and genders. A paper survey was distributed and collected during my first visit to each class, on which students were asked if they were willing to participate (and at which level) and were also asked demographic questions regarding their majors, their race/ethnicity, their gender identification, and their socio-economic background.
My total sample of eight students represents 40% of the total enrollment in the program for the 2016-17 academic year. Again, because of the low enrollment, I was unable to intentionally select participants in order to maximize diversity within the sample (based on their race/ethnicities, gender identifications, academic majors, and backgrounds). However, there was a good deal of diversity among the student participants. Table 3.1 outlines participant demographics.

While choosing a representative sample employs the type of sampling logic characteristic of positivistic research that Yin (1984) noted is misplaced in case study methodology, desiring a varied sample of students was warranted because student identities have been shown in research to impact writing development and success. Therefore, including students with different backgrounds allowed for data analysis that considered how identity factors influenced students’ writing processes and practices and how writing functioned as a tool for learning. Additionally, students’ previous experiences are part of the social context of learning. Utilizing participants from various experiential backgrounds assists in understanding the rich social contexts students bring to new communities of practice and how transfer of previous writing knowledge influenced their negotiation of writing in novel settings.

**Data Sources**

Multiple data sources were used to develop the case study structure of this mutt course. An outline of data sources follows:

1. **Student participation survey.** An initial paper survey to determine consent to participate at various levels and student demographic information was distributed and
collected upon my first visit to each class. Demographic factors were used to gain a
deep understanding of the composition of this particular context.
Table 3.1

Student Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section X</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>First Generation College Student</th>
<th>High-school Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ivy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Asian/Filipino</td>
<td>Bio-medical Engineering</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Private, Catholic Jesuit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Bio-medical Engineering</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Private Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harambe</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Digital Media</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Suburban, public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hero</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Asian/Hmong</td>
<td>Bio-medical Engineering</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Urban, public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section Y</th>
<th>Kat</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Private Catholic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Criminology and Law Studies</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Urban Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Private, Catholic, all male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MSF</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Asian/Vietnamese</td>
<td>Management &amp; International Business</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Private, Catholic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Fieldwork observation of Dynamics of Privilege and Oppression I. Each seminar met once weekly. I attended and video or audio recorded every class session of each section of the course, 29 sessions total. (Class met for 15 weeks, but on one occasion, the instructor of Section Y was sick and cancelled class, giving the students a take-home assignment as a substitute.) All sessions but three were video or audio recorded for the full class duration to ensure accuracy of the data. The first class meetings
were not recorded as consent was obtained at those meetings. Section X watched a film over the course of two sessions, and I only recorded when the class was in discussion. Additionally, Section Y met on the day after the U.S. Presidential Election, and class time was utilized to help the students process through the outcome of the election. While I was present for this discussion, I did not record or take notes as I wanted to give students a safe space to express themselves.

Observational notes were made regarding the general activity of the class, students’ engagement in the class activities/discussions, student references to writing or other courses, pedagogical practices of the instructors, the types of class activities instructors planned, and any mention of writing assignments. The recordings of the second, third, and fourth week of each session were transcribed to develop initial themes on which to focus notes. Because each session had a pretty regular pattern of activity, subsequent class sessions were not transcribed, but data from these observations was brought in when warranted.

3. Interviews with instructors. Each instructor was interviewed once (for 40-45 minutes approximately) at the end of the semester (prior to grades being posted). Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. Interviews explored the instructors’ backgrounds as writers, interests in teaching the course, purposes of the writing assignments, assessment of the students’ writing, and how instructors assisted students in negotiating writing tasks (pedagogical practices). Instructors’ perceptions of writing assignments were compared with students’ perceptions.

4. Interviews with students. Three interviews (approximately 30-45 minutes each) were planned with each participant three weeks into the semester, at midterm, and
near the end of the semester. Of the eight students consenting to full participation, only six completed all three interviews. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Interviews explored students’ backgrounds and interests in enrolling in the program, their writing processes and practices, how they conceptualized the writing they did for this course, the resources on which they drew in negotiating their writing assignments, and what they perceived they were learning through writing about course content. Specific questions on each category of writing assignments were also posed.

5. Course syllabi, assignment prompts, and handouts. In order to triangulate other data sources, course syllabi, assignment prompts, and class handouts were examined to help unpack expectations for students’ writing and learning. Syllabi and prompts assisted in exploring how students conceptualized the writing they did as well as prior genre knowledge they might have drawn upon in negotiating writing for this course.

6. Analysis of student writing. All required and completed writing assignments for the course were collected from consenting students (18 total students): response/reflection papers, personal identity inventory and reflection (midterm), and analysis papers (final). While each section had the same number of required papers on the syllabus, the required number of written assignments was adjusted in each section based on how the classroom dynamics played out. For example, Section X combined the response/reflection papers for two weeks because the class watched a film over those two weeks. Section Y added a take-home written response to an online video they were required to watch in lieu of a class meeting because the instructor was sick. Additionally, not all consenting students turned in every assignment. The breakdown of papers collected by section is displayed in Table 3.2.
Table 3.2

Collected Writing Assignments by Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Section X</th>
<th>Section Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response/Reflection Papers</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Identity Inventory Reflection (midterm)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis Paper (final)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Researcher journal. Throughout the research process, I kept a journal as a record of data collection and analysis procedures as well as reflections on pedagogy, students’ engagement with the course, and the research itself.

Observation Tools

Given the multiple data sources of this study, different observation tools were used to collect data for later analysis.

1. Participant interest/consent meeting and survey. In order to gain initial access to the study context, I had a separate meeting with each instructor prior to the start of the semester, during which I explained the study design and answered any questions the instructors had. A formal consent form allowing me access to the classrooms was given to each instructor (see Appendix A), and they returned those consent forms to me via campus mail within a few days of the initial meeting.

On the first day each section met, a paper survey and consent form was distributed to all students in the enrolled in the program (see Appendices B and C). The survey collected student demographic information that I intended to use to select
participants, but because of the low enrollment in the program, I initially contacted each student who consented to full participation to schedule interviews.

2. Fieldwork log. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) advocate the use of a fieldwork log as the primary tool for recording observational data. Fieldwork observation was made in a hardcopy paper notebook as opposed to on a computer to minimize my presence in the classroom. My goal in observation was to be a “fly on the wall,” to vividly capture the essence of classroom sessions and describe them in the most detail possible. Because of the interpretive design of the study, I cast a wide web in initial observation, making notes of the classroom setting (where students sat, the position of the instructor, what students did in the classroom setting, the topics of discussion and dialogue that occurred, how the teacher responded to students, etc.) and also recorded my reflections as to what transpired in the classroom so that notes were both descriptive and analytic (Glesne & Peshkin).

Reflections were noted on one side of the paper and observations on the other so that I could identify patterns and themes that occurred as well as speculate on what was occurring. Observation notes were organized chronologically by date and by class section. A chronological record allowed me to speculate on progress in students’ learning. As the research progressed, a more focal approach to note taking was undertaken, narrowing in on specific themes that occurred with regard to research questions.

3. Collection of course documents and student writing. Syllabi (which included assignment prompts) were accessed through D2L, the university’s online course management system. The Office of the Registrar (with the program administrator’s permission) granted me access to each section’s D2L course site. Having access to the
D2L site allowed me to download documents and students’ writing without the instructors knowing which students consented to participate. This ensured the protection of the identities of participants. Course documents helped to corroborate fieldwork, interview, and student writing data sources (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Copies of the participants’ writing were imported in NVivo, a program for data analysis.

4. Interview protocol. Both instructors were formally interviewed once at the end of the semester. Conducting interviews at this juncture gave ample time for instructors to have established relationships with students, and students had submitted all of their required writing assignments. Interviews took place in instructors’ offices and lasted approximately 40-45 minutes. Instructors were asked the same series of questions (see Appendix D) with some variation that allowed for follow-up on responses to pre-planned questions.

Six of the case study participants were formally interviewed at three junctures throughout the semester for a period of 30–45 minutes in my university office (once at three weeks into the semester, once at midterm, and once near the end of the semester). Two participants were only interviewed once (three weeks into the semester). All participants were asked the same series of questions in each interview, with some variation to allow for follow-up on individual responses. (See Appendix E). Notes were made during the interviews in a notebook to record observations and responses as well as to allow for revision of future interviews if themes emerged that warranted further investigation as the study progressed.
All interviews were audio recorded. The majority of interviews were transcribed by the researcher, but five were transcribed by an independent, paid transcriber for analysis by the researcher. Interview data was also imported into NVivo for analysis.

**Data Analysis and Coding**

Activity Theory provided a framework for analyzing and interpreting the data. Within this framework, student writing (as a tool/artifact) and learning (as the object) were viewed as part and parcel of the social context. Observation tools were chosen to uncover the writing processes and practices of participants, what was influencing their negotiation of writing assignments in this context and what they were learning through their writing. Tools also explored how instructors intended to use writing as a tool for learning and their pedagogical practices.

Activity Theory additionally provided a model of the social context and allowed me to focus on how the tools/artifacts within the activity system (i.e. the writing and the resources students drew on in order to negotiate their writing) functioned toward the overall goals of the class (i.e. object) as well as what rules governed the activity system and how the overall community and division of labor influenced the learning/development of subjects (see Figure 3.1).

Coding of data was conducted through a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 2009) in which each data source was examined individually and then with others to paint a picture of how writing functioned in this activity system. Observational fieldwork data and interview data was initially examined for recurring themes (substantive coding) as soon as possible after each class session and interview. More
focused observation of instances of these themes occurred throughout the fieldwork observation. A journal with analytical notes was kept throughout the data collection and transcription process (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) in order to develop themes and codes in the analysis process. Themes and codes were refined as the study progressed through the analysis process. Specific analysis and coding for each data source follows.

Fieldwork Data. Fieldwork data (four weeks of transcribed class recordings and the full semester of the fieldwork log) was examined and coded for instructors’ pedagogical practices as they applied to the writing students did. This analysis occurred after interview data and student writing data was analyzed. I specifically sought to find instances of the writing to learn pedagogies outlined in my review of literature because research questions were focused on how writing functioned toward learning. However, I looked for other themes that occurred as well. For example, two initial themes that emerged were “checking in” with students and “posing questions/prompting.” Instructors checked in with students at the beginning of each class, and in discussion posed questions and/or prompted students to respond to questions they posed. Ultimately these themes were not pursued in analysis because they did not appear to contribute to how writing was functioning in this context. Checking in had more to do with students’ wellbeing. Furthermore, writing was rarely discussed in class, and when it was, discussion did not go beyond the question of “how did the writing go?” Students would reply to these inquiries with responses such as “fine,” “good.” And discussion of writing was abandoned thereafter. In terms of posing questions/prompting, this occurred in discussion of content. While discussion of content likely had an impact on students’ learning,
interview data did not show evidence that discussion had a clear connection to the writing students were doing and how that writing impacted learning.

**Course documents.** Course documents were examined and used to triangulate and make sense of interview data, writing sample data, and fieldwork data. Course documents were analyzed concurrently with other data sources when there was a logical connection. For example, in analyzing instructor interview data and fieldwork data for pedagogical practices, course syllabi were analyzed in terms of the “writing prompts” as prompts were part of the syllabi.

**Student Interviews.** Student interviews were coded within multiple broad categories, some of which were then broken down into sub-categories to better understand the data in relationship to research questions. Because Activity Theory considers the experiences, knowledge, and attitudes subjects bring into an activity system, interviews were coded to examine both students’ previous and present experiences within the community. In other words, the data was coded along the lines of students’ backgrounds and what they brought into the system: the type of high school they attended, the types of classes they took in high school, their high school co-curricular involvements, their college co-curricular involvements, and their attitudes about writing. The data was also coded to examine what resources students drew upon in their writing. Lastly, data was coded for how students perceived their writing functioned in the course.

After data was coded for student backgrounds, writing resources, and writing function, Bloom’s Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) was utilized to unpack what kinds of cognitive processes WeLead writing evidenced, at least in terms of how
students perceived writing functioned for them, as well as the kinds of knowledge (i.e. domains) students were developing/acquiring. One initial theme that occurred in terms of writing was “reflection.” Students characterized their writing as reflective frequently. However, when analyzed further, it was clear that “reflection” encompassed different aspects of learning, such as students examining their own beliefs and values as well as others’ perspectives and understanding the content. In examining this data, it became clear that I needed a framework to understand this further in terms of the learning students were describing. I began research of “types of learning,” and Blooms Taxonomy fit well with regard to what students were expressing about how writing functioned toward their learning. A complete listing of codes is contained in Table 3.3.

**Instructor Interviews.** Instructor interview data was coded for how writing functioned in the WeLead course as well as the pedagogical practices of instructors. While interview data was considered in terms of instructors’ backgrounds (why they taught the course and for how long and their backgrounds as writers), codes were not developed for these factors because there were only a few questions that concerned these. These questions were included to help triangulate findings with regard to how writing functioned for subjects in this activity system, mainly to compare how students and instructors perceived writing to function. After data was coded for these functions, Bloom’s Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) was utilized to help understand the functions as well as unpack what instructors perceived students to be learning from their writing (i.e. the objects and outcomes of the activity system).

**Student Writing.** After themes from interview data were established, I conducted a content analysis on writing samples. In addition to thematic coding, content analysis is
one technique that helps to reduce researcher bias (Hussey & Hussey, 1997, cited in McGuiggan & Lee, 2008). The content analysis was informed by Anderson and Krathwohl’s *Revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Education Objectives* (2001), Activity Theory, and interview data. Content was analyzed in terms of the functions of writing (as expressed in interviews) and what cognitive processes students demonstrated through their writing (as informed by Bloom’s Taxonomy). This analysis was then used to understand the knowledge domains students seemed to be developing (also informed by Bloom’s Taxonomy).
Table 3.3

**Codes for Student Interview Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad Coding Categories</th>
<th>Student Involvement College</th>
<th>Writing Resources</th>
<th>Attitudes about Writing</th>
<th>Writing Functions</th>
<th>Bloom’s Cognitive Processes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Student Background High School</td>
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<td>Student Involvement College</td>
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<td>Writing Resources</td>
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<td>Attitudes about Writing</td>
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<td>Bloom’s Cognitive Processes</td>
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<td>Sub-Categories Coding</td>
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<td>Private/Public high school</td>
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<td>Sense of Community in High School</td>
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<td>• Felt included</td>
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<td>• Felt excluded</td>
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<td>AP Courses Taken in High School</td>
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<td>Social Justice Course(s)</td>
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<td>Taken in High School</td>
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<td>High School Co-Curricular Involvements</td>
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<td>• Clubs</td>
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<td>o Academic/Professional</td>
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<td>o Cultural</td>
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<td>o Faith-based</td>
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<td>o Honor Society</td>
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<td>o Performing Arts</td>
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<td>o Social Justice related</td>
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<td>o Sports</td>
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<td>o Student Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Writing-related</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Leadership position held or leadership activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Participated in Service Activities</td>
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</table>

*No sub-categories defined.*

- Student’s past experiences/perspectives
- Media (real-world examples)
- Class readings/in-class activities
- Assignment prompts
- Out-of-class activities (retreat, campus sponsored events/programs)
- Previous writing knowledge or assignments (both in WeLead and in other courses)
- Other courses
- Instructor feedback
- Other campus resources
- Didn’t like writing
- Enjoyed writing
- Wrote outside of academics
- Writing to demonstrate knowledge/learning
- Writing to learn
- Writing to Communicate
- Remembering
- Understanding
- Applying
- Analyzing
- Evaluating
- Creating

* At the time of the first interview—3 weeks into the semester—students’ involvements were still being explored/formed. Some students were not yet involved in co-curriculars but were planning on getting involved, and those that were had only been to one or two meetings. Therefore, it would have been hard to determine if those involvements played a significant role in their college experience at that juncture and if college involvement, therefore, significantly influenced WeLead course objects and outcomes.
Throughout the process of analyzing participant interviews, themes emerged in terms of how participants discussed the function of writing. Anderson and Krathwohl’s framework provided a means to understand particular ways of making meaning within these themes: (1) knowledge domains: factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive and (2) cognitive processes: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. In determining knowledge domains, I worked deductively in coding, first coding for cognitive processes. I looked for instances in students’ writing when the language used the verbs of the cognitive processes (e.g. “I understood” or “I provided examples”) or related to cognitive processes as outlined by Anderson and Krathwohl. I looked for where students were demonstrating understanding of the content, and I knew the content because I attended every class session. After identifying examples of the cognitive processes, I combed through that data to analyze the knowledge domain students appeared to be referencing in some way. Additionally, my analysis considered other coding categories: student background/involvements and the writing resources on which they drew in order to gain a deeper understanding of the activity system and to come to some conclusions about the questions this research posed. Activity Theory provided a means to understand the object of writing as a tool/artifact toward the outcome of the activity system.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Participation in this research study was strictly voluntary. Fieldwork observation focused on the consenting student participants and the instructors, with particular attention paid to the students who consented to full participation. Instructors and students were asked to sign consent forms for the various levels of participation. (See Appendices
To ensure that no students were penalized by their instructor for not participating, the instructors had no knowledge of who was selected as individual cases and who agreed to submit their writing. Additionally, the instructors, students, the institution, living-learning program, and course were all given pseudonyms to further protect participants’ identities. Participant demographics were outlined previously and also referenced in the findings chapters of this study, but the use of pseudonyms minimizes the possibility of matching data to individuals.

To further ensure maximum privacy and confidentiality for all participants, only I and my dissertation advisor had access to data sources. The independent transcriptionist had access to interview data, but that data was destroyed upon completion of transcription. Additionally, an Exempt Review form was submitted to the Institutional Review Board at MJU on June 15, 2016 to gain permission to conduct this study with human subjects and protocol for protection of data as outlined in the exempt review was followed.

**Trustworthiness of Data**

Multiple methods of data collection (fieldwork observation, interviews, and document analysis) and cross-data comparison assisted in establishing trustworthiness of the data. In order to promote consistency and allow for comparison, parallel questions were asked in instructor and student interviews. Feedback on coding schemes was solicited from knowledgeable peers. The write-up of the research was also shared with participants to elicit their feedback (if they chose to give any) to further establish the trustworthiness of findings. Two of the ten participants provided feedback. Additionally, while case study research has limitations in precision of the data analysis, techniques
such as content analysis and thematic coding help to reduce researcher bias (Hussey & Hussey, 1997, cited in McGuiggan & Lee, 2008).

**Researcher Subjectivity**

While I entered this study with the intent to explore the context of this particular mutt course and how writing functioned within it, allowing the data to drive the narratives that unfolded, it was inevitable that I viewed the data through my own experience and subjectivity. There are a few factors that likely influenced my focus in fieldwork and my analysis and interpretation of the data with regard to the context.

1. **Work in student affairs.** At the time of the study, I had worked in the field of student affairs for ten years. The bulk of this work had been in marketing and communications of student programs and services. Throughout that time, I had served as a supervisor of and advisor to student employees and volunteers. Students had shared with me perspectives of both their classroom and co-curricular experiences, so I was aware first-hand of the tensions and challenges students face in balancing academics, employment, and co-curricular involvements. I had also witnessed how students’ experiences outside the classroom foster their learning and development. Therefore, I came into this study with the knowledge that an integrated college experience assists in student learning, persistence, and success.

   Additionally, my work in student affairs had made me privy to conversations on co-curricular learning outcomes as well as the planning and design of co-curricular programs. I had designed marketing materials for three living-learning communities that existed at MJU, including the one on which my research was conducted. I had professional relationships with past and current instructors of the seminar associated with
the WeLead program, and at the time of this study, I had a somewhat close working relationship with one of the instructors. That relationship deepened as a result of this study. I found myself sharing with this instructor my struggles and challenges in developing my own cultural competence as well as helping the students I advise in my professional role at MJU to do the same.

In my professional role at MJU, I advise the student government association (SGA). Diversity and inclusion within that organization was an ongoing concern since MJU is a PWI. Students from underrepresented groups often feel that the student government does not represent them or advocate on their behalf. Indeed, the students involved in SGA vary in their understanding of privilege and oppression. While I had consciously challenged my advisees in terms of the social justice aspects of MJU’s mission, their development as advocates was an ongoing challenge. Often this instructor and I would discuss these challenges after class. These discussions, no doubt colored my focus in this study and interpretation of the data.

However, one section of the seminar that was taught by an instructor whose professional role fell outside Student Affairs. This instructor, while certainly oriented toward social justice, did provide a perspective outside of a student affairs professional background. Additionally, at the time of this study, I was not, in a position of power above either of these two instructors. They neither reported to me, nor to my direct supervisor. This dynamic mitigated some of the potential bias that could have occurred given my role at MJU.

2. Experience as a writing instructor and professional writer. I was a teacher of writing for eleven years, two years at the secondary level in a large urban Midwest
public school district and nine years at the post-secondary level at both a community college and technical college, a community arts center, and at MJU (where I had taught first-year composition for four years, though I was not teaching at the time of data collection or the research write-up). Though I have not engaged in any formal writing across the curriculum training as a professional, my experience in teaching writing and my own study of writing pedagogy have embodied me with a firm belief in writing to learn. I am aware of good writing pedagogy through my own development as a teacher of writing, and while scholarship questions the transfer of writing knowledge across contexts as well as the benefits of first-year composition courses in developing students’ abilities to write across contexts, I hold a firm belief in the benefits of teaching writing with particular pedagogical strategies. I believe that writing can be taught with an eye toward transfer.

As a professional writer who has written in many contexts (literary; academic; for marketing purposes; and to students, parents, and colleagues—and with them) I know first-hand how writing develops over time and is specific to contexts/discourse communities. My own experiences in writing have evidenced the possibility of writing-related knowledge transfer, and this subjectivity surely influenced my observations of students’ writing in this context.

3. My own college experience. While I attended a traditional four-year college directly after graduating high school, my own experience in college was not traditional. I was a first-generation college student and did not reside on campus. I grew up in a working-class household in which both parents worked full time and were unable to assist my siblings and me with the expenses of college. I worked a part-time job to help
finance my education in combination with student loans, and I was not enrolled full time for the entire tenure of my undergraduate degree. Therefore, it took me longer to graduate than is expected of the students enrolled at MJU. Additionally, I identify as a white, heterosexual female. Because the living-learning community I studied has traditionally attracted some students from MJU’s Educational Opportunity Program (all of whom are first-generation college students), some of the participants may have had similar socio-economic backgrounds as I. Others likely did not. My own undergraduate experiences likely assisted in understanding the identities particular participants brought to their college experience. This dynamic certainly introduced a risk of bias in interpreting data, but given that all participants were residential students and not commuters as I was, the risk of bias was minimized. Additionally, there is a 26-year distance between my undergraduate experience and those of the students I studied. A great deal has changed in the college experience since I completed my undergraduate degree.

4. **Additional factors.** At the time of this study, two additional factors likely influenced the interpretation of the data. First, during the semester this research was conducted, I was enrolled with other professionals at MJU and community members in a course through the YWCA titled “Unlearning Racism.” Much of the content of this course was very similar to the content of the WeLead seminar. While a lot of the content of both the YWCA course and WeLead was familiar to me through my own professional development and courses within my Ph.D. program, my concurrent enrollment in the YWCA course while engaged in this research provided me with an in-depth understanding of the systems of oppression that operate in our society. The course brought that to the forefront for me. Therefore, I had to continually check myself with
regard to my personal expectations for student learning/development in WeLead. I had to remind myself of the developmental state of students participating in the course and draw on my knowledge of college student development and the millennial generation in particular so that I would not expect more from students than their own backgrounds and experiences embodied them with at this stage in their development.

Additionally, the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election brought many issues of social justice to the forefront of the national dialogue. Issues of oppression and privilege were omnipresent during the campaigns, including racial/cultural issues, immigrant issues, and gender issues, all of which were intersectional in many ways. The dynamics of the campaign and election were brought up many times in class sessions, and my own perspectives on these issues no doubt influenced what I attended to in the data in terms of what students were learning and how that learning influenced their development of advocacy skills and movement toward becoming change agents. One aspect of this research that helped to mitigate this potential bias is that its focus was on the writing students did toward learning. Examining student writing as a data source and staying focused on how that writing affected students’ learning of course content assisted in minimizing any personal bias I may have had toward what it means to understand social justice and develop advocacy skills or an inclination toward becoming a change agent.
CHAPTER FOUR
INTERACTION OF SUBJECTS AND OBJECTS IN THE WELEAD ACTIVITY SYSTEM

Overview

This research sought to explore how writing functioned in a particular activity system: a mutt course associated with a living learning community (LLC). To review, the term mutt course refers to a course that is neither discipline specific nor interdisciplinary, but one for which students receive academic credit and that may draw content from academic disciplines. With regard to how writing functioned, the research questions asked were:

1. How do students view the writing they do in terms of what they are learning, and how does writing enable or perhaps hinder that learning?
2. How do instructors use writing in the seminar?
3. What are students learning about course content (and perhaps writing itself) through their writing in the seminar?

Activity Theory was used as a framework to unpack these research questions and guide findings. (See Chapter Three, Figure 3.2 for a model of the WeLead activity system.) I honed in on the top triangle of the model, which includes subjects (students and instructors), tools and artifacts (writing and other resources), and the object (intended course goals) and attempted to make sense how the other factors of the activity system (community, rules, and division of labor) influenced the subjects’ use of writing as a tool toward the object. The first two of the above research questions are addressed in this
chapter, and the third one in Chapter Five. Bloom’s Taxonomy was also used to frame findings specifically in terms of the kind of learning that transpired (discussed in Chapter Five).

What follows are the findings organized by the activity system triangle. I begin with the subjects (i.e. the participants of this research) and paint a picture of who the subjects were: their backgrounds, prior experiences, attitudes, and values; these are not only embedded in the subjects, they are also influenced by (as well as a part of) the community, which forms the base of the activity system triangle. These factors help to understand how writing functioned as a tool/artifact in the WeLead course. Thus, after examining the subjects and community, I discuss findings on functions of writing (the activity it performed).

**Students and Instructors: The “Subjects” of the WeLead Activity System**

Sociocultural learning theories, and Activity Theory in particular, note the importance of prior experience, knowledge, and attitudes on learning, what “subjects” bring into an activity system. Thus, my research sought to understand students’ and instructors’ backgrounds and how those may have influenced the activity in the WeLead course. Students are discussed first with a focus on (1) their high school experiences (what kind of high school they attended, what kinds of courses they took, and co-curricular involvements), (2) the sense of community they felt in high school, (3) their writing experiences and attitudes, and (4) their interests/involvements (including WeLead) during their first year of college.
Instructors are discussed after students in terms of how they perceived course purposes and content, their backgrounds as writers, their intended purposes and expectations for students’ writing, and finally their pedagogical practices.

**Students**

Sufficient context is necessary to paint a picture of WeLead students. These findings focus solely on the eight students who were interviewed, as their participation in interviews provided the most holistic picture of a typical WeLead student. Four students in section X agreed to be interviewed, with two of the four completing all three interviews, and four students in section Y agreed to interviews, with all four completing the three scheduled interviews. Interviews took place at three junctures: a few weeks into the semester, at midterm, and at the end of the semester. On the whole, the eight WeLead students interviewed were diverse in their backgrounds as well as shared a lot of commonalities. (See Chapter Three, Table 3.1 for student demographics).

**High School Experiences.** In terms of high school backgrounds, five students attended private, faith-based institutions (two in section X and three in Y) and three attended public schools (two in X and one in Y). Students were not asked specifically if they had taken Advanced Placement (AP) classes in high school, but four students mentioned AP classes in their interviews (one in X and three in Y). It possible that the other four students may also have taken AP classes, but they did not specifically reference such courses in their interviews. The section X student who had taken AP classes had attended a public institution. In section Y, two of the three who had taken AP classes had attended private, faith-based institutions and the other had attended a public institution.
Three section X students referenced having taken a course in high school that examined issues of social justice. Hero took a summer workshop titled “Social Justice,” Ivy took a class titled “Peace and Justice,” and MM took a two-semester honors contemporary problems course. MM noted “the first semester was poverty studies, and the second semester was social justice in America.” MM and Ivy had attended private, faith-based institutions. Only Kat in Section Y mentioned having taken such a course, which she described as “a contemporary issues class, and we weren’t necessarily learning about the isms, but it was kind of write about a topic and how you feel about it.” She specifically compared her WeLead writing to writing in that course. She, too, had attended a private, faith-based institution. Linda, also in section Y, who had attended a public high school, did not characterize any of her high school classes as being specifically themed around social justice, but she did mention writing about social justice-type topics. When asked what they studied in high school, all eight students mentioned having had a typical high school curriculum (i.e. math, English/literature, sciences, and history).

All section X students but one were fairly involved in high school. Hero, who identified as male and Asian and who had gone to a public high school, was involved in sports (tennis and swimming) and a cultural club for Asian students, in which he served as president. He also participated in service and was involved in his church. He noted “I helped like tutoring sixth graders, and I really loved it. But then I don’t want to become a teacher, though. Like I like kids but I don’t know, teacher isn’t my thing.” Ivy, who identified as an Asian female, was involved in sports, service, performing arts, student government, and a faith-based involvement through Campus Ministry. She specifically
mentioned holding leadership roles in some of her involvements: She attended a private, faith based institution, and this resonated with her:

I was involved in a bunch of leadership things in my high school, and I’m trying to get involved over here as well. And I’m really devoted to doing service and helping people. I came to MJU because I wanted to experience the Jesuit teaching and values because I went to a Jesuit high school as well, and it taught me to go out into the margins and help people who are displaced.

MM also attended a private, faith-based institution that was male only. He identified as a white male and was involved in cultural clubs (Latino-Filipino club, and Japanese club), faith-based involvements (retreats and campus ministry), and service. He specifically mentioned a service trip to Peru he attended, and he referenced having held leadership roles in many of these involvements. He recalled:

I was president of the Latino-Philipino Club. I did Japanese Club for two years just to see it and try it out […]. I was also very strongly involved in campus ministry. Doing anything I can to volunteer for the retreats. I was like leader on all the retreats, in charge of all the service events and retreats and for the sophomores, the freshmen, the juniors, the seniors. And that was really good. And then like I said I was a part of the small campus ministry group that did the mission trip to Peru, which was very exciting, very interesting.

Harambe, who identified as an African American male and attended a public high school, was the only section X student who was not involved in any organized clubs in high school. He noted that “extra-curricular” was not “his thing;” he mainly tried to focus on his school work, and for fun he would “play soccer or tennis with my friends, or basketball, just screw around. Or just chill.”

Like their peers in section X, all four section Y students were pretty involved in high school as well. Kat participated in student government, performing arts (theater), writing club, an honor society, service, and a faith-based involvement. Linda also was part of an honor society and involved in student government and performing arts (theater). Q participated in campus ministry programs and retreats at his high school as
well as a social justice related club. Additionally, he was involved in performing arts (band) and sports (prior to his cancer diagnosis). MSF was involved in an academic/professional club (“The Young Entrepreneur Society”—a business club in which she held a leadership position), an honor society, performing arts (played piano), and service. Additionally, she received a national award for her artwork.

**Sense of Community.** Interviews revealed an interesting theme among WeLead students, the sense of community they felt in high school. Writing studies scholarship notes that feeling a sense of belonging within a disciplinary community can lead to better writing proficiency (Beaufort, 2007; Fraizer, 2010; Nowacek, 2011; Poe, Lerner, & Craig, 2010; Soliday, 2011). Feeling a sense of community also impacts the success and retention of students from under-represented populations at predominately white institutions (Harper, 2013; Hunn, 2014; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Vaccaro, 2014). While students were not specifically asked about their sense of belonging/community in high school, it did come up as they spoke about what their high schools were like. Since Activity Theory posits that subjects’ attitudes and beliefs impact the activity within a context, having a sense of WeLead’s students’ feelings about their high school assists in understanding how their sense of community in WeLead may have been impacted by their high school experiences (the attitudes they brought into WeLead) and in turn how it may have impacted their writing.

There were not great differences among section X and Y students in terms of the sense of community they felt in high school. Overall, students from both sections expressed a mix of feeling included and excluded in high school. The way Harambe
(section X) talked about high school led me to believe that he felt somewhat excluded.

When asked what high school was like, he responded:

> I feel it was exclusive, everybody had formed their relationships. [...] I did not live close to [the city of his high school] from grade school to middle school so everybody else was [...] close to the school, and they were able to build those relationships [...] and they had those relationships throughout high school. [...] They had established their friend groups. [...] It was pretty cliquey. [...] The only way you could get into those friend groups was you had to be friends with someone who was friends with someone in that group.

In the fourth week of the WeLead course, Harambe also recounted in class discussion that “In high school the majority of my friends were white. [...] The main thing I heard was they would call me an Oreo, black on the outside, white on the inside. [...] and the way people would introduce me is ‘Oh, he’s probably the whitest Black kid you’ll meet.’” When the instructor asked him how he internalized this comment, Harambe responded:

> I kind of embraced it, I don’t know. I mean not everyone who is African American is walking around with saggy pants, but it ties into the preconceptions people have. [...] When people meet me they get confused, they wonder why I don’t act that certain way.

The instructor asked him if his high school was predominantly white and he replied “Well, mostly. It was in a white neighborhood.” It is possible that the sense of exclusion he expressed when asked about his high school may have been partially due to his being a student of color in a predominantly white context.

Other section X students did not express this sense of exclusion. MM’s and Ivy’s tones were fairly excited and contented when they discussed high school, and their involvements pay tribute to how I believe they felt about their schools. Ivy noted:
My high school, they were like well rounded. I liked them because they were good at athletics. The drama department. They were really good at academics too. They really honed in on everything about cura personalis. It was great how they taught us to manage your time and not do everything, yet we still did everything because we think you have to do everything to I don’t know build up a resume, and I still do that but I learned that my high school really does bring out the best in you because they showed me how to care for others.

MM noted how diverse and inclusive his school was: “I just really love toting that about where I came from because a lot of my friends went to like these other schools that were very like majority of one color.” Hero, on the other hand expressed a mix of feeling included and excluded, noting how he had just moved to the city his freshman year of high school and not knowing anyone except his cousins. He did not get involved at all that year. However, his sophomore year he noted “I got more outgoing,” joining swimming, and continued to get involved more throughout his years.

All four section Y students spoke positively of their high school communities for the most part. Three of the four students felt a strong sense of community in their high schools. Q attended an all-male, Catholic high school and expressed a great sense of pride in his school as well, noting how strong bonds were formed among students and how even alumni from the school held this sense of pride and community:

It was a good experience for me. For one being all guys we’re not usually very judgmental of each other. We’re usually very supportive. And since it was an all guys school we developed kind of a brotherhood sense of bond. […] And that was the kind of environment; you could go anywhere if you were wearing the shirt that has a logo of the school, somebody would come up and be like “Oh are you a Saintsmen”; and they’ll say, “Oh Yeah, I’m a Saintsmen”, and then that opens a whole new world of whatever it is that Saintsmen are doing.

Kat noted that she had to travel a good distance to her high school each day, but she had close friendships there. She expressed missing her high school friends a great

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14 I believe she used “they” to refer to the high school community at large: the faculty, staff, and students.
deal: “I’m the only one from my high school to come to MJU, so this is kind of a big step for me. I miss my friends a lot.”

Unlike Harambe in section X, Linda, who identified as an African American female who went to a public high school in the local community, did not express feeling any sense of exclusion (at least in high school). She noted:

I definitely was fun spirited in high school, like I was all about [name of high school], representing the Tiger way. […] So I was always involved in stuff whether it be theater, student council, national honor society, extracurricular activities like clubs. I was always involved. Always willing to be like a teacher helper, too.

Linda did recount a situation in kindergarten in which one of her friend’s parents told Linda’s friend that she could not play with Linda anymore. Linda attributed this parent’s actions to the fact that Linda was African American and expressed a sadness over this situation in her interview, noting that it was the first time she realized she was Black.

However, she did not express a sense of feeling othered when she spoke of high school. It is possible Linda’s sense of inclusion in her high school had to do with the large urban school district of which her high school was a part. Being an urban district, it was racially diverse, with White students in the minority. Harambe (section X) attended a suburban high school, which was less racially diverse.

MSF was the only section Y student who expressed feeling a sense of exclusion. She noted that it was hard to make friends at her high school because she was the only Vietnamese student. The other international students at her high school were Chinese, and while she did make friends within that group of students, she noted she “felt like the odd one out” both because of her ethnicity and because she was a very focused, determined student:
I was one of the bigger nerds, I came in as a sophomore so the other kids had friends and groups that already knew so much about, it was hard to find one that I could fit into. My school had a WIA [Wisconsin International Academy\textsuperscript{15}] program for international students but it was more oriented toward Chinese kids, they had their own dorm, they lived together like college students. I did not.

Despite feeling somewhat excluded, however, MSF did say that she enjoyed her high school classes and teachers: “I liked them all [classes]. I got along well with the teachers too. Senior year I was the economics and math tutor for my school.”

**College.** Knowing about WeLead students’ college interests/involvements as well as what drew them to participate in WeLead helps paint a picture of who these students were, what they brought to the activity system, and what may have been influencing their learning in the program. Additionally, because the WeLead Living Learning Community had among its goals to develop student leaders who were “aware” of “social inequities with the belief that students will use their skills and awareness to create social change and a more equitable society” and who would understand their “role and responsibility in creating an inclusive community” (WeLead Syllabi, 2016), knowing the ways students were involved in college and what their interests were helps to unpack if this intended outcome was realized.

In terms of majors, three of the four section X students were engineering majors and the other was in communications. In section Y, one student was undecided, one a criminology and law major, one an exercise physiology major, and one international business and management. (See Chapter Three, Table 3.1 for participant pseudonyms and demographics.) At the time of the first interview (about three weeks into the semester),

\textsuperscript{15} “Wisconsin International Academy (WIA) provides a […] program that surrounds international student enrollment at quality private and parochial high schools in the metro Milwaukee area to prepare the students for admission to competitive colleges and universities in America and beyond” (https://www.english.wiaedu.org/about2-cxlm).
college involvements were still being solidified among students. All but Harambe expressed being involved or wanting to get involved in various things outside their academics. Harambe noted he was “trying to balance” his work “and see how things go.” Hero said he wanted to get involved in an acapella singing group, and he was still involved in his church, participating in what the church called “care groups.” Ivy was involved in a service program and the Filipino student organization. She also desired to go on a spring service trip sponsored by Campus Ministry, joining a service group also sponsored by Campus Ministry, and wanting to join an engineering club related to her major. MM was involved in his residence hall council and an “unofficial” Bible study group in which students just got together to talk about the Bible. Q was on The Quidditch team and had signed up to be a tour guide for his residence hall. Linda was chair of her hall council, in Gospel Choir, in a service organization, and part of the Educational Opportunity Program. MSF was involved in the Filipino student organization, the United Nations club, and the Economics Club. Kat noted that she had signed up for “several clubs” (College Democrats being one she mentioned) but most enjoyed being part of University Radio, on which she co-hosted a show with another student.

The WeLead Living Learning Community aimed to develop leadership skills among students and intended for them to be involved in the community in some way outside of their academics as spaces where they might practice and exhibit leadership skills. Findings indicate that there may be a relationship between college involvement and the type of high school one attended and/or feeling a sense of community in high school. All the students who had gone to private-faith based institutions were involved in college co-curriculars. All the students who expressed feeling a sense of community in
high school were also involved in college. Hero and MSF both expressed a mix of inclusion and exclusion in high school, but MSF was involved in college co-curriculars, and Hero had expressed a desire to get involved.

There doesn’t seem strong evidence to suggest that race/ethnicity played a role for these students in their getting involved in college. Of the six students who identified as students of color, only Hero and Harambe were not yet involved in any co-curriculars. It is worth noting that Hero was involved in high school and overcame his feelings of exclusion through his involvements. Harambe, on the other hand, who had expressed a sense of exclusion in high school, was not involved in organized co-curriculars in high school, nor was he involved in college co-curriculars. Though he did mention having friends in high school, he also expressed what I would describe as being “otherized” by his friends, how they called him an “Oreo” and the “whitest Black kid you’ll ever meet.” It is possible, thus, that his sense of exclusion in high school was due to his race, and that this impacted his desire to get involved both in high school and in college.

It is also reasonable to posit that being involved in high school influenced students’ college involvement, and that the types of high school involvements had an impact on the choices of students’ college involvements. Several of the students chose to get involved in similar types of activities in college as they did in high school. Some who held leadership roles in high school also took on leadership roles in their college involvements. Thus, leadership in high school may have impacted students’ taking leadership roles in college. However, it is difficult to assess leadership among these students based on the data collected in this research. All the students could have been practicing leadership in their college involvements, but it was not explicitly referenced in
student interviews. Therefore, it’s hard to know if WeLead had impact on students’ development as leaders from this research. This data was also collected in the first semester of these students’ college careers, and leadership development takes time.

The same might be said of students’ desires to take leadership in issues of privilege and oppression. WeLead aimed to develop this among students, but leadership in this arena takes time to develop as well, not only in terms of comfort level among students, but also in terms of understanding the issues. Hero, Ivy, MM, Kat, Linda, and Q all had some experience with social justice topics in high school either through classes or through club involvements, but only Ivy and Linda were involved in service related clubs or activities in college. Interestingly, both Ivy and Linda were also enrolled in courses at MJU designated as service learning.16

However, it is also reasonable to posit that students who participated in WeLead came in to the program with some predispositions to social justice issues. When asked why they took the course, most expressed being interested in the subject matter and wanting to engage with others’ perspectives. Many noted wanting to have a sense of community as part of the reason they participated in WeLead as well. For example, Harambe (section X) said he participated in the program because he “thought it was interesting to go over issues that are going on in [the city], to be around other people that have the same interests. Going over the issues and knowing and acknowledging those issues.” Hero (section X), too, said he was interested in the topics of the class, and noted that his brother who went to a state school participated in a similar LLC: “I remember

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16 Students at MJU do not opt into service learning courses. Faculty designate these as such after students have registered for classes and work with the Service Learning Office to connect with community agencies.
him talking to me and my siblings about it, and I was like if MJU has it, I’ll join it too.”

MM (section X) described his interest in participating in WeLead as follows:

I did have that contemporary problem course which was very similar to this, that was a really fun class because it wasn’t really focused, and very similar to this one, it’s not really focused more on like quizzing you or testing you on memorizing formulas or how to solve this. It’s more focused on your understanding and your opinion of things, and it’s, I mean we don’t do a lot of like actual busy work. I really love how it’s very discussion based and you can just hear other people’s opinions and I just really like, you know, listening to other people’s backgrounds to see where they’re from, just to see what they’ve experienced and been through because it’s very different for everyone.

These three students appeared to have come into WeLead with a disposition toward the course content. This seems especially true for MM whose previous experience having taken a social justice themed class in high school influenced his decision to participate in WeLead. Kat and Ivy had also taken social justice themed classes, which may have influenced their decision to participate. Kat said she signed up for WeLead because she “wanted to find a family at Marquette to make the transition easier, and I thought that living on the floor with girls with similar interests would do that. And so far it’s been a really good experience. I was also interested in the class. I love what we talk about in class.” Ivy (section X) expressed wanting to participate in WeLead to “meet people who were diverse.” She seemed to have an understanding of the different perspectives students raised regarding course content coming in:

I can hear like different sides now, because there’s a lot of people in that class who are white so I hear what they have to offer and I feel like, of course you have to defend what you are saying and stuff, but they’re saying when they hear these things from the previous reflection how they were being attacked. I’m like well if you’re from a different cultural background you’re constantly being attacked […] but you don’t see it in the lens of the other people who constantly feel it all the time […].
Linda had learned about the program over the summer through her participation in the Educational Opportunity Program. The director of the residence hall in which WeLead was housed was a major factor in why she signed up for the program:

[...] he was pushing WeLead so hard. He was so energetic about it and I am a very energetic, positive person, so I was like ooh, let me find out more. [...] definitely the service learning, and being able to live in a community where I’m comfortable with the people I know and we’re able to talk. That’s one thing [the hall director] always pushed was how being in this WeLead program, we become in a way like our own little family. Because we’re in this class together, we’re discussing these things and topics [...] so that was one thing that really pushed me like living in this little unity, unified community where we are living and learning about certain things that are really valuable to know now.

Linda had not taken a social justice themed class in high school, but she did recount writing about social justice topics in high school. She wrote one paper about the Trevon Martin incident for her AP Language and Composition course, which she said she had interest in because she wanted to go into criminology and law studies. This indicates a possible predisposition to the content of the WeLead course. Linda also identified as African American and spoke of her experiences of being minoritized by her race (for example the incident in kindergarten that was previously mentioned). These interests and experiences are clearly something she brought into her experience in WeLead and may have influenced her decision to participate.

Q, too, entered WeLead with a background that may have predisposed him to the course content. Having gone to a Catholic high school, it is reasonable to assume that he had encountered topics of social justice in the curriculum. He had gone to World Youth Day in Kraków, 2016, an event that brings together youth from around the world “to experience in first person the universality of the Church; to share with the whole world the hope of many young people who want to commit themselves to Christ and others”
(About World Youth Day, 2017). He no longer identified as Catholic and instead characterized himself as having “Animistic tendencies,” which he explained as follows:

[…] it originates with Native Americans in that respect. More reverence for nature and life is to be upheld over all other things. So I sort of gravitated toward that because I guess maybe nature is my religion. I don’t like killing things. If I see a spider, I’ll take it outside. […] Just respect for life, how everything in life is connected even though you don’t realize it. So while I’m not the kind of person who tells everyone, hey you need to cut down on your fossil fuels, I still do understand the importance of taking care of our earth. Why, because we need it as much as the earth needs us.

This statement shows a sort of social justice inclination, caring for the earth and respecting all life. Additionally, he was involved in a club in high school that could be characterized as social justice oriented. He explained:

My sophomore year I started a social enterprise called Empowered Teens for Teens. It was basically “ET for T” for short. It was meant to help kids from low income families […] who were suffering from life threatening illnesses such as cancer of sickle cell disease or something life threatening, and the whole point was to teach them […] there’s more to life than their disease and also to help teach them life skills or tutor them because most of the kids who go through treatment for any disease they end up missing a lot of school, and they end up falling behind, and I wanted to fill those gaps.

He did not, however, express that he signed up for WeLead because of an interest in social justice topics. He had requested to live in a different residence hall, but the hall was full, and he was placed in the hall that housed WeLead instead. He recounted: “if I’m going to be in [the WeLead hall], I might as well do WeLead, see what it’s all about,” but his background does demonstrate a care toward social justice topics.

Like Q, MSF did not express an initial interest in participating in WeLead because of the content:

My dream was to go to college on the East Coast. I applied to many colleges in the East before coming to MJU and was not accepted. So I wanted to really establish myself at MJU the first year and then transfer to a college on the East Coast after that. I wanted to show other colleges that I was involved and that it is a very cool thing to be involved in. But then I started getting to know my friends
and building a tight bond with the girls on the eighth floor and my RA and the instructors and the boys on the seventh floor. I learned to love what I was doing. So taking WeLead was not so much for building my resume to transfer to an east coast school but to see the world in a different way and how I could make a difference.

While her initial intentions were to bolster her resume, she does indicate an interest, and thus, predisposition to “making a difference.” MSF, like several of her peers attended a Catholic high school and participated in service in high school, volunteering as a tutor. This background may have predisposed her to the course content and goals. In the first interview, three weeks into the semester, she described the purpose of the class quite eloquently:

I think they put a lot of thought into having a program like this. The retreat at the beginning of the year was a great way for students to get to know each other and learn to think in a different way. The readings that we do really help us see that there are issues in the world, there are problems in society that are not always on the surface. Like privilege, people that have always had privilege would never recognize that they have certain privileges and never know how others feel and how they should treat other people. I think this is really important. I think this is the main goal the people who designed this course want us to have, for us to see that we need to be aware of these issues and if there is someone who can stand up and speak opinions, that would be us. That we know the right way to do it and that we should do it.

MSF seemed to have understood the purposes and goals for the class pretty well at this juncture. While program outcomes were listed on the syllabus, it is hard to imagine that she came into such an understanding of privilege after only three weeks of class. To be sure, the students had read about privilege and oppression and had discussed it in class by the time of this initial interview, so it is possible that MSF had experienced what Mezirow describes as a disorienting dilemma in his theory of Transformational Learning (2009). Mezirow defines transformative learning “as the process by which we transform problematic frames of reference (mindsets, habits of mind, meaning perspectives)—sets of assumption and expectation—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open,
reflective and emotionally able to change” (p. 92). Because transformation is a “process,” it does not happen in an instant but occurs in time. Therefore, it is unlikely that MSF transformed her way of thinking about the world completely within those first three weeks of WeLead. It is more likely that she came into WeLead with some understanding of privilege and oppression and that she was engaged in an ongoing process of transformation.

**Writing.** The students’ interests in participating in WeLead seem to be influenced by their backgrounds and previous experiences. Their backgrounds and previous experiences also seem to have influenced other college involvements. It’s additionally useful to examine students’ prior writing experiences and dispositions toward writing as this will help unpack how writing functioned for these students toward intended course goals (i.e. the object of the activity system).

All eight students had a variety of writing experiences in high school with many genres. When asked what sorts of writing assignments they did in high school, responses included rhetorical and literary analysis papers, research papers, informative essays, narrative essays, creative writing assignments, personal essays, and reflection papers. Ivy in particular had to write reflections in all her classes as it was part of the school’s curriculum. Hero mentioned one genre of writing that was unfamiliar to me, a “DBQ (document based questions)” paper, which he wrote for his history class and explained in this way:

> it’s like an article but there’s different documents on it, like A, B, or C, and then you have to cite all of the documents in your essay, and then you have to transition it, so that it can make sense or it will go smoothly. And you have to use quotes from history, too.
In terms of students’ attitudes toward writing, findings were somewhat mixed. All eight students expressed enjoying writing in some way or another, but four of the eight also made references to not liking writing in some instances, too. MM (section X) for example, expressed not enjoying writing because it was “tedious.” Ivy noted, “I’ve always hated writing because I’ve always had kind of like writers’ block because it just takes me so long to write a paper and it just gets really frustrating.” During the second interview, when discussing what the writing in WeLead was like, Q noted “I’m kind of against professional style writing just because the way I like to write, creatively, trying to write professionally doesn’t let me do that as easily as I were to just free-write something like this [WeLead writing assignments].” He also noted that he was working on a video game script with some friends. While Kat expressed not liking writing in school initially, eventually she joined a writing club and wrote as part of a job for her local Archdiocese. She further noted:

I love writing in all fields. I love writing for my school. It really helps me understand a topic when I have to kind of teach my reader about that topic vs. just memorizing it. Interpreting the information, I love doing that. I love collecting everything. I think it’s fun. […] I love writing outside of school because it’s kind of an escape. It’s what I make of it, so I can write about anything I want in the world, and it doesn’t, no one has to read it; it just is for me. I just think it’s a good way to stay focused, while not, while taking a break from school work.

Interestingly, all eight students admitted that they wrote outside of their academics, which suggests a positive attitude toward writing. Hero engaged in writing activities through his church group in which they wrote responses to Bible readings. Ivy mentioned having journaled in high school and wanting to journal in college, but her academic and co-curricular involvements limited her. Harambe noted that he sometimes wrote poetry and “mess[ed] around with music.” MM said he liked to “free-write” and “let his ideas out.” He noted:
When I’m stressed, you know, I’ll just like talk to my friends and then be like text big paragraphs along things, like what’s going on, what’s the problem, like I’m going through this, or just like writing it out, just all my issues, my problems, like what I’m stressed about and then just like crumpling it up and throwing it away. It just helps to get that out.

Linda and MSF both wrote creatively (poetry and short stories) as well as journaled.

Linda noted:

I love writing because it allows me to put my own words on paper and then to see it and then say it back to myself, it’s like man, you said that?! Like I don’t know, it’s more like a reflection for me when I write, and when I read it back I reflect on what my mind’s saying […]. I say some really interesting things sometimes and I just be like, your mind thinks that? Like yeah, my mind is thinking that.

In the first interview, MSF described her WeLead writing as “totally fun and exciting,” and in the second interview characterized it as “fulfilling” and “a valuable thing to do.”

She also journaled and considered her writing in this genre an extension of her faith:

When I was small I used to write short stories, I like romantic stories and love stories. I don’t have time to do that now. […] now usually it is about my faith, writing only comes when I feel like I am being challenged or when life is hard. It is more like journaling, I do reflective writing. […] I feel like my faith is very strong, my Catholic religion. I turn to God in times of trouble, so that is when I would write, when I felt really stressed.

Furthermore, some students noted they enjoyed academic writing as well. When discussing his writing in high school, Hero (section X) noted

I had an honors English. I really liked English class because we talked about the rhetorical devices, which I’m learning about right now, too, in English, Rhetoric and Comp. […] the teacher showed us all the rhetorical, the appeals, like logos, ethos, and pathos, […] it was really fun. And then we also wrote like an essay, like a five-page essay on, like we had to write it on the topic and then apply those appeals to it.

MM (section X) mentioned that he did “a lot of like analyzing and summary and like reflective writing” in high school. He referenced his “contemporary problems” class in high school in particular with regard to reflective writing. In one reflective paper, he wrote about the Matewan Massacre and noted:
I found [that] really engaging just because like of my Italian background […] it was like during the industrial revolution when the Italian immigrants came over, the Blacks came over and you had the Whites that were here, and how they all hated each other, and they would not accept each other and how, it was just interesting to see like how even though I’m clearly white because of my skin color, my people, Italians, were not seen as white, and they weren’t given that kind of privilege, and it’s just kind of interesting to see that.

He mentioned this paper in his second interview as well, so it clearly had an impact on him. It is interesting, too, that he referenced a paper in a course he found to be similar to WeLead, so it appears that he came into WeLead having written about social justice issues, that he may have had some generic knowledge of writing about these kinds of topics.

Of her writing in high school, Linda (section Y) recalled:

I did a lot! […] I was in honors English where we did a lot of like free-write, documentary-type journals throughout high school, like to build our like daily diary I guess we would call it. We also did a lot of analyzing of like films we would have to read as far as like Shakespeare, we’d watch some of their movies and I’d have to like literally take, we’d literally take like a month creating an essay that was like wow, is this really how we feel about that?

She additionally noted that she was “grateful” for all the writing she had done “because now in my freshman year of college we’re like working on rhetorical analysis and stuff too, and I’m definitely able to reflect back on high school where my teacher gave me good notes, where I can like point out how to deal with context and clues and the ethos and pathos and stuff like that.” Thus, it seems that previous writing experience was something that Linda benefitted from, at least in her perspective.

Kat (section Y), as was noted earlier, expressed that she “loved writing for school” and that it helped her understand a topic. She, too, came in to WeLead with a lot of writing experience, having been in a writing club and having written articles as part of
a job she held. She also was able to articulate an understanding of the difference in writing in different disciplines:

History it was more of an information, informative essay. So I was doing more research whereas in my English classes I was creating my own opinion about the characters and the plot line and what not. So different in terms of having more of my own opinion in my English classes vs. history and politics.

This indicates some understanding of different discourse communities, a prior knowledge that may have assisted her in negotiating her WeLead writing. Writing studies scholarship shows that students repurpose their prior writing knowledge/experience to negotiate new writing situations (Beaufort, 2007; Carroll, 2002; Nowacek, 2011, Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011; Wardle, 2009). Furthermore, all of the students interviewed wrote outside of academic work. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume these students’ prior writing could have assisted them in their WeLead writing endeavors. At very least writing did not appear to be an obstacle toward learning for these students. Ivy (section X), as mentioned previously, did express how she struggled with writing, but she also expressed how it helped her learn. Other students expressed similar feelings about writing and learning.

Findings on how writing functioned toward learning as well as the resources on which students drew, such as previous writing experience, will be discussed in a later section. Before understanding the functions of writing, it is important to understand the instructors as subjects of this activity system. Findings on instructors’ perceptions of course content and purposes, their own backgrounds as writers, their intended purposes and expectations for students’ writing, and pedagogical practices aimed toward writing is discussed next.
Instructors

Each instructor participated in one interview, which lasted between 40 and 60 minutes, in which they responded to questions about their backgrounds and the course. Each instructor was classified as staff at MJU, and each came from a different area of the university. One worked in student affairs and the other in a non-teaching academic affairs unit. Each of those offices fell under academic affairs in the university’s organizational structure, reporting ultimately to the Office of the Provost. Both instructors expressed interest in teaching the WeLead course because they cared about diversity issues, both noted enjoyment working with students in a classroom setting, and both had previous teaching experience with first-year students in different capacities. Instructor X had been teaching the WeLead course for three years and Instructor Y for two.

**WeLead Course Purposes and Content.** In terms of Activity Theory, WeLead course purposes can be categorized as the activity system objects, the goals toward which activity is aimed. Content can be considered a tool. In the WeLead activity system, content was also what students wrote about, so it informed another tool in the system: writing. Therefore, understanding instructors’ perceptions of course content and purposes assists in understanding how writing functioned as a tool within that activity system. Additionally, the content and purposes for the course are a factor in the division of labor; part of the role of a classroom instructor is choosing content that will work toward intended outcomes.

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17 The capacities in which each instructor taught is purposefully omitted to protect the identity of each instructor.
Each instructor was asked to describe the purpose and content of the WeLead course in their interviews in order to understand how writing might function toward learning that content. Responses were similar. Instructor X noted the purpose was “to raise awareness of issues of diversity and multiculturalism among these students and hopefully to engage them to the point where they are ready to take some action to promote justice in the world.” Instructor Y explained the course purpose to be “cre[ating] leaders who are leading using that kind of inclusive lens.” When asked what the content of the WeLead course was both gave responses that referenced developing students’ understanding of privilege and oppression. Instructor X in particular noted that the course intended for students to “understand the different levels of oppression whether it’s at the individual level or the institutional level or societal level” but one of the challenges “is trying to get them to go past the individual level. They’re good at talking about one on one interactions and how they can be nicer or more understanding with an individual, but they don’t think about the systemic issues as well. So that’s one of the things I try to emphasize.” Instructor Y emphasized “hopefully by the end of the semester, or the end of the year” students would “understand how they can impact that system hopefully and disrupt some of those problematic things that have been happening.” These responses seem consistent with why each instructor said they were interested in teaching the course. They each cared about issues of diversity and inclusion, and perhaps through teaching this course, they could impact change through inspiring students to create change.

Instructors were also asked what academic disciplines they felt the course drew from. Both mentioned sociology and psychology, and Instructor X added anthropology as well, but both felt that sociology was the main discipline from which the course drew.
Instructors’ perceptions regarding the disciplinary underpinnings of the course may have had an impact on how they approached and conceptualized the writing for the course, particularly with regard to their expectations for students’ writing as well as with regard to the pedagogies they employed. This will be discussed in a subsequent section, but before that, it’s important to understand how instructors’ own backgrounds as writers.

**Instructors’ Backgrounds as Writers.** Activity Theory considers subjects’ backgrounds and prior experiences factors that influence activity within a system. Since, like students, instructors are part of the WeLead activity system, it’s important to understand a bit about instructors’ own writing habits and practices as these could influence how instructors use writing in their classrooms. In terms of their backgrounds as writers, neither instructor engaged in writing outside of professional or scholarly pursuits. Instructor X had recently co-authored a book chapter. Instructor Y was pursuing a second master’s degree at the time of this research and mentioned doing writing as part of that program. Both felt themselves to be competent writers though neither expressed a great enjoyment of writing except for in their undergraduate pursuits where each noted having enjoyed the writing they did for particular classes. When asked about his background as a writer, Instructor X noted:

> Well when I was at [previous institution] […] I was required to do research in order to get tenure promotion there. I had done some professional writing before that but nothing concentrated, and when I was at [previous institution] I had to do it or I wouldn’t stay in the job, just like any faculty member would. So that pushed me to be a little bit more regular about thinking about what I would want to write about, what contributions I would want to make to the profession. And so I can’t say I enjoy writing. I think I’m decent at it, but it takes a lot of effort for me to get to that final result, and it can be harrowing.

When asked how he felt about writing in college, he added

> Where I remember writing the most was in my first-year English class. And I actually loved it. I remember having to do descriptive writing and informational
writing about a process. You know they had all these different things, and I actually enjoyed it, and I did well in it. Beyond that, I changed majors a lot of times, so I took science courses where there wasn’t much writing at all for a couple years of my time. And then I did a lot of field work where I did write field notes, but it was just for those few months that I was on a project.

Instructor Y offered similar responses to interview questions, noting “I don’t write often except when it's for school, but I have always been pretty good at it and, thus, enjoyed it. But yeah, I’m not a big writer, writer.” She also noted that in college, she was “not a fan of writing,” and added “I just didn't like the quantity of things I had to write. I was in more writing intensive majors, but when I actually buckled down and did the work, it was fine.” Instructor Y additionally alluded to writing functioning toward her own learning in a way. When asked about how she felt about writing, she replied: “OK, writing lesson plans, that’s not so much fun, and I do have to write a lot of those. But some of the other things that we talk about allow me to really take the class concepts [the class she was taking] and talk about them through my diversity, inclusion, social justice lens, and I enjoy that greatly.”

These examples suggest instructors had mixed feelings about writing. They did not particularly enjoy it, yet they did enjoy some of the texts they wrote in college because they felt they were decent writers and had done well in classes that required writing. They did writing in their professional lives but didn’t particularly enjoy that either. It is hard to know if their attitudes about writing affected how they used writing and what they expected from their students’ writing, but they did express particular expectations for their WeLead students’ writing and also expressed some dissatisfaction with their students’ writing. This is discussed next.

**Purposes and Expectations for Students’ Writing in WeLead.** More will be said about how writing functioned for instructors in a later section, but in order to better
understand the WeLead activity system, it’s important to put purposes and expectations for writing in the context of the instructors as subjects of this activity system as well as their role in the division of labor. While the instructors of WeLead did not design the course, they were responsible for how course content was delivered, and instructors were responsible for how the course outcomes were evaluated and how students were graded. Instructors also had the freedom to conduct class sessions as they saw fit, bringing in additional content where they deemed appropriate. And while course syllabi were essentially the same, there were some nuanced differences in how they explained required written assignments as well as with regard to requirements noted on writing prompts. For example, Instructor X’s syllabus, referred to weekly response papers as “reflections,” yet Instructor Y’s syllabus referred to them as “responses.” Additionally, there were different page-length requirements for students’ final papers, and the way the paper prompts were worded on syllabi were slightly different. It seems likely that how instructors perceived course outcomes were filtered through their own expectations and teaching practices. These expectations, in turn, impacted students’ experience of the course.

In interviews, instructors were not only asked what the purposes for the course were, but also about the purposes for each writing assignment that was required for the course (weekly reading responses, the midterm Personal Identity Inventory Reflection, and the final Analysis Paper). From the instructors’ perspectives, reflection was a key

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18 The WeLead LLC was co-designed over a decade ago by student affairs administrators with final approval by academic affairs. At the time of this research, instructors were part of a work group that discussed course content and outcomes as they prepared for revisions in the university’s Core Curriculum that would impact how the course fulfilled a Core Curriculum learning outcome. The program itself was overseen by Student Affairs who reported to the Office of the Provost.
reason writing was assigned; instructors wanted students to be able to “process” and
“question” what they read and learned about in class. Reflection meant “connect[ing] the
reading to their [students’] experience, their beliefs, their attitudes, their values” as
Instructor X put it. Instructor Y framed reflection in terms of students “interpreting” what
they read, “tell me what the article is about and then reflect on what does that mean, how
do you see that playing out in the real world.”

In terms of what instructors expected from students in their writing, both
expressed that they were not really strict in how they assessed students’ writing.
Mechanics, grammar, and organization were important and were noted on the syllabi as
expectations, but each instructor admitted that they didn’t pay too much attention to those
at least in assigning points to a paper. For example, Instructor X, when discussing what
the purpose for papers were, noted: “I don’t worry about grammar at all. I don’t think this
is the place for that. Some of these concepts are big concepts for them, so I’d rather have
them focus on just getting their thoughts out. And so I’m very lax when it comes to that
kind of thing.” In describing what a successful midterm paper might look like, Instructor
X also noted:

    I hope for some real reflection on where these identities fit in their thinking about
themselves. If they’re, whatever some identity, and they identify that one most
strongly, why is that? So I want them to address that kind of issue. Explain to me
how the systems impacted their life individually to end up with themselves
thinking about themselves the way they do, basically.

Similarly, Instructor Y commented:

    This year I have gotten a lot less strict than I was in the past. In the past I was
much more on them about like how to structure papers and grammar and all these
other things, which are still important. So I still leave notes about those things in
their papers, but I don't really factor it as much into their grade, unless it seems
like there's a continued pattern and I feel like it can be attributed to your rushing
versus maybe genuinely not knowing.
Furthermore, Instructor Y explained that the purpose of the midterm paper:

was to get them to really sit down and think more in depth about what those identities mean and how those impact their experience of the world. [...] This was to go in depth and think about how do these different identities play out and which ones are meaningful to me and why might that be that these stand out more than others.

Assessment of papers had to do more with content and what instructors perceived students’ understanding of content was as opposed to students being able to clearly and rhetorically communicate their understanding through mechanically “correct” writing.

However, there was a bit of a disconnect in terms of what instructors expressed regarding their expectations for student writing both in terms of grammar and in terms of depth of thought. As instructors had expressed, papers were evaluated more on depth of thought, but instructors did comment on students’ employment of rhetorical skills such as mechanics and grammar. When asked about the overall quality of student writing, Instructor X noted:

I have to say I’m pretty appalled. There are a few good writers in each class that I’ve taught. But I am just amazed at how careless they are, using the wrong words, misspelling, poor grammar; it’s really surprising to me at this point in their lives. I mean sometimes I have to read it 2 or 3 times to understand what they are saying, and sometimes I realize they have left out a “not” or something like that, so it just completely changes the point of what they are saying when I’m sure they meant to have a not in there or whatever the case is. And I just don’t think they proofread. I’m just very surprised.

While Instructor Y said that she focused more on content, she also expressed

I do have to offer the additional comments [on grammar and organization] because they're first year students. So sometimes I don't know if they're ready for college level writing, and I don't know how much one on one assistance they’re getting with that.

When asked about the kind of feedback she gave students and the most frequent comment she made on students’ texts, she explained:
It’s not even usually a comment. It’s mostly going through for grammar things and just being like, maybe—I can't remember how I've said it nicely—I try to find nice ways to remind them that when you type this Word, since I can see the little red and green squiggly lines, that means you got the little red green squiggly lines, so you should reread those because there's usually a reason [...] it's either a sentence fragment or a word is spelled wrong. It's usually right. You should go double check that.

Additionally, each instructor felt that students often fell a bit short in regard to depth of thought. Instructor X, for example, noted that what he hoped students gained from the writing in the course was “Clarity of thought. I’m not sure if this is the best way of saying it but understanding the complexity of issues and giving them the chance to actually pull some of that complexity together without just being on the fly.” He also noted:

I look to see that they’re applying the deeper principles that are involved in the reading. Again, I think my expectations may be a bit too high for that. So this semester I’ve really looked at easing up on pushing that point so heavily. I often start out grading heavier or harder because I’m trying to push them to that, and then I don’t know if I get tired or lazy at the end, but I find myself being a lot easier on that aspect of the grading. Maybe it’s a growing realization that my expectations are too high; I’m not sure about that, but I find my comments to them being so much the same throughout, “go deeper; think about the systemic issues; go beyond the individual,” those are so common; I get tired of writing them every single week.

[...] they’re so stuck, I’ll say—that’s a little negative connotation—I don’t like the word—but on that individual level, it’s like it’s so hard for them to get past that to see how does the legal system impact racism. I mean the one place I’ve seen them engage on that is on the police shootings of Black young men, they might see that connection, but just last week I think it was, we were, they were talking [...] I remember thinking you just talked about all kinds of systems that you’re not identifying as systems in impacting this issue. [...] And they weren’t seeing that the legal system was separate from the law enforcement, and all these different things, and I sometimes think, how can you not see this? But that’s what I keep hoping they’ll reflect on when they look back on this class, that they’ll see that there was a bigger perspective that impacts these things, and we can’t just react on a one-on-one basis.

Instructor Y made similar comments with regard to the depth of thought in students’ writing and noted a particular issue was “misinformation:”
Sometimes they’ll say things and I’m like, I don’t think that's true. So that I’ll go look into it a little more like maybe you should check out these additional resources because I don’t really know where you pulled that from, especially when it’s in like their reflections because they’re not required to cite where they’ve heard it. They’ve just heard it and think it’s true. So I try to point them to places, like here are places you could look up some more information and see if maybe that’s accurate.

Instructor Y also expressed that she really looked for understanding of the content in students’ papers. However, she was quite flexible in terms of what that understanding looked like in the writing itself:

[…] it’s showing some sort of understanding of what you read. […] I get really flexible understanding because I grasp that they’re first year students in college and that this is oftentimes the first time they’ve had to do these kinds of assessments and reflections. So if they’re not 100 percent understanding the concept, that’s ok. I don’t know that I would say I 100-percent understand everything related to like racism, sexism or ageism, any of the isms. So I get flexible. Like if they’re starting down the path I would probably give them credit for it because there’s a lot to take in. Even with so many of them pointing out that like they had never thought about religious oppression or how they benefit from religious privilege in society, it’s like OK, if you don’t even understand in the past, if you’re just getting a little bit of it, even if it’s just you have narrowed it down to it’s about holiday cups, I will take that small piece for right now and then try to keep up with it throughout the semester to push them further so that by the end of the year I hope that there is a stronger understanding, but if they’re showing a little, then probably.

Consistent with how instructors said they evaluated papers (even if they had implicit expectations and hopes for deeper understanding), overall, papers did not lose many points throughout the course of the semester. Most point deductions had to do with students failing to include some required part of an assignment or for being late. However, on occasion points were deducted for students not demonstrating the depth of thought expected. This type of point deduction, however, occurred only with Instructor X.

For example, in week two the topic was “Identities and Social Locations.” Students read about identity formation being a complex mix of influences at micro...
(individual), meso (community), and macro (institutional/global) levels. One comment that appeared on a student’s response paper from Instructor X was as follows: “Would like to see more discussion on the influences of factors from each of the three levels—micro, meso, macro—and their impact on you. What systems of structural inequality have you experienced and how did you respond?” This demonstrates the instructor’s expectation for greater depth of thought, but only a half point was deducted from the paper.

Instructor Y expressed in the interview that she often felt students needed to deepen their understanding of the issues, but she also noted that, at least for the response papers, “for the most part they’re probably going to get the four points if they put forth effort.” Instructor Y’s comments would often point students toward additional reading that would help them understand an issue more fully, but point deductions were limited to meeting all the requirements on the prompt and turning papers in on time. Instructor Y did engage in correcting mechanical and/or spelling errors on students’ papers as well, but again, points were not deducted for these things from what I could tell based on written feedback on the papers. Additionally, written feedback on students’ papers in both sections also tapered off a good deal near the end of the semester with more feedback offered pre-midterm than post. Further, neither instructor used a grading rubric, at least that they mentioned in their interviews, nor was a rubric available on the online course management system as part of the course materials. Instructor Y did include a rubric-like table as part of her feedback for students’ analysis papers. Only points were noted on the table; no commentary on paper content was included. Figure 4.1 shows this
table and includes an explanation of what the table included. It should be noted, however, that students did not see this criteria table prior to turning in their final papers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic: (instructor would type in the option students had chosen)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response Paper Requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three to five pages typed, double spaced (12 point font, 1-inch margins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionally written (including organization, sentence structure, grammar, and spelling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of reflection on course materials and apply learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression of original thoughts and suggestions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information supported with references to the course materials and appropriate citations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final Grade</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4.1. Instructor Y’s Analysis Paper Grading Criteria*

Rubrics are one of the pedagogical practices advocated by writing studies scholars. Clear and explicit prompts are another. WeLead instructors relied heavily on prompts to communicate their expectations for students’ writing. Thus, prompts were one of the pedagogical practices WeLead instructors used. What follows are findings on pedagogical practices instructors employed. Findings on writing to learn pedagogical practices (as advocated by writing studies scholarship and discussed in the review of literature) are contained in the next section.
**Pedagogical practices.** Examining the pedagogical practices of instructors assisted in understanding how writing functioned toward learning in the WeLead activity system because it provided a picture of how content (a tool) was delivered and how students experienced the content. Data drawn on for this analysis were instructor interviews, course documents (mainly syllabi) and fieldwork observation of class sessions. My fieldwork log was the main data source for analyzing the in-class pedagogical practices of instructors. While all class sessions but a few were recorded, I chose to transcribe only four sessions from each section. Classroom sessions fell into a familiar pattern after a few weeks, and transcription of all sessions would not have added nuance to my analysis. My fieldwork log focused primarily on what instructors were doing and capturing their speech in the classroom as closely as possible. Thus, I was able to go to class recordings and find the exact verbiage of instructors to transcribe for evidence in the discussion of findings that proceeds.

In order to maintain focus on the research questions, data was coded for pedagogical practices that specifically related to the writing students did. I chose to look for specific instances of the writing to learn pedagogies discussed in the review of literature and coded data in the following categories: 1) increasing the intensity of writing assigned; 2) scaffolding writing assignments; 3) using exemplars and rubrics; 4) providing clear and explicit prompts; 5) focusing on authentic writing in a particular discipline; and 6) engaging students in metacognitive writing. I also looked for other pedagogical practices that could reasonably be related to assigned writing outside of those categories. One other category emerged in my analysis: providing feedback on writing. These seven pedagogical practices are discussed in the sub-sections the follow.
Increasing the Intensity of Writing. Writing studies scholarship indicates that increasing the intensity of writing aids learning (Anderson et al., 2015; Galer-Uni, 2002; Poe, Lerner, & Craig, 2010; Shea, Nolan, Saccman, & Wright, 2006; Soliday, 2011; Sterling-Deer, 2009; Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006). Writing intensive courses are also a high impact practice (Kuh, 2008). WeLead instructors did employ this pedagogy. Because instructors were not “writing instructors” by trade, they may not have been aware that engaging students in intensive writing was a writing to learn strategy, yet they seemed somewhat conscious that writing would aid students’ learning. For example, Instructor X noted that writing was “meant to get them [students] to think about the issues that we’re talking about in a way so that they have time to, again, organize their own thoughts about an issue,” a way “to get them to understand the complexity of the issue.” He further noted that in the second semester of the course the students did less writing and expressed some uncertainty about this: “There’s fewer readings [in the second semester] and therefore fewer reflection papers and things like that, which I always question because when I don’t have a reflection paper, they don’t read it.” Instructor Y noted that writing was a means to helping students with their reflection. When asked how writing helped students to do this, she noted:

I think it's because it forces them to actually do something. Because they have to write it down and generally have to turn it in in some way, shape or form, whether it's actually submitting their reflections that they’re assigned or sometimes when they do those in-class writings, if they have to hand it to me or talk to somebody else about it that I know they're actually thinking about what I said whereas when I let them just think about it, if they're sitting quietly they could be thinking really hard or they could be thinking about what they want for dinner after class.

Students in WeLead engaged in a great deal of writing. They wrote weekly response papers to assigned readings, which were expected to be a page to a page and a half and averaged 300 to 600 words per week during the 15-week semester. At midterm,
students wrote what was called a “Personal Identity Inventory Paper.” These papers were expected to be three to five pages long, doubled spaced. Word counts ranged from 5,000 to 6,000 words. At the end of the semester, students wrote an “Analysis” paper.

Instructors’ prompts differed slightly with regard to length expectations. Instructor X’s prompt required five to seven pages while Instructor Y’s prompt required three to five pages. Word counts ranged from 4,000 to 9,000 words. Thus, the amount of writing was increased with each type of writing assignment. WeLead instructors perhaps had a sense (as many instructors do) that more writing would aid learning, but as Anderson et al. (2015) indicate in their study, the amount of writing alone does not necessarily have impact on students’ learning and that intensity has more to do with engaging students in “deep learning experiences” (p. 220) such as integrative, critical/original, and reflective thinking.

WeLead writing assignments did incorporate these kinds of thinking as well as required deeper kinds of thinking as they progressed through the semester. For example, the midterm paper expected more from students than weekly response papers. While worded slightly differently on each instructors’ syllabi, the prompt for weekly response papers had three main requirements: 1) outlining main points of the article (two to three main points), 2) providing an example of at least one of those main points from the “real world” and reflecting on how the text’s content impacts the student in some way, and 3) providing one to two questions for class discussion. (See Appendix F: Course Syllabi for differences in instructors’ prompts.) Content for these papers, thus, was drawn largely from the weekly reading assignment and students’ own experiences. Embedded in these expectations, however, is understanding (one of the cognitive processes outlined in
Anderson and Krathwohl’s (2001) framework) as well as conceptual and metacognitive knowledge. These knowledge domains and cognitive process embodies the notion of higher order and reflective thinking discussed in Anderson and colleagues’ (2015) study of how writing impacts learning.

The midterm paper had higher expectations, not only with regard to length, but also in terms of content. There were a number of questions students had to consider in their writing. They had to make a list of all their social identities and decide which ones were privileged and which were oppressed. They had to decide which identities were most salient and which were less important. They then had to choose one to a few of those identities to write about and discuss why they were privileged or oppressed, why they were salient or not important. They also had to consider how the identities they chose to write on impacted their world views. Students were to draw on all class readings, essentially synthesizing what they had read up to that point and applying it to their own identities. These expectations evidence higher order, integrative, and reflective thinking (Anderson et al., 2015) as well as understanding (exemplifying, classifying, and comparing), analyzing (differentiating), and conceptual and metacognitive knowledge (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001). In addition to the questions that were listed on the prompt, it noted: “Using these questions as a guide, along with readings, discussions and other related activities from class, complete a 3-5 page essay outlining your understanding and experiences of your chosen identity (or identities). Your essay should address the above questions in ample detail and articulate your reactions, learning and reflections” (Instructor X Syllabus, 2016). In following the prompt, students had to make rhetorical decisions about what to include in their texts. While students had to make
rhetorical choices in response papers as well (deciding what to include as examples to illustrate content), in the case of the midterm, they had a larger number of rhetorical choices to make, including a larger number of texts upon which to draw for evidence, which demonstrates the construct of integrative thinking (Anderson et al., 2015). Thus, the intensity of this paper is greater than that of the response papers.

More was expected in the final paper as well. The most “academic” of the three kinds of texts the students wrote, this “analysis paper” further increased the number of rhetorical decisions students had to make. There were three choices of topics: “Stereotypes and Prejudice in the News,” “Discrimination and Oppression on Television,” and “Power and Privilege on Campus” (WeLead Syllabi, 2016). Within each of those broad topics, students had to make a number of rhetorical choices as well, deciding what television show to write about, for example. The title of the paper, “Analysis Paper,” also evoked a different understanding of expectations among students. Whereas weekly response papers and the midterm were viewed largely as reflective writing by students, the analysis paper was viewed more like a research paper. To be sure, some students still used the term reflect as a verb in describing the analysis paper, but they also had a different understanding of what they were supposed to do on that paper. For example, MM (section X) in talking about the final paper noted:

There’s a difference between like reflective and persuasive; there’s a difference between reflective and analysis. Reflective is more of your opinion where analysis is more of, kind of your opinion but back it up with facts and details. […] you have what you’re analyzing, you have your idea, and then like you’re looking at it from like all these perspectives, so like analyzing it from different views, and then talking about that, and then giving your opinion and backing it up.

Kat (section Y) noted that the purpose of the analysis paper was:

to encourage us to do outside research because a lot of what we were doing in class was either personal evaluations on readings that we were assigned. But with
this paper we’re going outside of what we’re taught to have, to do further research and kind of help our interest in that topic, I think, and then see what we learned in class, how that relates to real life situations other than the examples they give us in the book.

Instructors intended for this paper to be more intensive as well. The prompts used verbs that align with high order cognitive processes (e.g. apply, analyze) as outlined by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). Students were to use both readings and outside sources to support their claims and were required to “cite” these sources. Additionally, students were to pose solutions to the issues they wrote about. The act of posing a solution aligns with the cognitive process of “creating,” defined as “putting elements together to form a coherent or functional whole” (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001, p. 84). The second phase of “creating” is “planning,” which involves developing a plan to solve a problem, “stopping short” of carrying out the steps to enact the plan. Creating also demonstrates the constructs of higher order thinking and integrative learning (Anderson et al., 2015).

The analysis paper required students to go beyond writing about how course concepts affected them (as the responses and midterm paper were framed). Instead students had to analyze something in the “real world” and then propose a solution. The purpose, as described by Instructor X was:

   trying to get them [students] to place it [course content] in a bigger context. [...] push them I think into thinking about it a little bit more abstractly but still, then, relating it back to them in some way. And I ask them to suggest solutions or at least ideas of possible solutions, so it’s getting them to be a little bit more active rather than just reactive, proactive maybe I should say rather than reactive.

Instructor Y expressed similar purposes for the analysis paper, noting it is meant to “get them [students] to apply all the concepts they learned in class and see how we see privilege and oppression and difference play out in the world.” She expected students to “show that you went back and looked at some sources for information to cite from to
back up what you're talking about” and “pull out actual concrete examples and talk about those examples.”

In essence, this final paper was a culmination of everything students had learned in the course. That there were higher expectations for this paper was also demonstrated by how it was weighted in terms of grades; it was worth 30% of students’ grades (30 points). The midterm paper was worth ten points and the weekly responses each worth four points. Furthermore, the other papers led up to this paper. In the responses, students wrestled with each individual reading. In the midterm, they drew from the readings assigned up to that point. In the final paper, they drew from all course readings in addition to outside sources. While instructors made no mention that the response papers and midterm were intended to prepare students to write the final paper, the papers did build on each other. This implies a kind of scaffolding logic the instructors employed throughout the course. Scaffolding assignments is one of the pedagogies advocated by writing studies scholarship (Artemeva & Logie, 2003; Bayer et. al, 2005; Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004; Bean, Carrithers, & Earenfight, 2005, Carter, Ferzli, & Wiebe, 2004; Defazio et al., 2010; Downs & Wardle, 2007; Poe, Lerner & Craig, 2010, Shea et al., 2006; Soliday, 2011). Scaffolding as a pedagogical practice is discussed next.

*Scaffolding.* Scaffolding, as a general pedagogical practice, refers to the instructor or more advanced peers serving as “a supportive tool for learners as they construct knowledge” (Driscoll, 2005, p. 257). In terms of writing instruction, scaffolding means breaking writing assignments into subsequent parts that build upon each other. Scaffolding helps students to understand how to construct a particular text, what to include in it, and how to build one’s claim toward some conclusion. WeLead instructors
did not specifically mention the term scaffolding in their interviews, but they seemed to have an inherent understanding of the concept and did employ it in some ways.

The discussion in the previous section indicates how writing assignments built upon each other and increased in length and intensity. As was also mentioned previously, instructors did not cue students into this intention at least in terms of the course writing. It’s also difficult to say that scaffolding writing assignments in this way was consciously and purposely enacted based on the way instructors discussed the purposes of course writing, but the design of the course implies a sort of logic in this regard. For example, each instructor mentioned how the two semesters of the course built upon each other.

Instructor X noted:

the first semester course is really foundational reading about the different groups of people that are oppressed, the different target groups. […] The second semester is different. […] there’s more group projects in that one. They actually give a presentation at midterms or somewhere in the middle of the semester, and their final project is a presentation.

Instructor Y also made reference to what she hoped students would learn in the first semester but framed the learning in terms of what students might be able to do by the end of the year. She described the course purpose as:

trying to get students to understand privilege, oppression, difference, how those things play out in our everyday society. And hopefully by the end of the semester, or the end of the year [emphasis added] getting them to understand how they can impact that system hopefully and disrupt some of those problematic things that have been happening […] to push them further so that by the end of the year I hope that there is a stronger understanding.

Furthermore, in the third week of class, she cued students into how the course would be structured over the semester. She asked students to summarize the assigned reading for the day. Q responded to this prompt noting that the article discussed the topics micro, meso, and macro levels of oppression:
 […] micro is how we perceive ourselves, meso […] I guess in the real world, on the street, face to face, perceptions of people—and how we perceive people every day. And on the macro level it involves a global or even larger scale of our perceptions so instead of moving to our individual perceptions, our perception changes to about complete races, complete social trends or even complete ethnic groups.

Instructor Y followed up to this response by noting:

And then looking at those, this is kind of going to be the structure for the semester in that we are going to start out small, start on that micro level, so today we’re going to do a lot of focus on you as an individual […] it’s really necessary to set the groundwork for the rest of the semester. How do you talk about privilege and oppression and power if you don’t understand where you are in relation to those things?

Thus, in terms of design of the course overall (inclusive of both semesters) scaffolding was employed.

Instructors also employed scaffolding through the use of in-class writing activities. Often these activities included some type of worksheet that engaged students in thinking more deeply about the course content, specifically with regard to the concepts in assigned reading. In essence, students would read a text prior to class. They would write a response to the text, summarizing its main points and providing examples of concepts in the text from their own experiences. In class, they would discuss concepts. Instructor X’s method most often was to pose questions to the class, but he would also have students watch videos (such as films or Ted Talks) that further discussed the concepts embedded in the assigned reading. Instructor Y had a similar methodology, posing questions and then bringing in additional material. Instructor Y also often used PowerPoint presentations that would define terminology for students. Each instructor would then provide students with a worksheet or prompt that would engage them in further thinking about the concepts covered in a class session. Students would typically break into small groups to complete these in-class writing activities, though sometimes they worked
individually at first and then paired up with someone to discuss what they had written about on the worksheet/prompt.

Instructors described these in-class activities in similar ways. Instructor X said the purpose of the in-class writing activities was to get students to:

think about the issues that we’re talking about in a way so that they have time to, again, organize their own thoughts about an issue, without being, saying it out in front of everybody. They have a chance to be kind of a little more thoughtful about their response, and then be a little bit more willing to share when we have the discussion portion.

Instructor Y also referred to in-class writing as a means to think more deeply about the content and prepare students for discussion. When asked what the purpose for the in-class writing was, she noted:

it’s just to get them thinking […] to go over things in as many ways as possible. […] each year I get a really interesting mix of people that will talk all day if they’re given the opportunity to talk. But if I ask them to write, they don’t want to write anything, or vice versa, never talk, but if I let them write something they’ll write me like five or six pages worth of content. So I try to just keep giving them as many different opportunities to share in whatever way feels most comfortable for them.

This method/design employs scaffolding. The reading was meant to introduce content. The response paper allowed students to actively engage with content and prepared them for class discussion (students also had to include discussion questions as part of their response papers). The in-class writing helped to further prepare students to discuss the content as well as provided different ways to experience the content (as Instructor Y noted).

Scaffolding, in terms of preparing students to write their papers, was not employed in the purest sense of breaking papers down into subsequent parts as writing studies scholarship advocates. However, scaffolding was employed toward preparing students to write their midterm papers through the use of in-class writing and discussion.
Both instructors engaged students in in-class writing activities in which they had to list out their identities and reflect on whether those identities were privileged or oppressed (something that the midterm paper required students to do). Students actually did quite a bit of this identity reflection and scaffolding leading up to the midterm. In week three of the class, Instructor Y had students complete a worksheet in which they had to list identities and analyze them. In week four of the class, Instructor X actually mentioned the midterm paper in class and noted that the materials for the paper were available on D2L. The materials included a “Social Identity Wheel Exercise.” Both instructors used this worksheet to help prepare students to compose the midterm paper, and it actually was required to be turned in with the paper. (See Figure 4.2.) In week four, Instructor Y had compiled a list of all the discussion questions students had posed in their response paper for that week. The topic of that week was “The Social Construction of Difference” (Instructor Y Syllabus, 2016). Students were asked to choose one or two of those questions and respond to them in writing. Questions included topics of identity, such as dominate and subordinate identities.19 In week five Instructor X gave students an in-class writing assignment in which students were paired with someone and each given a different social identity category (e.g. gender, race, ability-status, etc.) and students had to write out examples of how that identity experienced the “Five Faces of Oppression” (that week’s topic). Section Y class was cancelled in week five due to instructor illness, but students were given a take-home assignment in which they had to watch a video that explored the concept of racism and write a response to it. The video was titled “How Do You Identify Racism” (Elliott & Elliott Eyes, Inc., 2014) and discussed Jane Elliott’s

19 Note: My video recording equipment was not functioning on this date; I was only able to record audio. Thus I am unable to provide a visual of those questions.
classroom experiments on getting students to understand racism in the late 60s and early 70s, commonly known as the “Blue Eye/Brown-Eye Exercise.” The point of these exercises (and of Instructor Y assigning students to watch the video on Elliott) was to get students to realize that race as an identity is socially constructed. In week six, both instructors gave students worksheets in class that again had students write about identities in terms of their being privileged and oppressed. (See Appendix G: Identity Worksheets.)

![Social Identity Wheel Exercise](image)

**Figure 4.2. Social Identity Wheel Exercise**

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Thus, students had a great deal of preparation in writing their midterm essays on their identities. Weekly assignments were scaffolded in such a way that students were brought subsequently deeper into understanding of the construct of identity before they had to analyze their own identities. This was obviously intentional on the part of instructors, for why else would they have spent so much time on the concept? To be sure, instructors did not say that these activities would help students write their midterm paper. However, that they spent so much time on the concept demonstrates a logic of building a structure of understanding, which is quite literally what a scaffold is. Instructor Y also noted to students that they needed to understand their own identities to see where they fit into systems of privilege and oppression, and this was something students had to write about on that midterm text. This scaffolding did appear to be helpful for students as well.

For example, in his second interview Q referenced one of these in-class writings on identity when I asked him to describe his midterm paper:

> Essentially what the assignment was, was you had to classify, um, we did an assignment, we did that one assignment in class one time where you had to write an inventory of what you saw your gender as, your race, your sex your, I guess, economical background or disposition, and then any other qualities or traits about you that essentially made you who you are, your identity, what makes you you. So for that one, I kind of struggled with that one at first.

This in-class assignment, with which he struggled at first, laid the groundwork for him to examine his identities and helped him come to a decision about what he would focus on for his midterm paper. He noted “So I basically structured my entire assignment based on that.”

Students did not receive the same degree of scaffolding toward their final analysis paper. While in-class writing activities were employed with the same logic (getting students to engage with content more deeply and in multiple ways) they did not build in a
sequential way toward the analysis paper in terms of content. This is likely because the papers would vary in content. Students would choose an issue about which to write, and those issues would be multiple. Thus, instructors could not have prepared students for their individual analysis papers in the same way as for the midterm in which the topic was the same for everyone.

Where instructors could have employed scaffolding was with regard to how to write an analysis paper. To be sure, there were questions instructors raised that asked students what the evidence was for particular claims students made in discussion. Instructors would also press students for more information to be able to clearly articulate how something was an example of a particular concept. For example, in week five (“The Five Faces of Oppression”) a student gave an example of exploitation. Instructor X then asked the student “How is that being exploitive.” He engaged several times in this kind of questioning during the class discussion. Being able to clearly articulate how and why something is an example of a concept is something an analysis paper would require, so Instructor X’s questions in this regard are a scaffolding-like move. But there was no commentary about how this would be expected in students’ final papers. However, the course content as well as the design of the writing assignments overall did build toward that final paper. Conscious or not, the instructors engaged in scaffolding as a pedagogy.

Providing Clear and Explicit Prompts and the Use of Rubrics/Exemplars. As discussed in the literature review, making prompts clear and using rubrics and exemplars facilitates more successful writing among students because these pedagogical strategies help students to better understand the expectations for their writing. While prompts and exemplars/rubrics are separate strategies, these two pedagogical practices are combined
in this discussion because for subjects of this activity system, the term prompt and rubric were virtually synonymous. Additionally, there was no use of exemplars by instructors. At no point in the semester did either instructor give students example papers to demonstrate what they were looking for. However, each type of paper (reading responses, Personal Identity Inventory Reflection, and the analysis paper) did have a prompt included in the course syllabi, and half of the students interviewed (four out of eight) referred to these prompts as rubrics over the course of their interviews even though there was no document titled “rubric” available on the online course site (D2L).

In section X, Hero, for example, when asked how response papers were graded said “if you hit all the aspects of like, of [the instructor’s] rubric, then you, you’ll get a full score.” MM in his second interview also noted that meeting the requirements was important, but he wasn’t exactly sure how papers were assessed because he “never really read the rubric.” Ivy on the other hand noted that writing papers for WeLead was different than writing for her English class because “English papers are structured and have like a huge grading rubric, whereas this class [WeLead] didn’t.” In section X, Linda during her second interview noted papers were evaluated based on if students met the requirements, which were made “clear on the rubric.” Q, like Ivy, expressed that his papers in English class were different, more structured and needed “to meet a certain criteria within a rubric,” but he also referred to some rubric in WeLead as well: “the writing done in WeLead, you do have to adhere to a rubric, but [the instructor] gives you some lenience when writing so you don’t have to stay as conformed to the rubric. The rubric just gives you some ideas to work on.” He again mentioned a rubric when discussing the analysis paper in WeLead: “This one I didn’t really go so much as
reflective just because based on the rubric, it seemed to be a little more structured of a paper so I didn’t go completely open-minded on it,” and he referred to the rubric for the analysis paper an additional four times in the interview.

Additionally, while the other four students did not refer to the prompts as rubrics, it was pretty clear that they relied on the paper prompts in terms of understanding expectations. These findings suggest that these students had some generic conception of the functions rubrics perform. In essence, students were relying on genre knowledge of rubrics as a resource in terms of understanding expectations for their papers, the genre being the “prompt/rubric.”

Instructors also talked about paper expectations in terms of what was listed on paper prompts. For example, when asked what made a successful analysis paper,

Instructor X replied:

I specifically ask them to cite sources in those, so I look for that. And again, a lot of the same things, trying to get them to see in the broader perspective. I mean, we might have an issue on campus that they’re talking about, but if it’s just them talking about it that’s one thing, but I was hoping to see a little bit more broader research on the issue at hand, and maybe they can learn from other cases or other information that’s out there besides just what they know from their on-campus experience alone. So I’m trying to get them to go beyond just personal reaction, personal reflection, but to be a little bit more academic about it, a little bit more systematic about gathering the information that they get to support their claim, point, argument, whatever the case might be.

Instructor Y noted that she looked for the following when grading the analysis papers:

[...] whatever I put in the syllabus for what is important. So did you actually follow directions; that’s the big one. Follow directions. Did you show me that you [...] went back and looked at some sources for information to cite from to back up what you're talking about? Did you pull out actual concrete examples and talk about those examples. I try to look at their citations and make sure that it matches up with a major style [...]..

These comments by instructors demonstrate that they each relied on the prompt to communicate expectations, and for the most part, students perceived that they understood
what was asked of them. There was some evidence, however, that prompts were not exactly clear for students. In her first interview, Ivy (section X), for example, noted that she kept getting threes (out of four points) on her reflection papers and expressed “I don’t even know what [the instructor] actually wants.” By her second interview she conceptualized that the instructor was “expecting stories […] he likes stories. That’s all I have to say.” Yet the prompt itself doesn’t say anything about “stories.” What it says is:

Consider the issue addressed in the reading and reflect on how it impacts you, your family, or friends. To what extent does this issue impact your life experience, immediately and/or in the long term? Does the issue present any challenges to you? What could you do to promote positive change regarding the issue? (Instructor X Syllabus, 2016).

What instructor X said in terms of expectation for the reflection papers was:

I look for thorough summary that’s well balanced in coverage of what was talked about. I look for the personal connection of the issue to themselves. That it’s relevant to the issue, that they’re describing it in a way that I can relate to myself, that I can understand.

While the instructions on the prompt and the instructor’s stated expectations leave open the possibility that students will share a personal story in their paper, there’s nothing explicit about what counts for evidence in terms of showing understanding of a concept that is discussed in assigned reading. This may be why Ivy struggled to understand what counts for evidence and why she made her own determination.

Ivy was an outlying case in this regard. No other student expressed the same degree of uncertainty in terms of what was expected in course writing. Students relied on the prompt to understand requirements and expectations. Harambe (section X), for example, noted that in writing his reflection papers, he made “sure that I did everything the prompt asked for, going over it again and making sure that it is good and there are no
issues with the paper.” Kat (section Y) noted that students didn’t get any writing instruction and didn’t seem bothered by this:

[…] it seems weird to say but very little assistance. I mean before you write the assignment, there’s very little assistance. You have the reading. You have the title as your prompt. And then you write down what you think, but later [the instructor] will go in and respond to what you’ve written and then answer the questions that you have at the bottom of the page in class.

MSF (section Y) also expressed relying on the prompt in writing her analysis paper: “I started writing my own thoughts about the show [How to Get Away with Murder, the show she wrote her essay on] and like going back and forth to the prompt and looking up quotes in the book to back up my point.”

On the other hand, when asked during the final interview how helpful the prompts were in helping students to understand the course content, findings were mixed. MSF said “I wouldn’t say helpful; […] I felt like I was kind of left to find my own way to do it, as, you know, as long as I fulfill whatever it is that I'm required to hand in.” Kat noted that the prompts were “vague and a little broad, so I was able to do, write what I wanted to as long it made a direct connection to what we were reading. But I would say they’re vague.” Linda noted the prompts were “okay, at first they were okay, because I was not sure how I was going to address the reflections, how do I put together a reflection if I do not really care about the topic. As time went on I was getting better, and my grades were showing that I was doing what I was supposed to do on the reflection papers.”

Surprisingly, Ivy, who had expressed frustration in the first interview over not knowing what was expected from her on the writing, said that the prompts were “pretty helpful because you had to summarize two points from the article […] and then ask a discussion question about if you have any.” However, she did note that she was not sure that the discussion questions they were required to write each week were ever talked about in
class: “Although we have those questions, I don’t know if we actually address them during class. Yeah, I don’t think we did.” MM felt the prompts were helpful and that after a while he sort of intuitively understood expectations:

I feel like they were[helpful]. They were kind of like a stepping stone or a guide path to like you know here’s what you can talk about. I never really, after the first few papers, I never really looked at like what are the questions because I would kind of just read it, think about it, and be like OK, I would just think like big, like why is this important, how does this affect my life, and I would just think big things.

Q did not exactly answer whether or not the prompts were helpful but did seem to convey that the prompts put papers into genre categories that assisted in his understanding what expectations were:

For the papers that we had to write weekly, the reflections, […] it did exactly as a reflection does; it helps you reflect on the topic material to get an understanding of it, or to break down what your perception of it is, which I guess is the same thing as understanding, but um it’s just the whole point of the assignments I think were just to help you understand do you know it or as you’re talking about it. And giving examples will help you understand. […] So, that’s what I would say.

Interestingly, four of the six students chose to respond to the question about the paper prompts in terms of their weekly reflection papers. Only Kat and MSF responded to the question in a general way, which suggests they were referring to all the prompts in general. To be sure, the weekly reflection papers encompassed the bulk of the writing students did over the semester, so it’s not surprising that they would use those papers as a reference point. However, given that at least two students expressed the prompts were vague and left students to determine for themselves how to negotiate writing, and given that the other four students did not discuss any but the weekly reflection prompt, it could be posited that the prompts might have done more to assist students in negotiating their writing for the course and could have been more clear in communicating expectations. As was noted in the section on instructors’ expectations, instructors desired more from
student writing. They wanted greater depth of thought. I have to wonder if a more explicit prompt would have helped in this regard.

I also have to wonder if providing students with a rubric for how their papers would be assessed might also have yielded stronger writing from students. While students may have conflated conceptions of a prompt and a rubric, in reality, they are not the same thing. A prompt lists options, requirements, and expectations. A rubric defines how a paper is assessed in terms of requirements and expectations. Instructor Y included a rubric-like table on graded final papers for her students, but this instrument was not provided to students in advance. To be sure, this table included the items the prompt listed as requirements and expectations, so assessment in terms of these items should not have been a complete surprise, but it may have been helpful for students to know how many points they would receive in each area prior to composing the paper. Instructor X used no rubric on the final paper. While there was some general feedback left on students’ papers on the online course management tool (D2L), it was minimal and somewhat vague as to why points were deducted. Overall, more explicit feedback combined with a rubric distributed in advance may have yielded the kind of writing instructors said they desired from students. Findings on feedback as a strategy is discussed in the proceeding section.

*Feedback on Papers.* Giving feedback on students’ writing is part and parcel of teaching students to write and using writing toward learning. Clear prompts and the use of rubric or exemplars can facilitate pointed feedback that will assist students in developing as writers as well as in deepening their understanding of content. WeLead
instructors did provide feedback on students’ writing, but there were noticeable differences in how each employed this pedagogy.

As was noted earlier, Instructor X offered general comments in the comment section provided within D2L, the online course management system (see Figure 4.3), such as “go deeper; think about the systemic issues; go beyond the individual,” and by his own admission, “those are so common; I get tired of writing them every single week. And so I eventually stop doing that just because it seems like I’ve said it enough; they should know.” He also offered affirmative feedback when students were on track such as “Well done. Good framing of the issues” or “Excellent! Great summary clearly shows you understand the cycle.” These comments were not provided within the context of the text itself so that students could see where exactly they were missing or hitting the mark. Therefore, students were left to their own devices to determine where they needed to “go deeper,” where they could have explained better how an example demonstrated course concepts, or where they did well. Additionally, no comments were offered on mechanical or spelling errors even though he noted in his interview that he was “pretty appalled” by the quality of students’ writing and listed issues such as “using the wrong words, misspelling, poor grammar.”
Instructor X, however, was slightly more explicit in commentary on some students’ final papers. Again, this feedback was not offered within the context of students’ texts, but it was specific enough that students may have had a sense of where and how they needed to improve or where they made compelling points. Examples of this kind of feedback are as follows:

**Figure 4.3.** Example of Commentary Section in D2L, the Online Course Management System
Good discussion of the use of language and appropriation... Good point about the recognition of the role of comedy in dealing with discrimination issues.

Lots of good examples of stereotypes and discriminatory behaviors. However, comedies tend to deliberately exaggerate the issues to make the point; how much of that factors into their depictions?

As can be seen, these feedback examples are a bit more tailored, a bit less general.

However, among the mix of comments students received on their final paper, there were some examples of feedback that remained at that general level. Several students’ papers received the following commentary:

- Nice description of issue and multiple responses to it.
- Nice synthesis of multiple events related to and contributing to larger issue. Analysis and response still a bit simplistic... how to go beyond the individual-level responses?
- Excellent points, but some of your statements and claims could benefit from further evidence...
- Good examples of the issues. Appreciate the actions for change, but also consider beyond the individual level...
- Many good points made, but would like to see a bit more analysis of the issues...

Furthermore, this feedback was received by students after the course had concluded for the semester. There’s no way to know if they looked at the feedback and perhaps applied it to their writing in the second semester of WeLead. And since it was not provided within the context of the papers themselves, students again had to determine for themselves how to go “beyond the individual level” or where they needed “further evidence.”

Instructor Y, in contrast, gave written feedback in the context of the paper. Section Y students’ graded papers were attached to D2L as opposed to merely using the comment box. However, this practice was not consistent. Graded papers were only
attached for weeks 1, 3, 4, and 5 and for the final paper, and in week 5, only one student received an attached graded copy of her response paper. In weeks 6-8, just points were noted in the comment section of D2L (no graded papers and no comments), and in weeks 9-12, no points were recorded and no graded papers attached or comments left. When students received attached graded papers, Instructor Y would correct mechanical and spelling errors in students’ papers by using the Review/Comment functions in Microsoft Word. Instructor Y would also engage in discussion with students through written feedback, offering support at times to what students expressed in their papers or pointing them toward further reading. Figure 4.4. demonstrates the type of comments on papers.

The feedback was not really on the writing itself, nor did it ask students for greater depth of thought in any instance. The feedback may have hinted for more depth of thought or better understanding such as the comment on the first excerpt in Figure 4.4, which reads:

We can talk more about this in class, but the definition many of our authors use for racism does only account for racism by folks from the dominant group. This definition of racism requires that people have access to political, economic or institutional power in society. Under this definition, folks from subordinate groups cannot be racist, though they can be prejudiced.

Like Instructor X, Instructor Y also offered affirmative comments, such as “Good reflection.” This type of feedback, even if given in the context of the student’s text itself, still leaves students to determine what precisely was “good” about their papers. It doesn’t help students to improve their writing, and I question whether it assists in deepening their understanding as well. Since instructors felt that students were not demonstrating the kind of understanding they desired, I have to wonder how more explicit feedback might have yielded deeper understanding.
Interestingly, each instructor, when asked about their processes for grading papers, noted that they read through students papers a couple of times before assigning grades. Instructor X actually printed out students’ papers and commented on them:

I like to write on the paper. And I can’t do that online. So even though they don’t see my chicken scratchings, it’s helpful for me to go through that process, and so I’ll write my comments on there before I write them online. So I kind of think through what I’m trying to say before I post it.

Instructor Y also said she wrote notes to herself after reading through papers concerning “where are spaces where I see that they're having some of those gaps.” This instructor kept a document of social justice resources that she would pull from for class content or to direct students to other reading to deepen their understanding where she felt students had those gaps.

Also interesting was that only one student of all those interviewed explicitly expressed wanting more specific feedback on her writing. Ivy (section X) in her first interview noted:

I don’t know what he’s looking for […] because we don’t actually see our paper because it’s all on D2L; it’s all online. He just has these little comments that he says, but I don’t see exactly where the comments are placed into it. Yeah, it’s just like add, go deeper into that, but in my mind I did go deeper.

Ivy wanted to see comments in the context of her paper. She had expressed in a later interview that she struggled with writing in general. More explicit feedback may have assisted her in understanding how to improve. MSF (section Y) hinted toward a desire for more specific feedback, but did not say outright that she wanted such feedback. It was more in the context that papers shouldn’t really be graded at all. When asked in the final interview how the course writing helped or hindered her she noted: “Hinder […] I guess […] like when you don't get the score that you want and then you would start questioning
‘Oh what is it I did wrong?’ Like I think that's what made it bad, […] how it was put it like on a grading system.”

Other students, in contrast, rarely mentioned instructors’ feedback in the context of discussing the writing instruction they got or in discussing what they felt instructors were looking for in papers. Instructor feedback was a resource they drew on for their writing (this is discussed in a later section), but references to instructor feedback in terms of being a writing resource had more to do with general feedback instructors would offer in the context of class discussions/activities and less to do with actual written feedback on students’ papers. Linda (section X) was the only other student who mentioned writing feedback, noting that her instructor:

definitely comments on the writing assignments. And sometimes like if she takes a glance at it and she sees well maybe you’re not hitting that point I want you to hit, or you need to go a little more in depth, she definitely will let you know that ahead of time where you have enough time to […] fix it.

Linda had made this comment in the first interview, however, when students were receiving commentary on their papers. As noted, this commentary tapered off after the fifth week of the class. Instructor X also noted that his comments tapered off toward the end of the semester because he grew tired of making the same comments all the time.

Thus, it is possible students did not mention feedback on their writing often because they did not receive it throughout the duration of the course. Because they felt the writing was less formal and more personal than in other courses, perhaps students also felt they did not need a lot of feedback. This informality factors into the use of authentic writing as a pedagogy.
uncomfortable questions. For example, “Why do males get paid more and obtain higher positions than women?” Do not be afraid to make people feel awkward or uncomfortable. These questions have to be asked. Throughout the essay, she picks on dominants saying they have a hard time coping with the idea of working with subordinates. Lastly, she notes that you do not have to go above and beyond. Start small and work from there; any action is good action.

Personally, I was really mad while reading this. Like, I wanted to stop reading it because a lot of it was bashing on dominants. She made it seem like we were pretentious snobs that only care about themselves. She also said that “racist society is white dominant, white-centered, and white-identified”. Yes, they can be racist but so can other colors. Blacks can be racist toward Asians. Asians can be racist towards Indians. Indians can be racist towards Australians. The list goes on and on. It is not just whites. I understand that we do have to do something about it such as going out of our way to talk with people who are different than us and not treating them like they are inferior. But, I am annoyed that whites keep having this reputation. There are good wholesome white dominant people that are not oppressing others. Yes, we need to demolish the

peers. I for one, felt in some way saddened by the activity, because from my point of view I was one of the students with lesser heads. As I was sitting there I realized, although I may not have as many I have some privileges that others may not have and for that reason I can be grateful and only continue to strive for my right to privilege that I can earn. Another point in the reading was for the opposite side of privilege which is oppression. Oppression is seen as the inevitable defeat when it comes to privilege. There has to be another powerful force going against a group of the oppressed for it to be considered oppression. It’s like saying you can only be oppressed from people on the outside, even though you’re on the outside. In life even being included in the “norm” can still mean being on the outside, because not everyone is privileged as the next person.

Question: Is capitalism to blame? What economy would best favor the disadvantaged/oppressed? What are the differences between socialism, capitalism, communism and other systems? I appreciate your thoughtful reflection. I will try to have some answers for you about the author’s view on capitalism by class time.

Figure 4.4. Sample Excerpts of Section Y Graded Papers with Feedback
**Authentic Writing.** As a pedagogy, assigning “authentic” writing refers to engaging students in the kind of writing they would actually experience in a real-life context in a particular field. For example, a sociologist would engage in research of a particular cultural context and make note of behaviors of participants of that context. They would, of course, be guided by their research questions in terms of what they are attending to, and they would apply some theory to try to explain why people behave the way they do in that context. This explanation oversimplifies the kind of writing sociologists do, but I use this as an illustration. Writing is different in different contexts, situated to the goals (i.e. objects) of an activity system. When instructors employ authentic writing as a pedagogy, the purpose is to approximate, as closely as possible, the social action writing would perform in a particular activity system. In the WeLead activity system, instructors did not employ authentic writing as a pedagogy, at least not in its purest sense. There are a few explanations for why this was the case.

First, a classroom context is not quite “life in the field.” Students are becoming acquainted with a particular discipline in a classroom setting; they don’t have the full knowledge that an expert in the field does. Additionally, writing in a classroom setting has other goals and purposes: to deepen students’ understanding, to demonstrate knowledge, and to receive a grade. Students are conscious of these other purposes, which is why they most commonly see their instructors as the audience for their texts. Students in WeLead were no different in this regard, often identifying their instructors as the audience. Instructor Y even noted in her interview that she was the audience. These factors complicate using authentic writing as a pedagogy because in a very real way, classroom writing is not authentic.
The notion of authentic writing gets even murkier in a mutt course because a mutt course by its very nature is not set in a discipline. It may draw from a discipline, but it’s not that discipline. What does it mean to write authentically in a mutt course when the course is an amalgamation of many contexts?

Second, WeLead instructors said that the course drew primarily from sociology but also noted psychology and anthropology as other disciplines from which the course drew. Therefore, authentic writing in WeLead might be better characterized as authentic-like writing. As it drew from various disciplines, it might have employed some of the features of writing in those disciplines, but the writing would not quite be sociological, psychological, or anthropological in the purest senses, and this complicates using authentic writing in the same way professors of these disciplines might employ authentic writing with their students.

It might also be useful to view authentic writing in this mutt course context from the perspective of what academic writing in a generic sense embodies. While there is no pure generic academic writing due to the situated nature of writing, there are some generic features of academic writing, such as using evidence to support a point, adhering to a writing style (MLA, APA or the like), being aware of an audience and its expectations for a text, and making writing organized, clear, and coherent. Organization, coherence, and audience awareness were expectations that WeLead instructors had, even if they did not necessarily factor mechanics and rhetorical knowledge into grades. Thus, authentic writing in WeLead was an amalgamation of generic academic writing and disciplinary writing to some extent.
Third, WeLead writing was unique in that it drew from a generic sense of academic writing and was heavily reflective in nature. Instructors did expect to a certain degree that students would apply concepts learned in class in the spirit of how a sociologist or psychologist might apply theory to observations, but the reflective nature of writing meant students were to think about what they were learning and be able to point to it in real-life contexts as well as, primarily, their own lives. Thus, authentic writing in this context is difficult to define. Writing was used primarily to get students to think about their own lives and how privilege and oppression played out in them, but it was also used to assist students in thinking about how privilege and oppression was larger than personal biases/values and systematic in nature.

To the degree that developing an understanding of privilege and oppression was the function and purpose of writing in this context, all the writing students did might be considered authentic. On the other hand, if writing was also a sort of generic, academic writing (which also drew on disciplinary writing), it may be less authentic. While the instructors certainly had expectations for a generic academic writing, they did not grade students’ papers according to those expectations. Expectations for clear, concise, mechanically “correct” writing were noted on writing prompts, but again, points were rarely deducted from students’ papers if they had not met those expectations. Additionally, while there were expectations for evidence and source citations, and while students seemed to have some understanding of what those meant in the context of academic writing, it would be hard to categorize students’ writing, overall, as generically academic. The analysis paper came closest to this, but because the weekly responses were viewed by students as less formal (and were graded somewhat informally as well),
students had no explicit preparation in the WeLead activity system toward proficiency in generic academic writing in this context. Instead they drew on their former experiences of writing “academically,” and those experiences were varied. They had all written in different genres in high school, and they were writing in different academic genres in college. To be sure, they did draw from these experiences, comparing former writing they had done to WeLead writing in how they conceptualized it. However, in terms of writing authentically in WeLead, it largely amounted to how students understood the prompt, understood expectations for writing a paper in general, understood expectations of their WeLead instructors, and understood the content of the course itself.

Having said all that, the instructors did employ authentic writing as a pedagogy within the constraints of this context. Writing was viewed as less formal by students. Instructors graded papers somewhat informally as well. WeLead drew from some social science disciplines, and instructors did look for and expect students to be applying course concepts in their writing in how they examined their experiences (not to the degree that social scientists would apply theory, but in the spirit of that). Again, students did not lose many points when they fell short of this, but there was some feedback offered on students’ writing regarding their gaps in understanding and analysis. Additionally, there were expectations of generic academic writing, and feedback was offered in these regards. Furthermore, there were some mentions by Instructor Y in class about generic academic writing, mostly with regard to style (MLA, APA, etc.), but again, few points were deducted when students’ writing did not adhere to these styles and conventions. Perhaps the best example of employing authentic writing came through the use of metacognitive writing. Because WeLead writing was aimed at having students reflect on
their thinking, the writing could be considered authentic in this sense. Metacognitive writing is discussed next.

**Metacognitive Writing.** Metacognition is defined as thinking about one’s thinking and especially thinking about one’s learning. Thus, metacognition is a type of self-reflection. Metacognitive writing engages students in this kind of thinking. Metacognitive writing is advocated as a writing to learn pedagogy because thinking about one’s thinking and learning assists in understanding content (Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004; Chick et al., 2009; McGuire et al., 2009; Nail & Townsend, 2010; Wald et al., 2012). Chick et al. (2009) in particular found this kind of writing to be effective in learning about race. Since constructs of race and how race affected privilege and oppression was part of WeLead course content, metacognitive writing may have been an effective pedagogy for this course.

WeLead students did a lot of reflective writing; it was how they characterized most of their writing. Instructors, too, used the term “reflect” frequently. In course syllabi, the term “reflect” or “reflection” appeared often\(^\text{21}\). Both syllabi, for example, made the following statement in the Course Description: “Students will read and discuss articles and books and reflect on leadership and cross-cultural experiences.” The term also appeared in the description of the Course Structure: “‘Foundations’ classes will explore concepts and history, while ‘synthesis’ classes will emphasize personal storytelling, *reflection* [emphasis added], and focused activities.” Additionally, “reflection” was embedded in course goals (i.e. the object of this activity system). The

\(^{21}\) The term appeared 28 times in Instructor X’s syllabus and nine times in Instructor Y’s syllabus. Instructor X titled weekly response papers “reflections” while Instructor Y titled them “responses,” and this accounts for the difference in number of references as each weekly paper was listed on the syllabi by those titles.
term was explicitly used in the “Diverse Cultures” Core Curriculum learning outcomes, which state, among other things, that students will be able to “Critically reflect [emphasis added] upon one’s personal and cultural presuppositions and how these affect one’s values and relationships” (WeLead Syllabi, 2016). This outcome points toward metacognition. Reflecting upon “one’s personal and cultural presuppositions and how these affect one’s values and relationships” is, indeed, thinking about one’s thinking. Metacognition was also embedded in WeLead course specific outcomes. For example, “Self-awareness” was listed on the syllabus as a categorical area in which students will develop. Specific outcomes in this category asked students to identify their “personal and social values, practices, and beliefs” as well as to become familiar with how “personal and social identities interact and inform” one’s perspective, both of which cannot occur unless one examines one’s own thinking. The course goals in the “Leadership” category included students identifying “skills and abilities that may contribute” to students’ development and students becoming familiar with their “role and responsibility in creating an inclusive community” (WeLead Course Syllabi, 2016). These goals also require self-reflection and thinking about one’s thinking. (Note: More will be said about course goals and metacognitive knowledge in Chapter Six. This chapter also discusses how students’ writing demonstrated metacognition.)

Consistent with course goals, metacognition was built into writing assignments. Instructor X actually called the weekly response papers “reflections” on the syllabus. While Instructor Y’s syllabus called the weekly papers “response papers,” she did conceive of them as reflective and referred to them as reflections in her interview. When asked to describe each of the writing assignments in her own words, for example, she
said “So it probably starts with the reflections […].” When asked why she called those papers responses instead of reflections she noted that in her previous year teaching the course she was partial to the word “reflection,” but the other instructors that year wanted to call the papers responses and explained “We were trying to make everything as similar as possible. So the other two instructors […] felt more strongly about the word response. So I said fine, I don’t care. They’re going to be reflecting either way, so I don't really need it to be called a reflection paper.”

To be sure, instructors did not use the term “metacognition” throughout the duration of the course, nor did they use the term in interviews. However, there seemed to be an unconscious knowledge that having students reflect on their thinking would assist in achieving course goals. That reflection in this regard was part and parcel of student writing demonstrates instructors’ intention to have students engage in metacognition. Instructor X noted that he “always ask[ed] them [students] to try to find a way to connect the reading to their experience, their beliefs, their attitudes, their values […].” Instructor Y, when discussing the midterm “Personal Identity Inventory Reflection” noted that the intended purpose was to get students to understand their “different identities and really starting to think about how those impact them personally.” Thinking about one’s identity as well as its impact implies thinking about one’s thinking, a self-reflective exercise.

Students’ reflection most often entailed how they saw course content playing out in their lives and, to some extent, how they saw the content playing out in contexts in which they were not directly a part. In this regard, they were examining their values, beliefs, and experiences in their writing, which was an exercise in thinking about their own thinking and learning. It was not so much metacognitive in the sense of thinking
about how they learned, but more in the sense of how they had come to know what they knew and how that was valid or needed to be reassessed.

Instructors also used metacognitive writing in in-class writing activities. For example, Instructor X had students engage in a metacognitive writing activity in the third week of the course. This activity was a round-robin exercise. After the content was discussed, students were asked to write down their reflections on the discussion and then pass that reflection onto the next person to comment on. His explicit instructions were as follows:

I want you each to think about the most pressing question you have about this idea of systemic discrimination and just write it out. [...] Institutional messages, whether it’s media, whether it’s housing, police, laws, what about that do you question the most? I’ll give you about four minutes. Just kind of reflecting our discussion over the last 20 minutes or so. What’s the most pressing issue or question or comment that you want to make about it. Actually, it can be a comment or observation or whatever.

This activity demonstrates an intention to have students think about their thinking. After students had written their own thoughts, they passed their writing to the person next to them and were asked to respond to their peer’s thinking, which further required them to think about their own thinking on the content. Then they had to pass the paper to someone else an additional time and comment on the response, again thinking about their own thinking in relation to someone else’s thinking.

These types of metacognitive in-class writing activities were common in section X. On the day that midterm papers were due, for example, the topic was “Adultism.” Class began with a worksheet that engaged students in thinking about their own thinking on this topic. The instructor specifically said that the activity “will help us discover our own beliefs.” In the second to last class of the semester, students were given a case-study activity in which they had to respond in writing to different scenarios on “religious
exclusion and harassment.” The questions on this worksheet all required students to think about their own thinking with regard to the scenario and to imagine possible responses. This act of imagining how they would respond forced students to think about their own thinking because students needed to examine their own comfort levels in intervening. The questions on the worksheet follow. I have emphasized words that demonstrate metacognition in italics.

1) **What is your understanding** of the specific religious stereotypes, prejudice, or exclusion described in this scenario?

2) **What are the specific attitudes and behaviors that you think should be changed?** Who **is responsible for intervening** on behalf of change?

3) **What are various ways that you could imagine** some intervening in or resolving the situation? **What do you consider** the most effective way to resolve this situation? **What ways of dealing with the situation might turn out to be ineffective, or even counter-productive?**

4) **If you were a participant or bystander in this scenario, how might you become an ally** to the person excluded or stereotyped in this scenario?

While most of the writing students did in class had to do with thinking about their own thinking, Instructor X did engage students in thinking about their learning in the week after the midterm paper was due. At the end of class, he passed out a “Midterm Evaluation” that asked questions such as when they felt most engaged, when they felt distanced, what they found most interesting, and how the instructor could help them learn better. This worksheet was likely used to inform the instructor’s own practice, but it also engaged students in thinking about their own learning. While Instructor X did not mention employing “metacognitive writing” in his interview, evidence shows that he used it. Section X students did view the writing in terms of examining their own lives as well. For example, in week nine, one section X student, while working on an in-class writing activity, jokingly commented about writing her midterm paper and how much
work it was. Instructor X playfully responded “I’m sure it was just draining,” to which the student replied “It was! I had to think about my life.”

Instructor Y had similar approaches with regard to in-class writing activities. She did not engage students in examining their own learning as Instructor X had\(^2\), but she did use in-class writing to engage students in thinking about their own thinking. In the section on scaffolding, it was noted how instructors used in-class writing to prepare students for their midterm papers on identity. Many of these identity activities asked students to examine their own thinking and beliefs. For example, in the third week of class, Instructor Y had students complete a worksheet that asked them to write about some of their identities. Her explanation of this activity to students demonstrated the use of metacognitive writing:

> Take some time to go through and reflect, which of those identities are you most aware of, so you should only mark one, maybe two. The next one, which one do you think about the least? Kind of some of the reflection we started at the retreat. Which of these impacts how others perceive you? […] Which of your identities has the strongest impact on how you see yourself personally? And then I want you to take some time to reflect on times when, and maybe pick one or two of those identities, times when it’s felt the most salient […]. And then when is the first time you realized that particular identity.

The following week, Instructor Y actually used students’ own writing as a springboard for thinking about their own thinking. On the overhead screen, she projected all of the discussion questions students had written in their response papers for that week\(^3\). Students were then instructed to respond in writing to one or two of the questions their peers had posed. After students did so, they were asked to share their responses first

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\(^2\) On the last day of class, Instructor Y told students she was going to send them some reflection questions to which she wanted them to respond. I don’t know what these entailed, and if they were ever sent to students, nor what students responses were. Presumably, these came via email as they were not included in the online course management system anywhere. It is possible that these questions could have asked students to provide reflection on their learning for the course.

\(^3\) This activity was also mentioned in the section on scaffolding.
with a partner and then in full-class discussion. This activity engaged students in thinking about their thinking and sharing with their peers what they thought. Because they had to share, they had to consider their audience. Thus, this activity also engaged students’ rhetorical awareness, an act that further required thinking about their thinking and expressing it in a way in which their peers might understand. In the large group discussion, Kat asked if she could respond to her own question and proceeded to explain what she wrote about in her response for that week. This demonstrates that she was thinking about her own thinking, particularly, the thinking she conveyed in her writing. Even though the instructor had asked students not to respond to their own questions, she allowed Kat to do so, an action that further suggests the instructor intended for students to think about their own thinking.

In section Y, however, most of these in-class metacognitive writing activities occurred before the midterm. Post midterm, there were no other in-class writing activities. Class sessions fell into a pattern of Instructor X engaging students in discussion about the reading and concepts, providing additional media that dealt with the week’s topic (e.g. PowerPoint slides that defined terms, videos, social media excerpts, articles, etc.) and then discussing the material presented. To be sure, Instructor Y did ask students what they thought about the additional material presented. She often directly asked students “What are you thinking?” or “Does that spark a new train of thought for you?” She wanted students to think about their thinking, but this was done in the context of class discussion as opposed to in writing. Thus, metacognitive thinking appears to have been a pedagogical practice Instructor Y used; it just was not used in the second half of the semester as a writing activity outside of the weekly response papers students did.
Both WeLead instructors expressed similar purposes and expectations for students’ writing. Writing was intended as a means for students to reflect on their thinking about course content, to come to understand the concepts of privilege and oppression and how those manifested in students’ lives. The pedagogical practices instructors employed worked toward the intended purposes they expressed; these practices assisted in deepening students’ understanding of and engagement with course content. This was especially salient in instructors’ use of metacognitive writing. The intended purposes of writing, the expectations instructors held, and their pedagogical practices, in turn, had an impact on how writing functioned as a tool in the WeLead activity system. Findings on the functions of writing are discussed in the preceding section.

Objects of the WeLead Activity System: Functions the Tool of Writing Performed

In the WeLead activity system triangle, writing was a system tool/artifact (see Chapter 3, Figure 3.2). It worked toward the object (i.e. student learning and course goals). As was discussed in the previous section, instructors intended writing to serve this purpose, yet there were distinct functions of writing embedded in the overarching object of student learning: 1) writing to demonstrate learning, 2) writing to learn, 3) writing to communicate, and 4) writing to inform pedagogy. These functions were expressed by both students and instructors, with the exception of the fourth function, which was unique to instructors. Findings on how writing functioned for students are discussed first, followed by how these functions were expressed by instructors.
How Writing Functioned for Students

On the whole, students in WeLead viewed their course writing as less formal and academic than writing they did in other courses. For example, Q (section Y) characterized WeLead writing as “simpler writing assignments” and noted “It doesn’t ask for complexity; it asks for understanding. So I don’t have to word what I’m writing very complexly, […] I don’t have to worry as much as if I were writing an actual professional grade essay.” When asked how the writing was similar to writing in other courses, Linda (section Y) emphatically replied “It is not.” When asked how it was different, she said “In this class, I am the resource, I am the person and it all comes back to me. In other classes, I have a textbook and I have to use other outside sources. With this class I am the resource.” Ivy (section X) described the writing as “not as technical because it’s like more reflecty [sic].” As was noted earlier, she also expressed that other classes had very structured rubrics for writing whereas this course did not. While MSF (section Y) felt that the writing in WeLead was similar to writing in other courses in that one had to “apply real life situations to theories,” she also noted that papers were different because they were “open minded and open to anything.” These students’ characterizations are in line with how writing studies scholarship depicts writing in an academic discipline. One writes about content within that discipline, and there are conventions and standards, for example, regarding what counts for evidence and what a text can include, but WeLead writing differed somewhat in this regard. MM (section X) evidenced this sort of disciplinary understanding when he described his writing in biomed classes and physics: “it’s not very like reflection or like analyze why this; it’s just straight to the point: this is this number, this is what it is.” Thus, students’ conceptualizations of writing confirm the
situated nature of writing being particular to a given activity system. Indeed, WeLead writing was situated to its context as well.

Students did see some similarities to their writing in other courses. Several students compared their WeLead papers to those they did in their English classes (first-year composition). While MM noted how different WeLead writing was from writing in his biomed classes, he also expressed, “It’s very similar to what I’ve been writing in English classes, you know, like talking about the content and then talking about why is that content important, like how to rhetorically analyze that.” Similarly, even though Linda felt writing in WeLead was not like writing in other courses, she compared her WeLead writing to writing she did in her Social Justice course in terms of topic and style. Ivy even compared the reflective aspects of her WeLead writing to the discussion section in lab reports: “it’s like reflective but you can’t use I-statements, and still, but like you’re discussing all your results that you’ve done, so in a way you’re reflecting over your entire lab report that you’ve gone over.” She also noted that summarizing the main points of the assigned reading in weekly response papers was “like introduction in lab reports because I’m summarizing what I’m doing in the lab.”

While interview questions prompted students to compare their WeLead writing to writing in other courses, the fact is that students were able to make comparisons and provide examples of similarities and differences. This ability suggests that on some level students were making those comparisons inherently as they engaged in writing. Their comparisons also indicate rhetorical knowledge, for students demonstrated understanding of writing in different disciplinary contexts. The comparisons they made additionally evidenced genre awareness (e.g. Ivy’s finding similarity between weekly response papers
and lab reports and MM’s noting the differences between the two). These findings indicate that students did draw on prior writing knowledge in order to negotiate writing in WeLead, repurposing writing knowledge in a way that made sense to them for the task at hand. A few students, for example, compared the WeLead Personal Identity Inventory and Reflection to their college application essays. This repurposing prior writing knowledge/experience additionally shows how the community within an activity system triangle really is broader than just the present course context students found themselves in. It included their experiences writing elsewhere. How students conceptualized the function of writing in WeLead was tied to their prior writing experiences. Literature on Activity Theory supports how different discourse communities/activity systems influence activity within a particular system. Greeno and Engeström (2014) note “specifically in schools, activity systems often include participants who are members of different communities of practice—this can make their participation problematic (see Eckert, 1990), or the resulting diversity can be a source of creative productivity (e.g. Engeström, 2001)” (p. 130). In WeLead, a mutt course that, indeed, included participants who were members of other communities of practice (from instructors who each came from different academic/professional backgrounds to students who had different majors and high school backgrounds), the diversity seemed to have allowed for creative productivity as students drew from their different communities of practice in order to negotiate their WeLead writing.

Student interview data revealed three themes in how writing functioned for them: writing to demonstrate learning, writing to learn, and writing to communicate. The first two themes were not surprising per se. Writing is used in educational settings to
demonstrate learning as well as to foster learning, but there were some interesting findings with regard to how writing functioned toward learning. The third theme was somewhat unexpected. A communicative function is always embedded in a written text, for language by its nature is communicative, but the students in WeLead described their writing in ways that went beyond merely communicating to an audience what they were learning or what they thought about course content. They saw it as a conversation/discussion of course content and a means to further understand course content through that discursive function. What follows are specific findings with regard to each theme.

**Writing to Demonstrate Learning.** Writing to demonstrate learning is a common reason writing is assigned. Instructors want to be able to see students’ understanding of course content, and writing provides a tangible means toward this end. As was mentioned in the section on “Authentic Writing,” students are generally attuned to this purpose, for they are graded on their papers. This is likely the reason why students commonly view their instructors as the audience for their papers (Bean et. al., 2005; Beaufort, 2007; Carroll, 2007; Nowacek, 2005 and 2011; Poe Lerner, & Craig, 2010; Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006).

Data showed that WeLead students saw their instructors as the audience for their writing. In discussing her Personal Identity Inventory and Reflection, Ivy noted “I had to talk about personal stories about myself and kind of persuade the reader like my story and like have them be in my shoes, so I thought that [the instructor] was like a college grader or reader or whatever.” When I asked her explicitly who the audience was, she replied

I was picturing just like, of course [Instructor X], […] I don’t think I’d want friends to be reading that because then they would be like opening a door into
something I haven’t even told them. But this is like for someone who is like confidential, who’s going to keep it confidential to them, like they’re not supposed to send it out or give it to other people to read.

Like Ivy, the other students were guarded with regard to the content of their Personal Identity Inventory Reflections. Not a single student interviewed sought feedback for the paper, feeling it was too personal to share with others. Regarding the content of his Inventory, Q (section X), for example noted, “It’s not, believe it or not, it’s not something I would tell everybody, it’s—if somebody asks, I’ll tell them, but I’m not going to go out preaching and announcing to the whole world that this is what I have, this is who I am, this is what I do.” However, he also noted how he sort of had peers in mind when he wrote the paper, comparing it to a talk he gave at a Kairos retreat in high school because the content was similar. Other students expressed thinking of an audience outside the instructor as well. MM commented that he had peers in mind as an audience for the Inventory and was very emphatic that he didn’t care what people thought: “I’m going to write about me. And this is who I am,” yet he did express concern over what people might think: “Definitely, I mean of course, we’re all going to have that thought in the back of our heads, you know like what are other people going to think.” He did not share that paper with anyone but the instructor.

In their Personal Identity Inventory Reflections, students wrote about deeply personal content: their sexual orientations, their culture, their feelings about their race and the effects their race had on their lives. Q wrote about his struggle with cancer. Perhaps students did not seek input on their papers because of the personal nature of the content. Linda expressed the difficulty in writing the Inventory and noted:

So often for me, I feel like I do good in life and I’m always questioning who I am and how to like not fit into the norm of like oh because they do it, you do it, because you want to be a part. I’m still working on that because I want to be my
own genuine who I am person, that’s just me, but it was hard because I thought back to so many past experiences I’ve had and how far I’ve gotten, about how much I’ve hurted [sic] in the process, so it was kind of hard. […] I was trying to veer away from feeling like I was beating myself up, but it was my truth, so it was hard.

The fact that students did not share their papers with anyone but the instructors indicates that they were writing with the instructors in mind; the instructor as the “real” audience, even if they conceptualized others as a tangential audience. Writing for the instructor implies writing to demonstrate knowledge, and students were demonstrating knowledge in their writing. In the case of the Inventory, they demonstrated self-awareness, which was one of the course goals. They also were required to demonstrate knowledge of course content and terminology. The writing prompt asked them to consider their social identities: “gender, race/ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religion, economic class, and ability/disability status” (WeLead Syllabi, 2016), all of which were terms they read about in their textbook and discussed in class. They were then asked to “Share your understanding of a particular social identity or identities that is/are particularly important to the way you think about yourself.” The term “understanding” is one of the cognitive processes outlined in Anderson and Krathwohl’s *Revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Education Objectives* (2001). The verb “share” is synonymous with demonstrate. The students were attuned to this purpose and evidenced this function of writing throughout interview data. In interviews, there were over 80 utterances that in some way referenced writing to demonstrate knowledge/learning.

That students viewed a function of writing to be demonstrating understanding of course content is likely due to its being embedded in writing prompts. Examples of language that explicitly asked for demonstration of knowledge or alluded to it on the Inventory paper are noted above. The response paper prompt asked students to “Outline
2-3 main points of the reading” (WeLead Syllabi, 2016). It further asked students to connect the reading to their own knowledge/experience in some way. Instructor X’s syllabus stated:

Consider the issue addressed in the reading and reflect on how it impacts you, your family, or friends. To what extent does this issue impact your life experience, immediately and/or in the long term? Does the issue present any challenges to you? What could you do to promote positive change regarding the issue?”

Instructor Y’s syllabus worded this expectation slightly differently:

Use a ‘real world’ example to illustrate at least one of the main points of the article (e.g. example from the media or MU campus experiences). Describe the example in detail and then discuss how it is connected to the point/s of the assigned reading.”

In both cases, demonstrating understanding was a goal. “Exemplifying,” that is “finding a specific example or illustration of a concept or principle” (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001, p. 67), is a subcategory of “Understanding.” Instructor Y’s prompt was more specific in terms of the function of demonstrating understanding, using the verb “illustrate,” while Instructor X’s prompt was a bit more vague: “Consider the issue […] and reflect on how it impacts you,” [emphasis added], but by and large students interpreted the expectation along the lines of demonstrating knowledge by summarizing the assigned reading (“summarizing,” too, is a subcategory of “understanding”) and providing examples in their response papers.

Other interview data confirmed that students conceptualized knowledge demonstration to be a function of their writing. When asked what the instructor was looking for in a good paper, Hero (section X) remarked that the instructor:

want [sic] you to like paraphrase and explain what was happening in the text and the readings and he wants you to connect it to your own life, so pretty much reflecting back to what happened in the reading and if anything that happened, so
say in the books that connects you or happened to you, you can share it in the writing [emphasis added].

In the first interview, conducted a few weeks into the semester, students were asked how they would assess their writing so far. Harambe (section X) noted “I think they have been very good honestly. I think they show what the author is trying to get across, I have been able to apply it to my own life and what I have experienced, I think it is what [instructor] wants. [emphasis added]” Harambe’s language suggests a demonstrative function of writing, both summarizing and exemplifying. Interestingly, at the time the interview with Harambe was conducted, the students should have completed eight response papers total. Harambe had only submitted one. Nonetheless, he understood the function to be demonstrating knowledge and saw the instructor as being the audience for the papers.

In interviews students were prompted to explain what instructors were looking for in a good paper. Often utterances that were coded as “writing to demonstrate knowledge” appeared after these questions. However, students also understood that the writing was to be in their own words, which would demonstrate that they truly understood course content. For example, Linda noted that Instructor Y:

definitely stressed the fact of when you’re reading reflect, but reflect with like an intention to actually like reflect. Don’t just be typing to be typing, like actually have meaning behind the words you’re putting on the paper. Because [the instructor] definitely wants us to get something out of it, […], but [the instructor’s] looking for like finding the purpose of writing for yourself, not for everyone else, just you, but it has to be like genuinely real. […] [the instructor] stressed how we can’t quote the text. It needs to be in our own writing. I think that’s definitely what [the instructor] looks for, like how we address the different topics and texts in our own way.

Similarly, MSF (section Y) expressed that the instructor did not merely want students to “fulfill the requirements for the papers; the instructor was “seeking the depth of our thought process, if we really push ourselves into thinking in a certain way.”
Students also expressed this demonstrative function of writing in other ways. MM (section X) for example, when asked why he chose the option he did for his analysis paper noted that he chose to write about the TV show *South Park* because he could “talk about everything we learned; like there’s so many examples.” Q (section Y) also noted that he chose the option to write about portrayals of different ethnicities in the media because it was the option he could “draw the most examples from.” Kat (section Y) was asked to describe the analysis paper in her own words and remarked “So what I understood that we were supposed to do is you have a topic, then you research it outside of the class, outside class material, and then you make connections to personal experience and class readings and class discussions.” MSF, when asked if there was anything that helped her write the analysis noted that she drew on assigned readings, which gave her “solid supporting evidence. And definitely like hints, like suggestions to how I could construct my idea statements. […] I based a lot of my last, like conclusion about the solutions on the reading.” These statements indicate an understanding on the part of students that they needed to demonstrate knowledge of the content of the reading.

It’s not surprising that students saw one function of writing in WeLead to be demonstrating understanding of course content and using explicit examples from course texts. For one thing, the writing prompts explicitly or implicitly called for this, using verbs such as “identify, illustrate, analyze, and outline.” Students were also instructed to “use the course concepts to better understand” issues and examples about which the students chose to write. Interview data suggest that students interpreted these instructions as a means to show what they had learned. Some students even expressed concern over how they were being graded, further evidencing that demonstration of knowledge was
important. For example, as was mentioned previously, Ivy expressed concern in her first interview about the points she was receiving on her papers, and MSF also alluded to this concern.

Additionally, students had been through some twelve years of schooling prior to entering college. They were accustomed to receiving grades on assigned writing, so they likely carried with them an understanding that they must prove in their writing what they knew. However, also embedded in WeLead writing prompts was a writing to learn function. For example, the instructions to “use concepts to better understand” implies that understanding will occur as a result of writing. Students picked up on this as well.

**Writing to Learn.** The prompt for the WeLead analysis paper on both instructors’ syllabi stated “To *facilitate understanding* [emphasis added] of the course material, you will complete an analysis paper on a topic related to stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, oppression, power and privilege.” The phrase “facilitate understanding” indicates a writing to learn function. Student interviews evidenced that writing performed this function. The verbs and verb phrases students used when discussing their writing demonstrate learning. For example, Kat (section Y) noted that the response papers are “about interpreting what you read to your own situation and your own perspective. That’s how my essays usually go, taking what the writer tells me is happening and then fitting that to my own situation, my own experiences.” Interpreting is a subcategory of understanding in Anderson and Krathwohl’s (2001) framework. Linda (section Y) expressed that part of writing the response papers is “questioning the text.” Questioning falls into the category of evaluating in Anderson and Krathwohl’s framework. Hero (section X) noted elaborating on assigned readings in his writing. Harambe (section X)
noted the importance of bringing in examples that illustrate concepts in assigned readings. Exemplifying is another subcategory of understanding. To be sure, engaging in the acts of exemplifying, questioning, interpreting, and applying simultaneously fulfils the function of demonstrating knowledge, but it was through the act of doing these things that students also came into deeper understanding.

Understanding assigned readings was expressed by many students, in fact, when they discussed their writing, such as MM (section X), who noted that the writing is not just about listing main ideas in the assigned reading: “Don’t just be like main idea, main idea, main idea, main idea. Be like how does this then like connect to the second one, how does this one then connect to the third one? And how are all those related?” That MM expressed the importance of showing connection between ideas indicates that, at least in his perspective, he was going beyond mere rote knowledge and was also thinking about patterns. Writing allowed him to find these patterns. He later expressed that the writing “helps you to reflect and analyze where you are and where you’ve been, where you are and where you are going. To realize how does this affect you, how does it affect others, you know, and really, I’d say, just like where you are in life and how it’s shaped you. How you are shaped today.” Thus, it seems that writing prompted understanding and not just demonstration of knowledge. Ivy (section X) expressed this function of writing as well:

I think it’s important to assess and reflect what you’re learning, because then if you read it and like don’t even talk about it then you just pass by and it’s not going to be ingrained in your mind, but when you actually talk about it and write it down, you’ll remember what you wrote and what you actually think and believe, and you can put your thoughts on the paper.

According to interviews, students’ writing allowed them to understand course content and come into new understandings, “see the bigger picture” as Hero put it,
examine other perspectives, understand themselves, develop empathy, and develop an inclination to be a change agent toward a more inclusive community. Reflection seems to have been a key component in writing to learn toward these goals.

Reflection was discussed in the section on instructors, particularly in how it was an intended purpose for student writing and how the use of metacognitive writing aided that purpose. However, it’s worth discussing how students conceptualized the reflection in which they engaged through writing. In interviews, students overwhelmingly described their writing in WeLead as reflective. In the 20 student interviews that were conducted, reflection was referenced over 200 times in some way. The section on Metacognitive Writing noted how WeLead syllabi directly referenced or alluded to reflection as an expectation for students. Thus, it is possible that students interpreted reflection to be a main purpose for their writing because the course syllabi directly referenced or implied reflection as part of course goals (e.g. students were to “identify” their own beliefs, values, practices, and “conflict resolution styles,” among other course goals). Reflection seemed key to such self-awareness, for how could students identify these things without engaging in the introspection that would allow them to recognize values, beliefs, etc. and experiences that have led them to their ways of being in the world? Writing was a means for students to process through their understanding; it was a means to discover what they thought, and thus a writing to learn function is evidenced.

WeLead students wrote weekly on the assigned readings. Instructor X’s syllabus noted that the weekly papers would “cultivate” students’ “analytical reflective prowess.” The language on Instructor Y’s syllabus was essentially the same but omitted the word “reflective” before “analytical prowess.” Despite these subtle differences, students
interpreted the purpose of these papers to be reflection. Hero (section X) for example, stated that the purpose of these assignments was to read the chapter and “reflect it on our daily lives.” Ivy said the papers were “like reflections.” Harambe (section X) described the papers as “eye opening, to see other people’s point of view on what is going on in the country reflecting on what they think […].” MM (section X) also noted that in addition to summarizing the main points of the reading, they were to “reflect on it […] and try and see how it applies to today and like your personal life experiences, your everyday life.” In the first interview, Kat called the weekly papers “journals,” and in the second interview described them as “kind of more reflective of what you’re reading, so instead of research it’s more how you feel, your first reaction, your first impression of the topic.” Linda also described the papers as “more so like a reflection and a summary, but I think like a reflection of the reading, like what did you get from the reading that was pointed out.” Q noted: “I think the purpose is not so much as to, not to introduce us to problems or views of society that I previously mentioned, but also to help us understand our own opinions.” When asked what he would call those papers, Q stated “I guess reflections would be the best thing. Because the majority of it just involves us reflecting upon the topic.” Additionally, MSF characterized the weekly papers in terms of reflection: “One thing I noticed is that it is very voluntary and reflective, by writing all the weekly essays we have to do, it makes us think about what is going on in this world.”

In addition to the weekly papers, the midterm paper was titled “Personal Identity Inventory and Reflection” on both syllabi, and reflection, while also being in the title, was cued by the prompt: “This reflection is designed to help you think about the various aspects that make up who you are and how you identify yourself” (WeLead Syllabi,
Students were further asked to “share” their “understanding of a particular social identity or identities that is/are particularly important to the way” they “think about” themselves.

Even the final paper, which was titled an “analysis,” the students viewed as being reflective in ways. Q noted that the purpose of the analysis paper was “mainly just reflection of material that we learned in class and how we can actually apply it in the real world.” MM’s interpretation was similar: “I think the purpose of the assignment, specifically for the option I chose, was to kind of like reflect on everything you learned over a semester in this course and kind of apply it to a real-world thing or like analyze it.” Linda echoed this sentiment: “I think it could be considered a reflection; it was a reflection of our thoughts from the real world. You had to take time to look at society and what is around you and write about what you see.”

The other students who were interviewed did not use the term reflection when referring to the analysis paper, but the activity of reflection is embedded in the process of analysis and vice versa. The Allyn & Bacon Guide to Writing (2009), for example, defines reflective writing as “writing that describes, explains, interprets, and evaluates any past performance, action, belief, feeling or experience” and further notes that “To reflect is to turn or look back, to reconsider something thought or done in the past from the perspective of the present” (p. 679). A webpage on writing in the discipline of medicine from Monash University notes:

Reflective writing is writing which involves ‘… consideration of the larger context, the meaning, and the implications of an experience or action’ (Branch & Paranjape, 2002, p. 1185). In medical and health science courses you are required to produce reflective writing in order to learn from educational and practical experiences, and to develop the habit of critical reflection as a future health professional (Monash University, 2017).
The University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia defines reflection as “a form of personal response to experiences, situations, events or new information” and “a ‘processing’ phase where thinking and learning take place” and further notes that reflective writing entails a person responding to “experiences, opinions, events and new information” as well as a means to “gain self-knowledge,” “achieve clarity and better understanding” of what one is learning, “a way of making meaning” of what is being studied, and “a chance to develop and reinforce writing skills.” The site further notes that reflective writing is not just conveying/summarizing information or description or “simple problem-solving.” Nor is it a “standard university essay” (Current Students, UNSW Sydney, 2017).

In line with these definitions of reflective writing, students in WeLead saw benefits in their writing in terms of being able to think about and learn course content. When asked how the writing in WeLead helped or hindered her learning process, Ivy responded, “remember like the other interviews that I’ve had with you I just said that these were like reflection papers to help you figure out exactly like how you’ve seen these different isms again, how they outline your life and how you can stop them from happening.” In this statement, Ivy characterized the course writing overall to be reflective and to prompt understanding. In her second interview, she also noted reflection to be useful toward being a change agent: “it was a reflection for us, to realize that we are the people who do need to make the changes like in the society, and like that we can also see them in our lives. […] Yeah, I think it’s to get you to act.” Kat also saw the purpose of reflection to move students toward change and action:

I think writing the reflections forces us to have our own opinion vs. if we just read an article and not have to have any substantial conversation about it. We wouldn’t
interpret it, we wouldn’t think about it in our head, in our own heads, we wouldn’t disagree and agree with ourselves in our own heads. We wouldn’t ever change our opinions or evolve from there because we would never be forced to explain ourselves and defend our own opinion like we do in the response paper.

She additionally noted, “I always, in my writing, I always end up trying to provide some sort of solution.”

Students appreciated the opportunity to think about how to create social change. When asked what he thought was the purpose of the analysis paper, Q responded “ultimately I think the point of the paper is to help us better understand what we learned in class and apply it.” He further remarked “very seldom do you actually, are given a paper, not express your opinions but express a solution in terms —express a solution to a problem that you encounter.” That Q viewed solution posing as an opportunity suggests that he cared about social change. MSF also expressed the desire to create social change in discussing her Identity Inventory paper: “I talked about myself and things I hope to change when I go back home. And then I realized that I did not know how to change it, it is not that easy. I want to bring back what is good to my country, to cultivate it. I want to change an inadequate system.”

To be sure, WeLead course goals did include developing an impetus toward praxis among students: “The WeLead Living Learning Community and associated academic course requirement focuses on building and improving awareness and skills about social inequities with the belief that students will use their skills and awareness to create social change and a more equitable society,” [emphasis added] (WeLead Syllabi, 2016). Thus, it should not be surprising that students internalized this goal in some way. Students also self-selected into participating in WeLead, so it is likely that some came into this activity system with a desire to be change agents. What is interesting is that, at
least among the students interviewed, some saw writing as a means toward developing as a change agent (or at least an inclination toward making change). If developing an inclination to make change is indeed learning in this particular activity system, writing (particularly reflective writing) seemed to function toward that goal. This finding is consistent with the research of Campbell Peck et al. (2008), which found writing at a community literacy center to be a means of working toward social change. It is also consistent with research on writing in service learning classes framed in a writing about the community approach (Deans, 2000). Writing about the community allowed for students to integrate self-knowledge with course readings and to make sense of social justice issues (Borron, Loizzo, & Gee, 2015; Deans, 2000; Hullender et al., 2015; Leon & Sura, 2013; Richards, 2013; Zimmerelli, 2015).

**Writing to Communicate.** By its very nature, writing always performs a communicative function. All genres of writing have a particular audience toward which a text is written with the implication that some other is going to read the text. Personal journaling, whose purpose could be considered self-reflection with the audience as the self might be an exception, but many journals have later been published for audiences outside the author. A writing to learn function implies a self-audience as well, and several students in WeLead alluded to a self-audience when they described how writing helped them to better understand their own thoughts and opinions. Linda, for example, when discussing writing in general noted that writing “allows me to put my own words on paper and then to see it and then say it back to myself, it’s like man, you said that?! Like I don’t know, *it’s more like a reflection for me when I write*” [emphasis added]. This statement suggests that Linda viewed herself as an audience and also demonstrates that...
she wrote to better understand what she knew. This writing to learn/understand, however, also is a demonstration of what she knows. When students write to demonstrate learning, they are communicating what they have learned.

However, students in WeLead had a slightly different take on writing to communicate. In addition to the communicative functions embedded in writing to demonstrate learning and writing to learn, they viewed their writing as a conversation or kind of discussion with peers. This finding indicates that audience conceptions went beyond merely their instructors, even if they inherently understood the instructor to be the primary audience (as was discussed previously). For example, Harambe (section X) described weekly response papers as “eye-opening, to see other people’s point of view, on what is going on in the country, reflecting on what they think, aspects of their own lives, and to see how you can connect with that person and what they are saying [emphasis added].” When asked what the purpose of those response papers were, he responded, “To connect and to give us an open mind, have us discuss the issues, go off other people’s ideas and have a discussion of what the author is writing about and connect it to the real world [emphasis added].” His use of the term “discussion” shows that he felt his writing was a conversation about the content in some way, for he had to engage with others’ perspectives.

The verbs students used to describe their writing also provides evidence that they saw their texts as discussions of sorts. The verb “talk” was synonymous with writing in many students’ interviews, indicating this particular communicative function. Q (section Y) referred to his writing as talking: “the part where I’m talking about the topic, that’s structured because I need to address the topic,” as did MSF (section Y) who described the
response papers as “very open ended; we can bring any issues that we want to talk about in this world.” Ivy (section X), Linda (section Y), and Kat (section Y) also used the verb “talk” to describe what they were doing in their papers. When asked if the Personal Identity Inventory and Reflection was easy or difficult to write, MM (section X) responded:

I’d say it was a bit of a challenge, you know having to talk. It was very personal, you know, talking about what makes you up. And, talking about how this identity has helped you, but also how like this identity that is, that let you, that you are, like who you are, or how this identity of yourself is oppressed and how it’s viewed negatively and there’s nothing you can do about it, like it’s who you are, like it was kind of hard, you know like writing that personal thing, like letting it out, like being very open and personal about it, that was kind of a challenge [emphasis added].

Noteworthy is the first sentence of this utterance, “you know having to talk,” as though the entire essay was a conversation. Conversation is defined as an “informal exchange of thoughts” and the word’s origin carries with it the notion of associating to and with others (the Latin term conversārī means to associate with). In conversations, interlocutors express thoughts to each other, and thus, writing as discussion/conversation can be thought of as expression as MM indicated with his sentiment that he was “letting it out.” MM also indicated that he conceptualized writing as a discussion in his description of his writing style: “I kind of write it as how I would say it if we had a discussion pretty much.” Other students took this approach as well, writing as though they were having a discussion. For example, Q noted that he wrote his papers “as if I were actually saying those things,” and he, too, saw an expressive function of his Inventory paper: “I expressed the core fundamentals of what makes my identity.”

As part of the requirements for the weekly response papers, students were required to include two or three discussion questions, which may have influenced their
conceptualizing their texts as discussions. Additionally, students described the course on the whole as being discussion-based. They internalized that they would discuss issues in class (and class sessions did consist mainly of discussion), and this, too, may have impacted their conceptualizing a discursive function for their writing. When questioned if the things they wrote about ever made it into discussion in or out of class, some students noted that this was indeed the case. Both Kat and Linda said that they talked about issues they wrote about outside of class, for example. Ivy, too, who participated in a co-curricular community service program, actually brought to class an activity she did in this program, indicating that there was cross-discussion of course content in contexts outside the WeLead course.

That the students viewed their writing as less formal than writing in other courses may also have contributed to their conceptualizing their writing as a discussion. When asked what sort of writing instruction students got toward their assignments MM responded “I don’t really worry about that just because it’s like the writing more of like right or wrong. It’s more of just like, it’s your opinion or your reflection or what do you think? So there’s really no like right or wrong answer.” MSF also noted that she wrote about “things that I care about, not the things that always relate to the readings” demonstrating the informality the students imbued to their writing. While students were supposed to connect to the readings, she felt she could vary from that course, which is much like how a natural conversation would ensue.

Additionally, students engaged in many in-class writing activities in which they were given some sort of prompt or worksheet they had to respond to in writing. In both sections, after these activities were completed, students would discuss responses in small
groups. Often, too, they would complete these activities in small groups, co-composing responses. Large group discussion would ensue after the small group discussion or writing. This may also have contributed to why students saw their writing as a form of discussion; in-class writing was always followed by discussion. Students, in turn, saw benefit in these in-class writing activities because of the discussion they provoked. Hero (section X) noted that one activity, for example, “helps you communicate better with your partner, too, […] and get to know that person.” Ivy appreciated these activities because it gave students “a chance to engage with each other and see what we’re all thinking.” MM commented on the round robin class writing activity section X had done, noting that it “led to our discussion today and how we shared.” Linda expressed that one in-class writing activity helped her come to better understand her peers: “one thing I realized between me and my partner, we had a lot of the same things checked as far as dealing with like our ethnicity or how we fit into society’s norm. We definitely had a good conversation about how that went.”

Through this particular communicative function of writing, WeLead writing was somewhat different from writing in traditional academic disciplines, where what students write about may not make it into class discussions outside of writing instruction purposes. In my own experience of teaching first-year composition, for example, the content of students’ papers was rarely ever discussed in class outside of providing examples of how a text worked to construct its argument. I cannot speak for what happens in all courses at this university with regard to discussion of the content of students’ papers, but I can say that when WeLead students talked about their writing for other courses in interviews, they never mentioned having a discussion in those classes of the content about which
they wrote. Furthermore, it seemed that WeLead students conceptualized their WeLead writing in ways that were nuanced from the writing they did in other courses, even if they were able to point out similarities. The discursive function of WeLead writing was one of the main differences students seemed to see. The reflective and informal nature of the writing was the other.

To be sure, students saw similarities among WeLead writing to writing they did in other courses. Many similarities had to do with mechanics and organization of papers (i.e. rhetorical knowledge). Sometimes they pointed to similarities in content, such as Q noting his midterm Identity paper to be like a speech he gave at a retreat or others comparing this paper to a college application essay. As was noted in the section on “Authentic Writing,” students also saw similarities to writing they did in their English courses. More discussion on similarities occurs in a later section on the resources students drew upon for WeLead writing. Resources factor into what students learned from their WeLead writing (i.e. what the “objects” and “outcomes” were in this activity system). Before this can be discussed, however, it’s important to understand how writing functioned for WeLead instructors as well.

**How Writing Functioned for Instructors**

The three functions of writing discussed in the previous section were also evidenced in instructors’ interviews (as well as by course documents). Instructors used writing to have students demonstrate learning, to promote learning, and to communicate, and they also used writing to inform their teaching. Only this last function is markedly different and will be discussed in greater length.
Writing to Demonstrate Learning and Promote Learning. These two functions of writing were most common for instructors. Writing to demonstrate learning was referenced/alluded to 26 times in instructors’ interviews, and writing to learn 25 times. Instructor X made fewer comments referencing using writing in the demonstrative fashion (seven times as opposed to Instructor Y who referenced it 19 times). In terms of using writing to promote learning, instructors were pretty equal. (Instructor Y made 11 references to using writing in this way, and Instructor Y 14 times). The section on instructors’ expectations and intended purposes for writing covers much of the findings on how instructors intended for writing to function as a means for students to demonstrate their learning. This section and the section on writing pedagogies also covers how instructors used writing to promote learning. A brief review and a few examples, however, are warranted.

Writing to Demonstrate Learning. It was very clear that writing functioned as a means for instructors to see what students were learning. This was most evident in how instructors discussed the weekly response papers. One of the requirements for these papers was for students to summarize main points of the reading. Instructor X said there were “key points” he looked for in these papers, one of which was a “summary of the reading” and he looked for “thorough summary that’s well balanced in coverage of what was talked about.” He also said he “look[ed] to see that they’re applying the deeper principles that are involved in the reading,” and that students were “meeting the objectives of the assignment or not.” Explaining what the article is about demonstrates a goal of seeing if students understood the reading. Meeting the objectives of the assignment also evidences a demonstrative function of writing of sorts as well. Students’
papers received fewer points if the requirements were not met fully, and this speaks to the
division of labor within the activity system (i.e. are students doing what they are
supposed to, and if they are this demonstrates they are learning what the instructor
intends). This division of labor was also evidenced by Instructor Y, who noted that the
purpose of the response papers was partially “to figure out ‘are you reading what I
assigned?’” However, the other purpose she expressed was to see “how are you actually
interpreting what you read?” These expressed purposes demonstrate that student writing
was meant to show if content was understood or not. That Instructor Y also identified
herself as the audience for students’ texts evidences that the purpose of writing was to
demonstrate learning. While this demonstrative function was evident, instructors also
talked about WeLead writing in ways that showed it was used as a learning tool as well.

*Using Writing to Promote Learning.* When instructors discussed their
expectations of and purposes for assigning writing, they framed these in terms of helping
students to reflect on readings and course content. This suggests a writing to learn
function. Through the act of “processing” and “questioning” texts (as Instructor X
characterized the purpose of writing) and “interpreting” the text (as Instructor Y framed
it), students were engaging in learning by deepening their understanding of course
content. The section on how writing functioned for students demonstrates that students
saw writing in this way, too. Instructor X said writing was intended to get students “to
think about the issues” and “understand the complexity of the issue.” Instructor Y noted
how writing “forced” students “to actually do something.” Thus, writing was active and
not passive. It was intentionally used as a tool toward the course goals (i.e. the object of
the activity system).
This intention was also evidenced by the pedagogies instructors employed. They assigned a lot of writing, and the intensity of writing increased throughout the semester. Scaffolding was also employed, and this demonstrates an intention to bring students deeper and deeper into the content of the course. This was especially prevalent in how much scaffolded preparation students received toward writing their midterm papers. The cognitive processes in which students engaged in each writing assignment also show an intention to get students to think at higher levels by the end of the course. The analysis paper, for example, required not only demonstration of understanding, but also analysis, application, evaluation, and creation. Additionally, so much of the writing students did (both the assigned papers and the in-class writing activities) was metacognitive in nature. Metacognitive writing by its definition is a writing to learn endeavor in that students must engage in thinking about their own thinking; it’s an active learning process.

To be sure, there was overlap in the demonstrative and writing to learn functions of writing. For example, students were expected to do a lot of exemplifying in their writing (i.e. finding examples of course content in the real world or their own lives). This act is demonstrative in nature. By providing an example, students demonstrated that they understood course content. However, they had to assess their own experiences and the world at large to find these examples, and this was an act of learning. They had to actively think about what examples would fit, which examples would best demonstrate their understanding of the content. This act of choosing is active and requires analysis, evaluation, and application. It’s not as though examples were readily available to students and they could just spit them out. Students took time and care, at least in their perspectives, in crafting their papers. Many said it took them anywhere from an hour to a
day to write a response paper. Time spent composing midterm and final papers ranged from a few hours to a few days. And while instructors talked about writing in terms of students demonstrating understanding, they simultaneously talked about writing in terms of it helping students to engage more deeply with the course content. Instructors truly intended writing to be a tool for learning. This is further evidenced by how they assigned grades (not deducting a lot of points when students’ writing failed to meet requirements and expectations). If instructors were more concerned about students demonstrating learning as opposed to learning itself, they likely would have been stricter in their evaluation of papers. Evidence points to the writing to learn function as being most important in this context. There were a couple other nuanced functions it fulfilled, however. It performed a communicative function and a means to prepare future instruction.

Writing to Communicate and Using Writing to Inform Future Instruction.

Student interview data revealed that writing performed a discursive communicative function. Instructor interviews pointed to this as well, though not to the degree that students talked about writing in this fashion. In discussion of the reflection/response papers, Instructor X, for example, expressed that he didn’t “worry about grammar at all, […] I’d rather have them focus on just getting their thoughts out.” This letting out of thoughts paralleled how MM (section X) described the writing of his midterm paper: “it was kind of hard, you know, like writing that personal thing, like letting it out, like being very open and personal about it.” Aside from this one example of writing performing a communicative function, no other utterances from Instructor X clearly evidenced this function.
Instructor Y, on the other hand, made more references to writing performing a communicative function. When asked what she hoped students gained from writing in WeLead she expressed: “I hope they get a sense of kind of their own voice and their own perspective and how to share that.” The reference to voice she makes is akin to the expressive function of writing that Emig’s (1977) research advocated, which posited that students benefit from writing as a means of self-expression. Instructor Y, while also noting that she was the audience for student papers, noted that she hoped students would come to see that writing was a “useful tool” through which students could “share [their] perspectives and opinions,” and that they were “learning appropriate ways to do that.” She additionally noted that she hoped to find ways students could “practice” writing “not necessarily writing for me,” but “writing for and with each other.” These statements imply that she saw a function for writing outside of students demonstrating learning and using writing to learn, though learning is implied also in her hopes that students would gain a sense of their own voice (i.e. self-understanding).

Both WeLead instructors also used student writing to inform their future teaching though in slightly different ways. As was noted in the section on metacognitive writing, Instructor X conducted a mid-term evaluation with students in which they responded to questions about the course content and activities. On this evaluation, a question asked “How can I help you learn better?” Presumably, the instructor intended for responses to inform his teaching moving forward. It’s hard to determine what if anything changed as a result of the whatever students wrote in response to that question. The structure of class sessions did not change noticeably after this evaluation was conducted. They followed the same familiar pattern: checking in with students, discussing reading, providing other
media that discussed the content in some way or in-class writing activity, and more discussion. However, it’s possible the instructor might have changed something. Feedback on papers didn’t change much after this either. It actually became sparser, so there’s no evidence in the data of noticeable change made, but it can still be said that the purpose of this student writing was to inform teaching.

In her interview, Instructor Y specifically mentioned use of student writing to inform her teaching. In discussing how she graded students’ papers she noted that she went through papers twice, once “to get more of the technical stuff” and the second time to identify “spaces where I see that they're having some of those gaps maybe.” She went on to say:

and then I have somewhere, like a big Google doc that someone shared with me of like social justice resources […] I can pull from those. […] So […] if I have students that seem to be missing, you know, in this area or struggling here, here are some good resources I can refer them to and then I go like chuck those in on their papers. Like read this for more information.

Additionally, she expressed that she made notes for herself after reading students’ papers for what she “want[ed] to do in the coming semester. Like these are things to reinforce, to go over with the group because there seems to be group trouble.” She also referred to using students’ writing to inform her teaching when she was asked about what successful papers looked like. In talking about what sort of understanding she looked for she noted:

it's like OK, if you don't even understand in the past, if you're just getting a little bit of it, even if it's just you have narrowed it down to it's about holiday cups24, I will take that small piece for right now and then try to keep up with it throughout the semester to push them further so that by the end of the year I hope that there is a stronger understanding [emphasis added].

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24 This reference was in regard to the class on religious oppression and privilege in which section Y discussed Starbucks having Christmas-themed cups. The cup example was offered as an example of Christianity being a privileged religion, and Christmas being part of culture despite the fact that not everyone is Christian.
Students’ demonstration of understanding in their papers informed how much further Instructor X felt she needed to “push” students so that they got to deeper understanding by the end of the year. While it’s possible Instructor X may have inherently done something similar, Instructor Y referenced using student writing as a way to inform her practice a total of four times in her interview. This demonstrates a conscious intention on her part to use student writing in this way.

Overall, thus, students and instructors saw similar functions for writing in WeLead. Writing, indeed, functioned as a tool toward course goals (i.e. the object of this activity system). Instructors intended writing to achieve course goals, and students saw it functioning toward those as well. Understanding how effectively it functioned toward learning (i.e. what the outcome of this activity system was) can be unpacked by looking at the actual writing students did. This is discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5
HOW WRITING FUNCTIONS AS A TOOL TOWARD ACTIVITY SYSTEM OBJECTS AND OUTCOMES: WHAT ARE STUDENTS LEARNING FROM THEIR WRITING IN WELEAD?

Overview

Ultimately, this research sought to understand what the outcome of this activity system was, that is, what was it that students were actually learning through their writing. Anderson and Krathwohl’s *Revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Education Objectives* (2001) was employed to understand the outcome of this activity system. In *Bloom’s Taxonomy: A Forty-Year Retrospective* (1994), Bloom describes his theory as one that enables educators to “evaluate the learning of students systematically” (p. 1). Anderson and Sosniak (1994) note that the Taxonomy has been helpful to researchers “for viewing the educational process and analyzing its workings” (p. 10). Bloom’s Taxonomy proved useful in explaining the outcome of the WeLead activity system because it operationalized the kinds of learning that transpired among students in WeLead in terms of the knowledge domains learning fell into (factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive knowledge) as well as the cognitive processes students engaged in through their writing (remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating). What follows are findings on how the objects of this activity system (i.e. the functions of writing toward course goals) impacted the outcome. Analysis is drawn from student writing in order to understand what kind of learning the tool of writing helped to promote.
Outcomes: What Are Students Learning from Writing in WeLead?

The last chapter discussed how writing functioned for students and instructors in WeLead. Students did appear to be learning from their writing. Students shared that their writing was useful toward understanding themselves, their values and opinions, course content, and others’ perspectives (through both the writing to learn function and the writing to communicate function). Even writing to demonstrate knowledge helped students become aware of their own learning/understanding. Instructors also expressed these functions for student writing even if they felt at times that the students were not demonstrating the depth of understanding they may have hoped for. Furthermore, instructors used student writing to inform their own practice. This chapter will discuss findings on what students learned from their writing in this activity system (i.e. the outcome of this activity system). First, I review Bloom’s Taxonomy and situate WeLead course goals\textsuperscript{25} within the taxonomy’s knowledge domains. Then I discuss the cognitive processes as outlined by Anderson and Krathwohl and provide examples of these processes in students writing. Findings on students’ writing are also discussed in terms of the Activity Theory framework, that is, what other factors within the activity system influenced learning, including students’ backgrounds, experiences, and the resources (another tool) upon which they drew to inform their WeLead writing. Finally, I return to the knowledge domains and discuss where and how these were demonstrated in students’ writing.

\textsuperscript{25} The syllabi outlined “Program and Course Objectives.” I use the term goals in reference to these so as not to confuse the terminology of Activity Theory “outcomes” with course “outcomes,” which would be considered “objects” in an Activity Theory framework.
Course Goals as Objects of the WeLead Activity System

As noted in Chapter Two, Anderson and Krathwohl’s Revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Education Objectives (2001) outlines four types of knowledge: (1) factual, (2) conceptual, (3) procedural, and (4) metacognitive. Students in WeLead appear to have demonstrated most of these types of knowledge in their writing; however, because WeLead was not an academic discipline in the traditional sense, this framework requires a broader interpretation and some flexibility. For example, in terms of procedural knowledge, students did not learn exactly how to solve problems related to privilege and oppression. What students seemed to have developed is a desire to solve problems, which is not quite the same as a method or algorithm to follow for problem solving.

WeLead course syllabi identified a number of goals for the class. These goals fell into three categories: self-awareness, leadership, and social justice. Below these goals are framed within the knowledge domains outlined in Anderson and Krathwohl’s (2001) framework to better understand the objects of this activity system and further assist in understanding what the activity system outcomes were (i.e. were course goals achieved?).

Category 1: Self-awareness. An important goal of WeLead was developing students’ self-awareness. The intention was that if students understood their own belief systems and values, they could better understand how to respond to issues of privilege and oppression. Both instructors indicated in interviews that the purpose of the course was to help students become aware of issues of diversity and inclusion and develop students’ as leaders who take action in creating inclusivity. In order to do so, instructors believed students must first be aware of systems of privilege and oppression and where they fell in those systems. Self-awareness outcomes listed on the syllabi were as follows:
• Identify personal and social values, practices, and beliefs

• Become familiar with how our personal and social identities interact and inform our perspective, assumptions, and relationships (WeLead Syllabi, 2016).

These goals fall into the metacognitive knowledge domain, which Anderson and Krathwohl describe as “knowledge of cognition and about oneself in relation to various subject matters, either individually or collectively” (p. 44). This definition is manifest in the goals above. These goals also fall into the realm of conceptual knowledge, which includes knowledge of “classifications and categories;” “principles and generalizations;” and “theories, models, and structures” (p. 46), for concepts in the course included knowledge of different categories of social identities, knowledge of how identities are formed, knowledge of how values/beliefs become socialized, and knowledge of social practices.

**Category 2: Leadership.** In his interview, Instructor X noted taking action “to promote justice in the world” as the purpose for the course. Instructor Y noted a course purpose to be developing leaders who lead using an “inclusive lens.” Leadership outcomes on the syllabi were as follows:

• Identify personal skills and abilities that may contribute to the student’s growth and development as a leader

• Identify factors that can inhibit or promote effective leadership, communication and problem-solving

• Identify obstacles that prevent the formation of inclusive environments, as well as principles and strategies of developing inclusive communities

• Become familiar with your role and responsibility in creating an inclusive community (WeLead Syllabi, 2016).

These goals could be categorized somewhat as procedural knowledge (i.e. how to…), but they fall more neatly into the metacognitive and conceptual knowledge
domains. My observation of class sessions provided no firm data on students being given any explicit methods of how to achieve the objectives above. Class discussions tended to center on the issues, and students grappled with the issues through viewing media that discussed issues as well as through in-class assignments that asked them to provide examples of particular content from their own experiences and observations. There were activities that were procedural-like. For example, as discussed in the last chapter, at midterm students were asked to complete a social identity wheel in which they had to identify the multiple identities they embodied. Then they decided which identities were targeted and which were privileged and wrote about those most salient in their midterm essay. However, there was no method taught in terms of how to identify their identities, nor was there an algorithm that could assist students in deciding how their identities were privileged or targeted. Instead students relied on their knowledge and understanding of the concepts in order to interpret how their identities fit into these categories. In fact, some students interpreted being targeted in certain identities very differently than the instructors likely intended. For example, MM wrote about being a speaker of Spanish as being a targeted identity, yet his native language was English, so he certainly was not targeted in the same way native Spanish speakers are, people who come into a country that doesn’t fully embrace their native language, who in turn have to learn how to speak English in order to function fully in society.

Another example of procedural-like knowledge came in the form of a “Cycle of Socialization” model with which the students were presented in the fifth week of the semester. The model showed how beliefs and values become socialized, and understanding this may have helped students “identify obstacles that prevent the
formation of inclusive environments,” for example, but the model itself was not a procedure for doing so. Instead, these Leadership goals were really focused on self-understanding (e.g. “Identify personal skills and abilities […]” “Become familiar with your role and responsibility […]”) and on concepts that were part of course content (e.g. “factors that can inhibit or promote effective leadership […]”, “obstacles that prevent the formation of inclusive environments […]”).

**Category 3: Social Justice.** Both instructors referenced social justice in their interviews as being both a goal and topic of the course. Social justice in this context meant intervening in systems of oppression. The course content was described by instructors as well as by students as being about “isms,” and the weekly readings and discussions covered issues such as racism, sexism, religious oppression, ableism, ageism, and adulthood. Course outcomes in this category were as follows:

- Gain an increased knowledge about terms and issues relating to social justice
- Increase awareness about stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, the dynamics of power and privilege, and the interlocking system of oppression (WeLead Syllabi, 2016).

These goals also fall neatly into the conceptual knowledge domain. They are specifically aimed at gaining knowledge of course concepts.

Understanding these goals in terms of knowledge domains helps to paint a picture of the learning intended in WeLead. However, understanding this learning more fully also requires insight into the types of cognitive processes in which students engaged, for understanding the cognitive processes points to how students developed knowledge within each of the domains.
Cognitive Processes\textsuperscript{26} Employed in Student Writing

Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) outline six cognitive processes that promote the retention and transfer of knowledge: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Understanding was the process most commonly demonstrated by WeLead students’ writing. Remembering is a precursor to understanding; one must remember course content before understanding it. Therefore, remembering was taken as a given when coding for “understanding,” though there were certainly instances where students’ writing did not go beyond recounting what an assigned text said, but these instances were far and few between. In most instances, students were able to demonstrate the different types of understanding that Anderson and Krathwohl’s framework delineates. Students paraphrased authors’ words (i.e. interpreting), gave examples of content from their own experience and knowledge of the world (i.e. exemplifying), recognized patterns and/or categories in examples (i.e. classifying), summarized main points of a text (i.e. summarizing), compared text content to other assigned readings or content in courses outside of WeLead (i.e. comparing), and attempted to show cause and effect relationships from their perspectives about the problems and issues each assigned text discussed (i.e. explaining).

Analyzing, evaluating, and creating were also demonstrated in students’ writing with evaluating being the second most common cognitive process and analyzing and creating being the third and fourth. Analysis was largely limited to attributing (determining authors’ points of view and/or biases) in the weekly response papers, but there was some evidence of differentiating and organizing in the students’ analysis.

\textsuperscript{26} See Chapter 2 for definitions of each cognitive process.
papers. Evaluating revolved largely around critiquing a text’s ideas (agreeing or disagreeing with an authors’ text/claim and discussing their reasoning for this based on their own experiences/observations of the world). At times, students also critiqued particular social situations that they used to illustrate an example of a particular concept. It is also noteworthy that Anderson and Krathwohl’s framework suggests that analyzing is a precursor to evaluating. However, in WeLead, students rarely showed evidence of analysis in their weekly papers but did engage in evaluation. If analysis is, indeed, a precursor to evaluation, it’s reasonable to posit that students engaged in analysis but chose not to include it explicitly in their weekly papers. Perhaps it was the limited space and page-count expectations that influenced what students included. Perhaps it was the prompt itself, triggering prior genre knowledge of what to include in their written texts.

The analysis papers, which students wrote at the end of the semester, demonstrated far more instances of higher order cognitive processes. Understanding showed up in nearly every paragraph of students’ analysis papers. Analysis papers also demonstrated more instances of analysis, evaluating, and creating than the weekly or midterm papers. The higher numbers of cognitive processes in analysis papers could be due to the prompt, which listed analysis of, reflection on, and application of course content as well as ability to express one’s thoughts and course concepts as part of the criteria for grading. It may be reasonable to assume that the prompt being titled an analysis paper triggered prior genre knowledge among students, which in turn activated their understandings of what it meant to analyze.

There were not vast differences in the distribution of the cognitive processes demonstrated in papers across the two course sections. Table 5.1 shows the distributions
of cognitive processes found in students’ texts. Section X did exhibit slightly more instances of higher order cognitive processes in their analysis papers than Section Y. As will be discussed in proceeding sections, this difference could be attributed to slight variation in paper prompts among sections as there were not significant differences in pedagogical practices between instructors. What follows are examples and discussion of the cognitive processes most frequently exhibited in students’ papers: understanding (exemplifying and explaining), evaluating, analyzing, and creating.

Table 5.1

*Distributions of Cognitive Processes in Student Writing Across Sections*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Papers Analyzed</th>
<th>Remember</th>
<th>Understand</th>
<th>Apply</th>
<th>Analyze</th>
<th>Evaluate</th>
<th>Create</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weekly response papers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td>192</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section X</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section Y</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal identity inventory</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section X</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section Y</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analysis paper</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section X</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section Y</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Understanding.** By far, understanding was the most common cognitive process demonstrated in students’ writing. Among the 225 papers analyzed, there were a total of 769 instances of students demonstrating understanding. There was also a difference between sections in the number of instances of understanding (442 in section X and 327
in section Y). While there were more papers from section X analyzed (123 from section X vs. 102 from section Y), this finding was still surprising for a few reasons.

First, interview data revealed that students spent about the same time on average on their papers: about 60(X)–90(Y) minutes on weekly papers, 110(Y)–150(X) minutes on the midterm, and 300(X)–320(Y) minutes on the final paper. Second, there were not meaningful differences in instructors’ pedagogical practices nor in the kind or amount of feedback given on papers. Third, writing prompts were fairly similar as well, but perhaps the subtle differences in prompts cued different genre knowledge among students, which resulted in more instances of understanding in section X. As noted in the previous chapter, the prompts for the weekly papers differed in what these papers were titled (Instructor X’s prompt called these papers “reflections” while Instructor Y’s called them “responses”). Perhaps the word reflection carried with it an implicit understanding of having to do deeper thinking, for one of the definitions of the term reflection is “consideration of some subject matter, idea, or purpose” whereas the definition of response is “something constituting a reply or reaction” (Merriam-Webster, 2017). “Consideration” implies a deeper thought process. A “reply,” on the other hand, could come without much thought, such as an immediate reaction to something.

The only other notable difference among sections (at least among the students interviewed) was that section X had more students who had had some sort of social justice themed class in high school (three out of four students interviewed in section X vs. one of four in section Y). It is possible that the students who had taken such classes were used to writing about social issues and, thus, could more fluidly activate the cognitive process of understanding with regard to that content. However, on the analysis paper, the
number of instances of understanding exhibited by Kat (section Y), who had taken a social justice class, were less than her section X peers who had taken such classes. Kat’s paper had nine instances of understanding; Ivy had 19 and MM had 18 (Hero, the other section X student who had taken a social justice class, did not complete his analysis paper). To be sure, Kat’s analysis paper did exhibit more instances of understanding than the other three section Y students who were interviewed (they had not taken a social justice class in high school), but there were two other papers from section X that had higher numbers of instances of understanding. Those two students were not interviewed, however. Thus, it’s hard to know what may have contributed to the differences among sections. Looking at the different kinds of understanding students exhibited in their papers did not reveal any reasons for differences among sections as well, but how students employed these different forms of understanding is interesting nonetheless and speaks to how writing in WeLead was situated within that particular activity system.

There are a number of forms of understanding that Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) delineate, each demonstrating a different level of understanding: (1) interpreting, (2) exemplifying, (3) classifying, (4) summarizing, (5) inferring, (6) comparing, and (7) explaining. (See Chapter Two for definitions of these forms.) While students’ writing showed evidence of all forms, I limit my discussion to the two most common, exemplifying and explaining, because these forms best demonstrate the kind of understanding students’ papers exhibited and were expectations embedded in paper prompts. In looking for specific examples of these forms of understanding, I focused on students’ analysis papers, for these papers required the most from students in terms of the types of thinking instructors expected. The analysis paper was where students were to tie
everything together, draw upon what they had learned throughout the course of the semester, use both course readings and outside sources, choose a “topic related to stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, oppression, power and privilege” (WeLead Syllabi, 2016), and propose a solution to the issue(s)/problem(s) they identified in their papers. To be sure, the analysis papers did demonstrate other cognitive processes beyond understanding, but understanding is a precursor to higher order cognitive processes, for one must first understand an issue before one can engage in analyzing it, evaluating it, or creating a solution to it.

Exemplifying. The most common form of understanding was exemplifying. This was not surprising given that students were asked in each type of paper to provide examples of course concepts/content in various ways. In students’ analysis papers, exemplifying came in the form of providing examples from media or the university that demonstrated some form of oppression as well as providing evidence from other texts (e.g. course readings and outside articles) that supported students’ claims or provided further illustration of a concept. Among the 17 papers analyzed, there were 131 instances of exemplifying. There were more instances of exemplifying in section X analysis papers than there were in section Y papers (97 vs. 34). One could posit that section X students were stronger in this cognitive process than section Y students, but numbers don’t tell the whole story. In general, students in section X provided multiple examples of concepts

27 Applying, one was the cognitive processes outlined by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), is not included in this list, for it was not exhibited in students’ writing except for a couple of instances. Applying has to do with “using procedures to perform exercises or solve problems” (p. 77), and thus is indicative of the procedural knowledge domain. Since procedural knowledge was not a domain to which the content of WeLead lent itself, it’s not surprising that it did not manifest in student writing. WeLead did not instruct students, per se, in how to solve social issues. Instead it aimed to engender a desire to solve problems. When application was identified in student writing, it was within the realm of applying course reading toward a proposed solution to a particular issue, akin to applying theory to practice. This is discussed in more detail in the section on knowledge domains.
their papers discussed, while section Y students were more apt to choose one or two main examples of a concept and develop their analyses around those examples.

For example, MM (section X) had 16 instances of exemplifying in his paper whereas MSF (section Y) had eight. MM chose to write on four different types of oppression demonstrated in the show South Park. MM’s thesis was as follows: “The main forms of oppression/discrimination that the show focuses on is Classism, Racism, Faithism and Ableism, and are expressed in different forms, experienced by different characters and lead to a call to action for change.” He then developed each of these four examples of oppression with further examples, giving three examples from the show of each of the “isms” he outlined in his introduction. He also added quotes from course readings or outside sources that supported his discussion of each of these isms. The following excerpt from his paper demonstrates MM’s organizational/rhetorical logic:

Transitioning onto the topic of Classism, which is the oppression of people based on socio-economic background or access/lack of access to resources like money, is seen in the character Kenny. Kenny is one of the main characters and comes from a very poverty-stricken family and is often bullied because of his financial status. The rest of the community is predominantly middle-class families.

Additionally, looking at the content from the class readings on solving issues of Classism, “The goal is to make ourselves more trustworthy and to alienate working-class people less so that we can work together for economic justice and other common goals” (Readings for Diversity and Social Justice 216). The show does the exact opposite of this and tries to alienate Kenny and his family due to his financial status. […]

Another example of Classism at work in one episode, can be seen by Cartman’s actions to become a Nascar driver. […]

Because MM chose to include three examples of each ism, his paper exhibited a higher number of instances of exemplifying. MSF, however, chose a different strategy to develop her paper’s thesis. She, too, chose to write about a television show, How to Get Away with Murder, but instead of organizing her paper around different isms as MM had,
she chose to analyze characters in the show and point out how other characters’ opinions of those characters, as well as the audience members’ inherent biases, worked to create the perpetuation of stereotypes within the show, and also how the show did this purposefully to “condemn the social injustices in the world” as MSF put it in her opening paragraph. This thesis is more complex than MM’s thesis, which was essentially how South Park exhibited different forms of oppression, the act of which calls for social change. MSF’s thesis, on the other hand, embeds multiple arguments: 1) that the show’s characters exhibited biases toward other characters, 2) that the audience’s biases played into these displayed biases, and 3) that the show did this purposefully to expose these biases and work against them. Her paper was essentially a character analysis, which she organized around two concepts: group identification and prejudice/discrimination. In her first body paragraph, she discussed the character Annalise:

Group identification, in particular social contexts, can promote oppression if the foundation respect for differences is lacked. Annalise Keating, a renowned lawyer and law professor of an Ivy League, is no surrender when it comes to solving the puzzles of her clients’ crimes. In front of the court, her words are powerful weapons that challenge the truth and could, deceptively, reverse it. Professionals in the judicial system either worship or despise her, but they all have to agree that she is no African American woman to be underestimated. Yet not everyone thinks she deserves the acknowledgment. Both her sister-in-law and mother are discontent with the reality of her success. They expect faults, blemishes, and delinquencies that are consistent with her group-identity. Like the audience, they forget how “identity formation is the result of a complex interplay” and think of her as a “collective aspect of the set of characteristics by which a thing [African Americans] is definitely known or recognized” (9). It is an odd shift from the common media to have the protagonist be a successful black woman and not a white man. To many, such a contradicting identity leads to jealousy and discomfort. This explains why Annalise’s mother was against her marriage to a white man and immediately concluded her of guilt for his death.

MSF began the paragraph with a concept that was discussed in class: group identification. She introduced the character and showed how this character was regarded by others in the show. She then brought in perceived audience biases and quoted from a
text to support her contention (as well as to fulfill the requirement of using sources). Her final move in the paragraph was to tie what she wrote back to her thesis with explanation: “It is an odd shift from the common media to have the protagonist be a successful black woman […]. This explains why Annalise’s mother was against her marriage to a white man and immediately concluded her of guilt for his death.” Thus, there is only one firm example of how MSF’s thesis is demonstrated, that is, the one character Annalise. The paragraph did meander a bit into discussion of another character, but this discussion was used to further make a point about Annalise.

MSF went on in the second body paragraph to follow the same organizational logic and discussed one character in particular as an example. The final two paragraphs of MSF’s essay engaged in other forms of understanding as well as other cognitive processes. Thus, while she may not have had as many instances of exemplifying as MM did, MSF did engage in this form of understanding in a way that worked for the logic of her text and thesis. In fact, she engaged in other forms of understanding, such as inferring, comparing and explaining more than MM did in his paper. MM had no instances of inferring, one instance of comparing, and two instances of explaining. He did have five instances of summarizing, but MSF had three instances of inferring, five of comparing, and 13 of explaining. These other forms of understanding can be understood as higher order. It requires a deeper level of thought, for example, to show a relationship between things (inferring) than it is to merely give an example of how something is so. Additionally, exemplifying in an academic essay should be followed by explanation. One needs to make clear to one’s audience not only what something is an example of, but also how the example works to support the thesis.
This is not to say that MSF’s paper was necessarily better written than MM’s. Among the analysis papers I analyzed, these two were among the strongest. Both displayed better rhetorical sophistication than many other WeLead students (e.g. they were organized fairly well, they had few mechanical errors in them, and their arguments were fairly clear). It is merely that these students chose to negotiate their papers differently, and this led to different kinds of understanding demonstrated in each. Each student did well on the paper; MM received 28 points and MSF 30. One could argue that MSF had a stronger paper than MM based on the points awarded, but one must also consider the subjectivity of instructors’ grading practices and that each student had a different instructor. Each instructor had slightly different takes on this paper as well (as was demonstrated by the slight nuances in the prompt, discussed previously). That each student negotiated the paper differently points to the situated nature of writing in the WeLead activity system. Each paper was considered successful, yet each employed different rhetorical logic. This shows that students had a good deal of freedom to decide what would constitute an analysis paper in this context. In other academic contexts, the rules for what to write about and how may have been more confining. The lack of constraint students felt in writing their analysis papers might be attributed to the informality they ascribed to writing in WeLead. This informality is further supported by how instructors were not “strict” in assessing papers, seldom taking off points for mechanical errors or of what they considered would be a lack of depth of thought. This informality played into how students employed other forms of understanding in their papers as well.
**Explaining.** Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) note that “Explaining occurs when a student is able to construct and use a cause and effect model of a system” (p. 75). Explaining was the next most common form of understanding demonstrated in analysis papers, with 103 instances of explaining found (51 in section X and 52 in section Y). On the whole, students seem to have understood that explanation should follow their examples and that they needed to show how their examples demonstrated some form of oppression and/or led to stereotypes or oppression being perpetuated. In other words, students exhibited rhetorical knowledge in this regard, understanding that their audience would need to know how an example illustrated their points.

Rhetorical awareness indicates writing proficiency, and writing studies have shown subject matter knowledge to be a factor impacting writing proficiency (Bayer, Curto, & Kriley, 2005; Bean, Carrithers, & Earenfight, 2005; Beaufort, 2007; Defazio, Jones, Tennant, & Hook, 2010; Galer-Unti, 2002; Johnson & Krase, 2012; Moor, Jensen-Hart, & Hooper, 2012; Poe, Lerner, & Craig, 2010; Soliday, 2011). Thus, in analyzing instances of explaining, I looked at where explaining coincided/overlapped with exemplifying because these cognitive processes together might indicate the understanding of content that proficient writers would employ. Every analysis paper but one had at least one instance of overlap between these two forms of understanding. (MM’s paper was the only one that did not show this overlap, though he did follow up exemplifying with other forms of understanding in some instances.) There were also not vast differences between sections in employing this rhetorical logic. Section X had 29 instances of overlap between exemplifying and explaining, and section Y had 25.
For example, Harambe’s paper (section X) had six instances where exemplifying and explaining coincided/overlapped (and 13 instances of explaining total). Harambe was the only student who chose to write about “Power and Privilege on Campus” (WeLead Syllabi, 2016). His thesis was as follows: “A lot of the most powerful and successful people in the world can are [sic] white and there’s no arguing that really, and that for sure can be linked to college campuses, especially at MJU, because that is usually where the success starts.” This thesis closed out his introductory paragraph, a paragraph that began by discussing MJU as a predominantly white campus. He evidenced understanding as a cognitive process in three forms in his opening paragraph: summarizing, exemplifying, and explaining, and all three of these forms of understanding coincided with each other. His opening paragraph is quoted below, and I have bracketed where the different forms of understanding occurred:

Every human being has preconceived assumptions about a certain person or group of people, there isn’t really a way to shy away from that [i.e. summarizing—he extracted a general theme discussed in class and used it to set up his example that follows], and you can tell a lot of people from EOP\textsuperscript{28} has [sic] assumptions about the white people they were going to come face to face with in the fall [i.e. exemplifying—finding an example of a concept from the campus environment]. Those assumptions include: rich, snooty, privileged, greedy, racist (some), and many more [i.e. exemplifying—examples of preconceptions]. The key in that is privilege, everyone has their own privilege in their own way but in the real world it is seen that white people have the most advantages with their privilege [i.e. explaining—showing the cause of the preconceptions].

Harambe followed a similar pattern of logic in his second paragraph as well. I quote it in its entirety and again note in brackets where the different forms of understanding occur:

In Allan G. Johnson’s reading “The Social Construction of Difference”, He talks about how James Baldwin, an African American Novelist, notes that it’s not the

\textsuperscript{28} Educational Opportunity Program, a program that provides financial and educational support to low-income, first generation college students.
pigmentation in someone’s skin itself, but the culture that a person lives in and how that culture recognizes that person [i.e. summarizing from a course reading and using this summary to set up his proceeding example]. In the American culture it is obvious that White Americans are the majority and every other race is the minority, and the power and privilege of everyone in the country reflects that. The higher ups in the big businesses are mostly white, and the same goes for politicians, it took over 200 years to get our first African American president and who knows if we’ll ever have one again [i.e. exemplifying—how it is that the culture influences how a person is recognized and valued]. With the majority here at MJU also being white you can only assume the high up positions here on campus are going to be occupied by white people. The President of our University is white and all the on campus jobs it seems like they’re all taken up by white students [i.e. exemplifying—showing how the predominantly white culture at MJU impacts campus]. With the campus being dominantly white that causes the culture of the entire campus to be shifted more towards white [i.e. explaining cause and effect], and there’s people here who have never been exposed to any minorities at all before coming to MJU, so unfortunately that what causes the culture of the campus to stay centered around the majority (white), due to that inexperience with other groups of people back where they’re from [i.e. explaining—showing, again, cause and effect]. Baldwin’s point is clearly shown on White dominated campuses especially MJU and people are starting to notice that [i.e. explaining—showing how Baldwin’s point rings true].

The remainder of Harambe’s paper employed this rhetorical logic of explaining a cause and effect pattern of how the predominantly white culture of MJU led to students of color feeling excluded and used examples to demonstrate how this was so, some from his own experience of being an African American student at MJU. There were instances where explaining occurred on its own, without exemplifying occurring directly before or after. In some cases, other forms of understanding accompanied the explaining Harambe did. For example, in the third paragraph, Harambe paraphrased from a text in order to set up the explaining he did later in the paragraph. He wrote:

[...] Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okazawa-Rey’s article “Who Am I? Who Are My People” focuses on how people identify themselves and how that links with the people they are affiliated with, and how at times people tend to shy away from themselves to be accepted into a group of people to help themselves excel socially [i.e. interpreting and summarizing—he both paraphrased a text and summarized main points from it]. [...] Students don’t want to be seen as that social outcast and want to go to all the parties so they can feel like they were a part of something their 4 years in college [i.e. inferring—he saw a pattern between the ideas of the
text he quoted and college student behavior, though no specific example was given). You see all the college movies and TV shows that influence students’ minds convincing them that college is the best 4 years of their lives and that you need to party if you want to be social with anybody in college. Whenever someone is faced with a group of people there’s a good chance that they are very different from them and it’s only natural that they shift their personality to the liking of the group so that they are able to fit in. It’s worse for minorities on a campus like Marquette because there is less of their group of people so they’re usually either forced into isolation or to give up their culture that they’ve known their whole life to adjust to the mainstream culture of the campus [i.e. explaining—the stereotypes of movies cause an expectation among college students, which in turn causes people to “shift their personality” in order to fit in, and it is worse for students of color].

The above excerpt again shows the overall logic of Harambe’s paper and how explaining was employed to illustrate his overall argument. Exemplifying often occurred in conjunction with explaining, but other forms of understanding were shown as well.

Harambe’s writing proficiency was average. While his papers demonstrated understanding of course concepts and used explaining in conjunction with other forms of understanding in order to convey its point, there were a number of mechanical errors in Harambe’s paper that sometimes interfered with his intended meaning. For example, in one sentence he seemed to have omitted the word “not,” which shifted the meaning of the sentence. He wrote, “You can ask any minority on campus and it’s obvious that they feel it is very diverse on campus and they feel like that gives the majority a sense of power of them, which in most cases is inevitable when there is so much of a difference like that.” The paper’s overall claim was that MJU’s lack of diversity led to students of color feeling outside of the culture. This in turn led to people of color feeling excluded in society at large and not having opportunity to excel professionally. Yet this sentence stated that students of color felt campus “was very diverse.” It seems obvious he meant to say “not very diverse.” This omission negated the point Harambe tried to make in his paper. Instructor X when discussing the quality of student writing even alluded to
students sometimes forgetting a word such as “not” and how this lack of proofreading impacted meaning. However, Harambe did receive a good grade on his paper (28/30 points), so clearly the instructor was able to look past this and other mechanical issues in terms of comprehending the intended meaning of Harambe’s paper.

Harambe described himself as a decent writer in his interview, and while he only turned in one other paper for the course (week 1 reflection), his analysis paper did seem to demonstrate an inherent understanding of how to build an argument through exemplifying, explaining, and summarizing. His paper also showed evidence of other higher order cognitive processes (analysis, evaluation, and creation). Without other papers of his to analyze, my assumption is that he drew on previous writing knowledge as a resource to negotiate the writing of this paper. (Writing resources are discussed in a later section in terms of how they impacted students’ writing in WeLead.) The sort of informality that characterized the WeLead activity system also, it seems, allowed for his essay to be considered acceptable (the mechanical errors were looked past, and his meaning came through well enough for the paper to receive an A-).

For the sake of further illustration of how explaining often accompanied exemplifying, I offer an additional example. Linda (section Y) engaged in a similar rhetorical logic in her analysis paper as Harambe. Linda is a fitting counterpoint to Harambe because of the similarities she shared with him in terms of backgrounds. Both were African American students at a predominantly white university. Both had attended public high schools. Both spoke in their interviews and in class about experiences of being otherized in society and/or on campus. However, Linda was more active in WeLead than Harambe. She completed all 15 written assignments (12 weekly response,
the midterm identity reflection, and the final analysis paper), attended every class session, and was very vocal in class discussions. Harambe only turned in two papers, was absent on a few occasions, and was typically quiet in class unless called upon. Linda, too, chose to write about the oppression of African Americans in society, specifically the relationship between African Americans and law enforcement and in particular the shootings of Black men by law enforcement. Her discussion focused on how media portrayed these shootings.

Linda began her paper by employing explanation, showing a hypothetical cause and effect relationship right off the bat. Her introductory paragraph follows with notes in brackets where she employed explanation and exemplifying as forms of the cognitive process of understanding:

When it comes to the news and how mainstream problems in society are put forth, the story is done in a way to get people’s attention. If societies were consistently peaceful and continuing to flourish bringing everyone up together, people in the news media and law enforcement would be out of jobs [i.e. explaining—she showed a hypothetical cause and effect relationship to set up her ultimate argument that news media perpetuates stereotypes of African Americans]. Why, because it is the news job to report on the problems in society and law enforcement to rectify those of wrongdoing. When a society has potential to be prosperous, both with people and the economy, stereotypes and prejudices are very well factors to limit that potential [i.e. explaining—prejudice is a cause of people’s potential being limited]. With stereotypes in news media constantly having people question their beliefs and values on the human society and prejudices being so evident based off the information reported in the news, there is definitely a link in how the two coincide to bring attention to what society considers a problem [i.e. explaining—again, news coverage leads to people questioning their values and also that news media leads people to see what the problems of a society are]. One problem that has remained in news media is the interactions with law enforcement and the black community [i.e. exemplifying—she gave a general example as to how what she explained in the previous sentences is so].

In this opening paragraph, Linda set up her argument. At this juncture, the argument is not made in the form of a clear, concise thesis statement. Yet, she did
identify that there is a problem she aimed to discuss: “One problem that has remained in
news media is the interactions with law enforcement and the black community.” It is
unclear precisely what the problem is at this juncture in the essay, yet she hinted toward it
with the explanatory sentences that preceded this statement.

Her second paragraph began to unpack this further with more explanation
followed by another general example. I quote excerpts of it below and note in brackets
where exemplifying and explaining were demonstrated:

In recent events, that have seem to become a trend is the killings of black men at
the hands of police officers [i.e. exemplifying—a general example, which was
presumed to be known by the audience]. [...] Seeing that the altercations between
the two opposing forces have always been violent, goes back to the beatings done
by police to black people of all ages during the times of segregation and white
privilege being displayed. Society has painted the image that black people are a
problem to society. One look in the wrong direction could have very well cost a
person their life, and now fast forward to present day, there are black men both
young and old being targeted by white police and it doesn’t sit well with the
society. In recent stories, people of color, significantly black men, have been shot
and killed by police [i.e. explaining—she showed a cause and effect relationship,
that is, since Black people have historically been seen as societal problem, it has
led to their being targeted today by police in current times]. [...] The stereotype
comes in because, the moment breaking news airs, one can assume that the killer
is some estranged black young man with little to no home training, yet when the
murderer appears on screen in a uniform well-known its shocking. In the eyes of
society the “black man” should be punished because it has been instilled in
society to believe that “he” is a problem. The news has portrayed the deaths of
young black men as tragedies that can only be spoken from the perspective of the
police, which leads to the black community and their frustration due to the things
happening in society from those that are supposed to protect [i.e. explaining and
exemplifying—she explained how the stereotype of Black people being seen as a
societal problem led to how these stories are covered by media, and she offered
how these stories are covered as an example].

This paragraph demonstrates the rhetorical logic of Linda’s paper. She seemed to
have understood that she needed to follow explanation with examples. To be sure, her
examples were general in nature. She did not discuss any specific shooting or any
specific news coverage, a move which would have demonstrated stronger rhetorical
awareness as it would have allowed the audience to see more explicitly how what she wrote about was the case. Linda seemed to have assumed that the audience was familiar with the many shootings of Black men that have been in the news. Her decision to give general examples may have been due to the nature of writing in WeLead. Because students viewed writing as less formal, perhaps Linda assumed a familiarity with her audience. This familiarity, in turn, perhaps led her to believe she did not have to be very specific with examples. Section X did discuss police shootings in class. Additionally, Instructor Y noted in her interview that she really was the audience for students’ papers. Thus, Linda did not have to be explicit because the instructor likely understood what she was referring to in the text. This familiarity was part of the context of the WeLead and acted as a rule within the activity system.

Regardless of the fact that Linda did not give specific examples in these two paragraphs, the logic of the argument was apparent. She employed a “this leads to that” logic throughout her paper. She quoted from a few sources (class readings and outside sources) to support her claim, using those quotes also as examples of how what she claimed was so. In the fourth paragraph, she did offer a specific example of a shooting as an example (the Trevon Martin case). In this paragraph, too, she employed the explaining/exemplifying/explaining approach, and she carried this approach through her conclusion of the paper (again, staying general in terms of exemplifying, but employing this rhetorical logic nonetheless). While the instructor made several notes on the paper regarding restructuring or rephrasing sentences, ultimately the paper earned 28/30 points, indicating that the instructor understood the content and logic of Linda’s argument. I attribute this success largely to that sense of familiarity within the WeLead activity.
system, one that allowed for students’ writing to be less formal, to forego some of the constraints writing in other academic contexts likely would have had. This paper, percentage-wise was an A-. In a more traditional academic course, the standards for an “A paper” would likely have been different, but it worked to demonstrate understanding of content in this particular context. The informality was part of the context, and it influenced the shape writing took. This was also evident in how other cognitive processes manifested in students’ writing as well.

**Evaluating.** The second most common cognitive process demonstrated in students’ writing was evaluating, which Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) define as “making judgements based on criteria and standards” (p. 83). Evaluating occurred most in weekly responses (73 instances) and analysis papers (70 instances). When students employed evaluation in their writing, it always came in the form of critiquing, that is “judging a product or operation based on externally imposed criteria or standards” (p. 84). Students would either critique an author’s claim or would critique particular social situations that they used as examples to illustrate particular concepts. It wasn’t always clear what criteria or standards students were basing their evaluations on, but they seemed to have some notion of criteria at work when they made evaluative statements in their writing.

In the weekly papers, students would often agree or disagree with an author’s claim. The paper prompts likely cued this, stating that students “think critically about the assigned reading” as well as pose a discussion question that might “seek to clarify an idea the author raised” or “offer an implicit critique the author’s idea/s and or stance” (WeLead Syllabi, 2016). Agreement/disagreement is a very basic form of evaluation. In
most cases, after stating their agreement or disagreement, students would explain why they felt the way they did. This explanation should not be confused with explaining as a form of understanding, for it was not used to show a cause and effect relationship but instead used to convey the sense of criteria on which the evaluations were being made. For example, in week 7, the topic of adultism produced a number of instances of evaluating. Susan (section X) wrote:

The author is writing this article in the sense that young people don’t have enough power or freedom in their lives. I see where the author is coming from in saying this, but I believe that there are rules for young people for a reason. I believe that it is good to have freedom, but they are too young to make adult like decisions. There are reasons why young people are required to attend school, or have consequences when they do something bad, or even curfews. All of these rules and limitations are put into place for a reason and unless they are enforced young people will never learn for when they do become adults.

Susan stated her agreement with the author: “I see where the author is coming from,” but she then went on to discuss why young people are treated as they are (e.g. they need “rules,” they are “too young to make adult like decisions, and ultimately the rules are what allow young people to “learn for when they do become adults”). There seems to have been some criteria or set of values at work in Susan’s head on which she was making this judgment. She didn’t list out or interrogate her values, but she did apply them to what the author had stated.

BO (also section X) employed similar logic in her use of evaluation:

The points made in the article are all valid, however I do not think adultism is always a bad thing in society. Personally, the hard times my parents or teachers and I went through were later seen as a blessing. It is harder for me personally to see this as a problem in our communities because I grew up in a stable and loving family, with two solid parents. I attended good schools with mostly nice teachers. […] Being an adult comes with a great responsibility that some people are not ready for.
In this excerpt, BO validated the author’s points, but she didn’t say how or why they were valid. She disagreed with the author’s explanation of adultism: “I do not think adultism is always a bad thing,” and her criteria for judgement came after: adultism isn’t really oppression if it occurs within the context of a “loving family” and “good schools” with “nice teachers.” Essentially, BO’s logic was that whatever adultism-like oppression occurs, it’s justified because it molds people into adulthood.

Sophia (section Y) also employed evaluation in her week seven response paper. Unlike Susan and BO, however, her criteria for evaluation had to do with the logic of the author’s text. She wrote:

> Personally many of the examples given from this week’s article did not seem to hold very much weight in terms of supporting the case for adultism. The article acknowledges an adult's role in shaping a child into a functioning adult but as they continued to give examples to support adultism I felt as though they ended up removing the adult's original responsibility. School for an example was talked about in the article as a hindrance to youth because they are forced through both their parent’s [sic] and the law to continue their enrollment, yet I feel as though school plays an important role in enforcing responsibility and maturity in a child. Without sending a child to school we are completely taking out a major key in their development.

Sophia pointed out flaws she saw in the logic of the author’s argument (i.e., the article does this, but then it does that). In doing so, she also employed analysis as a cognitive process, specifically “attributing,” which includes deconstructing a text (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). She gave a specific example from the text, then she discussed schooling as a means to demonstrate the logic flaw.

The pointing out of flaws in logic (i.e. the criteria Sophia used) was not something specifically taught in WeLead. Such skills are often developed in composition classes in terms of rhetorical appeals (i.e. logos, ethos and pathos). Other WeLead students discussed rhetorical analysis and appeals in their interviews as something they were
learning about in their first-year English classes at MJU. It is likely, thus, that Sophia was drawing on other/previous writing knowledge/experience in order to negotiate her text in this case. To be sure, Sophia did move into her own experience to evaluate the author’s claims when she discussed the role of schooling in “enforcing responsibility and maturity.” Thus, her criteria for evaluation shifted, but the paragraph began with evaluation based on rhetorical logic. This shift in evaluation criteria is interesting in that it demonstrates the sort of informality with which students imbued their WeLead writing. Sophia used the words “I feel,” which is often frowned upon in formal academic writing. She also shifted into evaluating something based, presumably, on her own experience of having attended school. She did not develop her argument past expressing that she felt schooling was important. Such evidence would likely be considered weak in other academic writing assignments, but again, it worked in WeLead because the unique nature of writing in this context. She received full points on the assignment.

Similar to critiquing authors’ claims, students also critiqued examples of social situations they wrote about in their papers. For example, in week five students read and wrote about the “Five Faces of Oppression.” One of the “faces” PF (section X) focused on was exploitation. She wrote:

Another form of exploitation the author wants to focus on is menial labor. The chapter describes that “menial” has to do with slaves and the labor that they do. This idea means that people of oppressed racial groups are servants to the non-oppressed racial groups. An example used today was bellhop or bus boy jobs with a pressure to be filled by Black and Latino workers. Usually the jobs they are completely [sic] are considered to be low paying and unskilled. The process of exploitation is completely unfair because one group should not have the energies unequally distributed.

PF defined menial labor, gave an example of it, and then made an evaluation of it. In her evaluation, it is unclear what she meant by “energies unequally distributed,” but it seems
as though she was applying some criteria to determine fairness of labor that had to do with distribution of energy people put forth in jobs. My guess is that her sense of value came from the cultural mores she believed society should operate under. She further discussed exploitation in another example in which she used as criteria: the unspoken expectations people have of gender roles in society:

[...] something I can relate to is gender exploitation. [...] I know that society does put a pressure on me and other women to be nurturing as we grow up, get married, to be the perfect wife and raise/ have children. Although I know I want a family when I am older I can’t help but question do I want to fulfill this role for me or because I think that is what I am supposed to do.

Her critique comes in the form of questioning her own desire to have children. She set this critique up by discussing the criteria by which society judges women.

Societal norms/expectations were somewhat common when students employed evaluation to critique social issues or situations they discussed in response papers. Linda (section Y) discussed societal expectations in her very first response paper. The statements in which she employed evaluation/critique are italicized for emphasis:

Labels are placed on people, on an everyday basis. The more society tells you who you are, the more you will believe it. But when you know who you are and what you stand for then you have a purpose that has meaning. What makes a person unique is standing out from what society labels to be the "perfect picture". [...] One real world example in the media of the "perfect picture" is portrayed by models having a certain figure, which sends out the message that if you’re not this way, you can't be accepted in society and that isn't fair, because you should be comfortable in your skin and that's what makes you beautiful.

In this excerpt, Linda set up the idea that society determines people’s value. The criteria implied is general at this point. She then went on to critique that criteria by stating that real value is to reject the idea of “picture perfect.” She further went on to discuss the criteria of beauty the media perpetuates through using models who have a particular figure. Her rejection (i.e. evaluation) of this idea is demonstrated in her statement that
“this is not fair,” that the criteria for beauty should be people’s comfort with who they are.

To be sure, Linda could have done more to develop her claim. Her entire paper was only one paragraph, and she did not discuss the assigned reading in it at all. While it was only the first assignment and she was likely still learning what was expected in these response papers, she seemed to already have a sense of the familiarity and informality that characterized writing in the WeLead activity system, one that allowed her to assume that her paper’s connection to the assigned reading was understood. She could make this critique because of the sense of familiarity that was established on the first day of class. Instructor Y pointed out on that day that the course was mostly discussion. This sense of discussion seemed to have found its way into Linda’s paper and allowed her to make evaluations in her writing using general instead of explicit examples. The tone of her paper was conversational, and, ultimately, she received only a one point deduction on her paper because of its length. This sense of familiarity and informality also affected how students employed analysis in their papers.

Analyzing. Analyzing was the third most frequent cognitive process exhibited in students’ papers. Analyzing “involves breaking material into constituent parts and determining how the parts are related to one another or to an overall structure” (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001, p. 79). Like with evaluating, analyzing was perhaps cued by the paper prompt. The weekly response paper prompt implied analysis in telling students to “think critically” about assigned readings (WeLead course syllabi, 2016). In weekly papers, analyzing manifested mainly in the form of attributing (determining authors’ points of view and/or biases). The analysis paper prompt asked for analysis specifically:
“Identify and analyze a case of...”. In addition to attributing, students’ analysis papers demonstrated instances of differentiating and organizing as well. (The midterm Personal Identity Inventory Reflection is not discussed because there were only four instances of analyzing total.)

Students definitely had opinions about course readings, sometimes agreeing with and sometimes rejecting what authors wrote. As was noted in the previous section, a lot of these opinions came in the form of evaluating. However, there were instances where students’ opinions were embodied in analysis of texts, particularly in terms of pointing out perceived biases and/or points of view authors held. For example, Helen (section X) in week five wrote:

First I would like to point out how the author takes a moment to recognize that not all groups face the same kinds of oppression and how they can feel different amounts of the five different forms of oppression. But, the author does tend to generalize groups and I don’t believe that is necessarily good for this book and the points they make. While fighting for the rights of people who are oppressed, he simultaneously writes off that all people of the group are like that and does feel any differently or express his real ideas. Personally I believe that in this way the author is being a hypocrite because they do not acknowledge the fact that those who have broken down the walls of hate have succeeded in being an impactful force in our society after enduring such hardships.

It is fairly clear that Helen did not necessarily agree with the author, yet her opinion came through in how she attributed her perception of the author’s bias. She set up her analysis by first acknowledging what the author wrote: “First I would like to point out how the author takes a moment to recognize that not all groups face the same kinds of oppression and how they can feel different amounts of the five different forms of oppression.” In this statement, she pointed out what some of the author’s intentions were. She then pointed out her perception of the author’s bias: “But, the author does tend to generalize groups [...]” She continued to explain how this generalization was problematic and how the
author’s bias manifests: “While fighting for the rights of people who are oppressed, he simultaneously writes off that all people of the group are like that and does feel any differently or express his real ideas.” She ended the paragraph with a statement in which she attributed what she believed to be the ultimate bias of author: “Personally I believe that in this way the author is being a hypocrite because they do not acknowledge the fact that those who have broken down the walls of hate have succeeded in being an impactful force in our society after enduring such hardships.”

To be sure, Helen could have been more explicit about how the author’s generalization occurred by quoting from the text to demonstrate where she saw the bias, but students were discouraged from quoting the text in their weekly papers. The prompt instructed them to paraphrase the author’s words: “Outline 2-3 main points of the reading, written in your own words entirely [emphasis added]” (Instructor X Syllabus, 2016). Thus, Helen’s analysis fell a bit short because of its lack of specificity. She received 3.5/4 points on the assignment, and the instructor’s feedback read “I don't follow your argument that the author is being hypocritical; needs more development. Regarding social groups, your points are certainly valid, but be careful not to oversimplify.”

Regardless of how Helen’s paper was assessed, it demonstrated analysis in the form of attributing. The prompt likely influenced how Helen negotiated her analysis, what she understood she could include in her paper. It is also possible that the sense of informality and familiarity that characterized the WeLead activity system factored in to Helen’s rhetorical choices in this paper. Because students understood that they could not quote from the text, they likely had a sense that the instructor would understand what they discussed in their papers. Class discussions of readings displayed this familiarity.
Students were not asked “where do you see that in the text” when discussing readings. Instead discussions revolved around their opinions and personal experiences as related to the readings. Thus, students likely felt that they could employ this informality/familiarity in their writing, especially in weekly papers, which they understood to be reflections.

This familiarity/informality came through in other students’ employment of analysis in weekly papers as well. For example, Sophia’s (section Y) week five paper exhibited analysis in the form of attributing. She made an overall statement about assigned authors’ biases in her paper: “I find that articles in this class often look at issues of oppression from one perspective. That perspective often being the more popular instance of oppression.” Familiarity/informality factored in; Sophia did not give specific examples of authors’ biases (and she did not specifically reference the author of week five’s reading). She seemed to have assumed that the audience (i.e. mainly the instructor) would have a sense of what she claimed about authors’ biases. Instead of making a rhetorical decision to examine an author’s (or authors’) words to illustrate her claim of bias, she chose instead to give an example from popular culture to demonstrate her point:

This aspect is very clear to me after watching the speech given by Emma Watson to the U.N. Often when talking about gender oppression articles such as the ones in class solely focus on how women are treated unequally in society. While this is true and women are by far treated more unfairly than men we mustn’t forget that society at large has taken away aspects of men’s lives as well. In the speech Emma mentions how men who are open about their emotions are often seen as weak and that many men are dissuaded from mentioning their mental health issues due to the stigma that surrounds them.

This excerpt seems intended to demonstrate Sophia’s rationale for her original analysis of authors’ biases. It fell short of analysis in the purest sense because it did not explicitly exhibit how authors’ biases come through, but the intention was there nonetheless.
She used another cognitive process (i.e. understanding/exemplifying) to make her point about authors’ biases, in attempt to support her analysis of author bias.

Furthermore, Sophia engaged in evaluation in this paragraph after her initial analytical claim about authors’ bias. I quote the remainder of her paragraph and indicate in brackets where evaluation and further analysis took place:

For so long in our society we have created this idea that men are meant to be strong and show little emotion when in reality they have the majority of the same biological processes as women and they to [sic] should be able to express emotion other than anger to be accepted [i.e. evaluating—she appears to apply some criteria for how men are expected by society to behave]. To be clear I am not in any way saying that women are not the oppressed gender. In the broad scheme of things the male gender is dominant, but I feel it is important, especially in articles like the ones we read in class, that we don’t forget to see the other side of the aisle [i.e. analysis—she refers back to her original claim of authors biases].

Sophia’s move to evaluation after her initial analytical claim confirms Anderson and Krathwohl’s (2001) contention that analysis precedes evaluation: “Although learning to Analyze may be viewed as an end in itself, it is probably more defensible educationally to consider analysis as an extension of Understanding or as a prelude to Evaluating or Creating” (p. 79). Again, her analysis could have been more explicit, but she appeared to have gotten her point across, earning a full four points for this response paper.

Students’ analysis papers exhibited the greatest numbers of instances of analyzing: 76 instances total. Section X papers had more instances than section Y (58 to 18). It is difficult to account for why there was such a difference between sections, but it may have to do with the different rhetorical strategies students used. As was noted in the section on Understanding, section Y students were more apt to include fewer examples in their papers, but they developed these examples more deeply. Section X students included more examples as an overall strategy. Since analysis is an “extension of Understanding” (p. 79) and exemplifying a form of understanding, it makes sense that
section X papers exhibited higher numbers of analyzing instances as well. Analyzing did

tend to coincide with and/or follow instances of exemplifying in students’ papers.

Additionally, in the analysis papers, analyzing more often came in the form of
differentiating and organizing and less in the form of attributing. This phenomenon also
makes sense. As mentioned earlier, attributing means determining an author’s point of
view/bias. When students used quotes in their papers from sources, they did so to support
the overall claims of their papers. Thus, authors’ points of view were implied because the
quotes were evidence of the students’ points of view. Students likely saw no need to
explain authors’ points of view as they had in weekly papers where the rhetorical purpose
was to respond/reflect on the weekly reading. The purpose of the analysis paper was to
put forth an argument and pose a solution. Thus, analyzing took on different forms in the
analysis papers because of the rhetorical nature of those papers.

Differentiating, that is “distinguishing the parts of a whole structure in terms of
their relative importance” (p. 80) occurred often. For example, Meredith (section X)
began her paper with four paragraphs to set up her thesis. In those four paragraphs, she
recounts a situation in her hometown of an African American man being shot by police.
The incident affected the high school she went because a student there posted some
derogatory remarks on social media about Black Lives Matters protesters. Meredith did a
good deal of exemplifying and explaining in these four paragraphs, a rhetorical strategy
that then moved toward analysis. An excerpt from her paper follows:

[…] With that, Black Lives Matter appeared at [name of her high school], putting
two thousand kids in danger, and about two hundred faculty members in danger,
as well.

To absolutely blow this up, Donald Trump won the election on November
8th, 2016. One can only imagine what was going on in [name of town] at this
time. White people of [name of town] began protesting back at Black Lives
Matter, chanting how much they loved Trump, while Black Lives Matter fought back. Honestly, chaos is the only way to describe how crazy this was. The pictures at the end of this paper will give you just a little glimpse into what [name of town] looked like.

This story has many different components that keep piling onto each other. I will begin by breaking up the three sections, the shooting, the texts, and Trump winning the election to be the next president of the United States. It still seems unreal.

In the second paragraph above, Meredith engaged in exemplifying, but she made a move toward analysis because she attempted to draw a relationship between the election and the events that transpired. The pictures were offered as evidence/support for her thesis, which is not quite clear at this juncture in the text. She demonstrated inferring as well, implying a pattern between the election and the situation in the town. Again, the inference was not fleshed out well, but it seems that drawing a relationship was the intention. The use of these cognitive processes set up her analysis, which she cued the reader into by being explicit about what her paper will do next: “This story has many different components that keep piling onto each other. I will begin by breaking up the three sections, the shooting, the texts, and Trump winning the election to be the next president of the United States.” Analyzing literally means breaking things into constituent parts, which Meredith said she was going to do. Her analytical sentences demonstrate differentiating because she listed the components of this situation in an order she determined to be important.

The remainder of her paper developed these three components toward her overall thesis, a thesis that was not revealed until the end of the paper (essentially that Black people and White people need to stop fighting against each other.) Her thesis may not have demonstrated the depth of analysis the instructor was hoping for, and Meredith, herself, even noted its simplicity in the text: “We need the world to be black with white
and white with black, not against. This seems pretty superficial and naive, but peace is becoming farther and farther away with all of this chaos and riots.” However, her paper did exhibit basic elements of analysis. To be sure, many of the examples she used to develop her thesis were not explicitly connected to it. She would often make a point of something in one paragraph and then follow it up with an example that did not explain how her point was the case. For example, in her paragraph on the election, she made the point that “Trump was openly way more racist than Clinton.” She then followed this statement with the following:

One example in the news I would like to talk about is a video posted. Three African American men pull a white man out of his car after finding out that he voted for Trump. They pull him onto the street, kick him, punch him, drag him around, all because of his political view. The woman videotaping this fight is screaming slurs at him. This is just one of the videos, fights, etc. This is just one of the many instances that have been politically motivated. These fights are just causing a greater distance with peace between black and white people.

While she engaged in exemplifying toward her thesis, and made a statement of what the problem was in the final sentence, her example did not show evidence that Trump was more racist than Clinton. Instead the example’s intent was to support her claim of the tension between the races. Overall, this logic demonstrates analysis in her text because it employed a sort of organizing, which Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) define as extrapolating evidence from a text and structuring it into an argument. Again, the rhetoric was not as explicit as it might have been, but the intention seems to be to work toward her claim.

The informality of Meredith’s rhetoric deserves some discussion as well, for it evidences the overall familiarity/informality that characterized WeLead writing. She used the second person voice: “The pictures at the end of this paper will give you just a little glimpse into what [name of town] looked like.” With this use of “you,” she speaks
directly to her reader. She also relied on the pictures at the end of the essay to further make her point, without any explanation as to how they worked as evidence. Such moves would surely not have been acceptable in other academic contexts. Yet she seemed to have felt free to write with this sense of familiarity and be less formal in her essay, even though this was the most formal of the three types of papers students wrote. She received 27/30 points on her paper, which amounts to a B+. The following feedback was offered on her paper: “Nice synthesis of multiple events related to and contributing to larger issue. Analysis and response still a bit simplistic... how to go beyond the individual-level responses?” Thus, she got called out on her analysis, but the fact that analysis was mentioned by the instructor demonstrates that he did see evidence of it in her text.

It should be noted that analysis was not always apparent in individual paragraphs of students’ texts, though there were clear instances of it in some paragraphs. Analysis was often demonstrated through the paper as a whole. Students used examples, inferences, comparisons and explanations to work toward analysis, that is they used these to build and support their overall claims. They then used their overall analysis to pose solutions (i.e. creating) to the issues their papers discussed. For example, Q (section Y) wrote his paper about the lack of diversity among characters (and actors) in films. His thesis was clearly stated in his introductory paragraph: “Common across all media, though, is the common presence of white people (putting it bluntly).” He then gave an example of how this was the case in the film Wall-E. He used the remainder of his paper to explain why this phenomenon occurs: “Since culture in America is mostly dominated by white culture, they are the group that becomes the most represented and the representation of other ethnicities is just an afterthought.” He further drew upon course
readings and outside sources to support his claim, summarizing these texts and inferring patterns among the quotes he used for evidence. He employed analysis explicitly only once in his paper, writing:

As actors of varying ethnicities begin to assume larger roles in prominent films, individuals will begin to respond to the change. Initially, the change might be met with negative feedback by those who prefer that the dominant culture, white, continue to assume prominent roles. However, no change was ever enacted easily or accepted widely. It will be a difficult road ahead to gain acceptance of multi-ethnic actors and actresses, but it can eventually happen.

Q employed organizing in this passage; he pointed out a systematic relationship among elements (i.e. people will come to accept change once more actors of color are cast in prominent roles.) Furthermore, he put the idea of change into a larger structure of change: “no change was ever enacted easily or accepted widely,” and the quotations and explanations given in his paper built toward this analysis, which also posited his solution. To be sure, he could have provided more examples from films of how targeted groups are not represented. He could have also provided examples of how change historically has not been easy or widely accepted. Doing so would have made his argument and analysis stronger, but analysis is demonstrated nonetheless. Without the set-up from the other cognitive processes exhibited in his essay (mainly different forms of understanding with some instances of evaluating), this instance of analysis could not have been understood as analysis. The overall rhetorical logic was to build toward his solution. The solution he posed (cast more actors of color in prominent roles) is an act of creating. Creating as a cognitive process is discussed next.

**Creating.** While creating was not demonstrated in students’ writing as often as understanding, evaluating, or analyzing, it’s worth discussing because WeLead Course goals implied that students were to become change agents with regard to privilege and
oppression or at very least develop an inclination to make change. To review, a stated course goal was that students would “Become familiar with your role and responsibility in creating an inclusive community” (WeLead Syllabi, 2016). Creating, as defined by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), means “putting elements together to form a coherent or functional whole” (p. 84). One of its forms is “planning” (i.e. developing a plan to solve a problem). One of the requirements of the analysis paper was “to describe an original suggestion” for how to “reduce stereotyping/prejudice,” “reduce discrimination/oppression,” or “address power and privilege […] to bring about a more equitable environment” (WeLead Syllabi, 2016). Thus, students were expected to engage in the cognitive process of creating.

Students did this most in their analysis papers. Ivy (section X) for instance employed creating six times in her analysis paper, with solutions to stereotyping/prejudice ranging from people recognizing the existence of stereotypes and prejudice, people taking personal responsibility for realizing stereotypes are wrong, and people informing themselves on issues. Her paper discussed the stereotypes in the show *The Office*, and her ultimate solution was as follows:

> Ultimately, people should act as HERO’s. According to *The Office*, a HERO is an acrostic for H: honesty, E: empathy, R: respect, and O: open-mindedness. When people are able to grasp these skills it will reduce discrimination and oppression. By developing these abilities, people can ask as HERO’s to remove the injustice in the world.

What is interesting in Ivy’s employment of creating is that she didn’t offer only one solution, and she didn’t use creating solely in the conclusion of her paper. She employed it at key junctures as she discussed the different examples she offered in her paper.
BO (section X) also employed creating frequently throughout her analysis paper, with five instances total. The first instance came about half-way through the paper. She wrote:

For example, whites can assume when they go shopping that they are a potential customer but the black community on the other hand are often looked as shoplifters and watched closely. It is little things that only the oppressed understand. A suggestion to this problem is education. Education about oppression and these instances is the best way to let people inside the events happening.

BO offered this solution after discussing one of the course readings that applied to the television show, *Grey’s Anatomy*, which she discussed in her paper as an example of how media employed stereotypes (both using them to expose stereotypes and perpetuating them). She offered education as a solution again in the next paragraph, further demonstrating the use of creating in her essay. However, she offered an additional solution that had to do with people taking responsibility for perpetuating stereotypes and prejudice:

Racist patients serve as examples of oppression because they are the “stereotypical” members of society. This shows that even if a group of people are not racist, they will still encounter racism through the people they meet. This may never be able to be avoided but support within the hospital is the only suggestion that can help in these situations. For example, if all doctors at the hospital have respect and love for one another than they will be able to stand up and help those affected by the oppression felt by one of the doctors.

She further made the suggestion that the show should diversify its cast more:

By having no minorities in the show, the maker of the show has oppressed those groups and confirmed the stereotype that only white people are able to live fabulous lives in New York City. Whether this was intentional or not, it goes to show the idea that people have in their minds between black and white people. This could be avoided if the maker put one black character in, either male or female. By adding at least minority then the oppression is there but not as obvious.
Similar to Ivy, these acts of creating, of solution posing, occurred throughout BO’s discussion, not just at the conclusion of the paper. That the solutions varied in both students’ papers also demonstrates that Ivy and BO were thinking about multiple ways to combat prejudice. This indicates that they were developing understanding in the complexity of these issues as well as how to create change. The paper provided them with a means to articulate their understanding and their ideas about change.

Overall, writing seems to have functioned toward course goals as the examples from students’ writing demonstrate. The goals were objects toward which activity was aimed, and writing was a tool that engaged students toward learning. That learning manifested in the different cognitive processes their writing exhibited. The way those cognitive processes were employed, however, was influenced by the entire activity system. As discussed in the preceding sections, informality/familiarity was one factor that influenced the shape of students’ writing, but there were other aspects of the activity system that also influenced what learning took shape in students’ writing. Discussion of these factors with regard to cognitive processes is the content of the next section.

**Other Activity System Factors that Influenced Students’ Writing**

When the cognitive processes exhibited in students’ writing were further examined through the Activity Theory framework, some interesting findings emerged. The community, which forms the bottom of an activity system triangle, appears to have impacted learning also. Factors embedded in the community included students’ values and beliefs, previous experience with course content, and college involvements. Additionally, the resources upon which students drew in their writing (a tool that
influenced the tool of writing) also had impact on student learning. These influences can be seen through further analysis of the cognitive processes exhibited in students’ writing.

**World Views Challenged.** When students’ world views were challenged (the beliefs and values they brought into the context as part of the larger community), their writing tended to demonstrate more instances of analyzing (attributing) and evaluating in conjunction with each other. In week four of the semester, for example, students’ response papers indicated that students were challenged by that week’s content. The topic that week (and the previous week) was “The Social Construction of Difference.” The reading in week four discussed what people can do to respond to targeted, oppressed groups and move toward being agents of change in systems of oppression. Among the strategies forwarded by the reading were to recognize and acknowledge the existence of oppression, work to understand why oppression exists and how it manifests, listen to the experiences and perspectives of people in targeted groups, and to change how one participates in social systems. This content seems to have challenged students’ assumptions about themselves and the world. In her response for this week, BO (section X) remarked:

This article challenged me to reflect deeply upon myself and my life. It is interesting to answer the questions asked in the article and question myself if I’m positivity impacting my community. I agree fully that dominant groups don’t see trouble as “their” trouble; they are content with their lives and as much as they would want a peaceful world for everyone, they don’t look at it as their problem. However, I do believe that most any humans on this earth would want the best life for another human; yet they don’t know how to make that happen. It is hard to believe that they can make the change for a problem so big so they usually sit back and watch it progress. I agree that listening is a good first step to helping solve the problems between the dominant and minority groups however I think everyone should listen more not just the dominant groups; in the article it states that it is harder for dominants to listen. This may be true but the minority groups need to listen as well to fix their situation or get ideas on where to start.
While BO demonstrated an empathetic view toward the issue, she did not quite examine her own participation in the system. She also turned the problem back on the targeted group by suggesting that they, too, need to listen in order to get ideas about how to “fix their situation” as though the responsibility lied with the oppressed to dig themselves out of their situation.

Other students expressed similar sentiments in their response papers, feeling somehow that the author was attributing blame to privileged groups, and they seemed to take this personally. Excerpts from several students’ papers follow:

Meredith (section X):
First, I am privileged, which is something that I am proud of. Although I do completely understand all of the information in the reading, I am proud of being privileged. I am proud of my background, but I believe I would be proud no matter what I was, because my parents have shaped me into the person I am, and they have supported me throughout my entire life. Second, I want to share that this reading focuses solely on all of the negative aspects on how white people deal with this privilege, or how they don't deal with it. I am white, and I am not sexist or racist. I work to deal with oppression often. I have done several trips and retreats to expand my knowledge on racism and sexism primarily. I do support those who express their sexuality, I pay attention to the different forms of oppression, I speak against inequality in work places, I am aware of the class divisions. My family and I are privileged but we work to use our privilege (wealth, skin color, class, environment) to help those who are not. Not by donating money, but by treating them as equals, treating them with the same respect as any other human being, and by working to support them in their lives.

Susan (section X):
Lastly, privilege is not something that one should be ashamed of. There is not one thing that can be blamed for different people’s privileges. Privilege has to be addressed on a smooth small spectrum and then it grows larger, but it needs to be started first in order to grow.

Helen (section X):
Personally, I was really mad while reading this. Like, I wanted to stop reading it because a lot of it was bashing on dominates. She made it seem like we were
pretentious snobs that only care about themselves. She also said that “racist society is white dominant, white-centered, and white-identified”. Yes, they can be racist but so can other colors. Blacks can be racist toward Asians. Asians can be racist towards Indians. Indians can be racist towards Australians. The list goes on and on. It is not just whites. I understand that we do have to do something about it such as going out of our way to talk with people who are different than us and not treating them like they are inferior. But, I am annoyed that whites keep having this reputation.

Kat (section Y):

First of all, I do not quite understand the writer’s view on capitalism and I would love to hear some clarification in class. The idea that our current system of capitalism and our economy fuels privilege/oppression is interesting but the writer did not clarify or present much of an argument about it. Personally, I do not place blame on capitalism but on our economy and how we use capitalism. Many economic systems can succeed, if each individual ‘pays their dues’ and participates in the economic system with the goal of equality and the common good. People criticize Bernie Sanders’ socialist ideas, but socialism, in theory, could succeed if people were not so greedy, lazy, and comfortable in their privilege. Our capitalistic economy could succeed and favor the disadvantaged if our citizens, but the current economy does not favor the disadvantaged nor does it attempt to raise the lower class to true economic security. Obviously, I’m not an expert in capitalism/socialism/communism, so I cannot say what will succeed, but I do not blame the economic system for perpetuating privilege/oppression but the individuals

While the students demonstrated different levels of understanding, many of them took offense to being implicated in systems of oppression being members of the privileged, dominant group. They employed attributing by pointing out their perception of the author’s bias and evaluating by rejecting the author’s claim based on their own values and beliefs (which formed the criteria for evaluation). Kat’s evaluation was slightly different in that she evaluated the system of capitalism; she didn’t believe that the system was bad (making this judgement based on her own understanding and experience as criteria, though she did state an openness to learning more about how capitalism influences oppression).
The understanding demonstrated by students is likely not quite what the WeLead course intended in terms of developing students who are change agents and allies. It should be noted, however, that this was only week four of the semester, and one could not expect students to fully comprehend the contexts of what they were studying just yet. What is interesting, however, is that students who appeared to be most challenged by the content (who disagreed with the author’s claim in some way) engaged also in the cognitive processes of evaluating and/or analyzing. Those who tended to agree with the author’s claim did not demonstrate those two cognitive processes at the same levels. It should also be noted that the students who exhibited this rejection of the author’s claim were all White (and, thus, part of the dominant group the article implicated as having responsibility to change the system of oppression). Table 5.2 shows the instances of cognitive processes in week four across sections, noting whether students disagreed with the author’s claim in some way. While there are some exceptions, students who agreed with the author’s claims on the whole did not demonstrate the cognitive processes of analyzing or evaluating. Cognitive processes were limited to understanding.
Table 5.2

Week 4 Cognitive Processes by Student

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<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Expressed disagreement with author</th>
<th>Remember</th>
<th>Understand</th>
<th>Apply</th>
<th>Analyze</th>
<th>Evaluate</th>
<th>Create</th>
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<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates students who had social justice themed classes or were involved in social justice-related clubs in high school.

Some of the students who were interviewed mentioned having taken a social justice themed course in high school, and one student was involved in a club in high school that had social justice implications. Those students tended to agree with the author’s claims for this week. Perhaps students who were more developed in their social justice knowledge due to prior experience and who agreed with the author didn’t feel a
need to evaluate the author’s claims because they agreed. The influence of prior experience with course-related content on cognitive processes is discussed next.

**Prior Experience with Course-related Content.** Since understanding is a precursor to other higher order cognitive processes and creating is the highest order of cognitive processes, it seems reasonable that students who came into WeLead with some prior experience of course-related content might have been more equipped to engage in creating when writing about course content because of their prior understanding of it. To some degree, this was the case. Of the eight students interviewed, five students had some sort of formal experience with social justice-related topics prior to entering WeLead (four having taken a social justice themed course and one having been in a social justice club). Those five students’ papers exhibited more instances of creating than their peers who had not had some sort of social justice involvement in high school (23 instances of creating in papers of students who had had social justice themed involvements vs. 17 instances in papers of students who had not29). When analyzed by section, however, this turned out not to be the case. Section X students who had social justice involvements demonstrated more instances of creating in their papers than their section X peers who had not (17 vs. four)30. However, in section Y, students who had previous social justice involvements had fewer instances of creating in their papers than their section Y peers who had no social justice involvements in high school (six vs. 13). In order to understand if prior experience with course content had impact on students’ use of creating, it is useful to

29 These numbers are just for the eight students interviewed and not the whole sample of papers collected.
30 It should be noted that the one section X student, Harambe, who had no prior social justice involvements (at least that he mentioned in his interview) only turned in two papers overall the course of the semester.
look at the content of students’ papers and examine when creating occurred as well as the kinds of solutions they posed.

Posing a solution to the issues students discussed was a requirement in analysis papers. Thus, all students exhibited instances of creating in these papers. On average, there were no differences in the number of instances of creating in analysis papers between students who had previous social justice involvements and those who had not. Section X students who had previous social justice involvements averaged three instances of creating in their papers, and section X peers with no prior social justice involvements also averaged three instances. Section Y students with prior social justice involvements averaged two instances of creating in analysis papers, and section Y students with no prior social justice involvements averaged 2.5 instances.

Examination of students’ other papers (weekly responses and the midterm papers) tells a slightly different story. Students were not required to pose solutions in these papers. These two types of papers mainly required demonstration of understanding, yet students did engage in other cognitive processes in these papers. That they employed creating in these papers is most surprising because it was not required.

Harambe (section X), for example, engaged in creating in his week one paper, the topic of which was social identities. In discussing his own identity as an African American male, Harambe noted that “The media perceives me as either as a thug, or an oppressed individual. My identity could make challenges for me, because there are people who just aren’t comfortable around people like me.” His act of creation came in the final statement of his paper: “We just need to open peoples [sic] mind to everything, and make it so they don’t judge people on things they cannot control.” The solution was
not developed in great detail, but he posed one nonetheless. Perhaps Harambe’s experience of being part of a targeted group cued his use of creating in this instance. Without other weekly papers from Harambe to examine, however, it’s hard to know if this was the case. Ivy, MM, and Hero were the section X students who had prior social justice involvements. All three students engaged in creating in their week one papers. The solution Hero posed was as follows: “To change this racial identity, discrimination, or other negative views, I can make an advertisement for awareness and I can also make posters around the community for awareness also.” This solution is a bit more specific than Harambe’s. It is possible Hero’s prior experience with course-related content influenced the specificity of his proposed solution. This was one of only two papers Hero turned in over the course of the semester, however, so it is difficult to make a case for the influence of his prior experience impacting the use of creating in his writing. Like Harambe, Ivy’s solution was pretty general: “To remove the imbalance of social groups, there needs to be a way that people can blend cultures with each other.” She saw a need for a solution and proposed that cultures be “blended,” but she did not develop how this might occur. MM, however, was more specific in his proposed solution. Like Hero, he proposed individual actions he could take to make society more inclusive:

This article impacts me to continue to put myself out there and be more open to different cultures and ideas to not be closed minded and oppressive. The challenges the issue presents are to be more aware of the struggles and differences others have to go through than you. Another challenge is to just be nice and not be a jerk, be open to others and don’t put them down. I can promote positive change by being a role model to others to be nice and respect people and to not judge them on appearance or looks.

Ivy and MM did engage in creating in a couple other weekly papers as well (Ivy in week eight and MM in week nine). Ivy also engaged in creating in her midterm paper. This suggests the possibility that their prior involvement with course-related content
impacted their ability to employ creating (i.e. solution posing) in their writing. However, this did not bear out in section Y papers. Kat exhibited only one instance of creating in her weekly papers and also exhibited one instance of creating in her midterm paper. This is interesting in that Kat noted in an interview how she always tried to pose solutions in her writing. Q, who was involved in a social-justice related club in high school, exhibited no instances of creating in his weekly or midterm papers. MSF exhibited eight instances across weekly papers and the midterm. While MSF had no formal involvements with course related content in the form of classes or clubs in high school, she did attend a faith-based high school, so it is likely that she came across WeLead course related content at some juncture in high school. She did not mention such content when talking about her high school experiences in interviews, but she did exhibit good understanding of WeLead content in her papers and interviews. For example, in Chapter Four it was noted how well she seemed to have understood the concept of privilege, describing it in her first interview more or less in terms of a system, and this was only three weeks into the semester: “[…] there are problems in society that are not always on the surface. Like privilege, people that have always had privilege would never recognize that they have certain privileges and never know how others feel and how they should treat other people.” She went on in that interview to engage in the cognitive process of creating, posing a sort of solution: “[…] we need to be aware of these issues and if there is someone who can stand up and speak opinions, that would be us. That we know the right way to do it and that we should do it.” It was also noted in Chapter Four how it was likely that she came into WeLead with a predisposition to social justice issues. If this was
indeed the case, her prior experience/disposition may have impacted the learning she evidenced in her writing.

What can be said overall with regard to prior experience with course related content is that it probably shaped students writing to some degree. Writing studies scholarship supports that disciplinary knowledge is one of the factors that influences writing proficiency (Bayer, Curto, & Kriley, 2005; Bean, Carrithers, & Earenfight, 2005; Beaufort, 2007; Poe, Lerner, & Craig, 2010; Soliday, 2011). While WeLead was not a traditional academic disciplinary course, it is reasonable to assume that any prior knowledge students had of WeLead content likely assisted them in their WeLead writing. Prior knowledge/experience of course content is but one factor among many that shapes writing in a given activity system. Other experiences students bring into the activity system, such as co-curricular college involvements, have impact as well.

**College involvements.** Among WeLead course goals/expectations were that students would exhibit leadership in building inclusive communities, that they would do so in their college involvements, and that they would engage in activities outside the course that would deepen their understanding of privilege/oppression as well as allow them to practice inclusive leadership. Thus, out-of-class experiences were an important factor to analyze in relation to the cognitive processes students demonstrated in their writing.

Of the eight students interviewed, all but Hero and Harambe were involved in some sort of co-curricular experiences. Practicing inclusive leadership was a goal of WeLead, but since this research did not follow students into their co-curricular involvements, there is no way of knowing if this goal was realized. The best insight into
whether students practiced inclusive leadership in co-curricular involvements can be gleaned from looking at the solutions they posed in their papers (i.e. the cognitive process of creating). Doing so assumes that the solutions students offered in their writing were perhaps practiced outside of the WeLead classroom. Again there’s no way to know if this was the case, but what students’ writing does demonstrate at very least is that they were thinking about ways they might practice inclusive leadership outside of WeLead.

Examining instances of creating exhibited in the papers of students who were involved in co-curricular involvements at MJU provides some indication that the kind of co-curricular engagements students were involved in influenced how often they employed creating in their writing, the kinds of solutions they offered, and the cognitive processes that led up to creating.

Two students involved in college co-curriculars stood out in the use of creating in their papers: Ivy and MSF. These two exhibited the highest number of instances of creating across their WeLead papers (Ivy with nine instances and MSF with 11). Both Ivy and MSF were involved in the Filipino student organization at MJU. Ivy was also involved in a co-curricular service-related program and enrolled in a service-learning course. In addition to her student organization involvement, MSF attended one of the co-curricular events related to course content recommended by instructors. These experiences influenced both Ivy and MSF in how they understood course content and how it moved them toward praxis.

For example, in week seven, Ivy engaged the class with the activity she had done in her service-related involvement, a game themed on privilege and oppression. Different scenarios of privilege and oppression were laid out on the floor as the game board.
Students would roll the dice, advance the corresponding number of spaces, and read the scenario. A scenario of oppression, such as “you are homeless and unable to find a shelter to stay in for the night” would instruct students to retreat a number of spaces. A scenario of privilege would allow students to advance along the board. Almost always, students would have to retreat, the point of which presumably was to show how oppression does not allow people to advance in society. Ivy spoke of the impact of this co-curricular experience and related it to her writing, particularly the reflection aspect of WeLead writing, noting how reflection (specifically the midterm Personal Identity Reflection) was intended to get people to act:

Yeah, I think it’s to get you to act. Because I kind of, remember how I showed you, how I showed the class the exercises that, what was that? It was Candyland but not Candyland, so that was like me taking back from my reflection that I got from my other service thing and I kind of brought it back to the class, and I feel like if people are able to bring back what they learn and then teach it to other people it will like, it’s going to create that domino effect of people wanting to learn more about like what you’ve learned, so I feel like me bringing that into the class showed that I kind of, I like do really like this type of change and want to like help out in this, so I think it’s important that after you reflect, you act. So this assignment [the midterm] was supposed to help us and show us that we are at call to the world.

To be sure, Ivy’s weekly papers following the class that she brought in this activity did not exhibit many instances of creating; there was only one instance exhibited in her week eight paper. However, her analysis paper exhibited the highest number of instances of creating among all the students in the sample. That she saw praxis as important half-way through the semester before the point where students were actually asked to pose solutions demonstrates an understanding that other students did not express this early on. Thus, it is possible her co-curricular involvement in this service-related engagement influenced her understanding and led the ability to articulate in her final paper more examples of how oppression might be combatted. It should be noted that Ivy
did appear to come into WeLead predisposed to the desire to be a change agent. She had a social justice themed course in high school and expressed desire to make change in her very first interview. Her predisposition likely influenced the choice of her co-curricular involvements, but the fact that she brought to class something from one of her co-curricular involvements also demonstrates the influence this involvement had on her WeLead experience.

Ivy’s solutions (i.e. acts of creating) in her analysis paper also went somewhat beyond surface level solutions. The solutions were largely at the individual level of responsibility and did not quite get at the systematic levels of oppression as her instructor had hoped. However, her paper did address cultural language, particularly the use of the “N-word.” Language is an institutional system. Looking at the way language perpetuates oppression demonstrates a deeper level of thought than merely pointing out how people should just be more accepting of others as many analysis papers did. Ivy wrote about the roots of the N-word, placing it into a historical context. To be sure, she did not develop the historical roots very far, noting only that the word “has roots during the time of slavery,” but that she mentioned this shows some understanding of the historical roots. Her paper also discussed different perspectives on the word, how hip-hop culture has altered the meaning of the word but how some view the word as “unacceptable because it comes from a hate-filled history (Rahman 2015) [Ivy’s citation].” She ultimately engaged in an act of creation in her paper by proposing “When people are informed about the N-word it can help reduce discrimination and oppression. Since people are changing the meaning of the N-word, it is important to recognize the roots of the word.” This excerpt shows that she was thinking about a solution through multiple perspectives. She
ultimately expressed her own perspective that using the word is not “okay […] Although there are other people who do say the word, I think it is extremely meaningful to inform people about injustices to better the community. When people are able to recognize the problem it will essentially break the cycle of socialization.” Thus, the depth with which she posed her solution demonstrates an awareness that went beyond surface level awareness of oppression as a social problem. Ivy’s prior experience with course-related content as well as her involvement in a co-curricular program that also examined issues of privilege and oppression seems to have had some influence on how she expressed content and posed a solution, for she made connections between her co-curricular engagement and the course content.

MSF was the other student who stood out in this sample in terms of the impact co-curricular involvement may have had on student learning. MSF, too, appeared to have come into WeLead with prior understanding of course content, though she did not mention any prior formal/organized involvements with course-related content in interviews. However, she was the only student interviewed who referenced attending one of the instructor recommended co-curricular activities that related to course content. MSF attended an immersion trip to a Native American reservation in the tenth week of the course. A week prior, section Y watched a video about Native American spear-fishing treaty rights and the opposition to their fishing practices that ensued in the 1990s. The video showed the treatment of Native Americans by the dominant culture opposed to their practices, pointing toward the oppression of Native Americans. Instead of writing about the week ten assigned topic, “Microagressions,” MSF chose to write about her immersion experience. She noted:
I really loved it so much, so I told [Instructor Y] that I would write about this instead, I integrated the video that we saw in class as a day of Native Americans. This is the paper that I liked the most, it was nothing like the other papers I wrote. It was very open minded, really deep, happy and exploring reflections. I really liked this paper.

In the paper she wrote on this experience, she did not exhibit any instances of creating, yet she did exhibit a depth of understanding that is worthy of discussion, one that demonstrated an awareness of historical and systematic oppression of Indigenous peoples. The paper noted how the experience “extinguish[ed] the prejudices” she held of “the indigenous people.” This statement evidences self-awareness (a course goal). Her paper went on to recount what one of the Native Americans spoke about to students:

“You can call us the Native Americans, the Indians, or the indigenous people. But none of these labels mean anything. They are as meaningless as calling the British, Germans, and French ‘Europeans’.” He’s right. None of these names successfully convey the cultural and language diversity of a nation.

In this excerpt, MSF edges toward an understanding of the historical oppression Native Americans have experienced, and she also brought the experience back to what was discussed at the WeLead retreat at the beginning of the semester, at which students watch and discussed a TED Talk video titled *The Danger of a Single Story*[^31]: “They, Indigenous peoples] as far as they can go, are just simply stanzas of a single-sided story.” That she references this video shows evidence of learning transfer; she sees a connection between the TED Talk and this experience she had at the reservation.

MSF went on in her paper to demonstrate understanding of Native Americans’ experience of oppression:

[^31]: This TED Talk video, given by author Chimamanda Adichie, discusses Adichie’s experiences of attending college in the U.S. as an international student and the misconceptions her peers had of her as a person from Africa. The intention of showing the video at the retreat was to get students to think about stereotypes and prejudice.
Their story is still a continuum of sufferings and injustice. Their children still go to school in humiliation of their classmates as weirdos, as minorities. These kids can’t speak their own language because it was of their grandparents’ fatal impairment, who were feared to death under the force to permanently erase their customs and traditions and adopt what was seen as the only solution – the Great America. They can’t sing the anthem of their nation because the land that was once theirs is lost and reformed into a foreign world. They can’t even fish in their rivers, the only resources of their daily food intake, because some people considered the lives of walleyes more precious than alive human beings. […] We are so ignorant of their existence that we quickly categorize them as outsiders, use their traditional regalia as costumes for Halloween, and have their faces on athletic attires. Sometimes I wonder what the world would be like if they were the winners and their stories would dominate the popular media. Would we be able to see them for who they are? Will we accept their stories? Or will we put another population on the scale and label them out of our limited knowledge and for our personal pleasure?

The sort of awareness MSF demonstrated in this response paper was rarely made by other WeLead students, and it seems that this co-curricular experience assisted in her ability to articulate her understanding of oppression in this instance.

This experience and the understanding she gained through it, I believe had impact on MSF’s writing beyond the paper in which she wrote about it. This is evidenced in her analysis paper, which exhibited 13 instances of understanding, six of analyzing, and three of creating. The paper also exhibited an instance of applying, which was rare among students’ papers (only six instances overall among all 225 papers). MSF’s employment of creating in her analysis paper also shows a depth of thought that other WeLead students did not demonstrate. While the solutions she posed were at the individual level, the understanding she demonstrated that preceded her solutions shows that she was indeed thinking about oppression in systematic terms. For example, her first instance of creating in the paper came as follows:

One by one, we can stop the reformation of the cycle of oppression by deciding to take a stand. It is critical that we first understand the need to speak up and challenge the corrupted system. It is a cycle, and it will sooner or later find its way back to us. Thus every individual in the modern society, especially the
younger generation, should find a way to get more exposure to the truth. Listen to different perspectives. One of the reasons why we fail to empathize with others’ hardships is because we’ve only heard of the single sided story.

While MSF’s solution is individual (education and people listening to other perspectives), it was preceded by examples in society of how different groups of people were oppressed (Native Americans and African Americans). She also gave an example of oppression in the TV show she analyzed in her paper:

People behave in certain way because their power was taken away from them. Those with too little influence in society find new solutions to their anxiety, and violence, one of the easiest stress-reliever, is the key to all corruptions. Native Americans lost their rights to fish because they are deemed to worth less than Walleye fish. Blacks are dehumanized against whites and their marriage is forever unacceptable. Rebecca Sutter was killed to silence the truth that Frank was the real murderer after all. The powerful manipulate their privileges to exploit those below them, and the hierarchy continues without end. Lacking the redistribution of privileges, such deprivations will continue to haunt humanity and sink us deeper to the darkness of injustice and division.

MSF’s rhetorical decision to tie the real-life oppression of groups to the show she analyzed in her paper demonstrates that she was thinking beyond the confines of the show. That she further tied her solutions to these examples shows depth of thought (analyzing, evaluating, and creating). Furthermore, that she referenced Native Americans in her final paper shows that this co-curricular experience impacted not only her writing but her overall understanding of course content.

Thus, there seemed to be a relationship between co-curricular involvement and WeLead learning (as evidenced in writing) for MSF. Ivy’s negotiation of her writing also appears to have been influenced by her co-curricular involvements. While other WeLead students involved in co-curriculars did exhibit instances of creating in their papers as well as other higher order cognitive processes, Ivy and MSF are the only two who explicitly brought into the WeLead class or their writing those co-curricular experiences. One other
factor in the activity system seems to have had influence on students’ writing, and that was the resources they drew upon.

**Resources upon which Students Drew.** In interviews, students were asked particular questions to determine the resources they drew upon in negotiating their WeLead writing. Unpacking students’ use of writing resources assists in understanding the tools students used in this activity system and also how writing functioned as a tool/artifact toward objects and outcome. Tools are the things in the activity system that assist in carrying out activity toward a particular object or goal. If the intended goal/object of this activity system was students’ learning/development, and writing (and resources embedded in that writing) are tools that work toward that object, knowing about the tools assists in understanding the functions of writing toward that learning. Therefore, students were asked to compare their WeLead writing to other kinds of writing, to identify what assisted them in their writing, and to name the purposes and benefits of their writing to elicit the resources on which they drew in using writing as a tool in this activity system. (For a complete list of interview questions see Appendix E.) Interviews revealed a number of resources students drew upon to negotiate their writing in WeLead. Table 5.3 outlines these resources as well as the number of times students mentioned these resources in their interviews. What follows are findings related to the three most significant resources upon which students drew: course readings/activities, their own perspectives/experiences and previous writing knowledge/experience.

**Course Readings/Activities and Personal Perspectives/Experiences.** The resource on which students drew most in their WeLead writing was their own perspectives/experiences. This resource included their beliefs, values, and identities as
well as situations they encountered in their own lives personally. Because the bulk of students’ writing was reflective in nature and because prompts asked them to connect readings/content to their own lives, it is not surprising that students drew from their own perspectives/experiences most as a source for their writing. Thus, it is also not surprising that course readings and activities (i.e. content) was the second most utilized resource.

These two resources overlapped a great deal in responses to interview questions. For example, when asked what the instructor was looking for in a good response paper, Hero (section X) stated:

He want [sic] you to like paraphrase and explain what was happening in the text and the readings and he wants you to connect it to your own life, so pretty much reflecting back to what happened in the reading and if anything that happened, so say in the books that connects you or happened to you, you can share it in the writing. That would be like a big, it will help your essay.

Similarly, Harambe (section X) expressed that the instructor was looking for “A good analyzing of what the author is try[ing] to get across and then bring in your own experience. Bring in an example of something that happened to you or someone you know.”

MM’s (section X) responses to interview questions evidenced the relationship between connecting the reading to one’s own experiences/perspectives throughout the duration of the semester. In the first interview he mentioned how in his response papers he would “write the main idea and just kinda connect it, but I focus more on reflection, […] you know like ok this affects me, […] just see where I am, […] you know like these different experiences in my life, how they shape me today.”

In discussing the midterm paper, MM’s responses also evidenced a relationship between class readings/activities and perspectives/experiences as writing resources. The prompt for the Personal Identity Inventory Reflection was not as explicit in the
expectation that students were to connect readings to their own experiences as the prompt for the weekly response/reflection papers was. The Inventory prompt asked students to respond to a number of questions about their identities and how those “affect the person you are today” (Instructor X syllabus, 2016). It then stated: “Using these questions as a guide, along with readings, discussions and other related activities from class, complete a 3-5 page essay outlining your understanding and experiences of your chosen identity (or identities). Your essay should address the above questions in ample detail and articulate your reactions, learning and reflections [emphasis added].” There was language in the prompt noting that students were to use the readings, but the emphasis was on addressing the questions the prompt asked and articulating learning and reflection. However, MM did imply a connection between the readings and his perspectives/experience in describing his process for writing the midterm paper:

First thing you do is you pretty much write down all your identities from race, ethnicity, background, religion, just anything, sexual orientation, sexual identity, gender, all that. So you just write all that down. And then you go through and you write each one as either being one that is oppressed or one that is privileged. One that is like a targeted identity. […] So then for the paper, you pretty much just, you talk about your identities you know and then you pick like a few examples, like one that’s oppressed, one or two that are oppressed, one or two that are privileged. And then you talk about like how that’s affected your life; it’s more of like assessing like where you are right now. I talked about like these identities have shaped like where I’ve been, where I am, and where I’m going.
Table 5.3

**Writing Resources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Assignment Prompts</th>
<th>Class Readings or Activities</th>
<th>Instructor Feedback</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Other Campus Resources</th>
<th>Other Courses</th>
<th>Out-of-Class Activities</th>
<th>Perspectives or Experiences</th>
<th>Previous Writing Knowledge or Other Writing Assignments</th>
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<td>38</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
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The terminology he used (words such as race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, sexual identity, gender, privileged, targeted, and oppressed) are things that were discussed in course readings and class activities. He did not explicitly say that they were to connect the readings to this paper, yet his response indicated that he drew from them. In the third interview, conducted at the end of the semester, when asked how WeLead writing was similar to writing in other courses, MM described the writing in similar fashion: “So a lot of the writing is very like summary, like what did you read, and then reflection and analysis, like reflection like why is this important, how does it affect you, and then analysis like how does this relate to the world, why is it important, you know.”

Like their peers in section X, students in section Y evidenced a relationship between course readings/activities and their own experiences/perspectives and drew on these two resources most often in their writing. Section Y writing prompts also indicated students were to draw on course readings/activities in some way—most explicitly for the weekly response papers in which students were instructed to “think critically about the assigned readings prior to discussing them with the entire class,” “Outline 2-3 main points of the article,” and “Use a ‘real world’ example to illustrate at least one of the main points of the article,” (Instructor Y Syllabus, 2016). However, section Y students were also explicitly instructed not to quote directly from the article in the summary.

Whereas Hero, Harambe, and MM saw the summary of the reading in response papers as a key requirement, students in section Y seemed to have a more fluid interpretation of how the course readings were to be used in their weekly response papers and emphasized the experience portion more. To be sure, the course readings were drawn upon as a resource, but it was more about how the content of course readings could be
connected to their own experiences or what they had to say about the content in those readings.

For example, when asked to describe course writing in the first interview, Kat noted “It’s more about interpreting what you read to your own situation and your own perspective. That’s how my essays usually go, taking what the writer tells me is happening and then fitting that to my own situation, my own experiences.” Q explained the writing in this way:

We have to read passages from the book that we have for the class. And each passage addresses something different with regard to society, [...] from there we have to write about key points that the passage talks about and then provide a personal example that relates to that in forms of, it could be a story, it could be maybe an article or something, and then after you provide your own example, you proceed to ask two questions that you would ask the class.

While he did indicate that explaining key points of the reading was an expectation, he indicated later in the interview that “giving depth” in the response was more important. When asked what the instructor was looking for in a good paper he responded “Simply have you read the material, and can you formulate your own opinion or your own view on the topics and whether or not you can turn those into actual viable questions to invoke further thought.”

In the second interview (post midterm) students were asked to describe their course writing again. Linda expressed that the writing allowed her to “explain what I'm feeling, [...] what I want to talk about based off the readings, how I can apply it to things, whether it's been through media I've seen, through my own personal life, or other classroom settings that I'm in that talk about discussions that we having class.” MSF, too, indicated that the weekly writing was more about students’ experiences and perspectives on the issues they read about for class than it was about demonstrating their
understanding of the reading. She noted that WeLead writing was “very voluntary and reflective” and that the writing made her “think about what is going on in this world.”

She further noted:

One of my essays, that was about racism, I talked about President Obama. I said about how Americans and many people in the world paid attention to him because he is a Black man. It was interesting to me because when he was running for president I was still in Vietnam, in Vietnam we have communism, so Vietnamese do not have a choice on who to vote for. We paid attention to the American system and it was fascinating to see a president who was not white. […] When President Obama came on TV people would make fun of him. And I remember being a kid, people really formed all these theories about him, and they were so wrong. After eight years of him being president, he has really proven himself to be responsible, capable of making changes, so much more than just his appearance. I found this to be cool, people can have different skin colors, can have disabilities, and this does not determine their personality or their characteristics or who they are.

The response to which MSF referred was written in week three; the topic for the week was “The Social Construction of Difference.” Her essay did not summarize main points as the prompt indicated, only referencing the reading as the following passage demonstrates: “Barack Obama was the first African American President whose legacy proved and expanded the possibilities for a change in the common ‘social construction of reality’ (Johnson, Allan. Readings for Diversity and Social Justice).” However, the essay did touch racial classifications, which were a topic of the assigned reading for that week. MSF further explained in her essay:

The inferior groups of people are always those that get compared to the “normal”, accepted groups. Many looked at Barack Obama and chose not to vote for him because it felt odd that a black President was representing their country. Others did not find him trustworthy enough to manipulate their rights. The rest disliked him before getting to see the great deeds he ought to perform because of the typical stereotypes associated with African Americans. While many people still subjectively think that voting for Obama might have been the worst mistake a voter could have made, the majority of society acknowledges the difference. President Obama’s racial classification had very little to do with how great of a president, individual, or father he would become.
These excerpts from MSF’s essay are offered as evidence that for her, the more important resource was her experience and her perspectives as expressed in her interview. This is further evidenced by her response to the question that asked her to describe what the writing in WeLead was like: “It is very open ended; we can bring any issues that we want to talk about in this world and integrate it into our readings.” The readings are referenced as a resource, but the perception was that the writing was more about how students relate to the content in the readings.

For some students, class readings/activities figured a bit more prominently into negotiating the analysis paper. In the third interview, in which students discussed their analysis papers, the percentage of references to class readings/activities as a resource (in comparison to all references of this resource across interviews) was above 25% for half of the students for which data was available. (See Table 5.4.) The prompt did require that students use course readings in their papers, so it is not surprising that they drew on readings as a resource to negotiate this writing task. What is interesting is that the students viewed this resource not so much in terms of a reference citation source or evidence to support their papers’ theses (although there was some of that), but more so as a resource of what they learned overall throughout the semester and a means to discuss issues of privilege and oppression in a larger context.

Two students in section X alluded to class readings/activities as a writing resource somewhat in terms of what they learned overall for the course. Ivy made the least number of references to course readings/activities as a resource in her third interview and viewed the readings more as an evidence source: “I used the readings assigned from class, and I also just used like Blackish [a TV show], […] so then it was just easy to bring up things
that were brought up in the show and find things that kind of related to it.” However, she evidenced an understanding that the paper’s content was to connect to what they had learned overall in the course: “So I just decided to watch *The Office* [another show], find an episode that was like clearly related to what we have been learning.” In this way, the class readings/activities informed the paper for her and were a means to demonstrate what she learned overall even if she did not characterize them explicitly as an overall resource.

Table 5.4

*References to Class Readings/Activities as a Writing Resource in Interview Three*

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<th>Section</th>
<th>References to Class Readings/Activities Interview 3</th>
<th>Total Number of References to Class Readings/Activities</th>
<th>Percentage of References to Class Readings/Activities in Interview 3</th>
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<td>Harambe</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM</td>
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<td>MSF</td>
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</table>

Note: Two students did not complete all three interviews, leaving six students in this subsample. The percentage was calculated by dividing the number of references to class readings/activities in interview three by the total number of references to class readings/activities as a writing resource across all three interviews.

MM came closer to explicitly characterizing readings/activities as an overall learning resource. MM made many references to course content throughout the third interview. These references were coded under “class readings/activities” because the
content of the course was delivered via the readings and class activities. His first explicit reference of course readings did have to do with using them as source. When asked how the paper was supposed to be written he responded:

So for the option I chose, pretty much you watch your favorite show, so in my case South Park, and pretty much take note of whenever you see a form of oppression or discrimination, and then pretty much the paper wanted you to like cite at least 2 two readings from class, so like 2 forms of oppression that we studied, and then cite at least 3 outside sources that are supportive of your statements and supportive of your argument of your overall paper.

However, he did not reference readings in terms of evidence supporting his thesis. He had to cite them, but he characterized them in terms of learning and content that he studied. The outside sources are what he referenced in terms of evidence, stating that they were supposed to “cite at least 3 outside sources that are supportive of your statements and supportive of your argument of your overall paper.” The readings were the catalyst, the resource that allowed him to identify the forms of oppression. The TV show he analyzed was where he found examples, and the “outside sources” were what he used as support. Thus, the readings can be viewed in terms of what he learned overall through the course. He appeared to have learned a lot about different forms of oppression as well. He noted choosing South Park because “like there’s so many things I can talk about. Like I can talk about everything we learned; like there’s so many examples.” He further noted that the purpose of the paper was to “reflect on everything you learned over a semester in this course and kind of apply it to a real-world thing,” which also shows that he conceptualized the paper as a means to engage with what he learned overall, and the readings seemed to be the resource that brought this into focus.

Students in section Y seemed to embody the view that class readings/activities were an overall resource for learning, as opposed to an evidence source for their papers,
more so than their section X peers. When asked what the purpose of the analysis paper was, Kat (section Y) characterized it this way:

I think the purpose was to encourage us to do outside research because a lot of what we were doing in class was either personal evaluations or readings that we were assigned. But with this paper we’re going outside of what we’re taught to have, to do further research and kind of help our interest in that topic, I think, and then see what we learned in class, how that relates to real life situations other than the examples they give us in the book [emphasis added].

In this reference, Kat demonstrates an understanding that the paper was to connect with course readings, but she characterized the paper as an opportunity to “see” what she learned in class and how that went beyond what they read. The assigned reading was the resource, the catalyst for learning, and the paper became a means to draw upon what was learned overall. Later in the interview when asked what helped her write the essay, Kat noted that she used the class readings because they were required to, but she further expressed “I also wanted to connect it back to the readings. So that definitely helped.” This shows a desire to convey what she learned, to not just use the readings as evidence, but to use them to show relevance of the material in the real world. She further expressed a desire to make change or at least think about making change. The analysis paper was a means to do so: “I always have strong feelings about an issue, but it’s definitely harder to find a solution for it. So sitting down and writing ‘this is what I think we should do about the issue, this is how I think we can fix it,’ that kind of helped me realize how important it was.”

Linda (section Y) only made three references to class writing/activities as a resource in her third interview, yet she viewed the readings in a similar light. When describing the purpose of the analysis paper she noted:

I think the purpose for me was to see how the things we are reading about and discussing in class are things that are really happening. They are things that are
happening in our own community and notice these are things that are really happening and we need to take note of it. These problems in society are real; it makes you notice and ask yourself what can I do to make a change.

Linda explained the paper as a means to understand the issues they read about and discussed in class. The readings were a catalyst to understanding issues of oppression and privilege; through reading about these issues and then seeing/explaining how they manifested in the real world inspired in Linda a desire to make change.

Like MM (section X), Q also made many references to class readings/activities (i.e. content) in his third interview. He did not characterize them as evidence sources but in terms of overall learning for the course. For example, when asked what the analysis paper entailed, Q responded:

So the final assignment basically asks to describe […] the equal portrayal of ethnicities in media such as the news, movies, TV, music, etc., and using examples from curriculum that we learned in class: microaggressions, ableism, all of that stuff that we’re made aware of. We were asked to incorporate that into our perception of why ethnicities were not equally represented in the media or if there’s any specific reason that society’s placing that doesn’t allow this equal representation in the media.

Q characterized the readings/activities (the course content) as “all that stuff we were made aware of,” and he used explicit terminology from readings and discussions. He viewed the readings as “hypothetical examples” (even though many readings discussed actual people’s experiences) and the examples he identified in his paper as “actual real world problems.” He further noted that “the point of the paper is to help us better understand what we learned in class and apply it.” Thus, the content, again, was the resource that not only informed the analysis paper, but was also the vehicle that allowed for further learning and demonstration of knowledge in the paper. Later in the interview he described the paper’s purpose to be “draw[ing] from a multiplicity of examples, while at the same time analyzing it in a way that you could apply the knowledge that you
learned in class to solve those problems.” Like his section Y peers, Q expressed a desire to make change, and the analysis paper seemed to provide a means to explore becoming a change agent.

MSF expressed similar views as her section Y peers with regard to how readings/activities were a resource for learning. In her third interview she discussed her analysis paper and made several references to this writing resource. She wrote about the show *How to Get Away with Murder* because in watching it she realized “that this show is like talking about all the isms that we talked about in class.” She also understood the purpose of the analysis paper to be “apply[ing] what we've been talking about in class to a situation in real life.” This reference, again, shows that class readings/activities were a resource for her writing not merely as an evidence source but as overall learning for the course.

While MSF characterized class readings as a resource in terms of overall learning, she also used them as a model for her own writing. She noted that “The book helped me write the paper.” When she was asked to explain this further she said “The textbook gave me some pretty, some pretty solid supporting evidence. And definitely like hints, like suggestions to how I could construct my idea statements.” The readings served as an evidence resource for her and others, but MSF also used the readings in a way that her peers did not express in their interviews, as a rhetorical resource for how to convey ideas. Using a text as evidence is a rhetorical resource as well, but other students did not talk about the course texts rhetorically outside of using them for evidence. When asked to unpack how the text functioned as a rhetorical model, MSF explained “[…] like how to
phrase your sentences. If that makes sense, so like not how they construct their essays, but how they write their sentences.”

MSF was an international student. While she had been in the states for several years, she did express in one interview having to negotiate between her native language and English in her reading and writing tasks. In trying to understand more how she used the course texts as a rhetorical model, I asked her if the text informed her writing style, and she responded “I wouldn’t say style, but like how, like the terminology that they use and like how they would give out examples. Like I based a lot of my last, like conclusion about the solutions on the reading.” While the texts served as a rhetorical resource for MSF in this regard, she also referenced solutions, which relates more to overall course learning rather than to how to write. To be sure, for this student, class readings were a resource for negotiating learning to write, but they also served in a writing to learn capacity, as they did with other students. Readings were a catalyst for understanding more about privilege and oppression, and this informed students’ writing. The writing, in turn, served as a means to further that learning. How students negotiated their WeLead writing toward the furthering of their learning was also influenced by their prior writing knowledge and experiences.

*Previous Writing Knowledge and Experience.* Students characterized their WeLead writing as being very different from writing in other courses, but they compared it to writing they had done in other contexts. This indicates that they drew upon prior writing experiences as a resource to help them negotiate their writing in WeLead. For example, Ivy, Q, and MSF compared their WeLead midterm paper to college application essays. Kat compared this paper to a “state of self” paper she had written in high school,
and Q also compared it to a talk he had given at a Kairos retreat in high school. Linda mentioned a personal essay she had written in a high school English class as being similar to the WeLead midterm paper. Kat, MM, and Ivy also compared their WeLead writing to the writing they had done in the social justice themed classes they took in high school.

Some students noted similarities between WeLead papers and the writing they did in their English (first-year composition) classes at MJU (as was noted previously). In his first interview, for example, MM noted that WeLead was “more focused on more maybe the liberal arts side, where you’re not really looking at mathematics or engineering really. You’re more focused on like literature or English, you know reading the book that we have and reflecting on it.” In describing the reflective nature of WeLead writing in his second interview, he again referenced writing in his English class:

So definitely the writing we do in WeLead is very reflective, you know reflecting on the issue, how it affects you […] For English also we had a paper, it was an entire unit on um like understanding the accessibility, the inclusivity, and the usability of different spaces by like different groups, you know based on like culture, religion, race, healthiness, like body type, and for example, like what I did is you pick a space, so I chose Engineering Hall, […] I talked about like you know the initial impressions, like oh it’s really beautiful, like it’s so nice, it’s so welcoming, but then when you start looking at it and realizing it, it’s like well it is nice but it’s very exclusive to only engineering students at MJU. It’s not very open to the general public or other majors […], so it’s not like as beautiful as you think it seems. And so that was really interesting, like reflecting on that and analyzing it deeper.

In the paper MM wrote for English, he referenced accessibility and inclusivity, which were concepts discussed in WeLead. Later in the interview he expressed that WeLead writing was different than the writing he did in English, noting “a lot of what we’ve done in English is like analyzing rhetorical tools, so like what’s the purpose of this article. Who is this article writing for, and how is it organized? So it’s kind of more of not
really reflective writing, like WeLead is.” However, when asked if he engaged in rhetorical analysis in his WeLead writing, he expressed that he had in fact done so and referenced one paper in particular in which he did not agree with what the author had claimed:

I took a lot of offense to how the book was worded. And I started applying those [rhetorical analysis] tools. I was like, this seems very worded towards the working class, […] like it painted the middle class as like very evil and bad and they’re like ignorant and don’t understand what people are going through. And I was like thinking what’s the purpose of this? It’s like ok, so we’re analyzing classism and how working class people, are being oppressed, and then like thinking who is this written for? It was like, it sounds like it’s written for people who are in the working class, like how it was organized, it contained like personal accounts of people in the working class with low incomes and like struggling, their inputs on things, so yeah.

These examples illustrate that MM conceptualized his WeLead writing in terms of how it was both alike and different from writing in his English class. In the quoted reference above, it can be seen how he used rhetorical analysis to negotiate a WeLead response paper. Applying the rhetorical analysis skills he practiced in his English class helped him unpack and respond to a reading in WeLead. He considered the author’s motives and who the audience for the text was. This act demonstrates knowledge transfer, for the writing in one context had impact on MM’s writing in WeLead. Q also compared his WeLead writing to his English class, noting that was very different and that if he gave me one of his English papers, I would “see the difference.” He further explained: “most of the time in English classes we’re meant to create an argument either for or against the statement of some sort, but for this [WeLead] it’s more of what solutions do you have? Not, oh, are you for this or for that? And we don’t usually get what are your solutions in English classes.” Even though he characterized the writing in the two courses as different, his comparison shows that he was thinking about WeLead writing in terms of
other writing he had done. For Q, WeLead writing was “not” like English because of the
creating (i.e. posing solutions) aspect of the writing. Writing studies scholarship refers to
this sort of comparison as “not’ talk” (Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011). Reiff and Bawarshi’s
study sought to unpack how students made connections across writing contexts and
focused on students’ genre knowledge. “Not’ talk,” is defined as students describing their
writing and writing processes by means of which genres it is not (p. 325).

Other students besides MM and Q engaged in “not’ talk” when discussing their
WeLead writing as well. For example, Linda expressed “not’ talk” in discussing WeLead
writing in her second interview, noting “It's not the same as in English though. English is
definitely a different subject.” She further explained:

Well I know for one in WeLead one of the requirements is that you can't quote the
reading at all, always your own words and your own words only which is
different because in English you have articles and academic journals or writings
and disciplinary readings that you have to use when writing your essay. That's a
different structure in itself because then it's not so much me explaining how but
it's like why is the purpose of it, whereas in WeLead it's just how are you feeling
after you are reading.

Linda’s statement “why is the purpose of it” shows rhetorical knowledge as well, for she
is thinking about writing in terms of an author’s motives. This knowledge seemed to be in
the back of her mind, and she understood that WeLead writing was somewhat different in
that regard. WeLead writing was more focused on “how you are feeling after you are
reading.” Yet the author’s purpose must have entered her thought process to some degree,
for she made the comparison. She ultimately rejected writing about the author’s purpose
because she perceived that WeLead writing was not necessarily about explaining the
author’s purpose. It was instead about how she felt about what the author said. It seems
likely that she must have considered the author’s purpose first, for how would she be able
to express her thoughts and feelings on the reading if she did not first have some
conception of the author’s claim? This negotiation between the rhetorical analysis expected in Linda’s English class and her decision to not explicitly engage in it in her WeLead writing was evident in how she wrote her WeLead weekly papers.

Not one of Linda’s weekly response papers directly or explicitly referenced the readings to which students were to respond. Instead, Linda discussed the concepts embedded in assigned readings more generally. For example, the week six topic was the “Cycle of Socialization.” The assigned reading for that week began with the following statement:

Often, when people begin to study the phenomenon of oppression, they start with recognizing that human beings are different from each other in many ways based on gender, ethnicity, skin color, first language, age, ability status, religion, sexual orientation, and economic class. The obvious first leap that people make is the assumption that if we just begin to appreciate differences, and treat others with respect, then everything will be all right, and there would be no oppression. […] It should be that simple, but it isn’t (Harro, 2013, p. 45).

Linda alluded to the author’s claims in the following way:

When first laying eyes on someone, one can notice things such as gender, race, even ability, just by what you see on the outside. Then there are things you have to get to know of a person that are more protected. Acknowledging the differences of faces in oppression, is not the same as bringing forth a change.

In Linda’s text, she referenced ideas Harro discussed. Her statement that “acknowledging […] differences […] is not the same as bringing about change” reiterated Harro’s view that appreciating differences should lead to the absence of oppression, but that “it is not that simple.” Linda rejected a move to point out the author’s intention (as she might have done in her English class) and instead simply stated how she felt about the issue. However, how she felt is clearly in line with what the author claimed. Her negotiation of how she would reiterate the author’s main points was likely influenced by the prompt, which stated that students should not quote the text. However, Linda also
conceptualized WeLead writing as “not” like what she would have done in her English class, so she had to find a way to agree with the author without stating explicitly what the author claimed. She made the move to put the claim in her own words, which differed slightly from what the author said but encapsulated the author’s claim nonetheless. Thus, it seems, she drew from her knowledge of the rhetorical analysis skills expected in her English class but repurposed them in a way fitting for the WeLead activity system. Her WeLead writing was akin to the writing she did in her English class but also “not” like that writing as evidenced in the way she engaged in “not’ talk.”

MSF expressed “not’ talk” in describing WeLead writing in general also: “I feel like it is not like any other writing assignments, there are no limits to it.” Ivy expressed a similar characterization in describing WeLead writing “[…] it’s more personal. It’s not technical. And there’s more liberty in writing for here.” Kat, too, engaged in a sort of “not’ talk” characterization of her WeLead writing: “I think it’s more creative writing. As I mentioned before, because I do, I take Rhetoric 102, I take International Politics, and that’s more, like I said before it’s research and providing a solution, but this is just more of a creative, open style of writing.”

This “not’ talk” demonstrates that students were thinking about their WeLead writing in terms of other writing experiences. Other writing experiences also showed to be a resource in terms of genre-related and content-related knowledge. For example, Kat compared writing she did in her Theology course to writing in WeLead: “In theology, we do a lot of, she calls them journals. But you write about the reading and then your personal connection to it. So that reminds me of our [WeLead] papers, our weekly papers.” As mentioned previously, Ivy compared the discussion section of the lab reports
she wrote in her science classes: “The other papers related to reflection were more like in my lab reports be considered discussion, discussion writing. [...] like you’re discussing all your results that you’ve done, so in a way you’re reflecting over your entire lab report that you’ve gone over.” Linda, too, made comparison to reflective writing done in her Social Justice course at MJU: “Well I know for in my Social Justice and Welfare class, we have like reflections for service learning that we do, which allows me to be active in the community. I’m able to discuss and write about that, whereas in the WeLead class we are able to like read and reflect.” Kat also drew upon the content discussed in her theology class in reference to her WeLead midterm paper:

In Theology right now we’re talking about sin tendencies, and how some of us have tendencies to sin in different ways than others, and sometimes I think that’s similar to this [the Personal Identity Inventory Reflection] because if I am not looking at myself and my character and how I’m acting and what’s influencing that, then I might not be more understanding of other people who are different than me, that their inventories are different than mine.

Similarly, Linda drew upon the paper she wrote in her Criminology class in her WeLead analysis paper: “I wrote the criminology paper about a week before this [WeLead analysis] paper was due. One of the topics was discussing the news and how it affects police work. It gave me some background knowledge so I was able to talk more about it.”

These comparisons students made demonstrate their repurposing genre knowledge. They had done reflective writing in other classes, so they were able to employ that previous experience in WeLead writing, picking and choosing the aspects of other reflective writing that were applicable. The reflective writing done in WeLead also had influence on students’ seeing reflection as an aspect of writing they did outside of WeLead (such as with Ivy). This finding suggests that reflective writing is both generic (i.e. a genre) and transferable. As the definitions of reflective writing mentioned
previously noted, reflection includes more than just thinking about one’s own thinking; it also includes understanding, analyzing, and evaluating and leads to creating.

Additionally, Linda and Kat related content from other courses to WeLead writing. Other students related content from courses taken in high school (most notably those students who had some sort of social justice class prior to WeLead). This repurposing of content knowledge had impact on how students viewed and negotiated their WeLead writing. Both genre and content knowledge seem to have prompted other cognitive processes as well. These acts of repurposing genre and content knowledge further impacted the outcome of the WeLead activity system, that is, what did students gain through writing in the course? The outcome can be viewed through the knowledge domains as outlined in the revised Bloom’s Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). A discussion of findings with regard to knowledge domains follows.

**Knowledge Domains**

While this research sought to explore how writing functioned for students in the WeLead activity system and how instructors used writing, the question at the core of this research was what did students learn from their writing? In particular, the research sought to determine if/how writing functioned toward learning in similar ways as it does in traditional academic settings. In some ways, it did. Students’ writing exhibited evidence of the knowledge domains outlined in the revised Bloom’s Taxonomy, but not all of the knowledge domains were neatly applicable.

Of the four knowledge domains outlined by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), *conceptual* and *metacognitive* figured most prominently in the outcome of the WeLead activity system. There was also evidence of *factual knowledge* in students’ writing, which
is defined as “the basic elements students must know if they are to be acquainted with the discipline or to solve any problems in it” (p. 45). Factual knowledge is further broken down into “knowledge of terminology” and “knowledge of specific details and elements” (p. 45-48). However, the way Anderson and Krathwohl explain the factual knowledge domain is geared more toward academic disciplines, and the content of WeLead was not quite grounded in a discipline. Course readings discussed specific instances of people’s oppression, such as redlining and the discrimination of Muslims on college campuses. Students made reference to these kind of “facts” in their writing, used terminology referenced in readings (e.g. social construction of difference, cycle of socialization), and adequately summarized what assigned reading entailed. It is difficult, however, to say that one’s experience of oppression is a fact in the same way one can say the Declaration of Independence was adopted by Congress in 1776 or that the square root of 64 is eight. Certainly, redlining had an oppressive result on a population of individuals, but there’s much debate over what oppression is and whether or not it’s in operation in society. I’m not suggesting that oppression doesn’t exist, and I tend to agree with the views discussed in WeLead texts. My point is that oppression and privilege in terms of being “facts” do not have the same criteria as “facts” in many academic disciplines. Therefore, flexibility in applying Anderson and Krathwohl’s framework needs to be granted.

It is also difficult to apply Anderson and Krathwohl’s criteria of procedural knowledge to the outcome of the WeLead activity system. Procedural knowledge concerns knowing how to do something and “often takes the form of a series or sequence of steps to be followed. It includes knowledge of skills, algorithms, techniques and methods […]” (p. 52). There is no one method to solving problems of oppression, nor is
there an algorithm that can be taught. The closest approximation to procedural knowledge in WeLead came in the last week of class when students read an article titled “The Cycle of Liberation” (Harro, 2013), which discussed concepts related to creating social change. Harro’s model consists of the following “steps:” (1) “waking up” (i.e. recognizing that something that previously made sense no longer does), (2) “getting ready” (i.e. engaging in self-reflection about how one feels about a particular situation), (3) “reaching out” (i.e. seeking out experiences that are different from how one normally operates in the world), (4) “building community” (i.e. dialoguing with people both alike and different from oneself and joining with those others), (5) “coalescing” (i.e. organizing toward action and disruption of social systems), (6) “creating change” (e.g. creating public awareness campaigns or joining groups who lobby for social change), and (7) “maintaining” (i.e. continuing to engage in all these steps) (p. 619-624). Indeed, these are steps people can take toward combatting systems of oppression, but there is no guarantee that such steps will lead to change and/or solve the problem of oppression.

To be sure, students’ analysis papers did allude to the concepts embedded in Harro’s model, so in some ways they exhibited procedural knowledge. Many students’ solutions included acknowledging that oppression exists and becoming more educated about others and the problems of oppression. For example, Christina (section X) closed her analysis paper with the following solution: “Moreover, I think more schools should recommend students to take classes like WeLead because it will show students all the different groups that struggle within society that they may never even notice.” This solution embodies steps 1-3 of Harro’s model. Caroline (section Y) posed this solution:

If we install awareness programs that teach others about people that are different from them, then we will be making an effort to try and come together to
understand one another. Once we understand where everyone is coming from, we can make advancements and not hate on others. We will see that everyone is human and no one wants to be abused in any way. If this happens, then our nation will ultimately be a happy, comfortable, and safe environment.

This solution also embodies steps 1-3 of Harro’s model and edges toward step 4.

However, these two solutions are a bit simplistic in their understanding of the nature of systematic oppression. People may come to understand difference and oppression through education, but that does not mean that they will actively work toward change.

Furthermore, while students made suggestions for how to combat oppression in their papers, there’s little evidence in this data set to suggest that they engaged in the creation of change themselves. Writing more clearly evidenced conceptual knowledge. For instance, the examples from students’ writing referenced above show that students understood the concepts of Harro’s model—which Anderson and Karthwohl (2001) would classify as “knowledge of theories, models and structures” (p. 51). Students’ writing also demonstrated conceptual knowledge in the form of “classifications and categories” (p. 49), for they wrote about different types of oppression weekly (e.g. racism, sexism, ableism, adultism, etc.). Additionally, students’ writing showed knowledge of “principles and generalizations” (p. 51)—which also fall into conceptual knowledge. For example, stereotyping was a common topic of discussion in students’ papers. Susan (section X) wrote her analysis paper on the show Designated Survivor and how the show perpetuated stereotypes of Muslims as terrorists. She related the show to the current cultural context:

[…] this TV show talks about what we are facing right now in society by stating that because we’ve had a history of Muslim terrorist attacks in the US and elsewhere in the world, all Muslims should be considered bad people. […] Even on college campus, students find themselves being judged in terms of negative stereotypes about Islam and are put in the same category as a Muslim terrorist.
This excerpt from Susan’s paper shows conceptual knowledge, for she pointed to the generalizations made of a particular group of people. She further demonstrated knowledge of the principle of equality embedded in the course content: “We also need to understand that they [Muslims] should be under the same consideration as other religious groups such as Jews and Catholics who had in earlier decades rooted themselves in American soil.” In this statement, she not only showed conceptual knowledge, but she implied knowledge of Harro’s model as well in terms of “waking up.” Again, there’s no evidence that she employed Harro’s model, but the desire for change seems to present. This implication of procedural knowledge, however, isn’t framed in terms of how to combat oppression per se; therefore, it cannot be considered procedural knowledge in the purest sense.

Another principle that was embedded in WeLead course content was the idea that privilege causes people to see the status quo as normal. Students evidenced conceptual knowledge of this principle in their analysis papers, writing about how movies or television cast people from privileged groups, which then perpetuates society not being able to recognize privilege and oppression. For example, Sophia framed her analysis paper around the 2016 Oscar awards and how few actors of color have received Oscars. She brought the example of the inequity of the Oscars into a larger context: “As extremely unfair as the Oscars were this year the issue of inequality in Hollywood goes deeper than just the show it stems from the unequal roles played by people of color in the industry.” Her paper further discussed how television shows predominantly focus on the lives of the dominant white culture while society is comprised of many cultures: “The reality of America is that it is filled with an assortment of all ethnicities, so the fact that
the majority of the television shows aired display the livelihood of only one ethnicity is frankly baffling.” These excerpts from Sophia’s paper demonstrate conceptual knowledge. She referenced course readings that directly discussed the marginalization of actors of color in Hollywood, and her paper became a platform to advocate that Hollywood be more representative of how society actually is. Her writing, thus, edged toward the procedural knowledge outlined in Harro’s model, for she used her paper to call for change. However, the paper’s audience did not go beyond the instructor, so it falls short of the social action Harro’s model suggests. Still, the paper demonstrated Sophia’s desire for change.

Thus, conceptual knowledge figured more prominently in the outcome of the WeLead activity system. Students demonstrated knowledge of privilege and oppression in their papers and posed possible solutions. Some students’ solutions showed a greater depth of understanding (i.e. conceptual knowledge) than others, but all of them expressed a desire for change. This desire to enact change was the most significant outcome of the WeLead activity system. In actuality, desire to make change is really the only outcome that could have been achieved given the constraints of the course. Students were graded mostly on the basis of their writing. Class participation was also an area for which students received credit, but the majority of points came from the writing assignments. These assignments in and of themselves could not enact change, for no one saw them but instructors. Students may have taken their conceptual knowledge out into the world and advocated for change and/or challenged others’ beliefs, but this data set has no evidence to suggest that they did so. The desire to enact change was the ultimate outcome, but it would not have been possible if students had not engaged in the self-
reflection/examination they did in their writing. Indeed, metacognitive knowledge, was the other major outcome of the WeLead activity system.

There is a good deal of evidence that points toward metacognitive knowledge as an outcome of WeLead. Students’ writing demonstrated their wrestling with their own belief systems. The section on students’ world views being challenged is one example that demonstrates students thinking about their own thinking. The weekly papers in and of themselves were exercises in students examining their own beliefs/experiences as related to course content (conceptual knowledge). The midterm paper was another example of students having to engage in self-reflection through their writing. Interview data also provided evidence of metacognitive knowledge as an outcome of this course, particularly how metacognitive knowledge enabled a desire to create change.

In each interview, students were asked what the benefits of writing their papers were. MSF noted that “Writing these papers is like slapping ourselves in the face, saying, hey, you have to think more about it and put these into literal words.” Overall, she felt that the papers helped more than hindered learning in the class: “You know like back to what I was saying, how they were like, they force us to try to think in a different way.” Hero described the benefits of writing the weekly responses in this way:

I mean there’s some facts in the book that are new to me, about like the discrimination of handicapped people or like the percentage of incarceration and all that stuff. I guess the reflection, it also helps you like learn new ideas, things that you didn’t really know, like you thought it was this, but then it’s this. And it also helps you reflect back to yourself, so yeah like this kid, this happened to me this time in the past and then I just didn’t really bother to react to it or something like that, so. It really like, sometimes it makes you think twice.

In this statement, Hero evidences the “waking up” phase of Harro’s (2013) model: “you thought it was this, but then it’s this,” and he additionally demonstrates metacognitive knowledge: “it also helps you reflect back to yourself …” as well as a desire of sorts to
make change in his statement about the writing making him think twice about situations in which he might have reacted differently. If procedural knowledge as it manifested in WeLead meant understanding a model toward change and desiring change but stopping short of enacting change, then metacognitive knowledge worked toward engendering that desire in this case. Other students expressed this desire as well.

Kat expressed that the purpose of WeLead writing was to “challenge” students to “think about solutions,” and further noted “We wouldn’t ever change our opinions or evolve from there because we would never be forced to explain ourselves and defend our own opinion like we do in the response paper.” When discussing the benefits of her midterm paper she further noted:

[…] if I am not looking at myself and my character and how I’m acting and what’s influencing that, then I might not be more understanding of other people who are different than me, that their inventories are different than mine. And I think if I look at myself and kind of understand where I’m coming from, and know the influences that people have had over me and what influences me, and then I can look at other people with respect because they have had different influences and different experiences and they have different parts of themselves, but that doesn’t mean that we can’t co-exist.

These statements demonstrate her thinking about her own thinking (i.e. metacognitive knowledge) and how that self-awareness led her to encounter others with greater understanding and respect. She further evidenced metacognition as a product of the writing when she stated “It’s just, you’re feeling it and you’ve felt this your entire life, but writing it down just kind of makes it more real.” The writing caused her to see what she was thinking and allowed her to reflect on the need for change as well as how change might come about.

When asked about the benefits of weekly papers Linda noted:

Definitely being able to reflect on your own thoughts on reading because I didn’t do a lot of that. Like I do mini reflections on my essays, but never like on
someone else’s reading. […] I’m definitely becoming more aware, like when I’m writing in other classes to reflect on my stuff now, so that’s helping me do that.

These statements demonstrate that Linda developed metacognitive knowledge, not only thinking about her thinking, but also thinking about her writing. In her second interview, she provided further evidence that the writing led to metacognitive knowledge:

[…] it definitely allows me to sit back and think about myself as a person because before taking the class there was so many things that I never really focused on or pressed on in discussion in classroom settings in high school, so being able to do that now as a freshman, I can like take that in the next years of college with me. The knowledge that I’m getting now, it's just, it's always keeping me alert on issues that I wouldn't normally be so much involved in or wanting to know more about, so I think the class is definitely allowing me to reflect. Sometimes I talk to people and I'd be like hey I learned this, what do you think about it? It's a way for me to like share something that I didn't know before.

In these statements, Linda expressed a better ability to think about her own thinking as well as to examine the issues that were part of WeLead content. Thus, the writing enabled her to develop stronger conceptual knowledge also. Additionally, she referenced being able to transfer both her metacognitive and conceptual knowledge to other contexts.

Furthermore, the writing led to a sort of praxis, for she said she discussed issues with others. Discussing the issues with others and getting their perspectives evidences Linda enacting steps 1-4 of Harro’s model. She seemed to be working toward how Harro explains one can create social change. It should be noted that Linda expressed these ideas before the class was assigned reading Harro’s “The Cycle of Liberation.”

Q also expressed benefits of reflection and indicated a move toward praxis that came about from his writing. The midterm, for example, allowed him to see more clearly aspects of his identity that informed who he was:

[…] when I actually wrote them out and saw them in a concrete form, I began to understand, ok this is really who I am. Why, because I made the conscious effort and thought to type all these things out and to see them and read them and understand them. […] when you try to evoke that question “who are you?” you
can wrestle with that question for years and never have a solid solution, but the minute you put it something concrete in front of you, it suddenly becomes easier to understand.

Q’s statements show that writing the midterm paper led to a better understanding of himself. He moved beyond self-understanding and toward praxis in writing his analysis paper. Q expressed that he thought the purpose of the final paper was to “help us better understand what we learned in class and apply it.” And when asked if he thought the paper achieved that he responded:

To an extent. As I kept writing I began to think about it more than I would’ve had I not taken this class. I mean the ideas that I had before taking this class were there, but afterwards what we learned in class helped me to better understand why those ideas are there in the first place, so getting that understanding really helped to just realize all these problems that are going on and how to actually deal with them. So writing out the paper it wasn’t just, oh, this is a problem but also this is a problem, and this is how we can deal with it.

Q made a direct reference to better understanding the content (conceptual knowledge). In this act, he also demonstrated knowledge of his own knowledge (i.e. metacognitive knowledge). He further demonstrated a move toward praxis in the statement he gave about how the writing wasn’t just about identifying a problem, but about how to “deal” with the problem. He again referenced praxis when asked what a successful analysis paper looked like: “it draws from a multiplicity of examples, while at the same time analyzing it in a way that you could apply the knowledge that you learned in class to solve those problems. [emphasis added].”

The reflective aspect of WeLead writing was an important factor in moving students toward praxis. MM in discussing the midterm paper referenced the importance of reflection:

I think it’s really important to kind of just reflect and like be aware of where you are because if you don’t, then you’re kind of going blind to what’s really out there. […] I would say it kind of helps you affect like how you treat people, but it
should be more of like being aware of like where you may have more privilege here and they don’t so just to be sensitive of them and be, like have empathy for them, you know?

These statements show that MM’s reflection not only helped him become aware of his own thinking and understanding, but also affected how he treated people and his ability to have empathy.

The most significant example of how WeLead writing developed metacognitive knowledge and a desire to make change came from Ivy, who described the class overall as a “life hack,” a way “to be aware of what’s going on. […] Yeah like a life hack, because I don’t know maybe you, people might want to just take that class so then they can learn about the community and like figure out what made this world what it is today, yeah.” This idea of the class as a “life hack” suggests that Ivy conceptualized WeLead as a means to change life in some way, make it easier or better. The writing was a key component in moving toward change, in “hacking her life.” In describing her midterm paper, Ivy noted:

[…] yeah it was a reflection for us, to realize that we are the people who do need to make the changes like in the society, and like that we can also see them in our lives, like it’s not just minorities experiencing the social wheel. It’s like all of us are integrated into this wheel that creates this cycle that goes on, but there needs to be like a break into it as it shows that you can like lead to a different path that we all need to experience I think.

When asked about the benefits of the midterm she said:

I don’t know. I feel like after you make your stance of what you think should be right, then you’re like I need to like really make this a priority in my life. And to me that’s like why I’ve set priorities to fight like injustices, so that’s like what makes me, I guess. What’s that quote Ignatius, Saint Ignatius says, “Go set the world on fire;” that’s what he says, […] This is what sets my world on fire; this is what makes me like get up in the morning and inspires me to do something.

To unpack this more, I asked Ivy if she felt feel like writing about these issues helped move toward action. She replied:
Yeah, it like helps you remember that like this is why, like this is why I want to do this. It’s like, I don’t know if this is like reassess, reassessing your life. It reminds you that this is why you had these experiences so that you can like relate these experiences that you’ve had and then like tell people about it in this society, so I think the reflections really do help you and like remind you of those actions that you’ve taken place in, and that maybe you should change what you’ve done in the past or like use what you’ve done in the past to like help you in the future. But I think the reflections really do help you, and it like helps you change what you’re going to do in the future. [...] Maybe the term reflection like that’s what like stems people to do what they want to do also.

These statements show that Ivy saw reflection as spurring change. She specifically referenced the term “reflection” as what “stems” people to act.

Ivy’s perception that reflection moves people toward action is interesting for a few reasons. Merriam Webster lists a number of definitions for the word reflection, including “to turn into or away from a course,” “to give back or exhibit as an image, likeness, or outline,” “to bring or cast as a result,” and “to make manifest or apparent” (2017). All of these definitions imply action. It’s as if somehow embedded in Ivy’s and other students’ web of understanding of the term reflection is a call toward movement, a movement that is made manifest by the image. Perhaps as students wrote their thoughts, they created an image (quite literally through the word as an image on the page) that called them to move toward or away from a course of action. They were able to see what they thought, and this either caused a change in them or caused them to retreat. Perhaps these reflections had a way of creating disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 2009) in students. Their writing caused them to “wake up” as Harro (2013) put it, to understand that what they believed was once true no longer holds. In seeing that their ways of perceiving the world were altered, they moved toward making change. Creating change was the ultimate goal of the course (the object toward which activity was aimed), and this goal seems to have been achieved as an outcome, at least in the sense that students
developed a desire to make change or deepened their pre-existing desires to create change. This finding suggests that development of metacognitive knowledge can create a desire among students to change their ways of being in the world and inspire them to become change agents. This notion is unpacked further in the next chapter, which discusses conclusions and implications of this research.
CHAPTER SIX
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Overview

This research on how writing functions toward learning in a mutt course arose from my belief that writing promotes learning in a variety of contexts. Because writing studies research is most often situated in traditional academic disciplines, I wanted to understand more about how writing might benefit students in other contexts and how those contexts in turn impact writing. The choice to study writing in a mutt course themed around oppression and privilege is timely in the current cultural context: the global majority of people is comprised of those who find themselves excluded from the benefits people in the dominant group experience as a result of their white privilege (e.g. socio-economic benefits including access to jobs, adequate education, and/or health care as well as equal protection under the law).

In the past few years, media has been dominated by stories of people’s oppression, including stories of police shootings of African Americans, civil unrest regarding race relations, sexual misconduct experienced mainly by women, and the overall equality of different groups of people. Such oppression has always been present, but now it seems to be more in the open. People are finding their voices and intervening in systems of oppression. The Black Lives Matter movement is one example. These issues of oppression have found their way into the dialogue of colleges and universities. Those in the academic community have seen a need to use their expertise toward social
justice. This is especially true for Catholic Jesuit institutions who have always had a mission to serve the underserved.

Students, too, are seeing a need for change. Chapter One began with a discussion of the growing demand from students for courses focused on diversity and inclusion. Employers over the last decade have expressed the need for globally conscious and culturally competent employees in order to respond to the needs of a global economy, and students want to be able to find gainful and meaningful employment after graduating college. However, today’s college students also want to feel included and accepted on their campus (and beyond). With the growing numbers of students of color enrolled in college, it should be no surprise that inclusion has become a focus in the landscape of higher education. If colleges and universities are to remain viable, they must serve the students they enroll, and they must find ways to retain these students and ensure their success. Thus, programs, such as the WeLead Social Justice Living Learning Community, which work toward inclusion and cultural competence, are crucial to the fabric of contemporary higher education. WeLead embodied a number of high impact practices (Kuh, 2008) found to impact student success. It was a learning community, a first-year experience, a diversity learning course, and a class that could be considered writing intensive. However, the question remains as to whether such courses achieve their goals.

My approach to answering this question was to study the writing in which students engaged in the credit-bearing seminar that was associated with the WeLead living learning community. Writing studies scholarship points to writing being an effective tool of learning. Because the bulk of this scholarship is set in disciplinary
contexts, I sought to understand if writing had the same sort of impact on student learning, that is, did writing function toward the development of cultural competence and a desire to create social change in the same way it functions toward the development of disciplinary knowledge when used in traditional academic classrooms?

The findings of this research suggest that it did. However, there were some nuances in how it did so. It was both similar to writing in academic disciplines and different from it—as evidenced by students’ use of “not’ talk” (Reiff and Bawarshi, 2011). The informality/familiarity that characterized WeLead influenced the shape students’ writing took as well as how they perceived writing functioned toward course goals. Students’ backgrounds also influenced their writing. Overall, the shape writing took in WeLead influenced the outcome of this activity system, what students actually took away from the course. Students developed metacognitive knowledge through their writing (as well as conceptual knowledge and procedural knowledge to some degree). The development of metacognitive knowledge, it seems, also had influence on students’ desire to be change agents. Discussion of these findings and implications for theory, practice, and future research follows.

Summary and Discussion

This research posed three questions it sought to answer. I return to these questions in order to contextualize findings within the body of literature discussed in Chapter Two.
How Does Writing Function for Students in This Living-Learning Community Seminar?

WeLead students identified three functions of their writing: 1) writing to demonstrate learning, 2) writing to learn, and 3) writing to communicate. All of these functions showed impact on students’ learning and worked toward course goals. In demonstrating their learning through writing, students also had to articulate how they understood the content through the use of examples from their own experiences. This act of exemplifying was also an act of examining their own values and perceptions of the world, and in doing so, they engaged in metacognition (i.e. thinking about their own thinking and self-awareness). For example, in week four of the semester, many students found themselves challenged by the content. In her paper, Kat expressed not understanding the author’s views on capitalism and gave an example of how she perceived capitalism could work (see Chapter Five). She not only reflected on her own thinking, but expressed a desire to learn more. Thus, her paper evidenced both demonstrating her learning and learning through her writing. She also noted in interviews how the act of writing caused her to consider what she was thinking. Additionally, students expressed a communicative function for their writing. Writing was a way to engage in a sort of discussion with others’ perspectives. As Harambe expressed, writing was a means “to see other people’s point of view, on what is going on in the country, reflecting on what they think, aspects of their own lives, and to see how you can connect with that person and what they are saying” and “to have a discussion of what the author is writing about and connect it to the real world.” Through this engagement, students came to understand other perspectives, and this, too, was an act of learning. The idea of
engaging with others’ perspectives in relation to one’s own was embedded in WeLead course goals.

All of the functions of writing evidenced in this data suggests that students engaged in learning. Writing was a way for students to show knowledge, see/discover their own knowledge, and communicate their knowledge. These functions acting toward learning are supported by theory and writing studies scholarship. For example, Greeno and Engeström (2014) note that “activity systems found in learning environments have the goal of leading learners toward a desired learning outcome.” Activity Theory views learning as an identifiable “change in the practices of the system” and that “an important mechanism leading to change in practices is an expansion of the subject's understanding of the object” (p.131). WeLead course goals were the objects toward which activity was aimed, and writing as a tool assisted in students’ understanding of their beliefs/values (“Self-Awareness” goals listed on the syllabi), understanding the need to create inclusion and possible actions they might take (“Leadership” goals) and understanding of privilege and oppression (“Social Justice” goals). Thus, they expanded their understanding of the object of this activity system.

Emig (1977) argued that writing encompasses the enactive (learning by doing), iconic (learning by seeing), and representational/symbolic (learning “by restatement in words”). The way WeLead students talked about their writing shows these three kinds of learning. Bangert-Drowns, Hurley, and Wilkinson’s (2004) meta-analysis of writing to learn studies from 1966-1999 also showed that 75% of the studies they examined showed a positive effect of writing on learning. McGuire et al. (2009) also demonstrated that writing had an influence on students’ learning, particularly reflective writing, which
students in their study reported helped them become more engaged in courses, deepened their critical thinking, and improved their ability to apply theory to practice. While this study’s data is self-reported, at very least it demonstrates that students believed they could or did apply theory to practice. Such a finding gives me hope that WeLead students, too, applied what they learned toward creating social change.

WeLead students also drew on a variety of resources in negotiating their writing. Many drew on other courses they had taken or were taking at MJU, such as MM who drew on knowledge gained from his social justice course taken in high school as well as the English class he was taking at MJU. All students interviewed seemed to draw on previous writing knowledge and experience, comparing their WeLead papers to other papers they had written both in terms of similarities and differences. Additionally, all students drew on course content and their own experiences in their writing. This last act was an expectation/requirement on assignment prompts, but my sense is that students would have done so regardless, for how could they relate to and understand content if they did not frame it within their current understandings and experiences. To do so is precisely how socio-cultural theories frame learning. While not a sociocultural theorist per se, Dewey perhaps expressed this best: “Experience does not go on simply inside a person. It does go on there, […]. But this is not the whole of the story. Every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had (Dewey, 1986, p. 39).

The three functions of writing were evidenced in both assigned writing and in-class writing activities. In-class writing allowed students to further engage in course content. It also provided them with an opportunity to share with others what they were
thinking and learning, for each in-class writing activity was followed by small group and then large group discussion. In some activities, students wrote with each other as well, further demonstrating the social nature of writing and learning. Ivy’s thoughts on the in-class writing sums up students’ perceptions of how it was useful: “I like the activities because it gets, it gives us a chance to engage with each other and see what we’re all thinking. […] I learned that there’s so much things that are ingrained in our minds […]”

Most studies that show the impact of writing on learning are set in traditional disciplinary contexts. That writing was shown to impact students’ learning in WeLead, which was a very different context than a traditional disciplinary classroom, further demonstrates that writing promotes learning. While writing is, indeed, situated in different discourse communities (governed by different conventions, rules, and ways of making meaning—as was the case in WeLead as well), this research extends the findings of scholars who have studied writing in disciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts. Students in WeLead demonstrated that there are some generic features of academic writing that transfer among writing contexts. They drew on previous writing knowledge/experience in order to negotiate their WeLead writing. They also saw their WeLead writing helpful to some degree in understanding writing in other contexts. For example, Ivy likened lab reports to reflective writing in WeLead in some ways. She additionally mentioned having to write reflections elsewhere, noting “It has helped me write other reflections and put more story telling into my essays I’m writing, because I remember I had to write a reflection paper for my biomedical engineering class, and I should present this in like a story form, so that’s what I did.”
How Do Instructors Use writing in the Seminar?

Instructors placed value on writing in WeLead in that it gave students the opportunity to engage with course content and respond to it. While they expressed that students’ writing could be better, they also did not see WeLead necessarily as the place to develop students’ writing skills. Writing was primarily used to promote learning through self-reflection. Scholarship supports the use of reflective writing in promoting learning (Chick et al., 2009; McGuire et al., 2009; Papadopoulos et al., 2011; Wald, 2012). The research of Chick et al., (2009) is especially pertinent to the WeLead activity system as reflective writing was found to be supportive in students learning about race. Additionally, Chick et al. found class discussion to be an important factor in students learning about race. Both WeLead instructors characterized the course to be discussion-based. This characterization likely influenced the sense of informality/familiarity that students imbued to the course, a factor that also impacted the shape students’ writing took. This informality functioned as a rule in the activity system and could be the reason why instructors were not strict in their grading practices.

Reflective writing was clearly useful as students indicated in their interviews, but writing studies scholarship also supports the teaching of writing in disciplinary contexts as assisting in students’ understanding of content (Bean et al., 2005; Jaafar, 2016; Soliday, 2011; Sterling-Deer, 2009; Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006). Sterling-Deer (2009), for example, advocates a writing in the disciplines methodology and found that teaching students to write in a discipline “bolstered deeper levels of reflection essential to disciplinary grounding and interdisciplinary understanding.” Since WeLead was similar in some ways to interdisciplinary courses, one has to wonder if teaching students how to
write in that context would have assisted with deeper understanding of course content and in turn students’ ability to better articulate their understanding in writing. In interviews, instructors expressed that students’ understanding of privilege and oppression was not as strong as they would have liked.

Instructors expressed the same three functions for writing as students did, but they additionally used students’ writing to inform future teaching. Furthermore, instructors engaged in many of the pedagogies advocated by writing studies scholarship. They seemed to be somewhat unconscious that they were employing writing pedagogies, yet there was evidence of intentionality in the overall design of the course and in the way instructors scaffolded the midterm paper with in-class activities that helped students to compose their papers. Writing studies scholarship strongly advocates the use of scaffolding as a pedagogy to develop writing proficiency (Artemeva and Logie, 2003; Bayer et. al, 2005; Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004; Bean, Carrithers, & Earenfight, 2005; Carter, Fenzli, & Wiebe, 2004; Defazio et al., 2010; Downs and Wardle, 2007; Poe, Lerner, & Craig, 2010, Shea et al., 2006; Soliday, 2011). This seems to have been true for WeLead as well. Midterm paper scores were higher on average in each section than they were in final papers. This finding suggests that scaffolding the final paper may have assisted students in composing that paper and may have led to higher scores as well. Certainly, instructors could have been more intentional in their use of writing pedagogies. Further suggestions for how writing might have been better utilized are discussed in the Implications for Practice.
What are Students Learning about Course Content (and Perhaps Writing Itself) through their Writing in the Seminar?

Students did appear to come out of WeLead with a deeper understanding of privilege and oppression. Concepts were challenging for students, and as the discussion of week four papers showed, they often did not quite understand their own privilege and role/participation in oppression. This was also evidenced by MM in his midterm paper when he discussed his being a speaker of Spanish as a targeted identity, yet Spanish was not his native language, so he certainly wasn’t targeted in the same way those who come into a country as non-native speakers are. However, by the end of the semester, students had a better understanding of the systems of oppression, and their analysis papers demonstrated this. All papers articulated how oppression manifests in the “real world” through media and current cultural contexts and provided examples. All students posed some sort of solution toward these systems of oppression although, to be sure, some students’ solutions showed greater depth of understanding than others.

Students who demonstrated understanding more deeply may have been influenced by their prior experiences with course-related content as well as by their own identities. Chapter Four discussed how some students likely came into WeLead predisposed toward social justice topics, and Chapter Five discussed the impact of prior experience with course-related content on students’ writing. Writing studies scholarship contextualizes these findings, showing that students’ identities and self-concepts influence writing proficiency. Particularly, when students identify themselves within a particular disciplinary community, their writing tends to be stronger (Beaufort, 2007; Fraizer, 2010; Nowacek, 2011; Poe, Lerner, & Craig, 2010; Soliday, 2011). While WeLead was not a
typical disciplinary context, it did draw from disciplines in some ways. Students who came into WeLead with experience of social justice concepts tended to exhibit stronger writing. Kat, Q, MSF, Ivy, and MM are students whose writing showed greater depth and proficiency in terms of rhetorical logic and depth of thought. All of these students’ backgrounds showed some experience with social justice topics and/or involvements in some way. Perhaps because they identified themselves somewhere in the realm of being change agents, they could write more articulately about the topics discussed in WeLead. This finding is in line with Soliday’s (2011) research, which found that students more experienced in subject matter knowledge (and in actual disciplinary fields themselves) tended to produce more proficient writing (see Chapter Two).

Because of the space writing occupied in WeLead, one that exhibited both familiarity and informality, it’s difficult to firmly conclude that students learned about writing itself, at least in terms of academic writing. Their papers were largely informal and often used conventions such as the second person voice (i.e. “you”) that showed a familiarity students felt with their audience, an audience that for all practical purposes was the instructors. Students also discussed concepts of class reading in papers without a lot of specificity, suggesting that they felt their audience was familiar with what they discussed. Such approaches would likely not have been acceptable in other disciplinary writing contexts. It is possible that students wrote with a lack of specificity because they did not fully comprehend the content. Such an occurrence would be in line with other studies of writing that point to a lack of content area knowledge impacting students’ writing proficiency (Bayer, Curto, & Kriley, 2005; Bean, Carrithers, & Earenfight, 2005; Beaufort, 2007; Poe, Lerner, & Craig, 2010; Soliday, 2011).
However, there was evidence that students understood the difference between writing in WeLead and writing in other academic contexts. This was demonstrated by their use of “not’ talk” (Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011). That students made comparisons in terms of how WeLead writing was “not” like writing in other contexts shows that they were making connections to other writing. In this act of making connections, they were learning about writing, even if they may not have been conscious of it.

The connections students made to other writing evidences genre knowledge. Students saw that WeLead writing was different than, for example, lab reports, as both Ivy and MM expressed in interviews. Writing studies scholarship shows the influence of genre knowledge on writing (Askehave & Swales, 2001; Beaufort, 2007; Nowacek, 2005 and 2011; Poe, Lerner, & Craig, 2011; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 2000; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011; Soliday, 2011; Walvoord & McCarthy, 1990.) Nowacek (2011), for example, explains genre as a “sociocognitive resource” (p. 18) on which people draw in order to respond to and interpret a situation. According to Nowacek, genres are not merely a set of discursive/rhetorical conventions, but a collection of associations people use to make meaning, including social relations, identities, goals, knowledge domains, and ways of knowing. As such, genres are a means through which learning transfer occurs. Such transfer can be seen in how Ivy noted that her lab reports were also similar to WeLead writing in terms of reflection, the discussion section of a lab report being a reflection of what was learned in a sense. Other students saw the reflective aspect of WeLead writing as being similar to other reflective writing they had done as well.

Most importantly, students came out of WeLead with a desire to create social change. This was evidenced mostly in their analysis papers where they were required to
pose a solution, but in weekly papers students also made references to how forms of oppression were wrong. Sometimes they posed solutions in these papers as well, where they were not required to do so. Both the expression of discontent with oppression as well as the act of creating (i.e. solution posing) in papers indicates a desire to make change, which was the ultimate goal of the WeLead program. Students further expressed this desire in interviews. Most notably, MSF expressed wanting to take back to her native country what she learned and find a way to make change.

Overall, achievement toward course goals (i.e. the object of this activity system) were evidenced as an outcome. Writing, as a tool, had an impact in how course goals were achieved, and reflective writing seemed to be a key factor in student learning. Such a finding is in line with research on writing in service learning courses, which indicates that reflective writing is dominate in such contexts and assists students’ development of self-knowledge, knowledge of others, and understanding of the complexities of the social issues (Borron, Loizzo, & Gee, 2015, Deans, 2000; Hullender et al., 2015; Leon & Sura, 2013; Richards, 2013; Zimmerelli, 2015).

I would be remiss, however, if I did not also discuss the impact of the LLC as a high-impact practice on students’ learning. To be sure, this research focused on writing. Thus, findings concern the impact of writing on learning. However, Activity Theory considers the impact of many factors on the objects and outcomes of an activity system. One of these factors is the community. Chapter Four discusses the impact of the community on students writing and learning in terms of students’ backgrounds, prior experiences, value systems and beliefs, and Chapter Five discusses students’ prior experiences further in terms of the impact on students’ writing/learning. There was little
discussion of the impact of the LLC as a factor on students’ learning, mainly because this was not a focus of the research.

However, learning communities are a high-impact practice (Kuh, 2008). Such communities assist students in developing “new ways of thinking about and responding immediately to novel circumstances as they work side by side with peers on intellectual and practical tasks, inside and outside the classroom, on and off campus” (p. 15). WeLead students who were interviewed did express a desire to live among people with similar interests, and many also noted the desire to be in a community as one of their interests in enrolling in the program. There wasn’t a great deal of evidence that students discussed the content of WeLead outside of the confines of the classroom, but Linda noted doing so in a couple interviews.

The best evidence of the impact of the LLC as a factor influencing the objects and outcomes of the WeLead activity system comes in the form of the communicative function of writing students expressed. That students saw their writing as a means of discussion suggests that the LLC may have been a factor of influence on students’ writing. The International Residential Learning Communities Registry (Association of College and University Housing Officers – International, 2014) notes that living-learning communities can be “an avenue for facilitating meaningful interaction between peers, faculty, students, and staff” and that such communities impact student learning, retention, and satisfaction. On the whole, students seemed to have meaningful interactions in the class. One example of this was evidenced in section Y the day after the 2016 presidential election. Students took the entire class period discussing how they felt about the outcome and what the outcome may have meant for people in oppressed groups. While most
students in the class seemed to express dissatisfaction with the outcome, one student voiced her support of Trump. This shows that she was comfortable enough with her peers to share her values and perspectives. Her peers, in turn, responded respectfully. Clearly a sense of trust was present in the community.

Furthermore, because students exhibited a sort of familiarity in their writing (they assumed their audience knew about the content they discussed and they employed the second person voice in papers), it is possible that the sense of community developed through residing with one another influenced the shape students’ writing took in this regard. Classroom observation data also evidenced an ease of discussion among students. Even when they disagreed with each other, they were respectful in their discussion. Often after class, students would go to dinner together as well. Many classes ended with one student asking “where should we eat tonight?” Thus, it seems the LLC context was a factor that influenced this activity system. I turn now to implications for this research.

**Implications for Theory**

Activity theory was a useful lens through which to study writing (and ultimately learning) in this research context for it allowed an examination of multiple factors that influenced students’ writing and learning. Learning does not occur in isolation. Subjects of an activity system bring with them value systems, previous experiences, and knowledge, all of which impact the way they encounter the activity toward the object in a given system. Writing studies scholarship largely views writing as social action; it is an activity that is social, for it embodies communication (i.e. one writes for some purpose to some audience) and carries with it the acts of others’ writing (i.e. previously written texts inform the conventions of writing in particular contexts). If writing does, indeed, work as
a tool toward learning, it’s important to understand how this occurs. Activity theory provides a means to see the complex context in which learning occurs and how writing can function toward that learning as well as how that learning is complex in and of itself. The research of learning in a mutt course is particularly suitable to be framed in Activity Theory because a mutt course by its very nature draws from a multitude of other activity systems.

   In terms of understanding the learning that occurs in a classroom context, Bloom’s Taxonomy is also useful, but is especially poignant in a mutt course context. Because the goals for mutt courses may include social goals such as building community or developing leadership skills, content of these courses may not fall into traditional academic disciplines (though it may draw from the disciplines). Thus, learning looks different in these contexts. If practitioners are to assess learning, they need language to attach to the kinds of learning students come away with. Bloom’s Taxonomy provides such a language.

   However, Anderson and Krathwohl’s (2001) revision of Bloom’s taxonomy is still largely focused on disciplinary learning. The examples they give of knowledge domains are contextualized in terms of more academic contexts. In the WeLead activity system, students and instructors often talked about being able to apply the concepts of the course to “real-world” settings. Students felt that they were applying their learning in this way. The way applying is defined by Anderson and Krathwohl is somewhat limited and concerns “carry[ing] out or use[ing] a procedure in a given situation” (p. 67). An example given for carrying out is “divide one whole number by another whole number,” and an
example of using is “Use Newton’s Second Law in situations in which it is appropriate.” These examples are grounded in particular disciplines.

As was discussed in Chapter Five, it was also difficult to apply Anderson and Krathwohl’s framework in the domain of procedural knowledge in the WeLead activity system. WeLead students were exposed to some models that were procedural-like in terms of examining their identities for their midterm paper, understanding how oppression becomes institutionalized (the Cycle of Socialization model), and creating social change (Harro’s (2013) Cycle of Liberation model). Of these three models, the Cycle of Liberation came closest to how Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) define procedural knowledge, that is knowing “how to do something, methods of inquiry, and criteria for using skills, algorithms, techniques, and methods” (p. 46). To be sure, Harro’s model includes steps, techniques, and methods that may work toward enacting social change, but the way Anderson and Krathwohl explain procedural knowledge does not neatly fit the concept of creating social change. Again, the examples they use to explain the types of procedural knowledge (e.g. “knowledge of subject-specific skills and algorithms,” “knowledge of subject-specific techniques and methods”, and “knowledge of criteria for determining when to use appropriate procedures” (p. 46)) are largely disciplinary in nature, such as “whole number division algorithm,” “scientific method”, and “criteria used to judge the feasibility of using a particular method to estimate business costs.” A mutt course is not necessarily grounded in a particular discipline. Mutt courses might employ procedural knowledge from academic disciplines in some contexts, which validates the use of Anderson and Krathwohl’s framework to understand and
assess learning in some mutt course contexts, but in the WeLead activity system, not all of the framework was directly applicable.

To be sure, the framework was useful for understanding learning in WeLead, especially as it was demonstrated in students’ writing. There was clear evidence of the cognitive processes in students’ texts. When it came to describing the knowledge domains students exhibited in their writing, I had to be more flexible in my interpretation/application of the framework. The conceptual and metacognitive knowledge domains were the most directly applicable to describing learning in WeLead as evidenced by students’ writing. However, even the way Anderson and Krathwohl explain metacognitive knowledge has a disciplinary angle to it. They discuss it in terms of “strategic knowledge” (i.e. “knowledge of the general strategies for learning, thinking and problem solving”) (p. 56), “knowledge about cognitive tasks” (i.e. knowing how and when to use thinking strategies) (p. 58) and “self-knowledge” (p. 59). Of these three types of metacognitive knowledge, self-knowledge was most evident in WeLead students’ writing. This kind of knowledge is described by Anderson and Krathwohl largely in terms of understanding one’s cognition and motivation. Certainly, WeLead students engaged in thinking about their own thinking and value systems. This act falls somewhat into knowing about one’s cognition, but the term cognition implies a sort of clinical understanding of learning that seems somewhat misplaced in the WeLead activity system.

This is not to say that learning in this research context could not be studied through psychological lenses. I’m sure such studies would be fascinating, but they would be about cognition in a clinical sense. Anderson and Krathwohl’s framework is not
clinical per se; it *does* consider social dimensions of learning. It’s just that their conception of metacognitive knowledge seems limited to students having a sense of how to learn or why they want to learn. There was some sense of this in the data I collected, but metacognitive knowledge in this context was more in line with Transformational Learning Theory (Mezirow, 2009), which is framed around students coming into new understandings and changing the way they think about and navigate the world as a result of their new understanding. In WeLead, self-knowledge meant understanding why students believed what they believed about injustice and what they conceived injustice was. The goal of the course, to be sure, was to embody students with a particular understanding of injustice, one that was in line with the university’s mission to serve the underserved, to understand the implications of poverty and oppression, and to create positive social change that would alter such systems.

This research indicates that the revised Bloom’s Taxonomy should be expanded to be more inclusive of the kinds of learning that occurs in mutt course contexts, learning that is more transformational than it is disciplinary. In the WeLead activity system, for example, learning concerned students understanding systems of oppression, recognizing their own place in these systems, and thinking about how they might act to interrupt such systems. In a resident assistant course, learning means understanding how to best interact with resident peers, how to recognize their needs, how to resolve conflicts, and how to create a sense of community in students’ spaces of living—one supportive of their educational, co-curricular, and social learning/development.

These kinds of learning are not the same as developing disciplinary expertise, though certainly there are parallels in these kinds of learning. That there are parallels
validates Bloom’s Taxonomy as a framework to understand, assess, and design learning experiences. The Taxonomy would be strengthened, however, by including examples of learning domains and cognitive processes as they occur in learning settings that fall somewhat or entirely outside the realms of disciplinary contexts. For example, a new sub-category of procedural knowledge might be added, one that is framed around problem-solving that is not as black and white as applying theorems to equations or determining definitions of words through analyzing words’ roots and stems. When it comes to solving issues of oppression, there’s no clear-cut way to go about this.

Additionally, the category of self-knowledge might be expanded to include not only knowledge of one’s motivation, goals, and interests in performing a task, but also one’s knowledge of self in relation to others. WeLead students expressed a desire to understand others’ perspectives. This desire manifested in the discursive function of writing; students saw in their writing a way to discuss issues with others, to understand issues through the perspectives of others. Understanding the perspectives of others in turn allowed students to better understand their own perspectives on issues of privilege and oppression. To be sure, students didn’t fully understand their own place and participation in these systems (as the writing in week four discussed in Chapter Five demonstrated). However, they were moving toward a more complex understanding of such systems as their analysis papers demonstrated. Not one analysis paper ascribed blame to targeted groups or discussed how authors got it wrong about oppression as was the case in week four writing. These deeper understandings seem to have come about not only through their discussion with others, but also through their writing, which they viewed as a discussion with others as well. Thus, the subcategory of self-knowledge within the
metacognitive knowledge domain might also include or be retitled to “critical self-
knowledge.” Such a shift in Bloom’s Taxonomy would allow for the kind of
transformational learning that may transpire in mutt course contexts. Mezirow (2009)
noted that transformational learning cannot take place without critical reflection “on the
source, nature, and consequences of assumptions (both our own and those of others)” (p.
94).

The addition of the word “critical” to self-knowledge in the taxonomy would
broaden the understanding of learning that takes place in learning contexts, especially
those that are not traditional, academic contexts. A broader interpretation of learning
would also help disciplinary faculty and administrators to see that learning takes place as
much in co-curricular settings as it does in academic ones. If a goal of a college education
is holistic learning, as is stated in many institutions’ missions, helping educators to
understand learning more broadly might assist toward this goal.

**Implications for Practice**

As the discussion above indicates, students in WeLead did learn from their
writing. They came to better understand privilege and oppression. Writing also had
influence on students’ desires to be change agents. These findings, however, cause me to
question if writing could have been used more effectively towards these outcomes.

Students appreciated the informality of writing in WeLead. They were grateful to
have had the opportunity to express how they felt about the issues discussed in course
readings without having to engage in a more rigorous analysis of texts that was expected
in other courses they were taking. Perhaps they gained deeper metacognitive knowledge
because they did not have to be concerned with the typical conventions that characterize
academic writing in other contexts. They could simply focus on their own understanding and responses to those issues without worrying about citing sources, making an argument for or against something, adhering to style guidelines, making sure their mechanics were correct, and employing clear, concise, logical organization. To be sure, they did some of those things to various degrees, but as excerpts from students’ papers demonstrate, students’ writing could have been stronger, and they could have proofread their texts a great deal more. Instructors noted in interviews that they desired more from students’ writing both in terms of depth of thought as well as with regard to mechanical/rhetorical conventions. However, students were not penalized much in terms of points when their writing did not live up to these expectations.

On the other hand, I wonder if holding students to higher academic standards of writing might have promoted deeper understanding of the content discussed in WeLead. Part of being a change agent is intervening in systems of oppression. To do so, one must be able to articulate the issues to those who do not see a need for change. In Bazerman’s (2008) review of sociocultural studies of writing, for example, he noted that writers develop skill by “solving problems in particular situations and becoming articulate in those situations,” which means “learning the knowledge, forms of reasoning, criteria of evaluation, and forms of actions within those domains” (p. 16). Bean, Carrithers, and Earenfight’s (2005) study also found that better design of writing assignments and more guided instruction of how to write within disciplines aids students’ learning. Thus, having the ability to more clearly articulate causes and impacts of oppression could aid students in praxis. Being articulate on the issues will also vary in different contexts. One must understand one’s audience. Trying to influence peers requires a different sort of
communicative strategy than influencing policy makers, for example. Thus, making
students aware of the rhetorical implications of their writing might better serve the course
goal of developing students as change agents. Instructors certainly made comments on
students’ writing regarding how well they were understanding and conveying the issues,
but feedback on the whole was pretty general. Showing students where and how their
writing hit or missed the mark might have assisted students in their communicative
prowess on issues of privilege and oppression. More pointed feedback, therefore, is one
implication for practice in this mutt course context.

Another way to assists students in their communication skills would be to engage
them in peer feedback on their writing. Anderson et al. (2015), for example, found that
“meaningful” interaction with others during the writing process was related to students
experiencing “more course work that emphasized deep learning strategies” (p. 220) and
students’ perceptions of “deep learning” (p. 222). A secondary audience helps writers to
understand if they are being clear, which impacts students’ learning in that clarity is an
indication of writing proficiency. Writing proficiency is one indication that students
possess content/subject area knowledge (see Bean, Carrithers, and Earenfight, 2005;
Galer-Unti, 2002; Moor, Jensen-Hart, & Hooper, 2012). Having any audience outside of
the instructor would also assist toward the goal of praxis. No one but the individual
writers and instructors saw what students had to say about the issues discussed in the
course. While students had to pose solutions to the issue they discussed in their analysis
papers, these solutions have no influence if no one outside of the course context sees
them. This is not a problem unique to WeLead. Much of the writing students do in
academic contexts stays within those contexts. However, students can be encouraged to
see that writing has impact, that writing itself can work toward change. Making the
writing students do in courses more public (such as through blogs or websites, for
example) might help students to see that their writing can work toward change.

To be sure, WeLead course goals were largely focused on students’ self-
awareness, and the writing served this goal through its reflective/metacognitive nature.
Additionally, WeLead instructors employed many of the writing to learn pedagogical
practices advocated by writing studies scholarship. However, they did not appear to be
conscious that they were doing so, and this makes me question how intentionally writing
was used toward course goals, especially those that fell into the leadership and social
justice categories. If instructors engaged in some sort of writing pedagogy professional
development, perhaps students’ writing would have better met their expectations.
Additionally, writing would have better accomplished course goals because students
would have been more conscious of the purposes for their writing. Certainly, students
showed some awareness that their writing assisted their understanding as well as their
desires or ability to create change, but I wonder if students had engaged in more
discussion of what they wrote if they would have had a better sense of how their writing
assisted their learning and if they would have been able to transfer their writing
knowledge into contexts where they might actually enact change. In interviews, for
example, some students commented on how they didn’t ever discuss their writing in
class. As part of their weekly writing, they had to include discussion questions. Ivy, Kat,
Q, and MSF specifically mentioned that they weren’t sure if they ever discussed those
questions in class. Thus, it seems they probably saw no purpose for posing those
questions. If they saw no purpose for posing questions on the topics in class, I wonder
how likely students are to pose questions on the issues outside of class. And posing such questions and having such discussions is a goal of the class, that students will work to create change in other contexts. Having discussion on the issues is part of Harro’s (2013) social change model; it’s building community.

Thus, if writing is to be used toward learning in mutt course contexts such as WeLead, I recommend instructors of these courses become familiar with writing pedagogy and employ writing instruction at some level during the course of a class. Writing studies scholarship supports that instruction in writing aids students’ learning content area knowledge (Bayer, Curto, & Kriley, 2005; Beaufort, 2007; Defazio, Jones, Tennant, & Hook, 2010; Johnson & Krase, 2012; Moor, Jensen-Hart, & Hooper, 2012; Poe, Lerner, & Craig, 2010). Universities might require all instructors to take a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) seminar. Many universities offer faculty development through WAC centers or centers for teaching and learning, and often writing pedagogical offerings are part of these development opportunities. Instructors who fall outside of Academic Affairs or who work primarily in non-teaching appointments at universities should be encouraged to take advantage of these offerings, perhaps incentivized in some way to do so, especially if they are teaching courses of which writing is a part. Faculty/instructors in all disciplines should be encouraged to do so as well. This would improve writing instruction and the use of writing toward learning at all levels.

**Implications for Future Research**

Findings of this research indicate that writing about issues of privilege and oppression had impact on students’ desire to make change. As mentioned in Chapter Five, this desire was best articulated by Ivy who expressed “I think the reflections really
do help you, and it like helps you change what you’re going to do in the future. […] Maybe the term reflection like that’s what like stems people to do what they want to do also.” In their writing, students posed solutions to the examples of oppression that were discussed in WeLead. In interviews, students expressed a desire to create change as well. However, aside from Ivy bringing to class an activity from her service co-curricular involvement that engaged students in understanding how oppression and privilege affects people in society, there’s little evidence in this dataset to suggest that students acted on their desires. Thus, to better understand how writing impacts students’ ability to be change agents, research that examines students’ writing in conjunction with their co-curricular involvements should be undertaken to see if students put their words to action. Qualitative studies that engage in fieldwork observation of students in co-curricular settings and analyze students’ behavior in such settings in comparison to what students wrote about in terms of change in papers would further unpack how writing might lead to action.

I also suggest further research of mutt course activity systems. This research studied one particular type of mutt course and found that writing did have impact on students learning/development in that course. However, there are other types of mutt courses, and writing is likely a part of those contexts in some way. Thus, further research should examine writing in contexts such as first-year experience courses, resident assistant training courses, and/or other seminars that may be associated with themed living learning communities. My research also found that one function of writing in this activity system was to demonstrate learning. Therefore, looking at students’ writing in other mutt course contexts would help unpack what learning takes place in these activity
systems. Research on other mutt course contexts could study learning through other
means, but writing is a tangible demonstration of learning. Further research on mutt
course contexts and what students are learning in such contexts would assist with the
design of such courses.

At the time of my research write-up, MJU was undergoing a redesign of their
Core Curriculum to be implemented for incoming first-year students the following year.
As a result of the revision, the Diverse Cultures learning outcomes were going to be
obsolete. The new Core Curriculum embedded the ideals of these learning outcomes but
in slightly different ways. Thus, the future of the WeLead Living Learning Community
was uncertain as the class would no longer count toward the new Core Curriculum. MJU
also had a resident assistant training course for which students received academic credit.
Because of the revised Core Curriculum, it is possible that students would no longer
receive academic credit for this course as well. Additional research that shows what
learning transpires in mutt course contexts as well as how these courses have academic
implications would assist program administrators in redesigning the courses to better fit
within the university’s academic mission as evidenced through its Core Curriculum.

WeLead had a good deal of potential to align itself with MJU’s new Core
Curriculum. Students did a great deal of writing in the course, and it could likely be re-
envisioned as a first-year composition course (a course that would remain part of the
Core). Such a suggestion is supported by writing research. Voss’s (2016) case study of
two students enrolled in residential learning communities (RLCs) followed them into
their first-year writing courses in effort to examine opportunities for coordination

See Chapter Four for what the Diverse Cultures learning outcomes embodied.
between learning community experiences and their writing course and found potential for writing programs and residential learning communities “to reinforce and amplify one another’s impact, pointing to shared objectives around which writing studies faculty and RLC administrators might build common cause and programming with student affairs personnel” (p. 9). Since WeLead examines issues of privilege and oppression toward the goal of creating change in the world, the course seems to fit in well with MJU’s Core Foundational courses, which are explained as follows: “Foundations courses invite students to consider from multiple angles the wholeness and diversity of knowledge and its relevance to making change in the world” (2017, MJU Core Curriculum). My hope is that this research can work toward a re-envisionment of WeLead which more closely coordinates the living program with students’ academics, but additional research of mutt course contexts would provide a stronger case for the value of the WeLead class in terms of the learning MJU envisions in its new Core.

Writing is also used as a reflection tool in other co-curricular settings. For example, at MJU, the Community Service Office engages students in reflection post service events. Reflection is also often employed as a tool at retreats and immersion experiences. Sometimes these reflections are written; sometimes they are exercises of thinking alone. In the contexts in which written reflections occur, it would be useful to study the students’ writing to better understand what they are learning through these engagements as well as if and how writing assists in that learning. In the contexts in which reflection does not include writing, it would be useful to understand if this kind of reflection has the same impact as written reflection. These kinds of research projects would assist in understanding more about how writing functions toward learning as well
as for making improvements in written exercises to maximize student learning/development.

There is one additional implication for future research toward which this study points. Chapter Four discussed how WeLead instructors assessed students’ writing. They were pretty forgiving in their grading practices. Students rarely had many if any points deducted from their papers when the papers did not quite meet instructors’ expectations. Suggestions for how to better facilitate proficient writing among students through pointed feedback and writing pedagogy education are discussed in the implications for practice section above. However, to be fair, WeLead instructors were not writing instructors, and while they certainly had a good deal of academic writing and professional writing experience, part of the issue of assessing students’ writing in WeLead has to do with the unique space writing occupies in a mutt course activity system. It’s like academic writing in some ways, but also not like it. The conventions of writing assessment in an academic context do not fully apply in a mutt course. Thus, research that works toward developing assessment tools for writing in mutt courses should be undertaken.

This suggestion is not novel; other research points to this need. For example, the research of Wolfe and Haynes (2003) points to the challenges of assessing writing in an interdisciplinary context. They noted that “assessing interdisciplinary writing is not as straightforward as measuring height or weight” (p. 130). Because “disciplines form the foundation of interdisciplinarity” (p. 132), those teaching interdisciplinary courses need to understand the disciplines their courses embody. Since different disciplines adhere to the writing conventions of their disciplines, assessing writing in such contexts is challenging because there are different ways of making meaning across disciplines.
Historians, for example, make arguments much differently than engineers, and what counts for evidence in these discourse communities varies. Even among the social sciences, there are different ways to construct a text. Thus, Wolfe and Haynes developed an instrument that would assist in the assessment of students’ writing in interdisciplinary contexts. They note that the instrument “is a means of assessing undergraduate interdisciplinary work for the purpose of improving teaching and learning” (p. 128) and identify a number of dimensions within which interdisciplinary writing can be assessed: 1) drawing on disciplinary sources (sources should be primary, recent, and inclusive of the different disciplines embedded in the course), 2) critical argumentation (defining the problem and supporting it with appropriate evidence as well as reflecting on the limitations of the author’s approach), 3) multidisciplinary perspectives (identifying aspects of the paper’s topic as being addressed by different disciplinary perspectives and demonstrating understanding of the different disciplinary approaches), and 4) interdisciplinary integration (showing common ground in the different disciplinary approaches as well as a new understanding of the topic addressed through the multiple disciplinary lenses). Wolfe and Haynes’ instrument is far more detailed than what I’ve outlined here. It encapsulates many ways of making meaning across disciplines and works toward a synthesis of disciplinary approaches. The instrument would be useful to look toward in the development of an assessment tool for writing in a mutt course, but it’s also not completely applicable to writing in such contexts.

Because mutt courses are not quite interdisciplinary, some of the dimensions along which writing is assessed in Wolfe and Haynes’ instrument would not work for writing in a mutt course. WeLead, for example, drew from some disciplines, but not
necessarily in an intentional, integrative way. The goal of the course was not to understand content through different disciplinary lenses. The goal was to understand content in some way that inspired students to move toward praxis. Thus, research that helps to develop ways to assess writing in such contexts is warranted.

Such research could certainly look toward studies of reflective writing in order to develop such a tool. Park and Millora (2012) conducted a quantitative study on how reflection impacts an ethic of care (EC), leadership, and psychological well-being among college students. They note that the incorporation of reflective writing in classes is somewhat common among faculty citing two other studies. A 2005 study by Lindholm, Szelényi, Hurtado and Korn found that 18.1% of faculty surveyed incorporated reflective writing in their classes. A study in 2009 by DeAngelo et al. found that 21.7% of faculty did so. The findings of Park and Millora’s study showed that “reflective writing and journaling were both significant positive predictors of students’ EC and Leadership” (p. 231). These findings confirm my own that writing impacted WeLead students’ desires to be change agents and suggests that students would exhibit leadership as the course intended for them to do.

However, Park and Millora’s study does not discuss what students’ reflective writing looked like, in what contexts it occurred, and how that writing might have been assessed. Their data source was the College Students’ Belief and Values survey conducted in 2004 and 2007. The data source was rich, including 136 institutions with a total of 14,527 students surveyed. However, the data is self-reported, including only students’ perceptions of how reflective writing assisted them in developing an ethic of care or leadership skills. Examination of students writing would tell more. Thus, I also
suggest additional studies that examine how reflective writing aids in students’
development. These kinds of studies would further inform research aimed toward
developing an assessment tool of reflective writing as well as writing in mutt course
contexts, writing which is likely to include reflection.

**Conclusion**

Research of the WeLead Activity system gives a glimpse into the learning that
occurs through writing in contexts outside of traditional academic, disciplinary contexts.
It also shows how writing is an effective tool for learning. Even though WeLead students
expressed a mixture of attitudes about writing, they seem to have enjoyed their writing in
this context, and the writing seems to have impacted both their understanding of privilege
and oppression as well as their desires to be change agents. To be sure, many of the
students interviewed seem to have come into WeLead with inclinations to create social
change. However, the course seems to have strengthened these inclinations for these
students. Writing was part and parcel of how students developed these inclinations
further. As a result of this research, I come away with a strengthened belief that writing is
worthwhile. It allows one to see what one is thinking and examine it. It allows one to see
one’s thinking in relation to others. Writing always has an audience, an aspect that further
shows how writing is social and directed outward toward some other. Writing can and
does lead toward change as Vygotsky (1986) noted “the relation of thought to word
undergoes changes that themselves may be regarded as development in the functional
sense. Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them.
Every thought tends to connect something with something else, to establish a relation
between things (p. 218). WeLead students seem to have understood this unconsciously,
for their writing helped them to see a need for change. In this desire for change, they evidenced development in a “functional sense.” I am confident in concluding that this course was meaningful to students and the writing they engaged in through the course was equally meaningful as it led to deeper understanding among students as well as a desire to enact social change.

This research also has implications for theory, practice, and future research. While all of these are important and related to each other, as an educator, the aspect of practice stands out for me. Teaching should always be informed by research. If educators truly care about students’ learning, they should be informed on learning itself. This research adds to the body of scholarship on learning. It has informed my own perceptions of learning and using writing as a tool of learning. My hope is that other educators will be both informed and inspired by this research as well.
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APPENDIX A

Agreement of Consent for Research Participants (Instructors)

You have been invited to participate in this research study. Before you agree to participate, it is important that you read and understand the following information. Participation is completely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

PURPOSE:
• The purpose of this research study is to explore how written assignments function and promote learning of content in the academic seminar associated with the WeLead Social Justice Community living-learning program in the fall 2016 semester (August 15–December 16, 2016).
• You will be one of two participants in this research study.

PROCEDURES:
• You will be observed in seven class sessions and notes will be made about class activities.
• You will be interviewed once about midway through the semester. The interview will last approximately 30–45 minutes. The researcher will make notes during the interview in a notebook regarding her observations and your responses. You are free to pause or terminate the interview at any time.
• Interview questions will concern the writing purposes and expectations for this course. Additionally, you will be asked questions about yourself, course content, instruction, and grading. You are free to ask any questions during the interview process.
• Interviews will occur in your university office or in the office of the researcher.
• You will be [audio] recorded during the interview portion of the study to ensure accuracy. The tape will later be transcribed and destroyed after 6 years beyond the completion of the study. For confidentiality purposes, you will choose a pseudonym, which will be associated with your interview and field notes.
• You will grant the researcher access to your course section’s D2L site with the permission level of an instructor so that the researcher can access course documents and consenting students’ graded assignments. Allowing this access assures that you will have no knowledge of which students are participating in this study.

DURATION:
• Your participation will consist of the following:
  o Written observations of yours and student participants’ behaviors and interactions in “Dynamics of Privilege and Oppression I” during the 2016 fall semester (7 sessions total, 75 minutes each);
  o A recorded and transcribed interview at midterm;
  o Collection of written assignments of all consenting students (12 response papers, 1 Personal Identity Inventory and Reflection paper, and 1 Analysis paper or Action Plan Proposal paper depending on which option the student chooses for the final assignment)
• Total duration of your participation will last from August 15–December 16, 2016.

RISKS:
• Because there are only three sections of this course offered and you will be one of two instructor participants, there some possibility that you could be identified based on student participants’ interview comments in the study write-up. Steps will be taken to help mitigate this risk. (See the section on Confidentiality below).
**BENEFITS:**
- Benefits of this study include the opportunity to reflect on your teaching of this course and potentially shape improvements for the living-learning program.
- This research may benefit society by informing university educators of pedagogical practices that assist students in writing to learn. The study also has implications for the design of living-learning programs that include writing as a learning/assessment tool.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**
- Data collected in this study will be confidential through the employment of pseudonyms. You will be asked to choose your own pseudonym. All your data will be assigned a pseudonym of your choosing rather than using your name or other information that could identify you as an individual.
- I will also employ the use of gender-neutral pronouns when referring to you (they as opposed to he or she) as gender could be an identifying characteristic.
- The course, living-learning program, and institution will also receive pseudonyms to further protect your identity.
- Data will be stored as follows:
  - Interview data will be recorded on both the researcher’s university-owned computer and smart phone. Copies of these files will be transmitted electronically to an independent transcriptionist who will destroy the audio files after transcripts are received by the researcher. Interview audio files will be stored on the researcher's university-owned computer, which is password protected. Back-up files of the audio recordings will also be kept on an external hard drive. This hard drive will be kept in a locked drawer of the researcher’s university office desk. This office is also kept locked when not in use. The researcher and university building staff are the only individuals who have access to this office. University staff do not have access to the researcher’s locked desk. University IT staff can access the researcher’s computer in emergency situations only.
  - Observation data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s office when not in use.
- Data will be used for the purpose of writing a dissertation toward the completion of the researcher’s doctoral degree. Data may be used to publish articles on this research.
- Results of the study may be presented to program administrators, and a final copy of the research write-up will be shared with participants in the study.
- Results may also be presented at professional conferences.
- When the results of the study are published, you will not be identified by name.
- Direct quotes will be used in reports or publications.
- The data will be destroyed by shredding paper documents and deleting electronic files 6 years after the completion of the study.
- Your research records may be inspected by the MJU Institutional Review Board or its designees, and (as allowable by law) state and federal agencies.

**VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION:**
- Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
- Data may be used if subject withdraws from study.
- You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer.
- Your decision to participate or not will not impact your relationship with the investigator or Midwest Jesuit University.

**ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION:**
- There are no known alternatives other than to not participate in this study.
CONTACT INFORMATION:
- If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact (Jennifer Reid, M.F.A., Ph.D. candidate AMU 428 | 555.555.5555 | jennifer.reid@mj.edu)
- If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact MJU Office of Research Compliance at 555.444.4444.

I have had the opportunity to read this consent form, ask questions about the research project and am prepared to participate in this project.

____________________________________________  __________________________
(Printed Name of Participant)                                                           Date

____________________________________________
(Signature of Participant)

____________________________________________
(Printed Name of Individual Obtaining Consent)

____________________________________________
(Signature of Individual Obtaining Consent)  Date
APPENDIX B: STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Survey

You may skip any question you do not wish to answer. When you are done responding, please fold your paper in half.

1. Would you be willing to participate in this study and consent to be interviewed three times over the course the semester for a duration of 30-45 minutes each? NOTE that participation is voluntary and will not affect your grade for the course. Your instructor will have no knowledge of who is participating in this study and efforts will be made to ensure confidentiality. If you choose to participate, you will select a pseudonym to conceal your identity. The institution will also be given a pseudonym to further protect your identity.

☐ Yes  ☐ No

2. Would you be willing to submit your graded written assignments for analysis? NOTE that assignments will be collected after your instructor has assessed them and participation will not impact your grade for the course. Your instructor will have no knowledge of whose papers are being copied. Your name will be blocked out during the copying process.

☐ Yes  ☐ No

3. What is your academic major?

4. What is your preferred gender identification

☐ Female  ☐ Male  ☐ Other  ☐ prefer not to respond

5. What is your race/ethnicity? Select all that apply:

☐ American Indian/Alaska Native  ☐ Asian—including Indian subcontinent and Philippines
☐ Black or African American—including African and Caribbean  ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
☐ Latino/Latina/Hispanic  ☐ White  ☐ prefer not to respond.

6. What is your citizenship status:

☐ U.S. citizen  ☐ Permanent resident
☐ not U.S. Citizen/permanent resident  ☐ prefer not to respond
7. Have either of your parents or people who raised you earned a bachelor’s degree?
   ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ prefer not to respond

8. Provide commentary on anything else you’d like me to know about you.

First name ______________________________________

Last name _______________________________________

MU Email address _______________________________

Phone number _________________________________

Signature _____________________________________

Date _________________________________________

Date _________________________________________
Agreement of Consent for Research Participants (Students)

You have been invited to participate in this research study. Before you agree to participate, it is important that you read and understand the following information. Participation is completely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

PURPOSE:
- The purpose of this research study is to explore how written assignments function and promote learning of content in the academic seminar associated with the WeLead Social Justice Community living-learning program in the fall 2016 semester (August 15–December 16, 2016).
- You will be one of eight participants in this research study.

PROCEDURES:
- You will be observed in seven class sessions and notes will be made about class activities.
- You will be interviewed three times over the course of the semester: three weeks into the course, at midterm, and near the end of the fall 2016 semester. Interviews will last approximately 30–45 minutes each. The researcher will make notes during the interview in a notebook regarding her observations and your responses. You are free to pause or terminate the interview at any time.
- Interview questions will concern your writing practices and processes for this course. Additionally you will be asked questions about course content, purposes, instruction, and grading. You are free to ask any questions during the interview process.
- Interviews will occur in my university office, room 428 of the Alumni Memorial Union.
- You will be [audio] recorded during the interview portion of the study to ensure accuracy. The tapes will later be transcribed and destroyed after 6 years beyond the completion of the study. For confidentiality purposes, you will choose a pseudonym, which will be associated with your interviews and writing samples. Your instructor will have no knowledge of your participation in the study.
- All of your writing assignments for the course will be accessed by the researcher via the class D2L site after they have been graded by your instructor.
- Participation will not affect your grade for the course.

DURATION:
- Your participation will consist of the following:
  o Written observations of your behaviors and interactions in “Dynamics of Privilege and Oppression I” during the 2016 fall semester (7 sessions total, 75 minutes each);
  o Recorded and transcribed interviews (three total lasting 30–45 minutes in length) three weeks into the semester, at midterm, and at the end of the semester before finals;
  o All written assignments (12 response papers, 1 Personal Identity Inventory and Reflection paper, and 1 Analysis paper or Action Plan Proposal paper depending on which option you choose for your final assignment)
- Total duration of your participation will last from August 29–December 16, 2017.

RISKS:
- The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than you would experience in everyday life.

BENEFITS:
- Benefits of this study include the opportunity to reflect on your learning for this course and potentially shape improvements for the living-learning program.
This research may benefit society by informing university educators of pedagogical practices that assist students in writing to learn. The study also has implications for the design of living-learning programs that include writing as a learning/assessment tool.

CONFIDENTIALITY:
- Data collected in this study will be confidential through the employment of pseudonyms. You will be asked to choose your own pseudonym. All your data will be assigned this pseudonym rather than using your name or other information that could identify you as an individual.
- The living-learning community, the course, and the institution will also be assigned pseudonyms to further protect your identity.
- Because interviews will take place in the principal researcher’s office outside of class, your instructor will not know who is participating. No data will be shared with the instructor during the collection and write-up period.
- Data will be stored as follows:
  - Initial participation surveys will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s university office.
  - Interview data will be recorded on both the researcher’s university-owned computer and smart phone. Copies of these files will be transmitted electronically to an independent transcriptionist who will destroy the audio files after transcripts are received by the researcher. Interview audio files will be stored on the researcher’s university-owned computer, which is password protected. Back-up files of the audio recordings will also be kept on an external hard drive. This hard drive will be kept in a locked drawer of the researcher’s university office desk. This office is also kept locked when not in use. The researcher and university building staff are the only individuals who have access to this office. University staff do not have access to the researcher’s locked desk. University IT staff can access the researcher’s computer in emergency situations only.
  - Observation data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s office when not in use.
- Data will be used for the purpose of writing a dissertation toward the completion of the researcher’s doctoral degree. Data may be used to publish articles on this research.
- Results of the study may be presented to program administrators, and a final copy of the research write-up will be shared with participants in the study after the study’s completion.
- It is possible that your instructor or others might be able to infer your identity based on the results, but results will not be shared until after you complete the living-learning program.
- Results may also be presented at professional conferences.
- When the results of the study are published, you will not be identified by name.
- Direct quotes will be used in reports or publications.
- The data will be destroyed by shredding paper documents and deleting electronic files 6 years after the completion of the study.
- Your research records may be inspected by the MJU Institutional Review Board or its designees, and (as allowable by law) state and federal agencies.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION:
- Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
- Data may be used if subject withdraws from study.
- You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer.
- Your decision to participate or not will not impact your relationship with the investigator or Midwest Jesuit University nor will it affect your grades for the course, relationship with course instructors and staff associated with this living-learning community as instructors and staff will have no knowledge of who is participating.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION:
- There are no known alternatives other than to not participate in this study.
CONTACT INFORMATION:

- If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact (Jennifer Reid, M.F.A., Ph.D. candidate AMU 428 | 555.555.5555 | jennifer.reid@mju.edu)
- If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact MJU Office of Research Compliance at 555.444.4444.

I have had the opportunity to read this consent form, ask questions about the research project and am prepared to participate in this project.

____________________________________________
(Printed Name of Participant)

____________________________________________
(Signature of Participant) Date

____________________________________________
(Printed Name of Individual Obtaining Consent)

____________________________________________
(Signature of Individual Obtaining Consent) Date
Instructor Interview Protocol

Background questions
1. What has been your interest in teaching this course?
2. How long have you been teaching this course?
3. Tell me about your own background as a writer.
   a. How did you feel about writing in college?
   b. What sort of writing do you do now, and how do you feel about it?

General course-related questions
4. What is the purpose of this course?
5. What would you describe as the content of this course?
6. From what academic disciplines does this course content draw?

Writing-related questions
7. Describe the purpose of writing in this course.
8. The course syllabus lists four writing assignments. Can you describe those assignments in your own words?
9. How do you assess the students’ writing?
10. What’s the most frequent comment you make about students’ writing?
11. Describe the characteristics of:
   a. a successful response paper
   b. a successful student identity inventory
   c. a successful analysis paper
   d. a successful action plan proposal.
12. What do you hope students gain from writing in this course?
13. How would you characterize the quality of writing of the students in your course this semester?
14. What sorts of struggles do students have with writing for this course?
15. What sort of assistance do you give students with their writing?
16. Is there anything else that you would like me to know about you or this course that I haven’t already asked.
APPENDIX E

Student Participant Interview Protocol

Interview 1

Background questions
1. Tell me a little about yourself.
   Probes:
   a. Academic major?
   b. What was your high school like?
   c. What did you study in high school?
   d. What kind of writing assignments did you do in high school?
   e. What were you involved in in high school?
   f. What are you involved in at college or what do you plan to get involved in?
   g. What kind of writing do you do outside of class assignments?
   h. Describe how you feel about writing?
2. What is your interest in taking this course?

Course-related questions
3. Describe the purpose of this course.
4. What is the content of this course?
5. What academic discipline(s) characterize this course?

Writing-related questions
6. What do you think the purpose of the writing assignments are?
7. How is your work graded?
8. Describe in your own words what your instructor is looking for in a good paper?
9. Describe the writing instruction you get from your instructor.
10. What assistance does your instructor give you toward your writing assignments?
11. Have you sought assistance outside of class for your writing? If so, can you describe that assistance?

Response paper questions
12. Describe the response papers in your own words.
13. How long does it take you to write a response paper?
14. Describe your process of writing a response paper.
15. What do you think your instructor is looking for in response papers (i.e. what makes a good response paper)?
16. How would you assess your own response papers so far (i.e. are they good, adequate, or so-so)?
17. What’s the purpose of these papers?
18. What are the benefits (if any) of writing these papers?

Interview 2

Personal Identity Inventory questions
1. Describe this assignment in your own words.
2. What do you think the purpose of this assignment is?
3. Describe what you think makes a successful Personal Identity Inventory paper.
4. If you had to compare this paper to another kind of paper, what would you compare it to and why?
5. How is this paper assessed by your instructor?
6. Describe your process for writing this paper.
7. How long did it take you to compose?
19. How difficult or easy was this to write?
20. Describe anything that helped you write this paper.
21. What sort of feedback did you get from anyone on the paper before you turned it in?
22. How well did you do on this paper?
23. What were the benefits (if any) in writing this paper?

**Interview 3**

**Analytical Paper or Action Plan Proposal questions**
1. Which of these options did you choose for your final paper?
2. Why did you choose this option?
3. Describe this assignment in your own words.
4. What do you think the purpose of this assignment is?
5. Describe what you think makes a successful Personal Identity Inventory paper.
6. If you had to compare this paper to another kind of paper, what would you compare it to and why?
7. How is this paper assessed by your instructor?
8. Describe your process for writing this paper.
9. How long did it take you to compose?
10. How difficult or easy was this to write?
11. Describe anything that helped you write this paper.
12. What sort of feedback did you get from anyone on the paper before you turned it in?
13. How well did you do on this paper?
14. What were the benefits (if any) of writing this paper?

**General course and writing-related questions**
24. What do you think the overall purposes for this course are?
25. What did you learn in this course?
   a. (probe) Describe in your own words what the content of this course is.
26. How did the papers help or hinder you in that learning?
27. How helpful were assignment directions/prompts in understanding the course content?
28. What class activities helped you understand course content?
29. What class activities helped you with the writing assignments?
30. How is writing in this course similar to writing in your other courses?
31. How is writing in this course different from writing in your other courses?
32. What recommendations would you make to future students of this course?
33. Describe your overall experience of being in this course.
34. What else do you want me to know about you or this course that I haven’t already asked you?
APPENDIX F

Course Syllabi

MIDWEST JESUIT UNIVERSITY
MJU 0001-702: DYNAMICS OF PRIVILEGE AND OPPRESSION
Fall 2016 Syllabus

Instructor: X
Office location: redacted to protect identity of instructor
Office hours: 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (By appointment)
E-mail address: [Redacted]
Telephone: [Redacted]

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This two-semester seminar provides an academic component for the cross-cultural residence hall experience. WeLead Social Justice Community The residence hall brings together first year students from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds selected because of their interest in being engaged in leadership development and cross-cultural experiences in and out of the classroom. In addition to weekly class attendance, the seminar requires attendance at designated extramural cultural events such as movies, plays, lectures, or community outings, including a weekend retreat on leadership and diversity issues. Students will read and discuss articles and books and reflect on leadership and cross-cultural experiences. Written assignments will provide opportunities to demonstrate achievement of course goals. Completion of MJU 0001 (fall semester) and MJU 0002 (spring semester) fulfills MJU’s Core of Common Studies requirement in the area of Diverse Cultures for most colleges and departments.

COURSE CREDIT: 1.5 credits
PREREQUISITES: Enrollment in WeLead Social Justice Community Program.

PROGRAM & COURSE OBJECTIVES:
The WeLead Social Justice Community and associated academic course requirement focuses on building and improving awareness and skills about social inequities with the belief that students will use their skills and awareness to create social change and a more equitable society.

SELF-AWARENESS
- Identify personal and social values, practices, and beliefs.
- Become familiar with how our personal and social identities interact and inform our perspective, assumptions, and relationships.

LEADERSHIP
- Identify personal skills and abilities that may contribute to the student’s growth and development as a leader.
- Identify factors that can inhibit or promote effective leadership, communication and problem-solving.
- Identify obstacles that prevent the formation of inclusive environments, as well as principles and strategies of developing inclusive communities.
- Become familiar with your role and responsibility in creating an inclusive community.

SOCIAL JUSTICE
- Gain an increased knowledge about terms and issues relating to social justice.
- Increase awareness about stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, the dynamics of power and privilege, and the interlocking system of oppression.
The two semesters of this course also fulfill the JIU Core of Common Studies Diverse Cultures requirement. At the completion of Diverse Cultures core studies, the student will be able to:

1. Identify differences and similarities in communication, values, practices, and beliefs between one’s own culture and other cultures.
2. Explain how categories of human diversity (such as race, gender, ethnicity, and disability) influence personal identities and can create structural and institutional inequality.
3. Critically reflect upon one’s personal and cultural presuppositions and how these affect one’s values and relationships.

COURSE STRUCTURE:
The course is designed to give students the opportunity to learn the context of the various issues covered while also sharing their own insights and experiences. “Foundations” classes will explore concepts and history, while “synthesis” classes will emphasize personal storytelling, reflection, and focused activities.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS:
Students in this course are expected to be actively engaged, which requires each student to take responsibility for their own learning and to share the learning process with the class. At minimum, students need to:

1. Attend all class sessions. This is critical to promoting a learning community within the class. Each member benefits from the viewpoints of the other members. If you cannot avoid missing a class, be sure to contact the instructor as soon as possible and make arrangements with a classmate in advance to get all information covered in class.
2. Read all assigned materials and make note of questions, inconsistencies, areas of interest, and connections you find in other readings.
3. Listen carefully, raise questions, and test out ideas in class discussions. This allows each student to learn and encourage learning in others by, for example, gauging our assumptions and expanding the worldview of others.
4. Submit assignments on time, on the day due, by the specified time, and in compliance with all the criteria listed in the assignment instructions. Late assignments will not receive full credit.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
It is expected that students will abide by the JIU Honor Code and the Academic Honesty Policy. For additional information on the policy and related procedures, visit: [URL redacted].

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS
If you have a disability and require accommodations, please contact us early in the semester so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to the Office of Disability Services. If you are unsure of what you need to qualify for services, visit the Office of Disability Services website at [URL redacted] or contact the Office of Disability Services at (number). Location: [location]?

STUDENT SUPPORT
IUJ provides academic support services, including tutoring, study skills development and writing support, through the Office of Student Educational Services [phone number] and the Writing Center [phone number].
REQUIRED TEXTS:

Other readings may be assigned in class or noted in the syllabus.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Point value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflection papers (x12)</td>
<td>3:00 p.m. Mondays prior to each class session</td>
<td>48 points cumulative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Identity Inventory &amp; Reflection</td>
<td>October 18</td>
<td>10 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Project: Analysis paper</td>
<td>December 6</td>
<td>30 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance &amp; participation</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>12 points cumulative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total points 100

GRADING POLICIES:

Final grades will be assessed using the following scale:

- 98–100 = A
- 89–92 = AB
- 85–88 = B
- 81–84 = BC
- 77–80 = C
- 73–76 = CD
- 70–72 = D
- <70 = F
Course Schedule

August 30
Topic: Introductions, course description, expectations, overview of syllabus, pre-test assessment

September 8
Topic: Identity 1
Readings: Beverly Tatum: Who Am I? Pg. 6
Assignment: Reflection Paper, due Friday, 9/2/16 (exception due to holiday)

September 10 and 11 – RETREAT (Attendance is required)
Saturday, 11:00 a.m. - Sunday, 12:00 p.m. [Redacted]

September 13
Topic: Identity 2: Identities and Social Locations
Readings: Who Am I? Who Are My People? Pg. 9
Assignment: Reflection Paper, due Monday, 9/12/16

September 20
Topic: Social Construction of Difference 1
Readings: Social Construction of Difference. Pg. 15
Assignment: Reflection Paper, due Monday, 9/19/16

September 27
Topic: Social Construction of Difference 2
Readings: What Can We Do? Pg. 612
Assignment: Reflection Paper, due Monday, 9/26/16

October 4
Topic: Oppression and Discrimination 1
Readings: Five Faces of Oppression. Pg. 35
Assignment: Reflection Paper, due Monday, 10/3/16

October 11
Topic: Oppression and Discrimination 2
Readings: Cycle of Socialization.Pg. 45
Assignment: Reflection Paper, due Monday, 10/10/16

October 18
Topic: Power and Privilege 1
Readings: Understanding Adultism: A Key to Developing Positive Youth-Adult Relationships. Pg. 542
Assignment: Reflection Paper, due Monday, 10/17/16
Social Identity Inventory & Reflection due
MIDWEST JESUIT UNIVERSITY
MIU 0001-702: DYNAMICS OF PRIVILEGE AND OPPRESSION
Fall 2016 Syllabus

October 25
Topic: Power and Privilege 2
Readings: Ageism, Another Form of Bigotry. Pg. 559
Assignment: Reflection Paper, due Monday, 10/24/16

November 1
Topic: Micro Aggressions 1
Readings: Classism From Our Mouths. Pg. 216
Assignment: Reflection Paper, due Monday, 11/28/16

November 8
Topic: Micro Aggressions 2
Readings: Recognizing Ableist Beliefs and Practices. Pg. 532
Assignment: Reflection Paper, due Monday, 11/7/16

November 15
Topic: Religious Discrimination 1
Readings: Christian Privilege: Breaking a Sacred Taboo. Pg. 243
Assignment: Reflection Paper, due Monday, 11/14/16

November 22 – NO CLASS: Thanksgiving holiday

November 29
Topic: Religious Discrimination 2
Readings: Creating Identity Safe Spaces on College Campuses for Muslim Students. Pg. 301
Assignment: Reflection Paper, due Monday, 11/28/16

December 6
Topic: Creating Social Change
Readings: Cycle of Liberation. Pg. 618
Assignment: Final Project: Analysis Paper OR Campus Action Plan Proposal due
Reflection Papers (4 pts each, 48 pts total)

In order to have a productive class dialogue, it is imperative that each student both complete and think critically about the assigned readings prior to discussing them with the entire class. Therefore, to cultivate your analytical reflective prowess, you are required to complete a reflection paper EACH week on the assigned reading. This paper should:

1. Outline 2-3 main points of the reading, written in your own words entirely.

2. Consider the issue addressed in the reading and reflect on how it impacts you, your family, or friends. To what extent does this issue impact your life experience, immediately and/or in the long term? Does the issue present any challenges to you? What could you do to promote positive change regarding the issue?

3. Develop 1-2 discussion questions for class discussion. These questions could:
   a. Seek to clarify an idea the author raised, e.g., what is the difference between power and privilege;
   b. Encourage the class to further explore a concept/idea raised in the article, e.g., how do racial differences affect student interactions in the classroom?
   c. Offer an implicit critique the author’s idea/s and or stance, e.g., do you think the authors claim that women can’t be sexist is accurate? Why or why not?

Your reflection paper can be written in a format organized around the questions (e.g. the three main points are...) or in an essay format. However, this assignment should be written in full sentences, articulate your ideas in a clear manner and demonstrate that you have put time, effort and thought into your answers.

Further, since the questions will be used for class discussion, they need to be clear, concise and relevant to the reading discussed. To better incorporate them into the class discussion, I would like you to submit your reflection paper with questions to me via D2L by 3pm (AT THE LATEST) on the Monday preceding class. Any papers sent to me after 3 pm will be considered late and you will be docked points for this assignment.
Social Identity Inventory and Reflection (10 pts)

This reflection is designed to help you think about the various aspects that make up who you are and how you identify yourself. Some people identify themselves by their race, others by their gender, and others by their talents or professions. How do you identify yourself?

- Begin by making a personal inventory of your own social identities relating to gender, race/ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religion, economic class, and ability/disability status.
  - Consider:
    - Which social identity do you think of most often?
    - Which identity do you think about the least?
    - Which social identity gives you the most privileges or benefits?
    - Which identity most hurts your options, access, and/or rewards?
- Complete the Social Identity Wheel Exercise.
- Share your understanding of a particular social identity or identities that is/are particularly important to the way you think about yourself. What is this identity/identities and how does it/them affect the person you are today?
  - Consider:
    - The first time you were aware that your membership in a social group affected how you were treated.
    - A time you became aware that your membership in a social group gave you privileges not enjoyed by members of other social groups, or denied you privileges enjoyed by members of other social groups.
    - A time you were aware of having multiple targeted identities intensified your experience of oppression.
    - A time you were aware of having multiple privileged identities intensified your experience of privilege.
- What are some beliefs, worldviews, values, etc. that are influenced by this identity?
- How have our class discussions defined or redefined these beliefs/values/worldviews?

Using these questions as a guide, along with readings, discussions and other related activities from class, complete a 3-5 page essay outlining your understanding and experiences of your chosen identity (or identities). Your essays should address the above questions in ample detail and articulate your reactions, learning and reflections.

Due: October 18, 2016; submitted via D2.
Final Project: Analysis Paper (30 pts)

To facilitate understanding of the course material, you are to complete an analysis paper on a topic related to stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, oppression, power and privilege. You will choose to write on one of the three topics below. The purpose of this paper is to give you an opportunity to apply the course material to "real world" topics and events. Your paper should be 5-7 pages in length (double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins). In your paper, you must properly cite at least 2 of the readings from the first part of this course and a minimum of 3 outside sources to support your position.

Choose one of the following topics on which to write your paper:

1. Stereotypes and Prejudice in the News -- Identify and analyze a case of stereotyping/prejudice in current events. Look at recent news stories, whether related to politics, the criminal justice system, entertainment, etc. Identify instances of stereotyping and prejudice, and then use the course concepts to better understand it. Also be sure to describe an original suggestion for how you could reduce stereotyping/prejudice in this case.

2. Discrimination and Oppression on Television -- Watch one of your favorite television shows, be it a drama, a sitcom, reality TV, etc. Identify instances of discrimination/oppression using the concepts covered in this course to better understand them. Be sure to describe original suggestions for how you could reduce discrimination/oppression in these instances.

3. Power and Privilege on Campus -- Identify and analyze a case of power and privilege on campus. Look in the dorms, in classrooms, at the AMU, at special events, etc. Identify instances of power and privilege using the concepts covered in this course to better understand this case. Be sure to describe an original suggestion for how you could address power and privilege in this case to bring about a more equitable environment.

Criteria for Grading:

- Paper should be written in essay form with good flow and organization.
- Effort put forth in analyzing your material
- Ability to reflect on the material and apply learning
- Ability to express your own thoughts and concepts
- Good writing, including organization, sentence structure, grammar, and spelling
- Proper citation of sources using any standard citation style (e.g. MLA, APA, ASA)
- Ability to follow instructions

Due: December 6, 2016; submitted via D2L
Attendance & Participation (12 pts)

The undergraduate attendance policy specifies the role of the student, the instructor and university administrators in cases when students are absent from one or more classes. The policy aims to clarify several aspects of attendance, including, but not limited to the following five:

1. With few exceptions, no distinction is made between excused and unexcused absences.
2. Instructors determine if work (including tests and examinations) may be made up as a result of one or more absences.
3. University offices do not provide documentation of absences.
4. Students may be withdrawn from a course as a result of excessive absences.
5. Lack of participation in an online course may lead to the recording of an absence for the student.

Students are responsible for attending all class meetings for courses in which they are registered. Any absence, regardless of the reason, prevents students from getting the full benefit of the course and as such, no distinction is made between excused and unexcused absences, with the following exceptions:

1. Absences resulting from legal obligations (such as jury duty).
2. Absences due to religious observances
3. Absences resulting from university sanctioned activities and related travel.

Please read the entire policy for full details. The complete attendance policy may be found online at: [URL redacted].
Instructor: Y
Office location: [Redacted to protect identity of instructor]
Office hours: 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. (By appointment)
E-mail address: [Redacted to protect identity of instructor]
Telephone: [Redacted to protect identity of instructor]

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This two-semester seminar provides an academic component for the cross-cultural residence hall experience, WeLead Social Justice Community. The residence hall brings together first year students from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds selected because of their interest in being engaged in leadership development and cross-cultural experiences in and out of the classroom. In addition to weekly class attendance, the seminar requires attendance at designated extramural cultural events such as movies, plays, lectures, or community outings, including a weekend retreat on leadership and diversity issues. Students will read and discuss articles and books and reflect on leadership and cross-cultural experiences. Written assignments will provide opportunities to demonstrate achievement of course goals. Completion of MU 0001 (fall semester) and MU 0002 (spring semester) fulfills MU's Core of Common Studies requirement in the area or Diverse Cultures for most colleges and departments.

COURSE CREDIT: 1.5 credits
PREREQUISITIES: Enrollment in WeLead Social Justice Community Program.

PROGRAM & COURSE OBJECTIVES:
The WeLead Social Justice Community and associated academic course requirement focuses on building and improving awareness and skills about social inequities with the belief that students will use their skills and awareness to create social change and a more equitable society.

SELF-AWARENESS
• Identify personal and social values, practices, and beliefs.
• Become familiar with how our personal and social identities interact and inform our perspective, assumptions, and relationships.

LEADERSHIP
• Identify personal skills and abilities that may contribute to the student's growth and development as a leader.
• Identify personal conflict resolution styles and triggers that can inhibit or promote effective leadership, communication and problem-solving.
• Identify obstacles that prevent the formation of inclusive environments, as well as principles and strategies of developing inclusive communities.
• Become familiar with your role and responsibility in creating an inclusive community.

SOCIAL JUSTICE
• Gain an increased knowledge about terms and issues relating to social justice.
• Increase awareness about stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, the dynamics of power and privilege, and the interlocking system of oppression.
The two semesters of this course also fulfill the MU's Core of Common Studies Diverse Cultures requirement. At the completion of Diverse Cultures core studies, the student will be able to:

1. Identify differences and similarities in communication, values, practices, and beliefs between one's own culture and other cultures.
2. Explain how categories of human diversity (such as race, gender, ethnicity, and disability) influence personal identities and can create structural and institutional inequity.
3. Critically reflect upon one's personal and cultural presuppositions and how these affect one's values and relationships.

COURSE STRUCTURE:
The course is designed to follow a pattern that will give students the opportunity to learn the history of the various issues covered while also sharing their own insights and experiences. "Foundations" classes will explore concepts and history, while "synthesis" classes will emphasize personal storytelling, reflection, and focused activities.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS:
Students in this course are expected to be actively engaged, which requires each student to take responsibility for their own learning and to share the learning process with the class. At minimum, students need to:
1. **Attend all class sessions.** This is critical to promoting a learning community within the class. Each member benefits from the viewpoints of the other members. If you cannot avoid missing a class, be sure to contact the instructor as soon as possible and make arrangements with a classmate in advance to get all information covered in class.
2. **Read all assigned materials and make note of questions, inconsistencies, areas of interest, and connections you find in other readings.**
3. **Listen carefully, raise questions, and test out ideas in class discussions.** This allows each student to learn and encourage learning in others by, for example, gauging our assumptions and expanding the worldview of others.
4. **Submit assignments on time,** on the due date, by the specified time, and in compliance with all the criteria listed in the assignment instructions. Late assignments will not receive full credit.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
It is expected that students will abide by the MU Honor Code and the Academic Honesty Policy. For additional information on the policy and related procedures, visit: [Website redacted to protect identity of participants.]

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS
If you have a disability and require accommodations, please contact us early in the semester so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to the Office of Disability Services. If you are unsure of what you need to qualify for services, visit the Office of Disability Services website at [Redacted] or contact the Office of Disability Services at [Redacted], located in [Redacted].
STUDENT SUPPORT
MIU provides academic support services, including tutoring, study skills development and writing support, through the Office of Student Educational Services (288-3270) and the Ott Writing Center (288-5542).

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Other readings will be assigned in class or as noted in the syllabus.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Point value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response papers (x12)</td>
<td>3:00 p.m. Mondays prior to each class session</td>
<td>4 points each, 48 points cumulative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Identity Inventory &amp; Reflection</td>
<td>October 20</td>
<td>10 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final project: Analysis paper</td>
<td>December 8</td>
<td>30 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance &amp; participation</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>12 points cumulative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total points 100

GRADING POLICIES:
Final grades will be assessed using the following scale:
93–100 = A
89–92 = AB
85–88 = B
81–84 = BC
77–80 = C
73–76 = D
70–72 = D
<70 = F

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION:
The undergraduate attendance policy specifies the role of the student, the instructor and university administrators in cases when students are absent from one or more classes. The policy aims to clarify several aspects of attendance, including, but not limited to the following five:
1. With few exceptions, no distinction is made between excused and unexcused absences.
2. Instructors determine if work (including tests and examinations) may be made up as a result of one or more absences.
3. University offices do not provide documentation of absences.
4. Students may be withdrawn from a course as a result of excessive absences.
5. Lack of participation in an online course may lead to the recording of an absence for the student.

Students are responsible for attending all class meetings for courses in which they are registered. Any absence, regardless of the reason, prevents students from getting the full benefit of the course and as such, no distinction is made between excused and unexcused absences, with the following exceptions:
1. Absences resulting from legal obligations (such as jury duty).
2. Absences resulting from university sanctioned activities and related travel.

Please read the entire policy for full details. The Complete attendance policy may be found online at: [Redacted.]

CLASSROOM POLICIES:

- All cell phones, beepers, mp3 players, and other personal electronic devices should be turned off during class. No headphones may be worn in class.
- Students are not permitted to leave class to take phone calls.
- Display common courtesy – please do not have side conversations while another person is speaking.
- No sleeping in class.
- No reading of materials unrelated to the class.
- No use of laptop computers other than for taking notes.
# Course Schedule

**August 31**  
**Topics:** Introductions, course description, expectations, overview of syllabus, pre-test assessment

**September 7**  
**Topic:** Identity 1  
**Readings:** Beverly Tatum: Who Am I?  
**Pg. 6**  
**Assignment:** Response Paper, due Monday, 9/5/16

**September 10-11 – RETREAT (Attendance is required!!)**  
Saturday, 11 a.m. - Sunday, 12:30 p.m.  
[Redacted]

**September 14**  
**Topic:** Identity 2: Identities and Social Locations  
**Readings:** Who Am I? Who Are My People?  
**Pg. 9**  
**Assignment:** Response Paper, due Monday, 9/12/16

**September 21**  
**Topic:** Social Construction of Difference 1  
**Readings:** Social Construction of Difference.  
**Pg. 15**  
**Assignment:** Response Paper, due Monday, 9/19/16

**September 28**  
**Topic:** Social Construction of Difference 2  
**Readings:** What Can We Do?  
**Pg. 612**  
**Assignment:** Response Paper, due Monday, 9/26/16

**October 5**  
**Topic:** Oppression and Discrimination 1  
**Readings:** Five Faces of Oppression.  
**Pg. 35**  
**Assignment:** Response Paper, due Monday, 10/3/16

**October 12**  
**Topic:** Oppression and Discrimination 2  
**Readings:** Cycle of Socialization.  
**Pg. 45**  
**Assignment:** Response Paper, due Monday, 10/10/16
October 19
Topic: Power and Privilege 1
Readings: Understanding Adultism: A Key to Developing Positive Youth-Adult Relationships. Pg. 542
Assignment: Response Paper, due Monday, 10/17/16
Personal Identity Inventory & Reflection due

October 26
Topic: Power and Privilege 2
Readings: Ageism, Another Form of Bigotry. Pg. 559
Assignment: Response Paper, due Monday, 10/24/16

November 2
Topic: Micro Aggressions 1
Readings: Classism From Our Mouths. Pg. 216
Assignment: Response Paper, due Monday, 10/31/16

November 9
Topic: Micro Aggressions 2
Readings: Recognizing Ableist Beliefs and Practices. Pg. 532
Assignment: Response Paper, due Monday, 11/7/16

November 16
Topic: Religious Discrimination 1
Readings: Christian Privilege: Breaking a Sacred Taboo. Pg. 243
Assignment: Response Paper, due Monday, 11/14/16

November 23 – no class: Thanksgiving holiday

November 30
Topic: Religious Discrimination 2
Readings: Creating Identity Safe Spaces on College Campuses for Muslim Students. Pg. 301
Assignment: Response Paper, due Monday, 11/28/16

December 7
Topic: Creating Social Change
Readings: Cycle of Liberation. Pg. 618
Assignment: Final Project: Analysis Paper
Response Papers (4 pts each, 48 pts total)

In order to have a productive class dialogue, it is imperative that each student both complete and think critically about the assigned readings prior to discussing them with the entire class. Therefore, to cultivate your analytical prowess, you are required to complete a response paper EACH week on the assigned reading. This paper should:

1. Outline 2-3 main points of the article. No quotes from the article may be used in this summary. It should be written in your own words ENTIRELY.

2. Use a ‘real world’ example to illustrate at least one of the main points of the article e.g. example from the media or MU campus experiences. Describe the example in detail and then discuss how it is connected to the point/s of the assigned reading.

3. Develop 1-2 discussion questions to use for class discussion. These questions could:
   a. Seek to clarify an idea the author raised: e.g. What is the difference between power and privilege?
   b. Encourage the class to further explore a concept/idea raised in the article, e.g. how do racial differences affect student interactions in the classroom?
   c. Offer an implicit critique the author’s idea/s and or stance: e.g. Do you think the authors claim that women can’t be sexist is accurate? Why or Why not?

Your response paper can be written in a format organized around the questions: e.g. the three main points are... Real life world example is... vs essay format. However this assignment should be written in full sentences, articulate your ideas in a clear manner and demonstrate that you have put time, effort and THOUGHT into your answers. If you submit a response paper that is full of fragment sentences, spelling errors and incomprehensible assertions, you will lose some if not all of the points for that particular assignment.

Further, since the questions will be used for class discussion, they need to be clear, concise and relevant to the article discussed. It is also important that there not be several versions of the same question submitted by different students. Therefore, I would like you to submit them to me via D2L by 3pm (AT THE LATEST) on the Monday preceding class. Any questions sent to me after 3 pm, will be considered late and you will be docked 2 points for this assignment. NOTE: If I find that questions are unclear or repetitive, I will contact those students who will need to edit their questions and/or resubmit new ones.
Personal Identity Inventory and Reflection (10 pts)

This reflection is designed to help you think about the various aspects that make up who you are and how you identify yourself. Some people identify themselves by their race, others by their gender, and others by their talents or professions. How do you identify yourself?

- Begin by making a personal inventory of your own social identities relating to gender, race/ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religion, economic class, and ability/disability status.
  Consider:
  o Which social identity do you think of most often?
  o Which identity do you think about the least?
  o Which social identity gives you the most privileges or benefits?
  o Which identity most hurts your options, access, and/or rewards?

- Share your understanding of a particular social identity or identities that is/are particularly important to the way you think about yourself. What is this identity/identities and how does it they affect the person you are today?
  Consider:
  o The first time you were aware that your membership in a social group affected how you were treated.
  o A time you became aware that your membership in a social group gave you privileges not enjoyed by members of other social groups, or denied you privileges enjoyed by members of other social groups.
  o A time you were aware of having multiple targeted identities intensified your experience of oppression.
  o A time you were aware of having multiple privileged identities intensified your experience of privilege.

- What are some beliefs, worldviews, values, etc. that are influenced by this identity?
- How have our class discussions defined or redefined these beliefs/values/worldviews?

Using these questions as a guide, along with readings, discussions and other related activities from class, complete a 3-5 page essay outlining your understanding and experiences of your chosen identity (or identities). Your essay should address the above questions in ample detail and articulate your reactions, learning and reflections.

Due: Paper submitted via DJIL by October 19, 2016 at 5:00pm
Final project:
Analysis paper (30 pts)

To facilitate understanding of the course material, you will complete an analysis paper on a topic related to stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, oppression, power and privilege. You will choose to write on one of the three topics below. The purpose of this paper is to give you an opportunity to apply the course material to "real world" topics and events. Your paper should be 3-5 pages in length (double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins). In your paper, you must properly cite at least 3 of the readings from the first part of this course to support your position. All papers should use ASA citation format.

Choose one of the following topics on which to write your paper:

1. **Stereotypes and Prejudice in the News** – Identify and analyze a case of stereotyping/prejudice in current events. Look at recent news stories, whether related to politics, the criminal justice system, entertainment, etc. Identify instances of stereotyping and prejudice, and then use the course concepts to better understand it. Also be sure to describe an original suggestion for how you could reduce stereotyping/prejudice in this case.

2. **Discrimination and Oppression on Television** – Watch one of your favorite television shows, be it a drama, a sitcom, reality TV, etc. Identify instances of discrimination/oppression using the concepts covered in this course to better understand them. Be sure to describe original suggestions for how you could reduce discrimination/oppression in these instances.

3. **Power and Privilege on Campus** – Identify and analyze a case of power and privilege on campus. Look in the dorms, in classrooms, at the AMU, at special events, etc. Identify instances of power and privilege using the concepts covered in this course to better understand this case. Be sure to describe an original suggestion for how you could address power and privilege in this case to bring about a more equitable environment.

**Criteria for Grading:**

- Paper should be written in essay form using ASA.
- Effort put forth in analyzing your material
- Good writing, including organization, sentence structure, grammar, and spelling
- Flow and organization of the essay
- Ability to reflect on the material and apply learning
- Ability to express your own thoughts and concepts
- Ability to follow instructions

**Due:** Paper submitted via D2L by December 7, 2016 at 5:00pm

**Attendance and Participation (12 pts; subject to instructor discretion)**
Identity Worksheets

Section X, 10/11/2016

**Cycle of Socialization Worksheet**

Choose two of your own social identities and write down 5 examples of what you have learned about being each identity. Identify where each learning came from and/or how it has been reinforced.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity #1 – Privileged/Agent:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What you have learned about that identity?</td>
<td>Where did the message come from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where did it come from?</td>
<td>How was it reinforced?</td>
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<td>5.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity #2 – Oppressed/Target:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What you have learned about that identity?</td>
<td>Where did the message come from?</td>
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<td>Where did it come from?</td>
<td>How was it reinforced?</td>
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<td>Individual and Interpersonal Interactions</td>
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<td>Examples</td>
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<td><strong>(Behaviors)</strong></td>
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<td>Unconscious</td>
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