

Writing Beyond the University

Preparing Lifelong Learners
for Lifewide Writing

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and Paula Rosinski*

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INTRODUCTION TO WRITING BEYOND THE UNIVERSITY AND THIS COLLECTION

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Writing is an integral part of engaged learning within and beyond the university, across the entirety of one's life. Students write for classes, of course, but they also write in academic contexts that focus on transitions to spaces beyond the classroom, such as when they write at internship sites or keep a practicum log. Writing also happens in workplaces and civic spaces. We write in our daily lives, often for non-obligatory purposes, when we reply to social media posts, journal, or engage in personal interests like contributing to fanfiction sites or sharing travel tips on a blog. Writers also routinely move among these "beyond the university" spaces—sometimes daily or even hourly—so discussions of writing beyond the university must attend not only to what happens within these unique spaces for writing but also to how writers navigate among those spaces.

Writing beyond the university matters:

- Because it pervades students' academic and co-curricular experiences, and they are often asked to engage in complex writing activities with little to no instruction;
- Because it's one of the primary ways individuals make sense of new information and convey their understanding to others;
- Because students report a connection between having opportunities to write in lots of different ways in college and their perception of success with workplace writing;
- Because alumni write extensively in the workforce, across many different professions; and

- Because alumni report that being an effective writer in the workplace helps them feel confident and competent.

Faculty and staff want students to be successful critical thinkers and engaged citizens; administrators want students to be well prepared for the workforce and want their institutions to respond to societal and employer concerns about the value of a college education; and students want to find meaningful, well-compensated work. And just as we know that writing beyond the university matters, we also now know there are strategies and pedagogies that support students/alumni to be more effective writers in these spaces and that teach them to transfer what they've learned about writing in academic and co-curricular contexts to writing beyond the university contexts. Since we know there are strategies and pedagogies that help students transfer their writerly knowledge among these spaces, we also should design professional development opportunities to teach faculty and staff these strategies and pedagogies, so they can integrate them into the learning experiences they design for students.

This collection features multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional research that examines this myriad of ways students and alumni write beyond the university (or college) classroom, how college faculty (i.e., academic staff, in some geographic contexts) and staff can prepare students to be lifelong and lifewide writers, and how administrators can support those efforts. In this introduction to the collection, we use three composite case studies of writers to illustrate what writing beyond the university can entail and to explore how two generations of research have studied that writing. We also briefly preview the collection's other chapters.

Writers Move among These Spaces

Fictional, composite stories about three different writers highlight the variety, the value, and the impact of the different kinds of writing beyond the university that lifelong and lifewide learners may encounter.

Sam is an undergraduate student majoring in public health at a large public university in the United States. They use they/them pronouns. Since they're doing a work placement this term (like an internship), they're enrolled in a course that supports their integration of learning with this work experience. During the school year Sam also works in the campus writing center and keeps a journal to help them reflect on personal and work challenges, successes, and relationships.

Malcolm, our second writer, uses he/his pronouns, and is an early-career IT professional in a temporary position in Spain. He earned his undergraduate degree in the United States at a medium-sized liberal arts institution, where he double-majored in professional writing and history. Malcolm wrote a lot in college in classes for his majors, at an internship, and for independent research with a faculty mentor. He writes a food and travel blog for fun, something he's been doing a lot more lately, especially while living in Spain.

Our third writer is Donna, a mid-career professional who uses she/her pronouns. She's in mid-management in a marketing firm in the United States. Donna earned her undergraduate degree in a country in western Europe, and while in college she did not receive a lot of explicit writing instruction. In her job she supervises early-career professionals and student interns, who are in work placements similar to Sam's work placement/internship. For fun and to feel connected to her community, she helps write a monthly newsletter for her church.

Imagine that our three writers have been asked to write a memo (or are supervising a group of novice writers as they write memos). Memos take different forms, but they're typically short documents used to share information internally within an organization or externally to stakeholders. Given each writer's different individual life and educational experiences, we'll briefly describe how they each respond to this same writing situation.

Sam, the undergraduate student, approached the task of writing a memo for their work placement just like they would write an academic essay because that's what they are familiar with. Sam

started off with an elaborate introduction in an inverted pyramid format, concluding with the main point. Then they wrote six additional dense paragraphs, with each one elaborating on a sub-point. Their supervisor told Sam that the memo was too wordy, included too much analysis, used too many long paragraphs, and failed to put the main point up front. Their supervisor also said the memo didn't even look like a memo—it looked like a school essay. That evening, Sam journaled about this memo-writing experience as they tried to figure out how the previous writing strategies they used in college writing assignments that got them high grades seemed to have failed them miserably at work.

When Malcolm starts writing a memo for work, he's feeling confident because he's had some experience writing this genre in his professional writing classes and in his internship. He knows the general format and purposes of a memo, and he knows enough to understand that context matters and that different companies will have their own unique expectations for memos. And when he did independent research his junior year, Malcolm learned how to work one-to-one with his faculty mentor, making him somewhat more comfortable approaching his supervisor for help. However, he's writing for a company in Spain now, and he doesn't fully understand the workplace culture or writing expectations, and he doesn't fully know how to work collaboratively with his team members or how to ask his supervisor the right questions: should he ask for example memos? Should he ask general questions, or specific questions about whether the memo should be summative and concise, or include background information and detailed statistics? Malcolm finds himself wishing that writing this memo was as easy and as fun as writing his food and travel blog.

When Donna started writing a newsletter for her church, she struggled with hitting the right tone, as she was so used to writing efficient marketing materials. She reflected on what she found challenging about writing the newsletter, which was a new genre for her and addressed a more informal audience than she was used to. As this was self-sponsored, non-obligatory writing for her, she

initially struggled to understand where to go for guidance. She eventually read through previous newsletters and talked to previous writers of the newsletter until she figured out an approach that was appropriate. When Donna started supervising a group of new employees and interns, her struggles with writing this newsletter helped her understand the challenges the newer employees and interns were experiencing when writing memos for the first time. She related to their confusion trying to figure out how to write in a new genre, to a new audience, and in a new context. Donna earned her undergraduate degree in western Europe and didn't receive much direct writing instruction. Thus, being able to draw upon her newsletter writing experiences helped her understand her employees' difficulties with the memo writing task and helped her explain to them how a professional tone was important to take in a work memo.

These three writers' profiles show individual writers at different stages in their writing development, negotiating how to take writing knowledge and strategies from one context and transfer them into another context; and they show writers with different college writing experiences, with different dispositions, and with varying levels of expertise and comfort with writing. What they all have in common, though, is their efforts to transfer (or to help others transfer) writerly expertise from school-based writing to writing beyond the university.

Reflection 1

Maybe these scenarios seem familiar to you or resonate with your own experiences with writing. What kinds of writing do you do now, in your personal, professional, or civic life? What kinds of texts do you write, why do you write them, to whom do you write them?

Reflection 2

How did you learn *to write* the texts you just listed?

- Where did you learn to do this writing? Was it in a class? Can you remember the class? Was it in an internship? On the job? Some combination of these?
- What challenges or successes did you experience?

First Generation Writing Transfer

The first generation of writing transfer research focused primarily on the writing transfer that occurs within the university. During the Center for Engaged Learning's 2011–2013 research seminar on *Critical Transitions: Writing and the Question of Transfer*, scholars primarily explored how, and to what extent, writers transfer writing knowledge and practice from one learning context into another. That research seminar led to the publication of the *Elon Statement on Writing Transfer* (2015). The research seminar participants' work also was featured in collections like *Critical Transitions: Writing and the Question of Transfer* (Anson and Moore 2016) and *Understanding Writing Transfer: Implications for Transformative Student Learning in Higher Education* (Moore and Bass 2017), as well as a special issue of *Composition Forum*, edited by Elizabeth Wardle (2012, Volume 26). In that special issue, Jessie Moore (2012) mapped the questions and methods used by the first generation of writing transfer research, providing a review of the scholarship to that point.

Although focused primarily on writing transfer *within* the university, this first generation of research gives us a great deal of foundational knowledge for studying writing transfer *beyond* the university. For example, Moore (2017, 4–8) shared five principles about writing transfer:

Principle 1: Successful writing transfer requires transforming or repurposing prior knowledge (even if only slightly) for a new context to adequately meet the

expectations of new audiences and fulfill new purposes for writing.

Principle 2: Writing transfer is a complex phenomenon, and understanding that complexity is central to facilitating students' successful consequential transitions, whether among university writing tasks or between academic and workplace or civic contexts.

Principle 3: Students' dispositions (e.g., habits of mind) and identities inform the success of their unique writing transfer experiences.

Principle 4: University programs (first-year writing programs, writing across the curriculum programs, majors, etc.) can “teach for transfer” . . .

Principle 5: Recognizing and assessing writing transfer require using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods looking at both critical transition points and longitudinal patterns of learning.

The first generation of writing transfer research demonstrated that writing transfer can occur across multiple contexts: between lower-level and upper-level classes; to/from classes and work-integrated learning, including internships; to/from self-sponsored and academic writing contexts; and in and outside of the classroom. In addition, universities can “teach for transfer” (reaffirming Perkins and Salomon 1988) by introducing tools to analyze expectations for writing and allowing students to practice with those tools across a range of writing situations. Although university curricula are built on the premise of transfer—that students will learn knowledge and skills that they will transfer to subsequent tasks—writers need opportunities to refine their strategies for analyzing and responding to new audiences and purposes for writing. Scaffolded opportunities to practice, paired with timely feedback, help students test their writing strategies and develop habits of mind needed to be successful writers beyond the university.

Second Generation Writing Beyond the University Research: Fostering Writers' Lifelong Learning and Agency

The 2019–2021 Center for Engaged Learning (CEL) research seminar, “Writing Beyond the University: Fostering Writers’ Lifelong Learning and Agency,” built on this first generation of research by examining how we know, or if we know, the ways that college writing experiences are preparing students for the wide variety of writing they do after they graduate. Our specific goals were to understand writing experiences and writing knowledge development across and among contexts for lifelong learning; to explore how writers’ developing professional identities, subjectivities, and practices are informed by writing experiences within and outside academic contexts; and to understand how to facilitate writers’ ongoing self-agency and learning.

This collection features second generation writing beyond the university research from the six multi-institutional teams that participated in the CEL research seminar as well as seven additional groups of scholars doing parallel research. While many of these teams’ researchers are from writing-related fields, they also include participants from law schools, student affairs, communications, statistics, health sciences, and education. The range of professional knowledge and insight these chapter authors bring to their research highlights how important it is that faculty from across the curriculum contribute their diverse disciplinary expertise to preparing lifelong learners for writing beyond the university.

The authors in this collection conducted their research at a wide array of sites and in various industries and countries, as well as spoke to a wide range of writers and employers. Sites and contexts for writing include the workplace, internships or work placements, and self-sponsored contexts. Researchers talked to alumni in industries such as marketing, social media, law enforcement, university administration, gig work, software engineering, education, and medicine. These research teams also focused on writing contexts around the globe, studying writers’ experiences in Australia, Czech

Republic, Germany, Ireland, Kenya, Madagascar, Oman, Singapore, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Vietnam.

We introduce the contributing authors here and then, later in this introduction, explore how this new generation of scholarship approaches inquiry about our three composite writers and their writing beyond the university.

In section one, chapter authors examine learning to write as a lifelong process, and in particular writers' adaptability as they learn to write in new contexts, both professional and self-sponsored:

- Karen Lunsford, Carl Whithaus, and Jonathan Alexander show how alumni orient themselves to collaboration in the workplace, often in serendipitous ways; the authors see this orientation as a form of wayfinding and map their participants' awareness of ongoing writing development. (*“Collaboration as Wayfinding in Alumni’s Post-Graduate Writing Experiences,”* chapter 1)
- Jennifer Reid, Matthew Pavesich, Andrea Efthymiou, Heather Lindenman, and Dana Lynn Driscoll study “rogue” writing (such as writing about gardening or writing for prayer groups) that occurs outside of university-sanctioned writing spaces. Lifelong learners engage in a great deal of this self-sponsored writing, but its impact on other kinds of writing is often ignored by teachers and researchers. The authors ask questions about the functions of self-sponsored, non-obligatory writing and rhetorical activity, and also about the relationship between those functions and writers' identities. (*“Writing to Learn Beyond the University: Preparing Lifelong Learners for Lifewide Writing,”* chapter 2)
- We (Julia Bleakney, Paula Rosinski, and Jessie L. Moore) partner with Heather Lindenman, Travis Maynard, and Li Li to explore how institutional efforts like campus-wide writing initiatives, writing majors, and other campus writing experiences (like writing center consulting positions, internships, or undergraduate research) prepare students for writing they'll encounter as alumni. The chapter draws on a national survey

of US college graduates and alumni studies conducted at two US institutions. (“Understanding Alumni Writing Experiences in the United States,” chapter 3)

Section two explores the ways colleges and their community and industry partners can support writers’ development as lifelong writers. This support includes preparing writers for the types of writing and workplace writing cultures they will encounter after graduation, helping writers access or request the kinds of resources that enhance their workplace writing, and attending to the complexity of writers’ writing lives:

- Kathleen Blake Yancey, D. Alexis Hart, Ashley Holmes, Anna V. Knutson, Íde O’Sullivan, and Yogesh Sinha study the non-linear complexities of the writing students do inside and outside of class—their occasions and opportunities for writing, their writing processes, the texts they produce, and the complex, messy, recursive relationships between all of these aspects of writing. (“There is a Lot of Overlap’: Tracing Writing Development Across Spheres of Writing,” chapter 4)
- Michael-John DePalma, Lilian W. Mina, Kara Taczak, Michelle J. Eady, Radhika Jaidev, and Ina Alexandra Machura make connections between two previously unconnected fields: the study and teaching of writing transfer and the study and practice of work-integrated learning (WIL). They argue that such connections enhance university-workplace partnerships and improve the teaching and learning of writing beyond the university. (“Writing Across Professions (WAP): Fostering the Transfer of Writing Knowledge and Practices in Work-Integrated Learning,” chapter 5)
- Ha Thi Phuong Pham and Dominique Vola Ambinintsoa focus on university contexts in Madagascar and Vietnam, where limited writing support is available, but their discussion of using low-stakes activities to help students develop the capacity to be lifelong writers is applicable to any college curriculum. (“Examining the Effects of Reflective Writing

- and Peer Feedback on Student Writing In and Beyond the University,” chapter 6)
- Jeffrey Saerys-Foy, Laurie Ann Britt-Smith, Zan Walker-Goncalves, and Lauren M. Sardi use survey data collected from ninety-one employers to highlight points of convergence and divergence between workplace and academic writing contexts; they use these intersections to offer pedagogical strategies and administrative implications for supporting the workplace readiness of students. (“*Bridging Academic and Workplace Writing: Insights from Employers*,” chapter 7)
 - Ann M. Blakeslee, Jennifer C. Mallette, Rebecca S. Nowacek, J. Michael Rifenburg, and Liane Robertson study professionals’ stories about their writing experiences, the formation of their identities as writers, and the role that mentoring or other resources play in their workplace writing contexts. (“*Navigating Workplace Writing as a New Professional: The Roles of Workplace Environment, Writerly Identity, and Mentoring and Support*,” chapter 8)
 - Brian Fitzpatrick and Jessica McCaughey use interview data to closely examine the writing lives and on-the-job struggles of two writers. The authors seek to understand how writing works for these writers, their challenges as they learned to write at work, and the extent to which these writers think their university writing experiences helped them do complex workplace writing. (“*I’ll Try to Make Myself Sound Smarter Than I Am’: Learning to Negotiate Power in Workplace Writing*,” chapter 9)
 - Neil Baird, Alena Kasparkova, Stephen Macharia, and Amanda Sturgill focus on the reality of workplace writing for alumni and how their university education enables them, or doesn’t enable them, to succeed as workplace writers. (“*What One Learns in College Only Makes Sense When Practicing It at Work’: How Early-Career Alumni Evaluate Writing Success*,” chapter 10)

In section three, chapter authors explore writers' ongoing agency and the networked lives of writers. Chapters in this section examine tools and practices that help students and alumni develop writerly agency in their workplace writing contexts, including practices that help students use writing to communicate their professional identities and use social media to build networking relationships:

- Nadya Yakovchuk, Ryan Dippre, Lucie Dvorakova, Alison Farrell, Niamh Fortune, and Melissa Weresh research how students about to enter a work placement make sense of the writing demands they will face. They also explore connections among this sense-making, students' various writing experiences, and the writing instruction students received in college. (“[Writing Transitions Between Academic and Professional Settings](#),” chapter 11)
- Ella August and Olivia S. Anderson demonstrate how familiarity with the types of writing that students will encounter in their professional fields can help faculty design writing assignments that give students scaffolded practice with the writing they'll compose as future professionals. August and Anderson also illustrate how assignments with authentic audiences and purposes—what they call the “Real-World Writing Project”—help students practice the types of professional writing they'll do beyond the university. (“[A Framework for Designing Effective Writing Assignments in Public Health](#),” chapter 12)
- And finally, Benjamin Lauren and Stacey Pigg argue that social media networking is essential for building writers' self-agency. They also suggest ways to teach networking as a transformative writing practice in the classroom. (“[“And Sometimes We Debate”: How Networking Transforms What Professional Writers Know](#),” chapter 13)

Second Generation WBU Research & Sam's, Malcolm's, and Donna's Scenarios

Returning to our writers' profiles, each of the chapter authors would be interested in knowing more about how our three writers navigate new writing challenges. What questions would the chapter authors ask about Sam, the student in the United States who used their prior experience writing academic essays to write a memo for their internship? What questions would they ask about Malcolm, the early-career professional with previous college and internship experience writing memos, but who's struggling to figure out how to write collaboratively with his Spanish workplace colleagues? And what questions would they ask about Donna, the mid-career professional who finds herself empathizing with her employees and interns as they struggle to write memos in a professional tone?

Below, we group inquiry questions that cross the foci and research methods of chapters in this collection to highlight the complexity—and significance—of this second generation research to understanding and preparing students for writing beyond the university.

Sam

- How would Sam make sense of the writing demands they are likely to face in their internship?
- Will the course they're taking, related to their work placement, help prepare them to write the memo?
- How does this course teach them the value of networking as a critical writing practice?
- What additional real-world writing projects could be integrated into the curriculum to better support students like Sam and to offer additional scaffolded practice with the types of writing students will encounter in their professions?
- Thinking about the functions and purposes of Sam's self-motivated journal writing, how might Sam use this non-obligatory writing to make sense of the other writing they're doing in professional contexts, like the memo? For example, does Sam use any of the same writing strategies when writing their

journal and the memo—such as reflection and brainstorming—and are these strategies successful or problematic?

- If Sam were to explain and map out—using colored markers and paper, with dotted lines, arrows, and circles—the complex relationships between the various kinds of writing they’re doing at the same time (in their work placement, in their journaling, and in their writing center consulting), how would they then use this map to describe connections between their writing processes, different contexts, and different purposes for writing?

Malcolm

- How does Malcolm draw from his prior experiences in college to determine if his memo is successful and to approach collaboration with his work colleagues?
- Which courses and writing-intensive cocurricular and extracurricular experiences have prepared him for the writing he does now?
- What kinds of instruction did he receive in college, especially as a double-major in professional writing and history, and did any of those experiences help him write the memo?
- How does Malcolm orient himself to collaboration through the challenges he’s facing in this new work context?
- What mentoring and support has he received from his supervisors that helps him make sense of the expectations for writing this memo, work collaboratively with his team, and ask for support?
- How does Malcolm make sense of the new writing demands he faces in his new context as an early-career professional?

Donna

- How does Donna encourage her employees and interns to draw upon their previous writing experiences?
- How does Donna draw upon her own prior writing experiences, from both college and the workplace, to support and supervise the people who report to her?

- How is the writing Donna does in her marketing job similar to and different from academic writing?
- What are Donna's employees' on-the-job writing lives and writing struggles, and how do these employees talk about their challenges as they learn to write memos in their current positions at a marketing firm? How much and in what ways do they think their experiences writing while in college helped them write the memo?
- What function and purpose does Donna's non-obligatory writing for church play in her life, what extent does it impact the writing she does in other contexts, and does this writing help her grow as an individual or as a writer?

Exploring questions like the ones posed above, collecting and analyzing data, and drawing conclusions helps the scholars in this collection build on our collective understanding of writing beyond the university, an understanding that moves outside the walls of the university into the cocurricular, professional, and personal lives of writers. It is our hope that such an understanding of this much broader picture of writing transfer and writing beyond the university will assist educators of all kinds—teachers across the disciplines, staff, and administrators—to make more informed decisions about curriculum, the allocation of new resources, and the support for existing resources like faculty development opportunities, general education requirements, cocurricular programming like internships and work-integrated learning, writing centers, and writing across the curriculum or university programs.

What We Know about WBU: Themes across Chapters

Despite the wide range of writers, writing experiences, and writing contexts that collection authors have studied, and the wide range of questions they've asked, common themes emerged.

We know that writing is messy and complicated. Research featured here reaffirms first generation writing transfer research

findings that transfer is a complex phenomenon and extends that awareness to contexts beyond the university.

We know that the writing a person does in one context impacts the writing they do in other contexts. For example, in our scenarios, Malcolm applied some of what he learned writing a memo in college to writing a memo for his first job, and Donna used what she learned about tone while writing a church newsletter and applied it to her work helping interns write a memo in the workplace. These scenarios forecast research in the collection that surveys and interviews current students (as in chapters 4 and 5) and young professionals (as in chapters 8 and 10) as they move across multiple professional and personal writing situations.

We also know that within the university, many students write in various contexts outside of formal classroom instruction, without that writing being intentionally taught (Brandt 2015; Moore et al. 2016; Pigg et al. 2014). Further, students are sometimes asked to write a lot, but depending on their institutional contexts, they don't always receive intentional, direct writing instruction that attends to teaching for writing transfer.

And we also know that beyond the university:

- There's a connection between students' engaging in a variety of writing practices during college and their perception of success with writing in the workplace.
- Writing is an important part of professionals' lives.
- Writers develop their own strategies for learning how to write in new contexts.
- Understanding what successful workplace writing is and how to produce it helps professionals feel confident and competent.

Given that these cross-chapter findings demonstrate a need for intentional instruction, the chapters' *research* on writing beyond the university also plays a critical role in helping readers imagine or adapt *practices* for supporting the development of writers in curricular and cocurricular spaces across a variety of institution types.

As You Read

We've already introduced you to the chapters and chapter authors above, but to offer a few additional guideposts for your reading, broadly:

- Each section begins with an introduction that expands on the significance of the section chapters for understanding and supporting writing beyond the university.
- The collection's conclusion invites readers to take action to support writing beyond the university and suggests areas for further study.
- A glossary at the end of the book offers concise definitions of several key terms.

Throughout the book, chapter authors reference supplemental resources—available on the book's website at <https://www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org/books/wbu>—that provide more information about their studies, prompt discussion and reflection, or offer additional strategies for putting their research-informed implications into practice.

As you read, we encourage you to consider:

- If you teach college writers, in or beyond the classroom, what research insights and practical tips from the collection's chapters could inform the way you design writing projects, support student writers, and give students feedback on writing tasks?
- If you administer curricular programs, *when/where* in individual courses or course sequences are students invited to bring their “beyond the university” experiences into the curriculum? How might the ideas presented here inform curricular revisions attentive not only to what comes next for students but also to their prior and concurrent experiences to facilitate more comprehensive integration?
- If you work with faculty and staff, what kinds of professional development opportunities might you design, or ask writing studies leaders at your institution to design, to share these researchers' conclusions and implications about writing beyond the university? Given the important implications

for alumni success, how might you encourage faculty and staff to participate in such professional development (stipends, recognitions)? If you are in a position to inform revisions to promotion and tenure processes, how might those systems value faculty and staff efforts to support student writing development beyond the university?

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