

It's hard to start swimming if you don't have water

Challenges student writers face when composing the scholarly essay

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Social Sciences and Humanities
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Faculty of Education & Writing Research

Disciplinary Case Study of
Undergraduate Writing in
Nursing Education



Today's Presentation

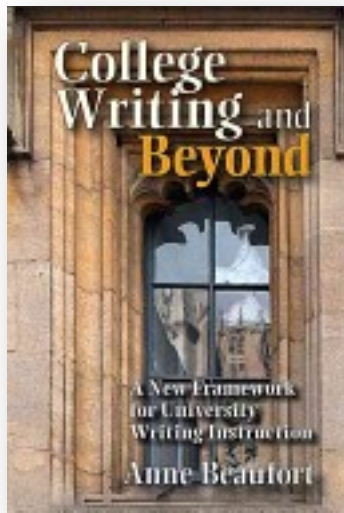
Challenges students faced
when learning to write
one assignment: the
scholarly essay



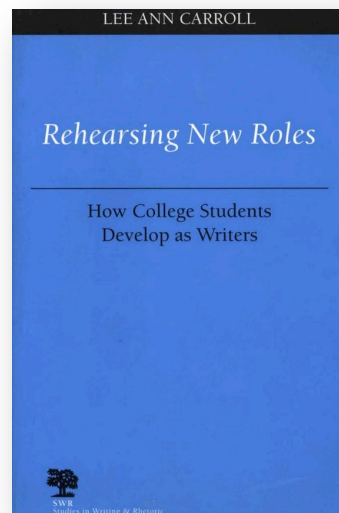
Methodology

- **INTERDISCIPLINARY FRAMEWORKS:** Rhetorical genre, Situated learning, Institutional ethnography
- **31 PARTICIPANTS:** 25 students and 6 tutors
- **METHOD:** Observation (classroom, peer-writing sessions); semi-structured interviews; focus group; textual analysis of assignment documents
- **ANALYSIS:** Content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002)

Other Case Studies



Anne Beaufort (2007)
College Writing and Beyond



Leanne Carroll (2002)
Rehearsing New Roles



Doug Hunt (2002)
*Misunderstanding
the Assignment*



Why This Study?

- ◆ Explore in detail how students write in each of the academic disciplines (Carroll, 2002, p. 89; Cooper & Bikowski, 2009, p. 219)
- ◆ Examine disciplinary writing instruction across all four years of students' major study (Beaufort, 2007, p. 15)

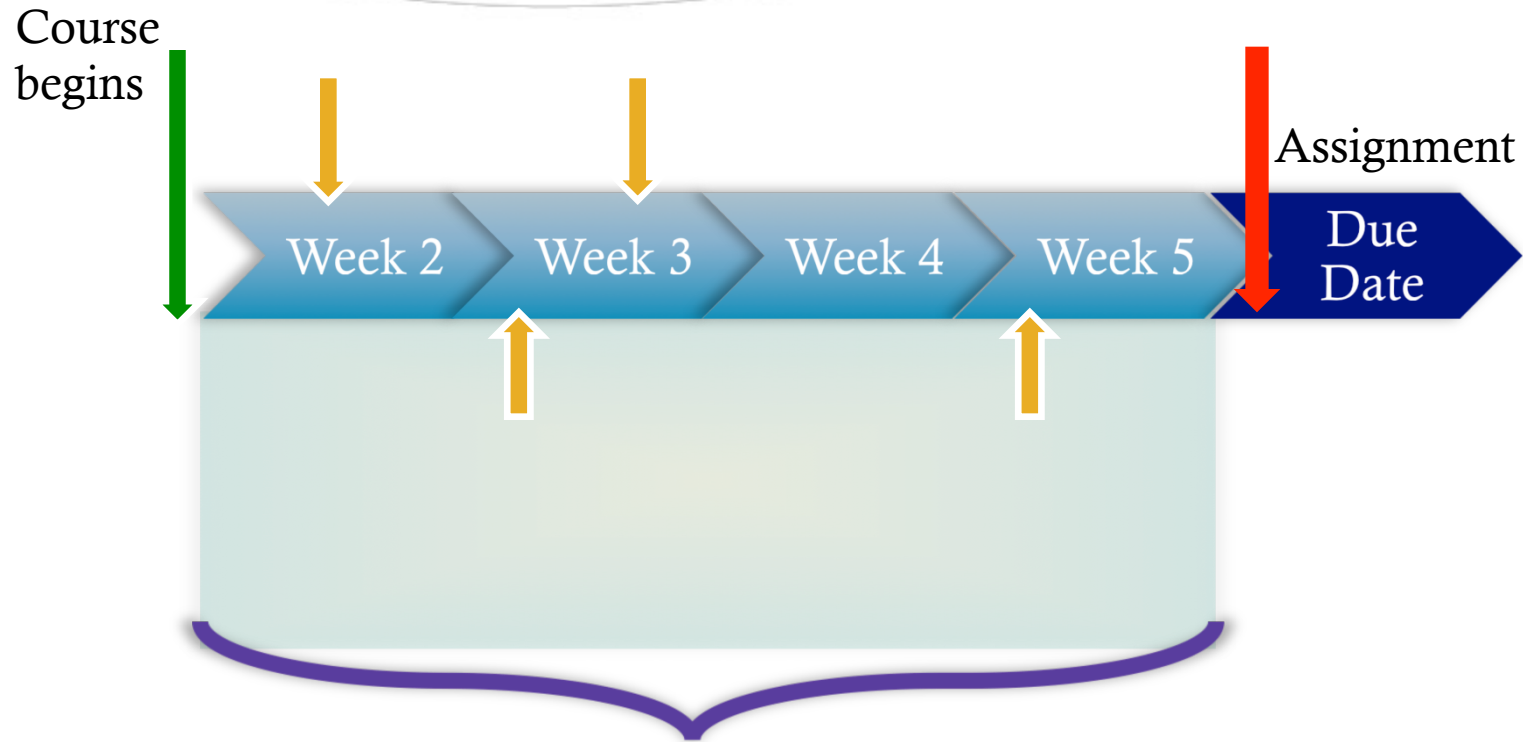


What Did I Study?

- ♦ **Research question:** *How do students learn what they are asked to write in one undergraduate nursing curriculum?*
- ♦ **Social processes of learning:** *before the assignment is turned in for a grade*



What Did I Study?



Social process of teaching and learning to write



Writing Culture in Nursing

>100 ^{writing} assignments

14 recurring genres

6-week courses



12 Scholarly Essays

④ **Scholarly Essays:** one in each year level

♦ **Value:** 30% to 60%

♦ **Length:** 2 to 12 pages

♦ **Rubrics:** 1 out of 4

♦ **Purpose stated:** 1 out of 4



Conceptual Challenges

- 💧 **Evidence-based practice**

- Disciplinary (*not professional*) conventions

- 💧 **Reflective writing in scholarly writing**

- Personal+academic+professional

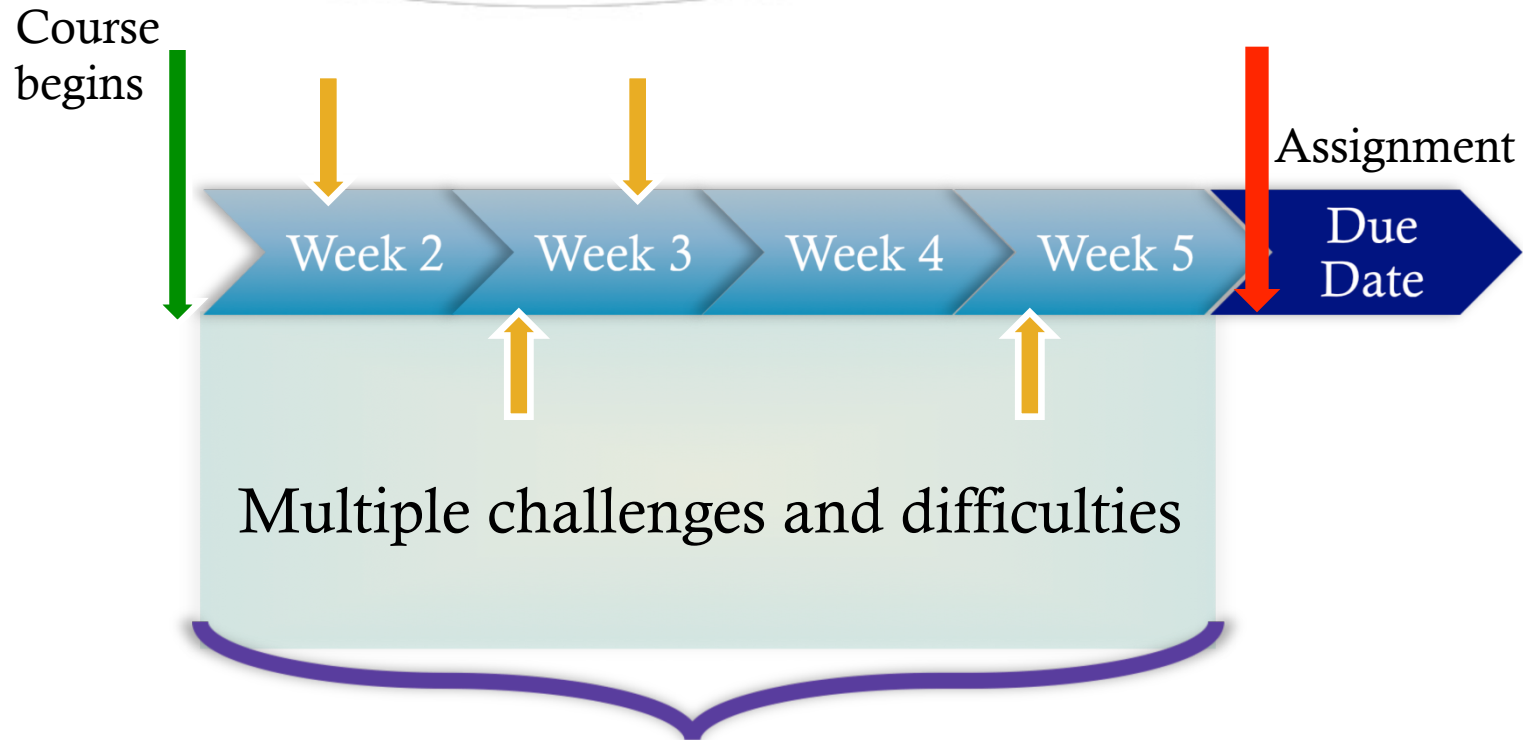


Concrete Challenges

Lower Years	Upper Years
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• APA format• Summarize / paraphrase	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communicating relevance of scholarly essay
Across All Years	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Revolving definitions of “scholarly” & “research”• Reading academic/professional documents• Procrastination	



Challenges Compounding



Student's (trying to) Write the Scholarly Essay

- 💧 **“Trouble getting started”**
- 💧 **“I’m stuck”**



*“It’s hard to start swimming
if you don’t have water or
know what liquids you’re
going to be swimming
through At least give us
a ground so that we can step
on something to start with.”*

~Katie, Year 2



On-going Interaction

Classroom nursing instructor

- ◆ *“Our relationship with [the tutor] is central to our learning.” ~Anita*
- ◆ *We look to [the tutor] to help us write clearly about the content.” ~Andy*



Understand Writing in Nursing

💧 Water

- 💧 Learning to write the scholarly essay has to be interpersonal *between the student and his or her nursing tutor*

💧 Ground

- 💧 Nursing tutor + writing specialists



To help nursing students like Katie overcome academic writing challenges, we need to teach in tandem with the classroom instructor about conceptual+concrete challenges that affect the student's preparation for professional practice.



Thank You!

I welcome your feedback

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