

SUSAN CHAUDOIR, PhD candidate

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Purpose of study

The purpose of the study is three fold. **First**, my study extends previous undergraduate writing assignment research from the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program at the University of Alberta (Graves, forthcoming). I was fortunate to work as the lead analyst (GRA) on six case studies, five of which were conducted with faculty initiative at the University of Alberta. The WAC studies focused on descriptive profiles of the curricular writing demands in each discipline, systematically categorized the undergraduate writing assignments in each discipline, and provided a context-rich, detailed analysis with a unique data set of the assigned genres (i.e., writing tasks and deliverables) within each discipline's undergraduate curriculum (Chaudoir, 2011; Graves & Chaudoir, 2011). Based on that data, I propose making the Faculty of Nursing (FON) the discipline for my case study. The FON writing assignments stood out in a number of categories when compared to those in the other four disciplines (Table 1). The FON had the fewest number of discrete genres (13), highest rate of feedback on assignments (96%), and the highest percentage of short assignments (75%), linked assignments (71%), and explicit criteria for assignments (60%). FON also had the second highest average of 4.3 writing assignments per course (CSL averaged 6.7; others averaged 2.8 to 3.3 writing assignments per course). With such a high percentage of feedback, sequenced assignments, explicit criteria, and a rather tight range of assigned genres, the FON could be considered a discipline of best practices or a situated exemplar in which to explore qualitative aspects of discipline-specific writing instruction and student acculturation into professional practice.

Table 1. Findings in Faculty of Nursing (FON) Writing Assignments

Category	Nursing	Other Disciplines
1. Types of genres assigned to students	13	18 to 54
2. In-process feedback on assignments	96%	7% to 41%
3. Short writing assignments ≤ 4 pages	75%	32% to 62%
4. Sequenced (linked) assignments	71%	30% to 68%
5. Explicit criteria given for assignments	60%	13% to 27%

Second, several case studies concluded that their study students wanted writing instruction that included discipline-specific, content-based writing assignments (genres), sequenced assignments with ongoing feedback, and peer collaboration. Findings from WAC's previous FON study suggested just that: nursing students received writing assignments with frequent sequencing, feedback, and peer collaboration. Currently, there is also on-going WAC consultations with FON instructors, in-class lecture presentations to students, and out-of-class group-tutoring sessions to demonstrate that the FON employs discipline-specific, course-based writing instruction for nursing students. Together, the findings and apparent best practices for teaching genre warrant a qualitative inquiry into the teaching and learning of disciplinary genre in the Faculty of Nursing, and will, in part, answer the call by education and writing studies scholars to better understand discipline-specific writing instruction and professional acculturation.

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¹ The five case studies conducted by the WAC program at the University of Alberta were with the Faculty of Nursing, Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, Department of Political Science, and the Community Service-Learning program.

² Susan reviewed six case studies conducted at one private U.S. college (Beaufort, 2007), Pepperdine University (Carroll, 2002), University of North Dakota (Hawthorne, 1998), Harvard University (Light, 2003), Stanford University (Rogers, 2008), and Open University (Stierer, 2000).



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Third, my study more specifically fills a gap in writing studies and education research mentioned by Beaufort (2007), Carroll (2002), and Rogers (2008). There is a need for disciplinary case studies that empirically examine the teaching and learning of sequenced writing assignments and the extent to which genre knowledge must be accompanied by rhetorical knowledge to explicitly move students progressively toward more complex or sophisticated writing demands of the nursing curriculum.

Research design

I intend to advance educational, writing studies, and nursing education research, theory, and practice by answering as complete as possible one central question: *How do students learn the genres they are asked to write in their major field of study?* Using a case study design with institutional ethnography methods, I explore the teaching and learning of discipline-specific writing assignments by examining the ways in which content-based writing instruction, sequenced writing assignments, and peer-group writing collaboration can explicitly move nursing students progressively toward more sophisticated writing demands of the nursing curriculum. I am interested in the modes of communicating discipline-specific writing tasks and deliverables (genres), rhetorical features of sequenced/linked writing assignment that help or confuse students as they learn assigned genres, and assignment-focused conversations between peers, instructors, and the course-based writing tutor. Three subquestions guide the method(s) of inquiry: (1) in what ways do instructors communicate discipline-specific genre(s)? (2) to what extent do rhetorical features of sequenced/linked assignments position nursing students to learn the genre writing task and deliverable? and (3) what kinds of peer collaboration enable/constrain students' genre knowledge? (see Table 2.)

Research methodology & methods

Activity theory (AT) (Engstrom, 1987; Vygotsky, 1978) and rhetorical genre studies (RGS) (Artemeva & Freedman, 2008; Miller, 1984, 1994) compliment situated learning of genre in disciplinary practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990; Wenger 1998) and provide a compatible approach to explore multiple contexts of writing, pedagogical documents, discursive/communicative devices, and the role of identity and agency. Bazerman (2004) and Russell (2010, 2012) encouraged polycontextuality because it accounts for the evolving dynamics of learning through space and time, especially in textually-oriented and socio-cultural systems of activity or, what Singer, Marx, Krajcik and Chambers (2000, p. 170) call the "hypothetical space between assisted and unassisted performance." A case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009) using institutional ethnographic methods (Smith, 2002; 2005; DeVault & McCoy, 2002; Eastwood, 2005) allows me to focus on the practice and function, as well as the intention and reception of particular documents, the appropriateness of genred tasks, deliverables, and writing instruction. I use three complimentary analytic tools of institutional ethnography for data collection: (1) semi-formal interviews with nursing instructors, nursing students, and the WAC writing tutor; (2) observations of courses with inclass instruction and peer-group writing sessions; and (3) textual analysis of all course materials and writing assignment documents.

³ Other case studies that employed complimentary methods of activity theory and situated learning in education research: Castanheira, Crawford, Green, and Dixon (2001) examined social constructions of peer interaction; Palincscar, Collins, Marano, and Magnusson (2000) investigated learning opportunities and challenges of peer collaboration with students with special needs; Kumpulainen and Wray (2002) explored the nature of peer collaborative writing with technology; and Marx, Freeman, Krajcik, and Blumenfeld (1998) researched teacher knowledge construction, situated cognition, and classroom discourse.



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Proposed timeline

Data will be collected when courses are in session, in increments of one course term (e.g., six (6) weeks) for the next three academic sessions. The study will begin with the second half of the winter term 2012 and end before the second half of the fall term 2012:

Begins: March 5, 2012.Ends: October 19, 2012.

Number of courses and participants

• Courses: (3) to (5) from the BScN Collaborative Degree Program;

• Nursing instructors: (3) to (5) from the selected courses; and

• **Nursing students**: (3) to (5) from the selected courses.

Table 2. Overview of Research Design for Proposed Pedagogical Research in Faculty of Nursing (FON).

2. 5 (6) (10) (11)	esearch Design for Proposed Pedagogical Research in Faculty of Nursing (FON).
Research Question	How do students learn the genres they are asked to write?
Subquestions	In what ways do instructors communicate genre(s)? To what extent do rhetorical features of the writing assignment position the student to learn the genre(s)? What kinds of peer collaboration enable/constrain students' genre knowledge?
Research Purpose	 Advance education, writing studies, and nursing education research, theory, and practice; Extend previous undergraduate writing assignment research in FON; Explore disciplinary best practices in writing instruction and student enculturation into professional practice; Empirically document the modes of communicating discipline-specific writing tasks and deliverables (genres) and assignment-focused teaching and learning activity of students, instructors, and the course-based writing tutor.
Research Methodology	Vygotskian activity theory (AT) and rhetorical genre studies (RGS)
Analytic Method of Data Collection	Case study using institutional ethnography: 1. Textual analysis a. course materials b. linked assignments c. dominant/peripheral genres 2. Observations a. classroom writing instruction b. peer-group writing tutorial sessions 3. Semi-formal interviews a. course instructor(s) intention of assigned genre b. nursing students reception of assigned genre c. writing tutor and/or director interpretation of assigned genre
Timeline	5 March to 19 October 2012 second half of winter term 2012; spring and/or summer term 2012; first half fall term 2012.
Number of courses and participants	Courses: 3 to 5 Nursing instructors: 3 to 5 Nursing students: 3 to 5



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