Chapter Four

Students Talk About Expectations, Confidence, and How They Learn

> *The writing itself is important, but it's also important that my teachers understand the person who's writing the material. For everything that's written, there's the story of the person behind the writing. But does the teacher see that person? I'm always aware I'm being graded by someone who could have 500 other things going on in their life.*
>
> —MELANIE, STUDENT

As we've argued in previous chapters, when teachers talk about their own professional writing and their expectations for student writing, they are never simply representing their disciplines nor, conversely, are they reproducing generic standards for "good writing." Rather, 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
- Institutional and departmental cultures and policies
- Personal goals and idiosyncratic likes and dislikes

These are some of the "500 things" going on in teachers' lives—to echo Melanie—that make her and so many other of our student informants suspect that teachers aren't telling them the full story when they assign and grade writing in the disciplines. In previous chapters we presented that fuller story

behind the writing in regard to our faculty; in this chapter we'll focus on the stories students tell about their goals as writers and how these coincide with perceived conventions for writing in their disciplines. We wanted to know the degree to which they feel bound by these perceived conventions and how they come to understand—if they do—what it means to have their own voice when they write in or outside of their chosen discipline.

Based on these concerns and the students' responses on surveys, in focus groups, and proficiency exams, we've organized our findings into the following four clusters:

- *Expectations:* What students say about expectations for writing in their disciplines
- *Passion and the disciplines:* How they understand what it means to be original within the context of their discipline, thereby gaining the confidence to write with passion and voice
- *Learning disciplinary writing:* What they say about how they learn to write in their disciplines
- *Students and alternatives:* How the student data relate to the taxonomy of alternatives discussed in preceding chapters

Our Sources of Data

As noted in greater detail in Chapter One, the findings in this chapter derive from three sources:

1. A 19-question survey completed by 183 upper-division students representing a total of 40 majors; all were enrolled in sections of English 302, an advanced writing course
2. Focus-group interviews of 36 undergraduate students from a range of majors
3. Timed (2-hour) essays by 40 upper-division students from 22 majors, written as part of a portfolio process for English 302 proficiency credit

While all the informants are George Mason undergraduates who had completed at least 45 credit hours by the time of their participation, the three populations differ sufficiently from one another so that we need briefly to point out these differences and suggest how they might affect the significance of the data derived.

The Survey

The 19-question "Survey on Writing in the Majors" (see Figure 4–1) was distributed by teachers of sections of English 302 to their students in the fall

Survey on Writing in the Majors

1. What is your major?
2. Approximately how many courses have you taken with the prefix of your major, e.g., HIST, ENGL, PSYC, GOV?
3. Within your major do you have a particular area of interest or concentration? If so, what is it?
4. Are you aware of some specialties or concentrations within your major? If so, name some.
5. How aware are you of characteristics of good writing in your major? Circle one.

   Very aware Somewhat aware Unaware Never thought about it
6. List some characteristics of good writing in your major:
7. How have you learned characteristics of good writing in your discipline? Rank (1=most important):
   _____ teachers
   _____ reading
   _____ fieldwork
   _____ published writing guides
   _____ other students
   _____ articles on websites
8. How confident do you feel about your writing in your major? Circle one:

   Very confident Somewhat confident Not confident Scared to death
9. From the following list, check those writing assignments you've been given in your major courses (those with the prefix of your major, e.g. HIST, DMIS, ITEU, CS):
   _____ Researched paper
   _____ Journal, reflection paper, or narrative
   _____ Collaborative project
   _____ Lab report
   _____ Impromptu in-class writing
   _____ Critique, review or reaction paper
   _____ Position/issue paper
   _____ Summary, abstract or outline
   _____ Letter (e.g. to an editor, a public official, a family member, etc.)
   _____ Other _____

   From those you circled above, which have you done most often?
10. Have you ever been given writing assignments in your major courses that surprised you? If so, describe briefly.
11. Have you ever been asked to write about yourself in an academic paper in courses in your major? If so, describe briefly.

(*continues*)

Figure 4–1.

12. Have any teachers in major courses allowed you or asked you to write in ways you thought were not typical of the major? If so, describe the assignment and how you approached it.

13. Have you ever been discouraged from using a style you thought would be a more original and/or individual way to respond to a writing assignment in your major? If so, describe briefly.

14. To what degree do your teachers in your major courses expect you to conform to strict guidelines for writing in your discipline? Circle:

    1 (not strict at all) 2 3 4 5 (very strict) Don't know

15. Do you find that your teachers' expectations for writing in their courses are generally similar? If not, describe briefly a time you felt a teacher's expectations were atypical.

16. Have you ever read any of your professors' writing? Check all that apply:
    _____ book
    _____ professional article
    _____ conference paper
    _____ website article
    _____ assignments

17. If you have not read any of your professors' writing, how aware are you of what they might be writing?

    Very aware Somewhat aware Not at all aware Never entered my mind

18. Is English your first language? If not, for how many years have you been educated in an English-speaking culture?

19. If English is not your first language, do you recall any time(s) teachers in your major were dissatisfied with your writing because of something other than grammar or content—for example, organization? If so, describe briefly.

Figure 4–1. *(Cont.)*

semester of 2002. Some 70 sections per semester of this course are offered to GMU students, who must have completed first-year composition and at least 45 credit hours at the time of their enrollment. The required course is subdivided into groups of sections tailored to the needs of students in five areas of the curriculum: arts and humanities, social sciences, natural science, business, and technology. We selected for the survey a roughly equal distribution of sections (12 total) from all versions of the course. All students who completed the surveys did so during a class period. We chose sections of English 302 for the survey because they were more likely than any other venue to produce an overall picture of student awareness of disciplinary standards in writing from an array of undergraduate majors. Moreover, because English 302 is a required course, it was likely to produce responses from a broad range of student performance levels.

The Focus Groups

Focus group interviews began in winter 2003. We planned them as an essential extension of the data-gathering of student perspectives begun with the survey, as we'd anticipated that the survey results would leave us with questions that we could pursue in conversation with groups of students. This indeed turned out to be the case. Most of the focus group participants were English 302 students at the time of the interviews, and all formally agreed to participate (see Figure 4–2). Not all participants were English 302 students. In addition, three master's candidates (with recent B.A.s) also took part, as did a group of three undergraduate students from New Century College, an interdisciplinary degree program.

Our method in the sessions themselves was to cover the same issues that the survey had, often to ask the same questions, and then to follow up as appropriate to a response. For example, a theme that emerged in the groups was the students' sense of the relationship between writing in school and writing at work, and the looser framework of the groups allowed us to pursue this line of questioning as appropriate in a given conversation. All the group conversations were taped, although the two of us also took notes as the interviews progressed. In general, we stayed with a line of inquiry until everyone had had a chance to speak; this procedure meant that if a response took us off on a tangent, we would come back, when appropriate, to the original question to be sure that several points of view had been represented.

The difference in method from the surveys meant that responses by focus group members were richer than those on the surveys. Whereas survey responses gave us trends and impressions, focus groups gave us examples, explanations, and comparisons. As the analyses of responses in this chapter will show, the focus group responses tended to reinforce the trends revealed by the surveys, but the focus groups gave us the reasoning and experiences behind the trends—plus a fairly keen sense of the diverse lives and voices that the numbers dull and obscure.

The Proficiency Exam Essays

This third source of data derives from a course exemption procedure that has been in place since the late 1980s, but that was modified for the purposes of this research in fall 2003. GMU undergraduates who desire exemption with credit from ENGL 302 may submit a portfolio of course papers that represent work from the sophomore year and beyond.[1] The reflective essays we analyzed for this research are submitted as part of the proficiency process.

[1] In 1997, we wrote about this portfolio proficiency option as a vehicle for gathering data on the effectiveness of our WAC program. The essay appears in the Yancey and Huot collection *Assessing Writing Across the Curriculum: Diverse Approaches and Practices.*

Informed Consent Form

Professors Christopher Thaiss and Terry Myers Zawacki of the Department of English are conducting research on students' perceptions of writing in their major courses. The research results will be used toward preparing books (scholarly book and textbook) on writing in the disciplines. They are seeking informal input from students to questions in the following areas:

- What students see as the characteristics and standards of "good writing" in the disciplines in which they are majoring
- The experiences, courses, and written materials that have helped them learn how to write successfully in major courses
- The students' favorite types of writing, in school and otherwise
- How they have been encouraged as writers
- How they would advise younger writers

If you agree to participate in this focus group, you will be joining a small group of students who will be asked to respond informally to the questions listed above. The discussion will last about one hour. The group discussion will be audiotaped and portions may be transcribed. You will be identified by your first name only; you are free to give a pseudonym should you choose. You will also be asked to identify your major area of study.

Participation is completely voluntary. Refusal to participate will not involve penalties or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts involved in participating nor any costs to you or any other party. There are no direct benefits for participating. However, your participation may help contribute to knowledge on students' perceptions of writing in their disciplines.

All data in this study will be confidential. Should specific information be quoted in the research write-up, all names will be changed.

If you have any questions about the research project, you may contact Professor Thaiss at 703-993-1273 and/or Professor Zawacki at 703-993-1187. You may also contact the George Mason University Office of Sponsored Programs at 703-993-2295 if you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research. This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

Date:_____

Signature:_____

Major:_____

Figure 4–2.

The proficiency exam prompt asks students (1) to define and explain "the distinctive features of writing in your major"; (2) for one or two courses in the major, to "describe specifically the writing lessons (e.g., research methods, techniques, style) you had to learn in order to succeed as a writer"; (3) to

"describe in detail how [one or two pieces from the portfolio] illustrate the distinctive features of writing in your major."

In any given year, fewer than 100 students (compared to 4000 who take the course) attempt the exemption process, and roughly 75 percent are asked to write the two-hour essay. Of these, it is rare for a student to be unable to successfully complete the essay and earn credit with exemption. From September 2003 through March 2004, 64 students attempted the process; 55 (86 percent) were invited to write the essay; all did so successfully.

Although all the essays showed at least minimal understanding of distinctions between writing in the student's major and writing in other course contexts, we have chosen to use for our analysis only those (40) that offer what we regard as especially articulate insights that help to clarify and illustrate findings from the survey responses and focus group interviews. We are well aware, and wish the reader to keep in mind, that the group of 40 proficiency exam writers we are analyzing are both demonstrably proficient as writers in their majors and also highly reflective about their process of writing in different contexts, for different courses, and for different teachers.

Student Expectations for Writing in Their Disciplines

When George Mason upper-division students reported on writing in their majors on the survey, in focus groups, and in their ENGL 302 proficiency essays, their generalizations for the most part paralleled those of our faculty informants, both those we'd interviewed and those who developed rubrics in departmental assessment teams. The good news for faculty is that at least in broad terms the students are "getting it": they clearly understand, even if they cannot always enact, the characteristics of academic writing, as we've defined them and as they've been confirmed in the rubrics.

Less certain is the degree to which they've internalized the more esoteric standards in their major fields, not to mention the "ecologies" and exigencies of the subdisciplines and concentrations that most of our student respondents have already defined for themselves. Less clear still is how they see their own developing senses of "style"—as well as what they perceive to be the idiosyncrasies of their teachers—as either meshing or in conflict with their ideas of the discipline. Nevertheless, our focus group and essay informants provide a range of nuanced perspectives that illuminate these issues.

We can generalize as follows from our three sources of data:

1. Only a few respondents to the surveys reported that they had done little or no writing in major courses, and these students tended to be those who had taken few major courses as yet.

2. Almost all, even in a brief survey, can delineate a few expectations for writing in their majors, and students who share the same major are remarkably consistent in the terms they choose. By and large, all three groups of informants express confidence in their understanding of disciplinary expectations.
3. In the survey and focus groups, these expectations for the most part echo those of our faculty informants, especially the terms we saw repeated in the rubrics (see Chapter Three), but also those that our primary informants gave us in their first responses during the interviews. These are the terms we refer to as "generic academic" in Chapter Three.
4. Students reveal a wide array of assignment types across majors, with research-based writing dominant.
5. When students are given more time to talk or write about writing expectations and the assignments that embody them in their majors, they achieve significantly greater specificity and insight, as particularly illustrated by the ENGL 302 proficiency essays.
6. When students regard writing expectations in a comparative framework—if, for example, they have a double major or have done considerable writing in more than one major—they are usually more articulate about expectations and how majors differ therein.
7. While formal standards (e.g, formatting, documentation styles, and argumentative structure) are seen by the great majority of students as defining their stylistic options, only a small minority feel hampered by these guidelines. Indeed, many of our informants clearly prefer assignment guidelines to freedom of choice.
8. While stylistic freedom is limited, most students see their teachers and courses as giving them freedom in choice of subject for writing.
9. Depending on their frame of reference, respondents can see teachers' expectations for writing as either remarkably unvarying or unpredictable. Our most varied responses were in this category, with, for example, most of the survey respondents seeing their teachers consistent from one to another in their expectations, while the focus groups saw their teachers' expectations as varying—necessitating the students' reliance on teacher feedback for guidance.
10. Although neither the survey nor the proficiency essay prompt asked students to focus on audience, our informants by and large do see a sharp distinction between writing for teachers and writing for other audiences, including audiences that they imagine as part of their writing goals in the discipline.

1. The Prevalence of Writing (and Feedback) in Majors

The less than 5 percent of our 183 survey respondents who reported not having written "as yet" in their major courses all had fewer than 9 credits in such courses. George Mason has had an active writing culture across disciplines for at least 20 years[2]; in the latest (2003) survey of graduating seniors conducted by the Office of Assessment, 72 percent said that they had been *required* to revise papers or projects in at least three of their major courses, and 86 percent said that writing in major courses had improved their ability to write. In addition to required English composition courses in the first and third years, all students must complete at least one "writing intensive"(WI) course in the major at the junior level or higher, and many departments designate two or more courses WI. Moreover, our interviews with faculty and the proficiency portfolios demonstrate that substantial writing is being assigned in many courses besides those listed as WI. We were not surprised that almost all survey respondents from the 39 major programs could identify characteristics of writing in their major fields.

Indeed, a finding from the focus groups that surprised and gratified us was that students had come to expect that major faculty would give them commentary on their writing early as well as later in a semester (more on the significance of this finding later in the chapter). When we pointed out to two groups that before the advent of writing-across-the-curriculum programs, a student could not have expected to receive "feedback" on their papers in courses across disciplines, their response was puzzlement. As one student said, "Then how would you know how to improve?"

2. Students' Awareness of Disciplinary Writing Characteristics

On the survey, 93 percent said they felt "very aware" (73/183) or "somewhat aware" (95/183) of "characteristics of good writing" in their majors. The students in the focus groups showed no less eagerness than our faculty informants to describe such characteristics. The 40 students whose ENGL 302 proficiency essays we read went into great detail to describe such traits and explain their rationale in the disciplinary context.

Corroborating our survey respondents' confidence that they are "aware" of disciplinary writing characteristics was the consistency of traits observed by students representing the same major. All but one psychology major emphasized "adherence to APA format"; "precise observation" was frequently mentioned. Business majors, from management to accounting to finance to management information systems to marketing, mentioned "getting to the

[2] Starting in 2002, Mason has been ranked among the top universities in *U.S. News and World Report*'s "America's Best Colleges" edition for its program in "writing in the disciplines."

point," "avoiding repetition," "being organized," and "writing for the intended audience." Government and politics majors stressed research, analysis, persuasive argumentation, and convincing rhetoric. This consistency within majors was also displayed in the focus groups and the proficiency essays, though, as we describe below, the greater detail of these data sources gives us a richer, more nuanced picture of disciplinary writing than does the survey.

3. The Prevalence of "Generic Academic" Characteristics in Survey Responses

In the survey responses, in some of the focus group remarks, and in a few of the proficiency essays, we were struck by how similar to our faculty responses the students' were. When we'd interviewed faculty, one of our first questions had been, "How would you characterize good writing in your field?" Their first responses were most often drawn from what we came to see as a short list of common academic criteria. Only as interviews went on, and we probed our informants' individual histories and visions as writers, did we get differentiating detail. As we reported in Chapter Three, a similar short list of items appeared on rubric after rubric as departments debated the expectations for student writing in the major. Some of the common terms from the student surveys include:

> conciseness, clarity, looks/sounds professional, gets to the point; efficient, organized, cohesive; research; accurate facts; reliable sources; thoroughness of argument; good supporting points; sentence structure, good grammar, correct terms; adherence to correct style (MLA or APA usually); directed toward intended audience

No academic could ask for better evidence that our students had understood—even if they imperfectly enacted—the principles of academic writing, as we outlined them in Chapter One. Even if our informants, as noted in Chapter Three, did not see their undergraduates as needing to learn and display the more esoteric rhetoric demanded of graduate students, the faculty's assignments and feedback were clearly getting across the less fine characteristics not only of writing in the academy, but also of writing in disciplines, broadly defined. In points 5 and 6 below, we show examples of how some of these undergraduate writers can express sophisticated awareness of varying disciplinary exigencies and rhetorical strategies.

4. Most Frequent Types of Writing Across Majors

"Research, research, research," said one of our focus group informants when we asked about the most prevalent writing tasks in their college experience. Certainly, the emphasis on research-based writing comes out in the lists of

common characteristics on the survey and in the stories of the essay writers, as well as in focus group transcripts. On the survey, students checked most frequently that they'd had assignments clearly based on research processes: "researched paper" (167/183), "critique, review, or reaction paper" (139), "summary, abstract, or outline" (135). When asked which type of assignment they'd written most often, the "research paper" (90/183) was the clear first choice, with "critique, review, or reaction paper" (50) and "lab report" (30) distant but still clear second and third choices.

But research-based writing is not the whole story of student writing in majors, and the term itself, like the other "generic academic" terms that reappeared, masks a wide range of source types, methods, and purposes. "Journal, reflection paper, or narrative" was marked by 114 of our respondents as a type of assignment they'd been given in a major course, and 11 percent chose it as their most frequent assignment category. Of course, "journal," "reflection," and "narrative" may reveal merely different aspects of or approaches to a research process, but at the very least they show teachers expecting students to use diverse methods, formats, and cognitive structures to think about materials and ideas. In the same regard, just over half the respondents had worked on "collaborative projects" (95/183) and 6 percent noted it as their most frequent type of assignment.

Some insight into the nature of "journal" and "reflective" assignments that survey students reported having received is gained from noting that 30 percent of respondents said that they had been asked in at least one major course to "write about themselves." In the section on "Passion and the Discipline" later in this chapter, we elaborate on the complex relationships that exist for our students between their sense of personal goals and the perceived expectations of disciplines and teachers. As we will explore later, the research demands of disciplines and the opportunity for personal expression coalesce for many of our students, as exemplified in this statement on her proficiency essay by Thuy, an anthropology major: "the expansive theories, techniques, and styles inherent in anthropological research provide the discipline with the potential to make worthwhile statements about everyday existence while also allowing room for personal reflection and experience."

5. Student Insights into Nuances and Complexities of Disciplinary Writing

However, just as our faculty informants revealed a significant diversity of methods, audiences, and acceptable rhetorics, so too did the students in both the focus groups and, particularly, the proficiency essays cohort. Karinna, a government and international politics major, illustrates through her description of the "scenario response," an assignment she'd received in an early

course in her major, the "practical" exigency for government majors of writing quickly for decision-making audiences. "I was required to act as if I were the foreign policy advisor to Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. Whereas with most papers enough time is given to do sufficient research and produce a well-written and informed paper, this particular assignment required me to do thorough and comprehensive research in order to brief the Prince in only three days."

Richard, a sociology major, differentiates in his essay three methodological and rhetorical strands of the discipline and how they have intertwined in his writing: "For me, the distinctive features of writing in sociology are threefold: explaining complex ideas in terms of social theory; report writing while conducting applied sociology; and writing ethnography for field work. While these three tasks require very different styles, none is more important than the others and all three contribute equally to the discipline." Indeed, as he details specific assignments that combine "qualitative research through ethnography and quantitative research through statistical analysis and reporting," he comes to a recommendation for the department: he sees ethnography as so integral to the field that he believes that a course in ethnographic method should be required for all majors.

6. The Richer Specificity of Those with Double or Interdisciplinary Majors

We also found that when students could knowledgeably compare one discipline with another, *because of their experience of having done a significant amount of reading and writing in those fields,* they were more quickly able to describe differences and convergences; they could pinpoint how the methods of one field might be useful in meeting the exigencies of another.

For example, Cary, a double major in history and religious studies, focuses in his proficiency essay on the interdisciplinarity of his studies, describing a final research paper he wrote for a religious studies course on "Zealots and Their Time in Roman Judea." Students who focused only on rabbinic Judaism, he argued, would not be able to fully grasp the topic without some knowledge of the historical events surrounding the rabbis' rise to prominence within Judaism "due to the Roman destruction of Jewish Jerusalem in CE 70 and the resulting decline of the Sadducees/high priestly class."

7. Student Attitudes Toward Strictness of Disciplinary Expectations

Survey respondents definitely saw the teachers in their majors as "strict" (76/183) to "very strict" (34/183) in adhering to formal expectations for their

writing. Nevertheless, when we asked them if they'd ever been "discouraged" from writing in a way that they preferred, the great majority (133/183) said "no." less than 20 percent wrote comments or gave examples; these indicated that the "no" votes were based on a range of reasons, from preference for the strictness—"I'm more comfortable using an objective style" (government major)—to resignation—"No, I conformed a long time ago" (systems engineering major)—to what we might call "flexibility"—"I just wait until prof tells me what style to use" (communications major). The small minority of "yes" responses varied in the tone of the student's dissatisfaction: from the resistant "I like a conversational voice, but am always being told to be more formal" (English major) to the pragmatic "yes, so that's why I go to the Writing Center to get help" (nursing major).

The cryptic survey responses made us wonder how students would respond if given more time and encouragement. Hence, we made a main theme of the focus group discussions this issue of students' perceived autonomy as writers. The responses reveal a wide range of attitudes and rationales, which we explore in the section on "Passion and the Discipline" later in the chapter. The writers of proficiency essays were not specifically asked about the freedom they felt in such choices, but the essays reveal spontaneously again and again that students care deeply about how they can find room for their "own ideas" and ways of expression within the intellectual and formal framework of a discipline. "Passion and the Discipline" includes some of these writers' perspectives also, as we try to understand the complex of reasons behind an academic writer's feelings of freedom or restriction.

8. Freedom of Choice in Topic

Related to the writer's sense of self and to the options available to academic writers were the responses to our survey question about freedom of choice in topic and style in major courses. The great majority of students answered "yes" (130/183), but when students gave examples, in almost all cases they said that they had freedom in choice of topic on research assignments, but not any freedom in style. A systems engineering student's comment was typical: "Yes, we get to pick our own projects. This involves a lot of writing of documents in a specific format." The proficiency essays and focus groups corroborate the survey in showing that students have significant choice of topic in major assignments but little flexibility in stylistic and other formal elements.

This response trend, coupled with the prevalence of "no" responses to the "discouragement" question, suggests several possible explanations, which may be overlapping. (1) Perhaps most students feel comfortable complying with formal and methodological demands, as long as they can

exercise choice in what they write about (and in the conclusions they reach?). (2) Students give higher priority to other factors, such as the grade in a course, than to their stylistic autonomy as writers. (3) Some undergraduate students have not yet developed a sense of their own style or voice, and so are open to conforming to disciplinary restrictions as part of their learning. (4) At least some undergraduate students have reached the point of understanding how their own goals, preferred ways of knowing, and voices can move comfortably within the structure of the discipline. The focus groups and the proficiency essay writers provided us insights into these possibilities, and these we explore in the following paragraphs and in "Passion and the Discipline."

9. Teachers' Expectations: Consistent or Unpredictable?

Survey responses, focus group comments, and proficiency essays agreed that teachers were the most important sources of knowledge about disciplinary writing characteristics. According to informant comments and survey responses, this knowledge from teachers came through their written assignments, their lectures, their comments on student drafts and papers, and students' inferences from the teachers' own writings. That the great majority of survey respondents (85 percent) thought their teachers in major courses largely consistent in their expectations for student writing helps to explain why there was such a large degree of confidence by students that they knew the characteristics of good writing in their majors. On the other hand, we've already noted (in 3, above) that the characteristics of writing mentioned in the survey responses tended toward the "generic academic" rather than the discipline-specific. So it's reasonable to speculate that the "consistency" agreed on by most survey respondents had to do with the broader aspects of writing in a field, e.g., the devotion to APA documentation and formatting in psychology, rather than with the students' experience of finer discriminations from course to course or teacher to teacher.

As with students' sense of freedom in their writing, we used the focus groups to pursue the issue of teacher consistency in expectations. Here we saw a different picture from that painted by the survey, with more shading. Courtney, an international politics major, noted that "Probably 50% of the time in a research paper you're just meant to report on an issue and the other 50% to use the information that you learned from history to make predictions for the future. So in a Comparative Politics class we would take for example "'China and the European Union, which is going to be more powerful in 20 years?'" For Courtney, then, expectations are predictable in general, but unpredictable in any given class until the student learns more about specific assignments.

For Huan, a psychology major now in graduate school, there was surprise in certain assignments: "We were twice asked to do personal writing in psychology and both occurred in the senior year. It was weird that the papers weren't supposed to be scientific—a total break from the type of paper that we had written up until then." Again, the difference is a surprise only because it breaks an established pattern, but there is still an element of the unpredictable in any class.

It is not really an inconsistency for students to see regularity in the broad expectations of their teachers across the major and at the same time difference in teachers' emphases on papers. For example, common in surveys was the note that some teachers care more about "grammar" than others. "Good grammar" is a generic academic expectation that students regard as independent of the conventions of the discipline, but differences in this expectation can make a big difference in how students write for a given teacher.

Moreover, students may see "surprise" or inconsistency at a point in their progress through a major when they have not yet encountered the array of exigencies and therefore genres that typify it. In other words, the mature writer in a field has encountered a sufficient range of course environments to develop an overall sense of disciplinary goals and methods—and comes to see the differences from class to class within that overall idea of the field. Of our informants, the proficiency essay writers reveal clearly this sense of pattern within difference. For example, Pamela, a studio artist with a double major in art history, describes the particular need of art historians to "convey an image in words, and care must be taken not to supplant image with description." This understanding relates, she has learned, to the overall goal of historians to "study events in their historical context: events are contrasted and compared with earlier events; other influences are discovered." As she is now an experienced writer in her majors, any sense of "surprise" about disciplinary strictures Pamela might have felt in early art history courses has long since given way to her understanding of those strictures in the merged contexts of history and visual art.

Thus, we might posit three rough stages in the development of a disciplinary writer[3]:

1. A first stage in which the writer bases a sense of disciplinary consistency on writing experience in very few courses with criteria in these courses generalized into "rules."

[3] These stages are reminiscent of William Perry's analysis in *Forms of Ethical and Intellectual Development in the College Years: A Scheme.* He posits nine "positions" through which students may develop as they move from either/or thinking to relativism to commitment that recognizes possibilities within an array of perspectives.

2. A second stage in which the writer encounters different exigencies in different courses, and the sense of inconsistency, sometimes interpreted as teacher idiosyncrasy, supplants the perception of consistency
3. A third stage, described above, in which the writer understands the differences as components of an articulated, nuanced idea of the discipline.

Interestingly, on a blunt instrument like our survey, a response of "yes" on our consistency question could mean that the writer is at either the first or third stage. Only a more sensitive instrument like the proficiency essay can reveal a "yes" as evidence of either naivete or maturity.

Some students, at least as undergraduates, may not reach the third stage. The most troubling explanation is that some students don't get enough writing experiences in their majors to enable them to develop this nuanced view. Our proficiency writers are able to show the sophistication of their perspectives because they've written substantially in a number of upper-level courses. In addition, some students may not reach the third stage because they do not become sufficiently invested in the discipline's academic discourses, developing instead a greater connection to nonacademic audiences and exigencies. These students may reveal impatience with academic conventions ("all these big long research papers") and see differences among teachers not as varied aspects of the discipline but merely as ineluctable differences. For example, Kelsey, a government major, spoke in praise of a professor who eschewed the research paper in favor of "lots of those short little things [one-page memos] throughout the class." She added, "That was helpful—it felt more realistic as far as getting out into your field. But I haven't had a lot of professors like that." Clearly Kelsey identifies with that aspect of the government major that emphasizes results in the polis and does not yet appreciate what motivates the scholarship nor its connection with the practical. In contrast, Samantha, also a government major, appreciates that the demand of most of the research assignments in her classes to "break down every argument into claims and warrants" has helped her "better connect with her audience, be more persuasive, and create concrete ties to real world concepts," all skills which are critical to her chosen career path with progressive nonprofit organizations.

10. Writing for Different Audiences

Although questions about audiences besides the teacher were not on the survey nor in the proficiency essay prompt, our informants in focus groups and the essay writers commented on the subject, as Kelsey's and Samantha's comments illustrate. The comments showed sensitivity to differences between

readers inside and outside the academy, as well as the impact of audience on the goals of writing in disciplines.

For example, Rhonda, a criminal justice major, in her essay, distinguishes sharply between the writing she did, as a salon owner, for periodicals on dog grooming ("mostly based on my personal experience and opinion") and the writing she does now for classes: "analysis based on research." But this academic writing is varied based on the demands of the particular class and teacher. Thus, her analysis of police work on a famous criminal case demanded an evaluation of the "facts of the case within the context of the available legal and social norms of the era," while her analysis of criminal motives in a recent high-profile case delved into the "psychological theories that best explain the investigation." Her description of a third paper noted specifically the importance the professor's perspective played in determining the appropriate blend of personal opinion and documented sources.

By and large, students in the focus groups distinguished between academic and workplace readers, much as Kelsey, quoted earlier, did. Typically, they contrasted the professor's demand for detailed analysis based on documented research with the demand of bosses and customers for succinct, action-oriented prose. But the stereotypes don't always hold. Eric, a double major in economics and management information systems (MIS), characterized his MIS writing as business-like ("you write a proposal where you go technically in depth into what each system can provide and you match the client with what they're looking for"). In economics, he said, "there is any number of things you can do, from straight research papers to opinion pieces." He distinguished further between these varied environments and a lesson he learned about audience in an early accounting class. "I modeled my paper on some accounting reports that I had read—my dad's been in the business for 25 years—so I tell him I have this assignment and he gets excited and wants to help me with it. I just got a little beyond the scope of this assignment and so I got this negative feedback from the teacher, even after having worked so hard on it."

Rather than seeing a disjunction between academic and other readers, a number of our informants saw that the writing they were learning in their disciplines was intended to reach both academic and nonacademic readers. In particular, our informants from government and politics, such as Steven and Courtney, whom we'll talk about in more detail later, emphasized how their courses often required them to visualize policy makers and voting constituencies as their readers in order to learn how to explain political theories, policies, and events to the people who act and react within political systems. A significant awareness of audiences was perhaps most advanced in the focus group consisting of students in the interdisciplinary New Century College,

about which we've written in Chapters Two and Three in relation to the work of faculty informant Lesley Smith. The NCC curriculum makes students highly conscious of rhetorical differences through complex projects that demand both documented analysis and "real world" succinctness and ease of use. (See our descriptions in Chapter Three of Smith's syllabi for the courses Writing for Multimedia and The Social World.) For example, students engage in service-learning and other community-focused projects that require writing for nonacademic readers, but they also write analytical and theoretical essays for professors.

Our findings regarding "what students say about writing in majors," which we've summarized in the preceding ten categories, show a student population whose considerable experience in writing in disciplines has given them confidence and knowledge. The differences in responses from our many informants have led us to project a three-stage developmental process that produces many students whose sense of "writing in the discipline" acknowledges the variety of exigencies and hence forms that characterize any field. These writers' nuanced understanding takes them beyond the "generic academic" conventions that the first-stage academic writer perceives and makes them, even as undergraduates, able to appreciate and begin to participate in the shaping of disciplinary rhetorics that our faculty informants have undertaken in their own careers.

What we see in these third-stage students is not only knowledge of disciplinary forms and purposes, but what we think is best called "passion" for their fields. We first explored this term in Chapter One, when we noted the ambiguous relationship between "reason," "feeling," and "sensation" in constructions of "discipline" and "academic writing." We returned to this relationship in Chapters Two and Three; we saw it manifest in diverse and exciting ways in the scholarship and the teaching of our faculty informants. In the next section, we describes its characteristics using what our student informants say about themselves and their writing.

Passion and the Discipline

> Through this course and with the guidance of my professor, I realize what I am destined to do in academia.
>
> *—Luz, music major talking about an ethnomusicology course*

As we read the essays students had written in response to the proficiency exam prompts, we were struck again and again by these students' level of engagement in their chosen field(s), their sense that, like Luz, they were destined to be doing this work. In contrast to many of the focus group

respondents (though certainly not all), these students seemed to have a clear sense of what it means to be an original writer, one who is passionate—even as their passion is disciplined by the academic conventions they've learned—and personal even though their "I" may never appear in the text. Their voices resonated with confidence.

In this section, we want to highlight some of the themes and contributing factors we saw recurring in these students' explanations of how they learned to be confident, engaged writers and scholars. In particular, these students exhibited a passion for the topic along with a belief that they could be original, disciplined thinkers. Interestingly, a strong subtext in many of their responses on the essay exams and in the focus groups was the role of a teacher's passion for his or her subject as a powerful model for engaged scholarship, a point we discuss in more detail at the end of the section.

Passion and Reason

We begin with Luz, the music major, who gradually became aware that "someone who is passionate about her topic [the history, culture, and musical traditions of her native Puerto Rico] and naturally creative can produce a paper that is clean, neat, and sometimes even dry." Luz writes that she found it difficult to control her feelings, especially when writing about the effects of colonialism. She tended to write in Spanish, which allowed her to be "poetic" and metaphorical, unlike the "bluntness" of English, and then translate her writing into English. She learned, however, with her teacher's patient guidance, that, though she was trying to be "proper and scholarly," her strong adjectives, when translated from Spanish, revealed her biased perspective. She understood that she had to change those adjectives. Her story illustrates the preference for reason over passion in academic writing, a topic introduced in Chapter One and explored in Chapters Two and Three. Another important factor in learning scholarly control, Luz writes, is understanding that a documentation guide, like the *Chicago Manual of Style*, can force a writer to be disciplined, "orderly," and clear. While Luz may have some misconceptions about the power of documentation to impose order, we're interested in the lessons she seems to have internalized: her "definitive" opinion that the format rules she learned from Chicago style kept her from "drowning in her material," allowing her to focus on her rich primary and secondary research; and also that she can "effectively translate" what she learned from research in a "prudent" and persuasive style because the footnotes allow her to voice her additional concerns.

In contrast, Steven, a government major, writes that with the guidance of two of his professors he was "able to regain the emotion and individuality"

he'd lost with the emphasis in high school on standardized tests. When one of his professors explained that a person majors in government "not because you want to know how government works but because you want to change it," he felt freed to "dive" into topics that allowed him to explore a range of cross-disciplinary sources—a "multicultural" paper, for example, in which he looked at anthropological definitions of culture, histories of American cultural identity, theories of multiculturalism, and so on. Two important lessons have guided him in his work: "Only through making waves can you tell what direction the ship is moving" and, once the ship is moving, you need to find "the perfect combination of emotion, logic, historical evidence, and vision." He found that combination once he became "a student of the topic" instead of "just amassing a pile of research and cramming it all in." Critical to his understanding of how to be this kind of student were ongoing discussions with his teachers, who gave him the latitude to explore the topics, told him to anticipate contradictions, and, when writing, to make his arguments "relatable" to a public as well as the academic audience. "You can't win by confusing the public," he learned.

Kathleen, an English major, shows this symbiotic relationship between reason and passion in another way. She describes a teacher in an African-American literature course who told her to quit playing it safe and to "go with your gut." What that advice meant to her was that she should risk making an argument she believed in rather than relying on plot summaries. In describing one of her papers for that class, she said she could be "freer in expressing" herself when she wrote about the "horrors of slavery" and the "emotional tales" she wanted to analyze. To do that, she read other sources' views and then drafted until she'd generated a strong thesis for her argument. Finally, she let the authors' words "wash over me" so that "I could reflect clearly on their meanings."

We found this emphasis on passion through reason and reason through passion in many of the students' essay responses to the proficiency exam prompts and, to some degree, in the focus group responses. We see in these responses an understanding not only of the exigencies—disciplinary and personal—that shape writing in a discipline but also a belief in the individual writer's ability to move his or her readers. They have learned, in other words, that the academic readers they describe as their audience are persuaded not only by carefully reasoned arguments but also by a rhetorical stance that conveys their deeply felt intellectual passion(s). Therefore, the principle of control of passion by reason really implies a vital interconnectedness of these principles, not the erasure of one by the other.

The confidence that these students exhibit when they describe their writing indicates that they view themselves as insiders in their disciplines,

able to understand and negotiate the demands of individual teachers and courses. We see them being in the third of the three stages we suggested earlier, in that they typically see teachers as reliable guides rather than as idiosyncratic arbiters of style and taste, as so many of our focus group students did; likewise, they come to see genres in their major as examples of multiple and varied disciplinary concerns rather than as a confusing array of teacher preferences.

But these writers, as they explain, have gained this confidence over time and through experiences both inside and outside of the academy. One of the focus group students, John, a well-read history major and a community college transfer, is particularly intriguing to us because of his "lack of confidence in the structures" that teachers in upper-division courses might want. While he may have lacked confidence because he hadn't yet experienced upper-division courses, he was certain that history teachers would not be looking for the kind of writing he was doing in his advanced composition course, even though the composition course was focused on writing in history. More than most of our respondents, John had a keen awareness of the difference between an academic writer of history and a popularizer, and in this awareness he echoed our faculty informant from history who talked about an academic reader's "suspicion" of texts that are too "seductive," "gripping," or "easy." John dismissed the popular history "stuff we've been reading in English class" as "a wordy, good example of bad writing." The intention of that kind of writing, he thought, was to make the reader "get emotional" about the topic, and the teacher's intention in assigning it, he said, was to show that "if you feel strongly about a topic, you're going to write very passionately." Although he was clearly passionate about history, that was not the model he wanted to follow—"opinions and assumptions without enough verifying evidence"; rather, he saw himself writing for "Ph.D.s in history," for whom the writing has to be as clear and carefully researched as possible. Once he'd begun getting some feedback from his history professors, he noted he was beginning to feel more confident about his ability to write for the kind of readers he envisions and in the voice he wants to use.

Originality and Voice

If the more confident students learned how passion for a topic could be conveyed through disciplined research and "clear," "sometimes dry," prose, they also ultimately learned what their teachers intended by style, originality, and voice. In contrast, for many of our focus group and survey students, the question of what constitutes an original voice and style seemed particularly fraught, sometimes, as one survey student wrote, from the moment they entered college: "The teacher in my very first English course discouraged me

from using my own style. She had to admit I was grammatically correct, but she simply didn't like my style and so critiqued it." A focus group member from communication lamented having to relinquish her ideas to please the teacher—"It's kind of sad, you want to have original ideas, but you know you'll get a good grade if you say what the teacher says." Others complained about vague or even "weird" criteria like "Be original" or "Be aggressive towards the topic." "I'd like to be original," one student said, "but I have no idea what my professor's ideas of originality are."

Many of the focus group respondents had figured out, however that originality and voice can inhere in even the most conventionalized disciplines. So, for example, Huan, a psychology major, noted that by the time he was a senior he understood how "all the rules you worry about following when you're just beginning to write sort of fade into the background and become the foundation from which you work. I guess that's how you feel like you have more freedom to say what you want to say." Lynn, an economics major, explained in her essay that a research review allows for original thinking because "by defining the current frontier of knowledge, economists can then go on to show the cutting edge nature of their work and why they are making an original contribution to the discipline."

Still, for many of these students, this understanding did not come without struggle. Some talked about the difficult process of finding their voice and authority in the midst of all the expert sources they'd been researching. For example, Courtney, a government major, said, "When I write an academic paper, I worry that I am not producing an original paper per se, that it is merely a thoughtful and organized submission of information I gathered and then properly cited." When one of her teachers told her that he couldn't hear her voice in the paper, she was confused. "That threw me off," she said, "I have been blatantly told by professors that as an undergraduate and an inexperienced scholar it was more important to learn how to research well and come up with information that's already present rather than try to develop an original voice." To find a solution to this seeming contradiction, she said she concentrated on developing her own set of criteria for evaluating political events, which she was able to do once she'd listened to the teacher's "interpretation," read widely on the topic, and also drew on her knowledge of democratic theory learned in other courses. "I use my experience as a student of political science to frame my essays as a whole," she observed. Through her experiences writing for many different government teachers, Courtney has learned that "professors don't want you to relate information that's already been discussed. You need to answer questions in a thoughtful way so it's obvious that it's you doing the thinking, drawing on all the things you've learned."

As we discuss in more detail in the next chapter (on the implications of our findings for pedagogy), Courtney's realization—that she could bring together knowledge she'd accumulated as a student of government even though she was still an "inexperienced scholar"—is important to consider in the context of many of our faculty informants' views that it is not their purpose in undergraduate courses to train little psychologists, mathematicians, biologists, and so on. Whether or not faculty intend to inculcate disciplinary ways of thinking and writing into their undergraduate students, they inevitably bring their disciplinary inclinations to their teaching, as we argued in Chapter Three. Further, while students in lower-division courses may resist assignments they perceive as too specialized to be useful to them (as Russell and Yanez found in their study of the conflict between the teacher's and students' motives and goals in an introductory history course), the more proficient upper-division students we've been discussing in this section understand that they are practicing discipline-based writing, even though their teachers may not be fully aware of the degree to which this is happening. Not only do they understand, but also many, like Huan and Courtney, have worked to internalize the motives and genres of the discipline while also finding ways to exercise an original voice and/or perspective. Moreover, as we've said, they tend to see differences in teachers' expectations as deriving from the array of disciplinary and subdisciplinary interests possible in the field. (What we're discovering is closely related to processes of enculturation Russell describes in "Rethinking Genre in School and Society: An Activity Theory Analysis.")

According to many of our focus group respondents and essay exam writers, a teacher's passion for his or her academic project or for the student's project was a significant contributing factor to the student's ability to internalize disciplinary motives, goals, and genres. With this ability come confidence and their own passion. "Reading my professor's book put me more in awe of her because it made me realize how passionate she was about her subject," a sociology student said. "It also gave me more of a sense of what she expected from me as a writer." Another student said that she learned to pick topics she felt passionate about after a teacher wrote on one of her papers, "Wow, you've taught me so much." The idea that they could teach a teacher was a powerful motivator for many of the students. Grace, a double major in music and nursing, described a teacher's positive response to a project she did on music and "everyday education": "My professor had never heard of my topic and she was extremely interested in it, so I took the extra steps of doing more research. And, by putting in the work, I was able to impress and enlighten her to the point that she has kept my project and considers me an expert in that subject."

Disciplining the Discourse to Meet Personal Goals

Most of the students we've been discussing in this section have learned, or are in the process of learning, that their chosen disciplines can accommodate their individual voices and academic interests. We also encountered in our focus groups and proficiency essays a number of students, not unlike our faculty informants, who were actively reshaping the rhetorics of their disciplines to meet their own individual needs and goals, whether these were academic or workplace, and thereby creating new forms. One of the most delightful was Melanie, an individualized studies major, whose expectation that the academy would accommodate her personal goals was striking to us. Both of us were thoroughly impressed by her clear sense that writing assignments should be made to serve her own well-defined career goals, as well as by her seeming success in persuading her teachers to the same view.

We quoted Melanie at the beginning of this chapter on the "500 things" that might be going on in a teacher's life to prevent him or her from hearing the individual voices of the writers in any given course. Melanie was determined that her teachers would hear her voice. And she had a lot to say in her chosen concentrations of sociology and communication. When she was not yet 21, Melanie started her own business doing beauty treatments, selling makeup, and, in a newsletter, promoting her products and counseling her "hundreds" of customers on "their cosmetic needs," while also addressing "fashion, relationship and family issues, and women's spiritual needs." She gathered information for her newsletter stories from the Internet, but also based them on "my grasp of what I knew my customers needed from me from our hours of conversation in my shop. So I included poetry, small articles, usually in connection with an approaching holiday, and short pieces that would be inspirational to people." Melanie returned to school to finish her degree when the economy faltered; however, she still has a small business and is also preparing to become an inspirational speaker.

When we asked Melanie how this kind of understanding of her readers translated into writing for her teachers, she explained that she has learned how to be persuasive, to use descriptive details, and to catch people's attention. She always strives to make her personality come through in her writing, and, she says, her teachers seem to like that. She might, for example, take an informative assignment "where I have to show that I know what I'm talking about, and I'll try to turn it into some kind of a narrative, maybe about my life or a situation with my clients. I'll compare that to the information I've learned in class. My teachers have been okay with that." One time, however, a sociology professor commented that "I had gone a little bit overboard. She knew some of my beliefs and where I'm coming from and she basically said

'this is sociology, this isn't a class about morals.' But I figured I was learning this information for my benefit so that I could use it to change some things in society that I believe need to be different." To her teacher's comment "'Well, that's not sociology,'" she replied, "I know it's not sociology, but I don't consider myself a sociologist. I want to learn more than just the facts. Like how society got to be the way it is and how it can be changed." Her teacher accepted that reasoning, she said. Melanie believes she is unlike most other students, who, she feels, are willing to write what teachers want to hear and aren't thinking about their own personal and career goals. She herself "cares more about how to make an assignment somehow fit it into what I'm trying to do with my future" than with getting a good grade—although she gets A's and B's.

While Melanie sees herself dissimilar to most students, we found a similar sense of empowerment in our New Century College focus group students; often, as with Melanie, this sense derived from a strong personal investment in shaping the curriculum and a conviction that their primary goal is to appeal to the audiences they will encounter outside the academy. However, whereas Melanie felt she had to persuade her teachers to consider her own personal learning and writing goals, the NCC program is based on that principle. When we asked the NCC students to describe the characteristics of good writing in integrative studies, they immediately responded, "a strong personal voice." While that voice should not "overpower the content or the message," it can, according to Lindsay, help the writer "explore [her] own knowledge and weave [her] own perspectives and opinions into the research." Lindsay talked about discovering her own voice as she experienced writing in the variety of styles and forms expected in an integrative program, in the range of audiences projected by her teachers, and in the collaborative writing situations that are typical in most NCC courses. Personal voice, then, is not something separate from all of these influences, nor is it just the product of them; rather it is a practical understanding of who she is as a writer and all the possibilities she has for self-expression. This point, we think, bears on and reconciles the distinctions made in the oft-cited debate between Peter Elbow and David Bartholomae on how best to teach students to write in the academy.

While we're both very familiar with the kinds of writing assignments teachers give in NCC pedagogy, we were struck, as we talked to these students, by their confident assurance that all their teachers would and should adapt themselves to the goals of writing in an integrative environment. In response to our question about whether they had ever been discouraged from experimenting with voice and style, two of the students mentioned an NCC professor trained as a biologist who "tends to lead his students across a very narrow bridge and doesn't allow them to stray far from the scientific format he

expects." Yet, these students continued, in a "rare showing of nonscientific openness," the teacher has been "including students in the pedagogy of his constantly evolving courses" and has also been "relaxing some of his rules." One of those rules is that students cannot use "I" in their papers. "He's just recently let that rule out of his clutches," largely, they think, as a by-product of the reflective writing that is fundamental to NCC pedagogy, as we discuss shortly.

Within the NCC community, there is a high level of consciousness about teaching writing and the nature of assignments, almost all of which are multilayered; that is, most ask students to think about audiences beyond the teacher(s), usually both within and outside of the academy; most require varied methods and formats, typically one of which is a Web document; and many are collaboratively written. Both faculty and students share in conversations about assignments and their purposes, so one would expect, in this kind of environment, more willingness to negotiate a sharing of activity systems.

The Importance of Reflective Writing

In the NCC focus group, the students talked at length about the requirement for reflection as a critical component of good writing. With the others nodding their heads in agreement, Matt defined reflection as "discovering the interconnections between areas of knowledge that you've explored and then exploring the significance of this knowledge." As an example, he described a "photojournalistic essay" he wrote after traveling to Australia, which described not only what he saw and did but also included reflection: "What did nature have to do with the culture? What does the culture have to do with the history? How do these all come together? What are the implications? So the reflective writing becomes a lens for viewing these different areas of knowledge." The other NCC students agreed that reflection is an integral part of the research process because "you are incorporating and synthesizing all that you have learned and experienced and asking why it matters." Without reflection, Matt noted, both the research and the writing risk being "flat and unengaged." While reflective writing may be central to NCC pedagogy, the students understood that it is not necessarily a common feature in most disciplines, and, in fact, they said, NCC work is sometimes seen as being "elementary" because people seem to think that "we're sitting under a tree writing in our diary, whereas what we are doing is integrating all of our coursework, outside experiences, previous experiences, things we've read from different courses and so on."

While explicit reflection on their writing and thinking processes is not a typical requirement within most majors, many students are aware of how and why they have come to acquire a disciplinary way of thinking. We saw this point illustrated most strikingly in the proficiency exam essays when students

were asked to describe distinctive features of writing in their major by referring to a piece of writing in the portfolio and also explaining their process of writing that piece. Although they did not indicate that they had ever been asked to reflect on their writing prior to this exam, most of the student writers were able to pinpoint specific courses and teachers that helped them learn how to be successful writers in the discipline. Perhaps not surprisingly those who were most articulate tended to be students with double majors or minors. Working within two disciplines enabled them to contrast features of writing in different disciplines and also to explain how they negotiated those differences in their own work.

Earlier in this chapter we posited three stages in the development of a disciplinary writer and suggested that students who are in the third stage understand that differences in teachers' expectations are indicative of the varied goals, interests, and concerns that motivate work in a discipline. Clearly, students need the experience of writing for many different teachers and courses within their majors to gain this understanding, which, in turn, helps them to become more proficient and efficient writers. But students also need, we think, many more opportunities than they currently have to articulate what it is they understand and why that knowledge matters to their growth as writers. For some students in our focus groups, particularly those in advanced composition for science and technology majors, the English class was the place where they encountered focused conversations *about* writing. Eric, a systems engineering major, noted, "It's kind of odd that in this [advanced writing] class, I feel like I've grown more as a writer because I've done more research and found out more things on my own, whereas in actual classes in my major it's more that they know what you need to write so they want to see if you can write or not." John, another engineering major, said, "What's been most valuable to me in this [advanced writing] course is that it has made me aware of the things that I'm doing when I write in my other courses."

How Students Learn to Write in Their Disciplines

We've described two important factors in students' gaining the confidence and ability to write proficiently in their majors: (1) frequent writing for a variety of teachers and courses and (2) opportunities for reflecting on their writing: reflecting on the rhetorical choices they've made based on purpose, content, and audience; on the connections they've discerned among topics, formats, and styles; and on their discovery that writing can be a means of realizing their own interests and desires as writers. As we've also noted, teachers play a significant role in a student writer's development. Indeed, when our survey respondents overwhelmingly listed teachers as the major factor in

learning the characteristics of writing in the disciplines, we spent considerable time in the focus groups probing the ways in which teachers function as guides to disciplinary writing. We also looked for descriptions of interactions with teachers when we read the proficiency exam essays. In the preceding section, drawing on focus group and essay responses, we've shown how teachers have encouraged and inspired highly motivated writers to acquire disciplinary and personal knowledges through both verbal and written interactions. Now we want to focus more specifically on what our student informants say about the ways they have learned to "read" a teacher's expectations and thus write to fulfill those expectations. As we will discuss, while students pick up on a surprising number of cues from teachers before they ever begin writing for them, even the most confident writers rely heavily on feedback on the first paper as a guide to writing subsequent papers and/or revising their work. Many also noted the importance of having models for their writing, be they examples of successful papers, the teacher's own writing, the readings that have been assigned, and/or workplace documents they perceive (or misperceive) to be relevant to the course.

"Reading" What the Teacher Expects

"I'm an observer. I've learned to perceive other people's wishes," Karen, a psychology major, explained when she told us why she feels fairly confident the first time she is writing for a teacher. Although we are well aware that most students are adept readers of classroom environments, we were nevertheless fascinated by the range of verbal, nonverbal, and written cues they use to predict what a teacher might expect in response to the first writing assignment. Many of our informants noted that they discern teachers' expectations for writing from the syllabus, the textbook, and teacher's lecture and presentation style: "If a teacher presents him- or herself very formally, you know they expect a more formal response, whereas if they're personable and they joke around and digress, they might not have as rigid expectations," Chris, an information technology (IT) major, observed. A teacher who is "nitpicky" about his or her syllabus and grading methods, he said, "is going to be nitpicky about your writing as well." In economics, Eric noted, "It's just assumed that you go in there knowing how to write. The professors don't really touch on what they're looking for, so I find myself more often than not going through the textbook and looking for examples of what I'm trying to model." In Eric's case, the model he used was not helpful. "I'd basically looked at the quarterly reports I found and I modeled those. But it turned out not to be what the professor was looking for because I went beyond what the class was covering. But that's what I was seeing and assuming we had to present."

We find Eric's situation particularly interesting in light of the stages of a student's writing development we posited earlier. Just as teachers often "assume" that students should know how to write because they themselves see academic writing as generic rather than discipline-specific, students also "assume" (understandably so) that the genres and conventions they are learning will apply from course to course and teacher to teacher within the same discipline. When students in the first or second stage of their writing development encounter different expectations in different courses, they are often surprised and chalk this up to differences in teachers' personalities and preferences rather than seeing them as nuanced articulations of the discipline, a subdiscipline, or an area of interest. Andrew, a geology major, said, "I go by a teacher's personality. For example, one of my teachers is a big environmental freak, so if I write with a big environmental spin, I know he'll be happy with it." He also attributed some of the differences he saw to the regions his teachers came from: "One teacher grew up in England, and we've got people from out west and people from the Appalachian area, and all of them have different writing styles; they expect different things. It makes it really tough at times to give them what they want." Karen thought that her psychology teachers' expectations varied according to where they were in their careers. Mike, an information technology major, said, "To a degree it's like flipping a coin. I think a lot of teachers look at writing sort of based on their own writing, and so I get different impressions from teacher to teacher."

When students can't pick up cues from their teachers, they tend to fall back on prior experience and on stereotypes they have about what different disciplines will expect. Chris, in IT, noted, "I had a professor who didn't have any writing assignments all semester and then we had a nine-page term paper to do. It was weird because once again you didn't talk to him about writing in general, so you didn't know how he wanted it to be written. I didn't expect him to grade it like an English teacher. I just wanted him to see that I had found a lot of information and that I was able to get the word count. That's what I expect from those who aren't English teachers because it's not their job to critique my writing, it's their job to critique what I learn." In computer science, Poona said, "My experience is mostly that if you cover things they want you to write about, they're happy. They're not too concerned about your writing style." She added, however, that teachers often do not return papers, so she is not too sure whether her perceptions of their grading standards are correct.

Because students rely heavily on feedback they receive on their first papers in the course, as we will explain shortly, they found it particularly disconcerting when they had to write a second paper before getting the first paper back. Matt, an NCC student, recalled a time when he had to write a second paper for a large section of a "standard history class." "Obviously," he said,

there was "no personal feedback and I certainly felt apprehensive about how I was going to approach the next paper." Yet he did well, he said, because he picked up cues from "the ways the teacher led discussions in class, thinking about his academic focus, the things that he would devote a whole class period to. These were the kinds of things that I made sure I included at the very least."

Other student informants apparently were not as successful as Matt in perceiving a teacher's expectations, and some seemed to sense that the teachers themselves were unsure about what they wanted. Grace told us she "failed" a music history course in her major because of the grades on her two papers, the second of which was submitted before she'd gotten the first one back. This was a problem, she said, because, "when he returned the first paper, he told the entire class that we had to redo it because he wasn't satisfied. When you get no feedback, you don't know what to do, and so we all did poorly in the class because he didn't give us the proper guidelines." Amanda, an IT major, described getting an unsatisfactory grade on a paper for which the teacher had "only vaguely touched upon what he wanted." When she queried the teacher about her grade, she said, "It was kind of like talking to a wall; you ask why you got the grade that you did and the response is 'I don't know' and now here I am bringing the assignment back to get some feedback and it's still 'I don't know.' It was submitted via email, so there was no hard copy and no remarks ever came back." While she didn't expect the teacher to remember all of the students' papers, Amanda noted that she preferred hard copy submissions so "at least you can discuss with the professor what it is that needs to be improved or clarified."

We were struck, as we listened to these students' complaints, by the anger they still seemed to feel about their teachers' lack of responsiveness to their work. Since we didn't look at graded papers by these students, we don't know whether their complaints are justified; clearly, however, these students think that feedback is important and they are looking for it to be specific. As Amanda noted, "Students are there to please and to get the grade and when they don't let us do that, that's what brings us down." Perhaps nothing shows the lack of transparency of writing in the disciplines more than these students' sensitivity to the rhetorical situatedness of the classroom. While many, like Matt, may have learned to read the rhetorical contexts in which a writing assignment is located, even he experienced some unease as he approached writing the second paper when he hadn't received feedback on the first.

Students' Reliance on First-Paper Feedback

In focus groups and, to some degree in the essay exam responses, our informants, no matter how confident they felt about their writing, stressed the need

for feedback on the first assigned paper. Robyn, a psychology major, explained, "Sometimes professors vary so much in what they expect that getting that first paper back is a sigh of relief. It's done, and I'll have the feedback and I'll learn whether I'm meeting the professor's expectations and how to improve. I feel confident that I can do well when I write for my classes. It's just getting those parameters set."

In their need for "parameters," students reveal their understanding that academic writing is transactional writing and, as with any transactional situation, a writer needs to know what the reader wants, perhaps even more so when there is a grade at stake. Prior to the writing itself, teachers can effectively convey parameters, according to a number of our informants, when they give detailed guidelines and criteria, often on a syllabus, so that students can see "ahead of time how rigorous they are and what they are going to look at when they read the paper," as Kelsey, a government major, said. While all four of Jess's sociology professors included "exactly what they were looking for" in the syllabus, one professor, she said, also "listed five things an 'A' paper and a 'B' paper would include, which made it very clear what her expectations are."

Students found models particularly helpful. Some communication professors write "an example paper" for the assignment, Laura said. She liked this because "you see how they write and obviously they would like you to write it similar to that." One of her English teachers, Lauren said, puts strong and weak paragraphs from students' papers on an overhead, showing them, at the sentence level, what was strong and how to fix what was weak. Similarly, in an NCC class where projects were done in groups, Lindsay described a professor using an overhead projector to comment on work from each of the groups, "either naming the groups or not, and saying what's working and what's not. That way the class as a whole gets an understanding of how their group is doing and how their work compares to the work of other groups." Another NCC professor passed around sample portfolios that demonstrated excellent work.

While students who receive prior information about expectations and grading standards find it useful, they, along with nearly all our focus group informants, said they feel at least some degree of anxiety when they write the first paper for a new professor. "In all my courses," Grace said, "each teacher prefers a certain tone and style and that's what you learn after you turn in the first paper. The first paper they grade, you know what they want, and that's why it's so important." Even in relatively compact disciplines like psychology, as Robyn noted, teachers' expectations can vary from course to course. In more diffuse disciplines, differing approaches to the same material mean that even the most confident writers, like Courtney, a government major,

need to know teacher expectations: "I'm taking political analysis and research and this kind of writing is very different from what I've been trained in so far; it's much more technical and it involves data and statistics, which I haven't been trained in using. So I'd say that I have some anxiety about writing for this class even though my writing has been reinforced well so far." What we can see in these comments is that in order to develop a sense of themselves as writers in a discipline, students need feedback that pertains not only to the assignment but also to the larger concerns of the discipline or subdiscipline.

The Cumulative Effect of Feedback

Even the most minimal feedback, we found, can help students intuit some of these concerns. This is understandable since students' sense of how to write in their discipline is cumulative, as we've already discussed, with proficiency and confidence gained through multiple and varied opportunities for writing and reflecting on their writing. "I was just thinking that in a lot of upper-level communication classes I've taken," Laura said, "teachers always make notes like 'try to simplify,' and if I try to write clearly and concisely they always say 'good, simple, good job!' And I think that's mainly how I've learned those characteristics of good writing." Similarly, students found that "cross outs" and comments like "'Expand on this'" helped them understand what was missing or where they were "going off on the wrong angle." Once they have even these sparse comments on the first paper, many said, they could use the comments as "a model for the rest of the work in that course, because you do get a sense of what's expected of you," as Shabnam, an engineering major, noted.

Many students stressed the importance of having a teacher point out their strengths as writers, as well as what needed to be improved. "When you turn in a 20-page paper you've been working on all semester and sweat is pouring off your face, you need someone to say 'good job,'" Jess explained. Yet that kind of generalized praise isn't necessarily enough, she added. "If a professor just writes 'Excellent job' and gives you back your paper and you notice that there are a thousand mistakes that she didn't say anything about, it makes you feel a little bit less. I think that if the professor marks up your paper and gives it back to you and points out your weaknesses and your strengths at the same time, it gives you a lot more confidence." Similarly, Shabnam said, "It's not just a good grade; you can get the highest grade, but for me what matters is if a professor mentions my strengths and then says what I should work on. Then the next time I write a paper I have a sense of my strengths and know that he's going to be noticing the strengths, too, and that increases my confidence."

When only one paper was assigned in a class, the students especially appreciated having opportunities for revision with feedback. Some mentioned the value of peer writing groups, though they tended to see peer review as a way "to gauge what others say and bounce that off what the teacher says." One informant explained that the most effective feedback she'd received in her health and fitness classes came from a teacher who broke the paper into sections, each of which was commented on and graded. This process, Danielle said, "makes you think about what you wanted to revise in the first part while you're writing the second part, so the teacher is always challenging you to create new ideas. It's stressful but it's apparent that she cares about what we're writing." Almost to a student, our psychology majors explained that they gained confidence with the APA "template" of the experimental report by writing individual sections and revising with feedback. "The TA was really good about saying that there are all these rules that we had to follow and making it clear that it's a pretty prescribed method of writing. So we actually practiced how to write in that style and submitted sections for review," Huan said. While he received helpful comments about where tables should go and how results should be discussed, he noted that "in terms of the writing, I think I was a little too verbose, so I got comments on that. The major thing I remember learning is to use 'whereas' instead of 'while.'" Though Huan didn't say that he found the "whereas" advice particularly arbitrary, he, like Robyn, realized that even within a prescribed template teachers will vary in their stylistic preferences.

Who Pays Attention to Style and Mechanics

That teachers will vary widely in their attention to a student writer's style and mechanics was, we discovered, an opinion held by many of our informants. In response to a survey question on whether they find teachers' expectations to be generally similar, the majority of students replied "yes"; however, those who said 'no' listed attention to grammar and mechanics as the most frequent instance of difference. When we probed this response further in our focus groups, we found that the student writers seemed to pay close attention to feedback on style and mechanics, regarding it as an important indicator of a teacher's preferences and also a key explanation of the grades they'd received. "Some econ professors are like 'I just want your ideas; you could scribble them out on a cocktail napkin, I don't care,'" Eric observed, while "others want to see that you've put a lot of time into how you're presenting the material and that everything is punctuated and spelled right. So you have to go by their comments." In psychology, Robyn said, "It raised my anxiety when one teacher just graded on content but for another one you knew it was going to be critical if your punctuation wasn't correct."

A number of students noted that English teachers—rightly so, they believed—had "more explicit" and "higher standards" for the quality of the writing. Laura, a double major in English and history, said her English teachers' attention to her sentences and word choices helped her become more stylistically "sophisticated," which she'd not found a priority in her history classes. In her proficiency exam essay, Laura wrote at length about how one English teacher helped her develop as a writer. Not only did this teacher attend carefully to his students' prose, he also showed them how to read literature from a "macro to micro" level. "First," she explained, "you read for the story. Then, at the micro level, for the details, like the names of characters, towns, the spaces (inside/outside, kitchens, trains, bridges, south/north), the time, colors, verbs, repetition of words, images, spelling, the ways words are physically printed on the page." When she learned to read this way, she said, she understood that you can "choose effective words at every step to create effective sentences."

The Role of Reading in a Writer's Development

In addition to teacher feedback on their writing, reading was frequently noted by students as an important factor in their development as writers in a discipline. Reading widely and deeply, many students said, helped them understand not only the subject matter of the discipline but also the ways in which it can be/should be presented. We've already mentioned the value of students being given explicit models for their writing, whether these be experimental lab reports in psychology, sample papers written by teachers or peers, or literary prose. But we also found that students can infer style from reading professional writing. Amanda and John, both in technical majors, said that they look to see whether the authors "drag things out or get to the point," "what you can get from skimming the first and last paragraphs," as well as "what extra information they give and what they assume the reader knows." Kristen said she has learned the necessity of "careful, deep reading" in philosophy and, because of that training, "I take a lot of time on revision, which is where my papers come together. I push myself to say, 'This is what the philosophers are doing, so shouldn't I be pushing myself to do the same?'" For Kristen, as with many of the highly proficient writers we've cited earlier, it is very important to find a topic that "gives me pleasure" in order to be motivated to spend time on otherwise "tedious" reading. John, who reads widely in history, said he looks to see "how the author has reached me, even though he may not necessarily reach other people, and how that style works."

Reading outside of their disciplines has also helped many of the students, particularly those we would call third-stage writers, appreciate the rhetorical

differences that distinguish one discipline from another as well as the comfort level they've achieved as readers and writers in their chosen field. Courtney, for example, told us that she realized how comfortable she'd become with even the most difficult discourses of government when she compared her ease of reading in her field with the trouble she was having with the "jargon" in her film studies course, which "is like Greek to me." With that realization of difference, as we've noted in earlier sections, also comes a much clearer understanding of the styles and strategies that are appropriate to one's own discipline. Sara, for example, said that her experience with the "high threshold of evidence" required in a physiology course made her appreciate the "out of the box" analysis that's encouraged in her government major. Some students said that they applied a particular way of thinking and/or researching that they had learned in one discipline to another. Both Sayeda, an English major, and Richard, a sociology major, said they have found the ethnographic methodology they learned in courses outside their major to be a useful tool for thinking, researching, and writing in their majors.

When we asked our focus group informants the advice they would give to new students in the major, they responded: "Read a lot." "Ask questions." "Take good notes." "Give yourself time to write." "Don't be afraid to ask teachers about how to improve your writing." While these responses are not so different from the generic advice they've no doubt been given by most of their teachers, they reveal, we think, that these more experienced writers understand that knowing a discipline occurs gradually and involves much more than imitation of forms, templates, and styles. We can't expect that students will develop from first- to second- to third-stage writers unless teachers give them the instruction and support they need to construct for themselves a nuanced, coherent sense of the discipline. It is not accurate for teachers to say that their expectations for good writing are the same as everyone else's nor, conversely, that their preferences in student writing are merely personal ("other teachers may not care, but for me, don't do ___"). Whatever we teachers convey to students about our expectations for their writing is grounded in our sense of what is appropriate to or allowed by our disciplines, so our instruction and feedback to student writers should help them understand this larger context.

How Student Perceptions Relate to the "Taxonomy of Alternatives"

In the previous sections, we discussed what students say they have learned about writing and themselves as writers in their majors. We've also been interested in their perceptions of teachers' practices in assigning and responding to

writing. As we probed those perceptions, on the survey and in our focus groups, we noted whether the students expressed feelings of being inhibited by an assignment or a teacher's response to their writing, or if they felt surprised by an assignments falling outside their conception of the discipline. In this section, we relate their responses to the taxonomy of alternatives we've discussed in preceding chapters.

- *Alternative formats*

Our questions in the survey, the focus groups, and the proficiency essays did not pursue explicitly this aspect of alternativeness, except in regard to "autobiographical detail," about which focus group students had a good bit to say, as we report in detail in "Passion and the Discipline." Our concrete data about format experimentation and variety are therefore scant. We focused on student perceptions; we did not view student written products as part of the research, except for the proficiency essays—which in every case stick religiously to the prompt, which asks implicitly for a first-person descriptive analysis. But the lack of explicit questions about audience on either this prompt or on the survey had not stopped the students from spontaneously discussing the nuances of adapting their writing to diverse readers. Therefore, the lack of clear evidence of formal experimentation, combined with our survey respondents' consensus view that they had not been "discouraged" from writing alternatively by their teachers, indicates that our upper-division writers have by and large been satisfied to write according to their instructors' guidelines; most seem not to have experimented outside these guidelines because they have not felt the need for such experiments.

But the reader should keep in mind the variety of formats that our faculty informants (see Chapter Three) had noted in describing their assignments. To the extent that our informants are representative of faculty, "instructor guidelines" may mean a more significant variety of formal structures than the student data easily reveal. Thus, even if most of our student informants did not define themselves as stylistic risk-takers, they may have had to be inventive in meeting the varied formal demands of assignments in regard to audience and purpose. To cite one prominent example of stylistic difference, remember that 11 percent of our survey respondents had noted "journal or reflection" as their most common assignment. On the other hand, when our proficiency essayists describe the assignments that have had the most profound impact on their learning to write in their disciplines, their lengthy summaries of analyses and researched arguments rarely imply stylistic risk-taking—even as the writers express the freedom they have felt to think originally.

Thus, we need to remember the distinction between the use of unconventional formats in order to meet an audience's needs, including the criteria

for a professor's assignment, and the student's desire to be "alternative"—a distinction we first posited in Chapter One. That our student informants by and large did not feel the need to resist the formal demands imposed by faculty does not mean that they did not invent or vary forms in meeting assignments—indeed, the spontaneous attentiveness to audience variation by our focus group and proficiency writers suggests otherwise.

- *Alternative ways of conceptualizing and arranging academic arguments*

Although our student data don't really speak to the question of format alternativeness, they do give us insight into students' ways of conceptualizing and arranging arguments—particularly as they attempt to reach diverse audiences. Again, the motive for experimenting may come more from the teacher than the student, but de facto our informants are having to think about what to present and how to present it, in order to convince a range of teachers and, in many cases, a range of nonacademic readers. Our proficiency essayists had the chance to expound on this struggle, and the many examples we excerpt throughout the chapter show them doing so inventively. Indeed, as third-stage writers, they see the writing of their fields as always involved in this effort to find the appropriate evidence, method of inquiry, arrangement, and voice to meet the needs of the particular reader. We find them transferring the writing styles and approaches they've learned in one course and/or through their reading to other contexts; they modify arrangements, language, and approaches; they develop the professional's sense of the alternative ways of conceptualizing and arranging that exist within the discipline—and that shape it for the future.

- *Alternative syntaxes (language and dialect differences)*, which we have characterized as varying in their acceptance by academic readers

The survey asked students to identify themselves as native or nonnative speakers of English. A follow-up question asked whether a teacher had ever criticized a piece of writing for something other than grammar; organization, for example. As expected, about 25 percent of the respondents identified as nonnative speakers, but less than 10 percent of the respondents answered "yes" to the follow-up question—and those who did noted grammar and mechanics, no other factors, as the key factors in teacher critique. That teachers expect conformity to standard edited syntax came through in survey respondents' answers to the earlier question on the survey in regard to differences in teacher expectations in their majors: as we mentioned earlier in the chapter, teachers' attentiveness to "grammar" was, they noted, the primary element that distinguished one teacher's expectations from those of another. When we asked focus group students to give writing advice to hypothetical

students just entering their majors, "use correct grammar" was a frequent recommendation. Not unexpectedly, the proficiency essay writers by and large ignored "correct grammar" as a characteristic of writing in the major, presumably because they did not see it as discipline-specific and perhaps because their own sense of control of syntax made it a non-issue for them.

There was no sense from the data that students regard nonstandard syntax as a "choice" in academic writing. Faculty are more or less stringent in marking it, but there was no evidence that students feel restricted or discouraged by this stringency. As we noted in Chapter Three, all our faculty informants valued grammatical correctness, with four of them emphatic about its importance. This same expectation shows up in all the departmental assessment rubrics. Whether influenced by teacher attitudes or not, our student informants gave no evidence of resisting this expectation. That said, we must remember that all our informants are upper-division students; our sample thus does not include writers whose deficiencies in the standard dialect, or attitudes toward it, had either kept them out of the university or kept them from passing lower-level courses.

- *Alternative methodologies,* which entail experimenting with methods and ways of thinking outside one's disciplinary tradition

With few exceptions, student attitudes toward methodology and ways of thinking corroborated their attitudes toward format and arrangement. The proficiency writers, by and large our most mature group of informants, revealed in their essays knowledge of the range of methods and modes of thought characteristic of their fields, as well as a pragmatic ability to tailor modes of inquiry and search strategies to differing topics and rhetorical situations. While some of our focus group informants expressed the wish to be more creative and less conventional in their approaches to writing, the consensus was that they were given sufficient opportunities to be original. The survey respondents by a large majority expressed satisfaction with the freedom their teachers gave them to choose topics; an even higher percentage (over 80 percent) said they had never been discouraged by a teacher from "using a style that . . . would be a more original and/or individual way" of writing to an assignment in the major.

Just as our faculty informants (in Chapter Two) spoke of their disciplines as dynamic in accommodating a range of alternative methods and styles, so our proficiency essayists were frequently eloquent and enthusiastic in describing the different approaches they used to different problems and issues, often with the encouragement and guidance of their teachers. Although we would not expect even our most mature undergraduate writers to have as clear a sense as faculty do of the range of alternative styles and

methods "allowed" in the discipline, we saw in these essays a similar excitement about possibilities, as well as a similar blending of perceived convention and individual passions to know and express.

- *Alternative media* (email, hypertext, digitized text and images, video)

As we noted in the previous chapter, we did not set out in this research to study technologies. So, just as our faculty data contain relatively few explicit references to digital media—except in the remarks and materials of media specialist Lesley Smith—our student data are relatively silent on the role digital technologies played in teaching disciplinary writing conventions. Even the students in the focus group representing New Century College, the media-intense unit where Lesley Smith teaches, did not attribute their attitudes to digital technologies, though we know that course syllabi and other materials emphasize web design and electronic collaborative tools. Certainly we can posit that the NCC students' obvious sophistication, self-awareness, and confidence as communicators derive in part from the rhetorical challenges posed in courses such as Information in the Digital Age; but our data do not suggest that the technological possibilities themselves are sufficient to explain this growth. As we suggest above, the commitment by NCC faculty to develop rhetorically versatile, culturally aware students better explains the students' sophistication.

All three of our data sources emphasize academic/disciplinary characteristics and personal agendas that are as likely to be expressed on paper as on screen. Conventions of linear written discourse predominate; the importance of correct grammar, for example, is the primary way that survey respondents differentiate the expectations of their major teachers. "Paper" is the common term students use for their assignments. The comments on "clarity," "use of sources," and "analysis" that are repeated from essay to survey to focus group imply the academic conventions of the formal essay. No student on the surveys mentions, for example, integration of sound and/or visuals with text as a major expectation. As might be expected, some students, such as computer scientists and majors in Art and Visual Technology, state that they write using digital tools; however, assignments involving Web design or other multimedia approaches remain uncommon across the curriculum. A program such as New Century College is still an exception.

Nevertheless, as with our faculty informants, student reliance on many aspects of digital technology has become so commonplace that students find it unworthy of mention. The "research" of which the students in all our data sources speak no longer occurs without email, word processing, file transfer, Web browsing, and electronic database searching—the basic IT skills that all GMU students learn in required courses. If at one time such skills constituted

an "alternative discourse," they have long since been assimilated into the reigning concept of academic discourse at a school such as ours.

Conclusion

The students on whose words, spoken and written, we have relied for our data in this chapter have enabled us to achieve insights into the attitudes and development of writers across many disciplines. We have focused on four areas of inquiry:

- Expectations for writing in students' disciplines
- How students gain confidence to write with passion and voice
- How they learn to write in disciplinary ways
- How our findings relate to the taxonomy of alternatives we've previously generated

In regard to the first, we've noted ten generalizations about writing in disciplines based on our data. In addition, we are positing three "stages" in the development of undergraduate disciplinary writers—a progression dependent on the frequency and variety of writing experiences, as well as on writers' reflectiveness about both the field and their growth into it.

As for our second inquiry, we have seen that for "third-stage" writers there is a merging of the writer's personal goals and preferred styles with the discipline's expectations, as the writer understands them. Similar to our faculty informants, students with the most experience writing in their majors understand how the discipline, in its dynamic variety of voices and exigencies, can accommodate original ideas and new perspectives. These students see their most influential teachers inspiring and encouraging their own passions, and they are confident that they will have a role in shaping the discipline.

That teachers play an essential role in this process of growth is one of our most emphatic findings. While the teacher as lecturer and as published writer is credited by our student informants as sparking understanding, it is the teacher as guide, interested reader, and commentator on student writing that is most often mentioned. Third-stage writers also credit the broad and varied reading they do for their courses as helping them understand how to write in their fields, but time and again students note the teacher's guidance in the process of revision as most vital to their development.

Few of our informants saw either the teacher or the discipline as inhibiting their writerly choices, so the idea of "alternative discourse" as resistance to either a "generic academic" discourse or a disciplinary discourse was not

played out in our data. The student data, corroborating the faculty data from earlier chapters, revealed a range of options for student writers, options that seemed to accommodate both their personal and academic goals. Also, as with our faculty, nonstandard usage and/or grammar were not considered legitimate "alternatives" by our student informants, even though students distinguished between faculty who were more "picky" and those who overlooked errors. Finally, while some electronic compositions, such as hypertext documents and Web pages, are still "alternative" in that they are not mentioned by most students as part of their discipline's expectations for writers, other aspects of electronic media have now been assumed into the generic construct of academic writing.

In our final chapter, we discuss the implications of these student findings, as well as the implications of our research with faculty. We offer recommendations for writers, for teachers, and for program leaders across the disciplines.