

Negotiating a Transcultural Ethos from the Ground Up in a Basic Writing Program

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ABSTRACT: This essay describes the process of reassessing our BW program at the University of Michigan-Dearborn in order to cultivate a more deliberate, transparent negotiation among stakeholders toward a “transcultural ethos.” Informed by Bruce Horner’s argument that leading-edge work on language and language difference can take place in BW, we formed a working group that conducted a two-year study designed to serve three purposes: to account for the local contexts of increasing language diversity in our BW classrooms; to revise the BW curriculum in ways that accounted for our evolving local contexts; and to begin fostering a transcultural ethos for our writing program. We found that the most progress toward these goals was made when language use was treated as a subject of critical inquiry, reflection, and analysis in the classroom. We also found that code-meshing approaches could foster student agency while making acts of negotiation more deliberate. The imperative to continue building toward a transcultural ethos has prompted us to pay more attention to the risks of commodifying student writing and to place greater emphasis on teacher self-reflection.

KEYWORDS: Basic Writing; code-meshing; curricular change; negotiation; transcultural ethos; translanguaging; writing program reform

BASIC WRITING IN DEARBORN

The students in our basic writing (BW) course have for at least a generation mirrored Dearborn, Michigan’s unique linguistic, ethnic, and racial character. Dearborn is home to the highest concentration of Arab-Americans in the United States, with vibrant and visible diaspora communities from Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen living the kinds of “multicultural” and “multilingual” lives that reflect the cosmopolitan narratives of 21st century higher

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education. For the past several decades, BW has served large numbers of multilingual Arab-Americans alongside white, often first-generation university attendees. This context creates an important juxtaposition: the children of Arab immigrants next to the children of auto workers, Arab Muslims next to white, working-class students from “down river” or Macomb County. While these two groups differ in demographic terms, they are united at times by an unfamiliarity with the dynamic terrain of university culture and the shifting conventions of academic literacies.

In the past four years, our campus has invited an additional student population: international students. BW in cosmopolitan Dearborn has become even more marked by multilingualism during the years following the recent global financial crisis, as our University has sought to make up for declines in enrollment by entering quickly into lucrative international partnerships. As Paul Kei Matsuda observes, the recruitment of international students often serves to increase “visible diversity” and tap “out-of-state tuition” dollars (“Let’s Face It” 142; “It’s the Wild West” 131). These rushed arrangements are often motivated by the potential for fast profit and entered into without consideration of necessary staffing and infrastructure. The *rush* to profit from inflated tuition rates and room and board fees and to tout institutional commitment to multiculturalism can obscure the need, for example, to prepare faculty for the needs of L2 writers, not to mention to assure adequate transportation and housing services. We have observed these demographic and institutional shifts as white, mostly “monolingual” faculty members, one of us (Bill) the writing program director, and one of us (Mike) a tenure-stream assistant professor, both with interests in BW studies and a desire to respond in critical ways. We have watched as the University’s administration has targeted Arabic-speaking nations like Oman, as well as China and Brazil, for these new partnerships. And so as Arabic-language signs literally mark some of the streets around campus, having changed the material and linguistic make-up of Dearborn, the campus itself is marked by new student populations and a new degree of language diversity, in part as a result of Michigan’s own economic realities and the University’s pressing need for diversified revenue streams.

Amid this flux, BW has been the site where linguistic diversity is most *audible*, where “difference is the norm” (Lu and Horner, “Introduction: Translingual Work” 208). New international students on our campus place into BW in high numbers based on a timed writing exam that many take after completing a language proficiency program. This program is on a non-academic track (language courses are open to non-matriculating and

pre-academic students) and arose around the same time as the increased recruitment efforts; there was no need only four years ago for such a program. It also generates fast revenue for the institution. These realities have complicated matters for our Writing Program instructors, many of whom are part-time lecturers, and who, at times, have reported experiencing difficulties teaching BW sections comprised of growing numbers of L2 writers alongside “monolingual” writers. So these rushed, transnational relationships prompted us to consider how we might make some reflective changes to our BW curriculum. These shifting realities have also led us to consider how BW might be the most appropriate locus of larger, programmatic change.

We are mindful of Bruce Horner’s compelling jeremiad that not enough scholarly, critical, and collaborative work toward inquiry into language difference and “difficulty as the norm” (“Relocating” 6-7) is located in the BW classroom, a site he argues is full of potential due to its pluralism and its marginalized position within the university. We wondered, given the growing linguistic diversity in our BW course, how we might craft a curriculum that better responded to *all* the students now sharing space in BW on our campus. Could a transcultural ethos—what we are imagining as a spirit of openness to multiple language practices—do transformative work within our program? We also wondered if both the lecturers who often teach our BW course and the students themselves would resist critiques of standard language ideologies (see Shapiro). Thus we were interested in the pedagogies informed by translanguaging articulated in particular by Suresh Canagarajah and Vershawn Ashanti Young, who argue that “code-meshing” offers agency and performative and reflective opportunities for students through a fairly explicit critique of the ideology of monolingualism. We hoped the BW classroom itself could become a rhetorical situation wherein students, given the agency to choose among a wider array of language options and by performing across multiple languages, dialects, codes, and registers, might in turn challenge instructors to reflect on standard language ideologies.

Though the growing linguistic diversity in our BW program is the product of global-local inequalities and profit-motive, we saw these new transcultural relations opening up important possibilities for approaches to language that could challenge the dominance of monolingualism and prompt teacher self-reflection and dialogue with student writing. That ethos would remain rooted in an awareness of the aforementioned global-local transformations, but also foreground the perspectives of BW students who, we believe—echoing Horner—had the potential to instill in our writing program a greater awareness of the dynamic nature of language across 21st

century milieus. This is how we define “transcultural ethos,” as a programmatic stance that affirmatively and actively works to engage with the distinctive markers of global-local language shifts and encourages the negotiation of these shifts among local stakeholders.

Since we wanted that “ethos” to emanate from students and student writing, a fundamental goal for us was to provide opportunities for basic writers themselves to engage with and reflect on those global-local shifts by such means as writing assignments with optional code-meshing components and critical reader-responses to difficult readings on the topic of language diversity. Seeing, too, an opportunity for collaboration to determine the best ways to move forward, the two of us formed a BW Working Group among BW instructors that would grapple with these decisions in a collaborative manner.

We asked if it was possible to foster a transcultural ethos in (and from) the BW classroom for program reform. This article presents findings about students’ increased language awareness that emerged from our pilot curriculum and an analysis of teachers’ responses to that writing as our intention was to pilot a code-meshing curriculum then “report out” to additional groups of stakeholders on campus (beyond our Working Group and beyond the Writing Program even), continuing to root discussions in student work. Our goal for change was to increase the opportunities for negotiation among the stakeholders in our program. That is, we wanted to give more support to students, but also to the teachers who prompted this assessment.

A WORKING GROUP TOWARD PROGRAMMATIC CHANGE

At UM-Dearborn, our BW course lacked a common syllabus and shared learning outcomes, and although other program courses (a two-course comp sequence, several professional writing courses, etc.) emphasized rhetorical awareness and were guided by learning outcomes, BW had remained neglected. Lecturers who taught the course had reported largely via informal communication at gatherings like professional development sessions and placement exam readings that the course was becoming increasingly diverse vis-à-vis L2 writers. Seeing value in programmatic change rooted in models that are collaborative and collective, we invited program lecturers who regularly taught BW and an experienced Writing Center consultant to consider BW on our campus. Recent scholarship in writing program administration highlights the utility of curricular reform and conceptualizing for program change *collaboratively* (Dunn et al; Ostergaard and Allan) and drawing on

principles of *collective* action (Gillfus); in addition to working collectively toward change, we hoped specifically that change could emanate from the ground-up, i.e., from a consideration of the perspectives of those actually involved in the day-to-day work of BW—lecturers, students (via close consideration of their writing), and writing center professionals alike.

Because we were starting from a place of uncertainty regarding the position of BW in our Writing Program, two broad questions guided the group's inquiry: To what extent did the COMP 099 curriculum serve the increasingly diverse BW student populations on campus? And, might the increased diversity of language practices in COMP 099 broaden the range of our teaching practices? As a group, we read samples of student writing to get a sense of what kinds of work students were doing in the course. Initial observations from these meetings included the following:

- There was no single, monolithic “BW student” but various profiles that included mono- and multilingual students from both the U.S. and abroad.
- The curriculum needed to provide additional support to students of all language backgrounds as they negotiated university expectations, conventions, and codes.
- L2 writers often communicated robust, fully developed ideas with “a high level of specificity” but in many cases struggled to meet the specific expectations articulated on assignment sheets.

Because our initial observations emphasized a need to foster reflective awareness across different rhetorical situations and to provide students with additional time to negotiate the expectations of college writing, the group discussed the viability of abolishing the stand-alone BW course in favor of a stretch or studio model. We considered how a co-curricular studio course—with its foregrounding of reflection on the writing process and in lieu of non-credit bearing BW course—might uniquely foreground the learning model that the group was articulating. (Mike had taught in a studio program during his doctoral program and helped facilitate a robust discussion of how a one-credit studio coupled with our first-semester composition class might meet needs across our established and emerging student populations.) Institutional data, however, showed that the non-credit BW course correlated highly with several markers of student success including baccalaureate attainment. So the group decided to 1) preserve the BW course but pilot a curriculum emphasizing language awareness and 2) create

a one-credit, elective studio course that would provide additional support to all student writers including but not limited to those enrolled in our BW course. Even though teachers saw merit in possibly instituting a large-scale curricular change (i.e., essentially abolishing BW), quantitative data told a story that was compelling to us—a story about student achievement. Data did not *contradict* our own teacherly points-of-view *per se*, but rather provided another, important (we felt), local perspective. And we hoped that action items emanating from the group would be true to the spirit of “ground up” program change.

A PILOT CURRICULUM TOWARD A ‘TRANSCULTURAL ETHOS’

We worked to ground our pilot curriculum in both programmatic deliberations in the field as well as recent scholarship. Indeed, we found useful the wealth of theory-building that has emerged in the wake of the “translingual turn,” drawing on scholarship that defines translingualism not as a specific practice but as an ethos. Lu and Horner define a translingual approach as “a disposition of openness and inquiry toward language and language difference” that “recognizes translation and the renegotiation of meaning” (“Translingual Literacy, Language Difference” 585). Translingualism, then, represents a potential strategy for encouraging students and teachers to regard both dominant and non-dominant discourses as resources for discursive *negotiation* in the academy (Canagarajah, “Codemeshing”; Hanson; M. Lee; Lu and Horner, “Translingual Literacy”; Milson-Whyte; Welford; Young et al.). Emerging studies of translingualism in *JBW* have likewise defined the term *translingual* as an “attitude of openness” (Mlynarczyk 12), positioning students “simultaneously as experts and learners” (Parmegiani 25). For example, Victor Villanueva has observed how code-meshing can foster a valuable recognition of the “the subaltern speaking” (100). Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk’s term “attitude” in particular resonated with us, though we hoped that our “transcultural ethos” would extend beyond “attitude” and encompass not just a stance but a spirit and practice. Similarly, Andrea Parmegiani promotes examinations of “how ways of thinking and using language clash and how these clashes can be implicated in power relations” (32). These are the approaches to language we wanted to cultivate first within the space of our pilot curriculum—and subsequently in our program.

Elements of our Pilot Code-meshing Curriculum

Our curricular choices aligned with several of the “six pedagogic strategies for supporting code meshing” identified by Sara Michael-Luna and Canagarajah. Three such strategies seemed particularly suited to our local contexts: “multilingual text selection,” “modelling written code meshing,” and drawing “knowledge from inside and outside the text” (60). We also emphasized low-stakes writing and the complexity of texts and then brought all of these elements to bear on a culminating literacy narrative assignment.

- *Multilingual text selection*: Articles like “From Silence to Words: Writing as Struggle” by Min-Zhan Lu and “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” by Gloria Anzaldúa helped foreground proficiency in *writing from texts* (summary, critical response, paraphrase, direct quotation, and close-reading)—all consistent with extant program goals.
- *Modelling written code-meshing*: We highlighted writing by Anzaldúa and Young (*Your Average Nigga*) to show how writers might integrate academic discourse with other codes. These texts served as models for composing in multiple codes. They also helped model the kinds of questions students might explore in their own essays. We invited students to practice code-meshing and supported whatever choices students made about what codes to use in their own writing, but also asked them to reflect on their composing process.
- *Drawing on knowledge from inside and outside the text*: We asked students to reflect on the role of language in their own lives, make critical connections with course readings, and examine how their own experiences as readers and writers might support or complicate the ideas about language, power, and genre communicated in the assigned readings.
- *Regular low-stakes writing assignments that worked toward longer, high-stakes (graded) essays*: Assignments would focus specifically on *language awareness* and *code-meshing*; language use would serve as a subject of inquiry for the course, and students would be invited to *discuss* code-meshing as a topic and as a prompt for personal reflection.
- *Assignments that asked students to close-read¹ complex, scholarly texts about language use in transcultural contexts*: We valued the work

of teacher-scholars like Canagarajah and Young and sought to emulate their approaches to language in our pilot curriculum. We asked students to read and respond critically to complex texts like Aleya Rouchdy's "Language Conflict and Identity: Arabic in the American Diaspora" in which the writer's fieldwork was conducted in our own backyard: the Arab-American community of Dearborn. We also found essays by Lu and Anzaldúa useful both as prompts to introduce students to theoretical constructs connected to "the transcultural" as well as examples of texts that highlight, challenge, and even reject genre conventions. We reasoned that these readings could provoke the types of conversations we had envisioned among both the mono- and multi-lingual students and illustrate the types of writing we were inviting, writing that engaged in a deeper awareness of language conventions and genres (not to mention ideologies).

- *The literacy narrative assignment:* A central piece to the final portfolio was a literacy narrative that encompassed all of the above elements. Students were asked to tell detailed stories about some aspect of literacy in their own lives and connect those stories to the global ideas addressed in the readings. The literacy narrative also presented opportunities for reflection about language in the very local-global contexts we started off wishing to foreground. Further, the literacy narrative was a durable assignment across both monolingual BWs, L2 writers, the numerous Generation 1.5 students in the class, international students, and BW students whose language profiles cut across the above categories.

IDENTIFYING STAKEHOLDERS: THINKING BEYOND THE WRITING PROGRAM

The core elements of our pilot curriculum were conceived as a means toward the broader ethos we hoped to foster. More specifically, the ethos we envisioned sought to encourage transparent acts of negotiation in student writing and, by extension, program discourse. Negotiation in these contexts could be thought of in Canagarajah's terms, as "performative competence"—less a set of skills and more a broader ethos of flexibility and reciprocity across diverse, dynamic rhetorical contexts rooted in local practices (*Translingual Practice* 173). For the BW student populations in Dearborn, for example, navigating a semester of BW with classmates who are international students

from Arab nations (and elsewhere), who are second- or third-generation Arab-Americans from multilingual homes, who are more recent immigrants from the Middle East (especially Yemen and Syria), and who are monolingual working-class white students is just one example of many of multilingual-multicultural situations virtually every student would experience. As our study of 1) student writing and 2) teacher comments below shows, we struggled with all of the above concerns and realized that one of the main areas of intervention we needed to consider was how we were constructing and engaging the multiple stakeholders of BW on our campus.

“Stakeholder” is a term we use deliberately to consider the ways different audiences each have vested, and sometimes competing, interests in standard language ideologies. Gaining an understanding of stakeholders within and beyond the Writing Program seemed crucial for any kind of programmatic change. This idea of “stakeholders,” however, bears unpacking because, as Wendy Brown observes, its wide use is burdened by a neoliberal rationale within higher education. For example, the term “stakeholders” can imply that the voices of those invested in BW are more important than those voices within BW because the term “operates through isolating and entrepreneurializing responsible units and individuals” (129). BW becomes a commodity rather than a place of intellectual work. Likewise, stakeholders often have different understandings of student “success,” informed by competing, sometimes conflicting, agendas (McCurrie 30-31). So, our use of “stakeholder” comes with a degree of ambiguity: It has helped us identify important, competing interests, but we do so with a conscious knowledge that it is also symptomatic of the kinds of rushed, globalizing changes we saw taking place on campus.

At the center, we have students and teachers in the classroom, and this is where we began our work of renegotiation and revision. The stake students and faculty have varies. Many international students follow a strict program dictated by their sponsoring nations; our BW class is one of many language courses they have to take. Domestic students sometimes feel slighted to have been put in BW, and so teachers need to earn back their trust or help them (re)build confidence. Some student-stakeholders are matriculating in programs with curricula that leave little room for electives or for deviation from a strongly recommended, prefabricated course plan, and so an “extra” writing requirement seems like a burden. For instructors, student success can be a measure of teacher success, and so the stakes for our BW instructors had been shifting with the new struggles of this dynamic student population. Further, most other instructors of the BW course are part-time lecturers who

have fewer institutional resources than the two of us do. We believed all of these material conditions mattered as much as the conditions that created Dearborn's linguistic and racial diversity.

Most directly connected with international students is the newly accredited English Language Proficiency Program (ELPP), itself tied to international recruitment efforts. The ELPP is one of the audiences with which we have engaged in the most negotiation on our campus. For instance, the ELPP director shared writing prompts and grading scales with us early in this process. At first, we were pleased that ELPP rubrics had a rhetorical emphasis, but then we wondered why students were passing ELPP and then overwhelmingly placing directly into BW rather than our credited writing courses. Another important set of stakeholders, though a slightly more fluid one, includes faculty in other disciplines who have international students in their classes. They occasionally contact the Writing Program or the Writing Center to express concerns regarding student work. We imagined using the results of our study to engage these audiences in future professional development opportunities.

ASSESSMENT OF PILOT CURRICULUM

The two of us piloted our code meshing curriculum in our own five sections over the course of three semesters. We graded our own students' work, and then presented final portfolios to the BW Working Group as artifacts that would prompt our programmatic reflection. That is, readers were not "grading" students, but reflecting on the work as part of a larger sense of program success. We received IRB approval and student consent to analyze eighty-eight student portfolios. Consent to use teachers' comments as data was also obtained. Each portfolio contained two critical essays, one literacy narrative, and one reflective piece. We also received a campus grant to support a reading of these portfolios that we hoped would fulfil at least two purposes: to determine the ways in which the curriculum served student and program needs and to reflect on teacher practice so we could formulate strategies for professional development. Portfolio readers (from the Working Group) examined portfolios by writing comments that contained open-ended questions about the strengths and weaknesses of the writing; the extent to which FYC learning outcomes were being met/approached; the level of language awareness and attitude toward literacy; and the manner in which students were representing culture.

Each portfolio was commented on by two readers, who were prompted to shift focus from the students to the textual performances and the broader program ethos those performances suggested. Data, therefore, for this study took two forms: student writing (final portfolios) and teacher discourse (portfolio commenter sheets). Results from commenter sheets were typed into a text document for coding. Codes were determined by looking at the words readers used to describe student writing (see tables 1 through 3 below). The two of us then collaboratively reviewed the final portfolios and the commenter sheets in an effort to assess the BW pilot curriculum and get a stronger sense of teacher disposition toward students' writing. Below, we present excerpts that reflect our own interpretations of themes we saw in the discourse of the two groups that we believe show how these specific stakeholders spoke to ongoing questions of language diversity in BW.

Findings and Themes: Student Voices

Students described literacy events that illustrated how active “BW’s” take part in 21st century literate activities, like translating for their parents or acclimating to “U.S. culture” (see also Arnold et al.), wrestling with academic constructs from difficult course readings to varying degrees of “success,” and at times opting to utilize multiple codes. We would like to underline four key findings that emerged from student writing during the pilot project that we believe have implications for others interested in transcultural and translingual pedagogies, especially in the BW classroom:

1. Code-meshing seemed to facilitate vivid storytelling, particularly in the literacy narrative assignments.
2. At times these vivid narratives led to critical reflections about the domains of literacy, and these critical reflections incorporated many of the concepts outlined in a translingual approach, such as identity and metalinguistic awareness.
3. Code-meshing appeared to help students make critical connections between local-global contexts, particularly in reflections on their own personal experiences with language use.
4. Although vivid description was valuable, code-meshing did not consistently lead to the kinds of critical, analytic engagement with the contexts of language use as we had intended.

Our code-meshing pedagogy appeared to facilitate vivid storytelling.

We are aware that highlighting “interesting” or “vivid” code-meshed texts by students of color suggests a fetishization, or at least a commodification, of student writing (see especially Inayatulla; Matsuda, “Lure”). But we are hopeful that the idea of *negotiation* can provide a broad framework for how “monolingual” and multilingual students might perform a range of language strategies, including the use of multiple codes, and then seize opportunities for critical and contextual reflection on language choice. Though over half of the eighty-eight students in our pilot sections chose not to code-mesh in ways that included the combination of multiple languages and dialects, those who did tended to inject a level of sensory detail and creative voice into their writing that the two of us found compelling.

Consider, for instance, Ali’s² story about his grandfather. His use of vivid detail and translation *shows* how he imagines himself as a language user:

My grandfather has always told me that for every language I learn, it is as if I have another person within me. . . . For the first years of my life, I grew up speaking English and Arabic, and then learned Spanish in my four years at high school. As I spoke both languages I noticed some differences in each language’s use of a word. A simple example is how your friend would respond to the nickname “dog.” The English language I learned taught me that “Dog” could be used to refer to your friend in a more comical way. I can meet my friend and ask him, “what up, dog?” and he would respond with a laugh or, “what up, G?” In contrast, if I were to address an Arab as (kelb or الكلب), they would be heavily insulted, as we do not see the word dog as an endearment.

For Ali, critical reflection seems to be enacted not only through a discussion of different domains of literacy, but also through interactions with the literacy sponsors in his life (see Brandt). Ali considers his grandfather as an influential figure in his understanding of literacy, and this example also helps him invest in establishing a humorous voice. English idiomatic expressions (“what up, dog?”) and Arab-cum-Islamic constructs (dogs as unclean) converge as English and Arabic converge.

Ali uses familiar literacy narrative tropes—recalling familial memories and important lessons handed down from elders—and freshens these tropes with stories of the multilingual household in which he grew up. (We want

to acknowledge that we are white academics who for all of our training in rhetorical analysis cannot fully understand all the signification behind Ali's use of, say, the term "dog.") But it is not merely Ali's multilingualism that elevates the narrative; rather it's the manner in which the text *embodies* multilingualism: Ali's text plays with multiple languages, creating a kind-of translanguing word game with the "what up, dog?" idiom. His joke hinges on the cultural dimension of dog and the word's dynamic ambiguity to a nineteen-year-old Arab-American Muslim merging an Arabic and an English inflected with the idioms of youth culture. Ali's commentary on language demonstrates negotiation and awareness in ways that position his code-meshed text within the broader perspective of translanguaging. He uses writing to explain his own open disposition toward language use and identity. This kind of example embodies the notion that students in the course can be both learners and teachers (see Parmegiani), as Ali's writing not only is creative, but highlights important perspectives gained specifically from his lived experience as a language user.

At times these vivid narratives led to critical reflections about the domains of literacy.

Students who used code-meshing to show vivid detail sometimes also used code-meshing as a means to critically reflect on the various domains of literacy in their lives (see Barton). For example, Zaina contextualizes her experience with languages at home and at school:

If I try to explain to my mom what I'm doing or how I'm feeling there sometimes isn't the right word to describe in Arabic. My sentence comes out like this 'mama ana kteer z3lane w annoyed,' which translates to mom I've very mad and annoyed. Something that comes out more natural would be me saying something like 'mama ma fee school bokra.' This means mom there is no school tomorrow. . . . At school my language is very sophisticated and it's just one language which is English . . . at home my tongue is all over the place.

Like Ali, Zaina's work asks valuable questions about language-in-context. In this case, Zaina gives us an example of how she uses code-meshed, computer-mediated communications when having an everyday exchange with her mother. She moves toward a more metalinguistic awareness while also writing something engaging and "interesting" to many audiences, though

again we are aware of the problem raised by highlighting an “interesting” code-meshed text by a student of color. We wish to echo Lu and Horner’s suggestion that translingual pedagogies ought to focus not merely on whether student-writers code-mesh, but instead on “how, when, where, and why specific language strategies might be deployed” (“Translingual Literacy” 27). That is, instead of putting an undue burden on students of color, including multilingual students, to produce a code-meshed text, or as Jerry Won Lee puts it, to be “on display” (181), we want to foster a greater sense of agency and rhetorical awareness with all students. Indeed, practices of *negotiation* can provide a broad framework wherein monolingual and multilingual students might deploy a range of language strategies including multiple codes as well as multiple opportunities for critical and contextual reflection on language choice. In this case, it’s not so much a code-meshed text that we found important to highlight, but the adaptation of strategies as Zaina moves between different domains of literacy. Zaina uses the literacy narrative as an occasion not merely to engage in storytelling “enhanced” by the code-meshing “device,” but also to *investigate* how her language use shifts in those different locations. Also like Ali, Zaina *shows* language in flux, while also moving from narrative to critical insight.

Code-meshing was used to make local-global connections.

Our assessment helped us observe more fully the kinds of significant experiences with dynamic language use in local-global milieus that so many of the students in these courses had, many of which challenged the notion that BWs are *deficient*. For instance, another student, Phil, identified as “monolingual,” but wrote about studying Arabic through several immersion programs. He reflected on a time when he got sick while visiting Jordan and was told to consume an entire lemon; the memory stuck. In his writing, he connected language use to this recollection: “To fully use language to your benefit you must taste and use the insides and outsides to receive the full strength of it.” Searching for a metaphor to describe his complex literacy history, Phil investigates and theorizes literacy, showing how slippery the ideas of “fluency” and “monolingualism” are. This metaphor brought his *global* experiences to bear on the specifically *local* contexts of college writing. Elsewhere Phil describes living in an especially multilingual area of Detroit. While shopping in a bodega one day, he witnessed a misunderstanding between the clerk and a customer who spoke different dialects of Arabic. Because the two used different words for “lemon,” they couldn’t understand one another.

Phil uses this as an example of the complexity of linguistic negotiation in a contact zone. Two Arabs from different regions of the Middle East, living in the West, having a misunderstanding overheard by a young U.S. American who happens to have lived in multiple Arabic-speaking nations. The moment also illustrates the value of critical sensitivity to language difference and fluidity. It's not lost on Phil that he was in a position to translate, not only because of his fluency, but also because of his awareness of dialectical difference.

Another student, Tony, typified many of the scholarly conversations on transnationalism that discuss how the nation-state is no longer a definitive demarcation. Tony wrote a narrative titled "Writing Back and Forth," a story of growing up and attending schools in both Mexico and the U.S. In his description of border crossing, he shows how the local and global can dynamically affect both cultural and linguistic practice. He references a saying, "¿Que transita por tus venas aparte del colesterol?" He goes on to write:

[In Mexico we] swirl around a topic until it gradually makes a point. . . . Moving back and forth between the two countries significantly damaged my capability to fully understand either English or Spanish. Even so, this constant move back and forth left me with a mixture of both languages. It has left me to see them in a new perspective. This perspective can seem to correlate with the belief that English is straight to the point while Spanish takes a little more deviation.

Tony points to the idiom above (literally "what moves through your veins besides cholesterol" but figuratively "what's up?") as illustrative of what he sees as the difference between Spanish and English. He incorporates Spanish, but, interestingly, is very much invested in a contrastive impulse, which leads to some rather generalized, unqualified statements about the languages. Still, Tony's work is reflective, rooted in his own experience and, like the written work of some of the other BWs in the pilot, made even more concrete and specific by practices of negotiation.

Deliberate code-meshing did not always lead to critical engagement.

At times, a high level of detail might open up further possibility for analyzing one's own language use and subject position—indeed, Ali's use of Arabic codes arguably opened up possibilities for critical reflection—but

as we found in our understanding of the following examples, the inclusion of multiple codes does not necessarily help writers meet program learning outcomes, like critical engagement with course texts and analytical thinking. For instance, Yasir writes about translating for his mother:

Doctor: Ask your mother how she's feeling?

Me: Mama, Doctor, puch raha hai, kesa lag raha hai?

Mother: Mere ser me dard hai. Doctor se pooch kafi din se dard kyu ho rahi hai?

Me translating back to the doctor: My mom is saying that she having a severe headache and she wants to know why she is having it for several days.

And here, Abdallah describes a common text-messaging practice:

There are some of the Arabs, uses English alphabet but the context is in Arabic. I sometimes use it while I text. Some of the Arabic words is not included in the English alphabet so I use numbers to express them here's a list of some words that I mostly use:

3 means ع

3' means غ

4 means ذ

6 means ط

These excerpts provide insight into the everyday realities of language users, but they also seem to stop their analysis at the level of the example. Abdallah started to make some connections by writing, "Not everyone knows how to write in this way. The young generation like me are the people who most uses it, so if I texted my parents using the English alphabet they may not understand what the numbers stand for." But, the two of us do not see the connection going far enough beyond a factual reporting, or translation, of the texting code, and toward a critical articulation of the context. Deliberate code-meshing does not itself lead the reader to a critical engagement with course readings or help the writer reflect on the global and local contexts of their examples. If we envision literacy narratives as moving from memory to insight, code-meshing appears to help with *memory* more than *insight*. Our goal was to explicitly draw students' and readers' attention to both, to a relationship between language use and critical analysis. But, as these examples imply, perhaps our own conceptualization of code-meshing practices within the literacy narrative assignment was limited. Only after our assessment did

we understand that code-meshing could serve as a stylistic device (especially in the context of a “personal” genre like the literacy narrative). The evidence we saw in student writing showed us that we need to continue to work on the best way to integrate code-meshing into a curriculum that asks students to become more reflective and analytic about language practices. If students thought it was enough to point out code-meshing without connecting such choices to the more global ideas in the readings, for example, then how could we more carefully scaffold the use of personal experience in their writing? Reading these excerpts alongside program outcomes helped us see these limitations. Our assessment *and* our reading of the literature also helped point toward ways we might continue working to avoid commodifying the code-meshed text.

THEMES AND FINDINGS: FACULTY VOICES

A consideration of faculty voices was also important to program reform because it would re-emphasize the kind of ethos and ground-up approach the BW Working Group felt was needed. In fact, faculty voices were actual members of the Working Group who agreed to read student portfolios for this project. The two of us looked at the reader comments and identified at least three themes that indicated possible directions for developing a transcultural ethos in our program:

1. Readers clearly valued reflective student writing, both writing about one’s own struggles and successes as well as one’s place in the local-global contexts of language use.
2. We observed faculty’s attempt to negotiate with student writing in the kinds of “measured” comments readers made. Readers often hesitated when praising or criticizing student writing, and we saw such hesitations as evidence of BW instructors negotiating between the student writing and their own assumptions about language.
3. In explicit comments on grammar and mechanics, we saw a need for a shared vocabulary for talking about language use in our program, one that would deliberately engage teachers in negotiation with multiple stakeholders.

Portfolio readers valued reflective writing.

Reflective writing was valued highly by portfolio readers, who saw merit in writing that performed even minimal “self-awareness,” such as when students would discuss struggles and weaknesses (see table 1). Although perhaps not included in our own thinking about a transcultural ethos, students sometimes commented on their experiences of going to the Writing Center or participating in peer review. Readers also valued broader reflection on language use in local-global contexts, which appeared to help students respond critically to course readings.

Table 1: Reflection

Code	Occurrence	Excerpt
Reflection total	110	“On next-to-last page . . . student recognizes how reading (“ideas come together”) sparks new ideas which then spread (writing). Nevertheless, recognizes a disconnect in himself.”
Reflection on own writing	26	“Self awareness”; “Portfolio demonstrates increased self-awareness and articulates student’s use of good habits like revision and reflections, which will serve her well moving forward.”
Reflection on language use	15	“Reflects on English as a lingua franca in various geographic and professional contexts in two different pieces in the portfolio.”
Needs more reflection	18	“Not much - the literacy narrative is all summary and doesn’t draw from the readings to reflect on own language use.”

The Working Group wanted to preserve and perhaps expand the program’s emphasis on reflective writing. In other courses, reflection often would take the form of a student commenting on their strengths and weaknesses or analyzing the specific choices they made in a given document. The group wanted to emphasize this in BW as well, but as comments showed the two of us, readers were open to seeing reflection on “English as a lingua

franca,” for example, and other ways students might write about themselves as language users.

In terms of fostering a transcultural ethos for our program, we see these comments on student reflective practices as a success, as both students and teachers seemed to consider reflection as something that was both individual and global. But, readers also commented that they wanted more reflection eighteen times, which mirrored our own observations of student writing, that code-meshing and reflection were not successful when “the literacy narrative is all summary and doesn’t draw from the readings to reflect on own language use.”

Negotiation was visible in the “measured” comments readers made.

Excerpts from reader comments revealed to us the kinds of negotiations teachers enter when they encounter linguistic diversity in student writing. Readers confirmed our observations and also saw code-meshing being used to *facilitate vivid storytelling*, particularly in the literacy narrative assignment. Teachers often remarked on the creativity of these rhetorical moves, often saying that they expressed a “confident” tone. At the same time, readers were *measured* in their comments on this kind of code-meshing because the student writing did not always lead to *critical reflection*—a learning outcome of our introductory first-year writing course. Although readers saw promise in the writing, they were not always wholly convinced of the value of code-meshing strategies, partly because there was often a perceived “lack of analysis.” We identified a *measured comment* when a reader undercut their assessment with a “but” or “however.” Readers made some kind of measured comment 182 times, one of the most observable characteristics across all reader responses (see table 2).

Table 2: Negotiation and Measured Comments

Theme	Code	Excerpt
<i>Negotiation</i>	<i>Measured Comments</i>	
	Positive, but struggles	“Language is clear for the most part, but lack of analysis.”
	Negative, but potential	“Could be somewhat long-winded at times—but, wow, what an interesting perspective!”

	Measured, but more	“Speaks Arabic at home, but not mentioned much, only in Daily Writing? So, it’s hard to see the ideas that were connected to the readings.”
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Perhaps these measured comments are evidence of a struggle on the reader’s part to make sense of evolving dynamics in student writing while also holding true to various standard language ideologies. We might think of negotiation in this case as a “relationship” of “place” and “labor” (Inoue, *Antiracist Writing Assessment* 78-80). Readers articulated a relationship with the text that attended to not only the “place” of BW, but the “placement” of students into BW. Readers looked at portfolios alongside the learning outcomes for FYC, but also worked to see student writing within the contexts of the rushed relationships made possible (or imposed) by local-global power dynamics.

Measured comments also prompted us to further consider what a transcultural ethos might mean for our specific writing program faculty. For instance, some students described experiences with different dialects or studying languages in different contexts, but these explorations sometimes stayed at the descriptive stage (or more precisely remained in narrative mode), which prompted portfolio readers to express a desire for a deeper level of critique of these experiences. This resulted in a *measured* reaction from readers who appreciated—though perhaps sometimes commodified—the code-meshed writing as well as the global experiences described in the narratives as experiences. As Inayatulla argues, the literacy narrative assignment itself tends to elicit this kind of racialized, limiting response in academic readers (11). Likewise, this potentially problematic, potentially Orientalist engagement between faculty and student writing is something Matsuda has warned about, that code-meshing pedagogies and unreflective endorsement of a translingual approach to language risk losing critical and theoretical rigor, *our analyses themselves* remaining at the level of narrative description (“The Lure” 478). In fact, the disposition of the BW Working Group might show a lack of negotiation in regards to our role as readers. Perhaps our own readings of code-meshing parallel students’ performances of code-meshing in that if students thought it was enough to describe code-meshing without reflecting on their choices as writers, we also thought it was enough to point to instances of code-meshing without reflecting on our disposition as readers.

Comments revealed an important need for a shared vocabulary for talking about language use in our program.

We asked readers about “strengths” and “weaknesses” because we wanted to know what they might say if these were their own students. Although these were questions that most likely led to the commodification of certain student discourses, readers’ answers also helped us see to what extent standard language ideology was a part of their criteria for success. For instance, readers sometimes identified standard English fluency as a weakness, and from their comments, we identified a vocabulary of how “error” in student writing was described (see table 3). We believe that this vocabulary represents a disposition toward language use that should be a point of teacher self-reflection. The vocabulary for describing fluency was not necessarily a shared one. Terms like “syntax” and “diction” were used sixty-one times to describe “grammar issues” and appeared in comments like, “Paragraphing, diction, grammar, and syntax, occasionally obscuring the thought” and “Some diction/syntax problems become distracting at times.” Often, such grammatical terminology was left undefined.

Table 3: Disposition toward Language Use

Theme	Code	Occurrences	Excerpt
<i>Disposition Toward Language Use</i>	Syntax	38	“Paragraphing, diction, grammar, and syntax, occasionally obscuring the thought.”
	Editing & Proofreading	27	“Some proofreading and editing inconsistency.”
	Grammar	24	“Serious grammar issues, but a definite voice seems to be emerging.”
	Diction	23	“Some diction/syntax problems become distracting at times.”

These disparities show the two of us that we should work toward getting teachers to be more reflective, deliberate, and consistent in the ways they describe not just code-meshed texts, but all student writing. These “grammar” assessment terms appear to evince a type of monolingual ideology that presents the “construct of language” as natural and obvious (Dryer). This

vocabulary for grammar acts as a kind of “code” for a dominant, ideological discourse that hides its prejudice in a reader being “distracted.” If we are to assess language, then our terms for that assessment should be both transparent and arrived at through a more deliberate process of negotiation.

Developing a *shared* vocabulary with teachers through professional development opportunities would help make our grammatical discourse more transparent to one another as well as to students, which would help teachers and students work together to negotiate audience expectations. According to Sarah Stanley, who borrows the idea of “noticing” from second language acquisition studies of “error,” translangual approaches can help teachers and students develop a “disposition toward noticing” (39). Stanley sees value in the study of error *with* students rather than teaching error unidirectionally *to* them. Stanley argues that this collaborative approach can also “foster discursive agency” (39), and we can use such approaches to work with students *and* teachers to develop shared understandings of language use as we cultivate a translangual ethos in our program.

Perhaps identifying a code-meshed product is not as important as using code-meshing for the purposes of negotiation and assessment. That is, engaging in code-meshing pedagogies with both students and teachers opened up the possibilities for student writing and created more opportunity for reflection on how we read. We began to see assessment itself as an act of negotiation and dependent on the dispositions of faculty. In that respect, the pilot curriculum was successful in the eyes of the BW Working Group because it addressed our initial questions about supporting students and it helped us work toward this idea of a transcultural ethos for the program. For example, our inquiry can help teachers be more reflective and deliberate when commenting on student texts, on the grammatical features of student writing. If we are not practicing negotiation, our assumptions about language use fails to provide alternatives to dominating language ideologies, or to what Horner describes as “the English-only variant of the ideology of monolingualism” (Horner, *Rewriting Composition* 55). Similarly, if we are not practicing self-assessment and reflection on ourselves, we risk undermining a transcultural ethos of negotiation. We end up focusing more on the product of a code-meshed text rather than on the actual practices of composing. Perhaps working toward a shared vocabulary is one area in which, as a program, we could engage in a more explicit, sustained negotiation.

LOOKING FORWARD: FOSTERING AN ETHOS, PROBLEMATIZING OUR SUBJECT POSITIONS

We are aware that although Dearborn has unique traits, our campus is most assuredly not the only campus where the BW class can serve as the departure point for critical, programmatic change (a *bottom-up* approach) rooted in student writing, the material realities of all stakeholders, and a critical awareness of global-local language use. In fact, given the frequency with which North American Universities are entering into fast relationships with international partners, we are aware of an *urgency* around building writing programs – especially BW courses and curricula – where inquiry into language diversity can thrive. Building on Horner’s call to situate BW at the leading edge of critical scholarship and work constructing code-meshing pedagogies by theorist-practitioners like Young and Canagarajah, we have documented our process and argued that the assessment and revision of BW curricula can serve as occasions for program-wide conversations about language change. Further, by narrating our pilot of a code-meshing BW curriculum, we show how these changes helped us move toward a greater accounting of local-global contexts, fostering greater student agency (evidenced by their use of a diverse array of “codes”) and a productive negotiation between our increasingly multilingual students and program faculty. We believe our pilot curriculum—which has now become part of program discourse during professional development meetings, interviews with prospective program lecturers and writing center staff, and even conversations with campus stakeholders beyond the program—made strides toward a more critical and transcultural ethos within our program while also highlighting the limits, risks, and problematics of our approach to code-meshing pedagogy.

While we do not see our own program’s narrative as a perfectly generalizable path for other BW professionals to follow, we do see value in creating opportunities for dialogue between multiple stakeholders around language diversity, and we want to advocate that others consider ways to create such opportunities. Our pilot fostered dialogue among students and teachers, including productive “dialogue” between code-meshed student texts and BW faculty of various rank. Ongoing, sustained change (not one-off workshops or brown bags, for instance) is especially warranted when it comes to asking all program stakeholders to reflect on language difference and the material realities of language diversity. And so the story we tell is only part of our program’s narrative.

Institutionally, we have started to meet our goal of provoking programmatic change. We envision ongoing interventions across campus—a sustained attempt to be visible and audible as a program and encourage useful dialogue. Our study led to these additional, tangible steps:

Our BW Working Group began to reach out to multiple stakeholders on campus. Our group attempted to create feedback loops with the rest of the Writing Program, including all full- and part-time faculty, at various points during our ongoing deliberations. The two of us conducted several workshops on working with multilingual writers. In keeping with our goal to dialogue with multiple stakeholders, these workshops were organized in conjunction with our HUB for Teaching and Learning (a campus-wide professional development resource for faculty across the curriculum) in order to sustain collaboration with that active and viable resource and attract as diverse an audience as possible. One such workshop included presenters like the director of the English Language Proficiency Program as well as a colleague from sociolinguistics, who could provide expertise on code-switching and language diversity from a distinct, disciplinary point-of-view.

Our study laid the groundwork for developing a working set of student learning outcomes.

Prior to our two-year project, BW lacked student learning outcomes. Whereas our standard FYC courses have for years been guided by SLOs collaboratively written by program faculty, BW lacked such a guiding or unifying set of principles. Subsequent to our two-year assessment and our pilot study, we worked with participating faculty (our portfolios readers), to write and revise learning outcomes for the BW course. The outcomes are informed by student work in the pilot BW sections and by our discussions of language diversity. Such outcomes are context-specific, and our study was invaluable in this regard because it gave us tangible evidence to present to other faculty invested in student success. The first SLO is “Use writing to make and support critical connections between texts and experiences” and is indicative of the value that portfolios readers assessing the pilot placed on the intersection of the stories that BW students bring with them and the new knowledge gained during the semester (see Appendix).

Our study prompted a working document of “best practices” to share with new BW faculty.

Based on the reflective discussions held by the aforementioned stakeholders, we composed a “Best Practices” document for use by the rotating program

faculty (especially new lecturers) who teach BW. This document contextualizes the learning outcomes and also foregrounds reflection and a critical awareness of language practices and is available to multiple stakeholders via various electronic file-sharing systems used by our program.

Our pilot curriculum became institutionalized.

The pilot curriculum described herein has become a more “official” BW curriculum by virtue of institutional and programmatic documents like those mentioned in this list. Given that our program does not have a “standard syllabus” for multi-section courses like BW, this essentially constitutes an institutionalization of the curriculum.

The BW Working Group developed a new writing “studio” course.

A key finding was the need to foreground opportunities for reflection and metacognitive awareness. Interest in Studio was acute and, building on the BW pilot’s momentum, we invited writing studio scholar John Tassoni from Miami University to lead a workshop for all faculty focused on the Writing Studio model as an alternative to BW “business as usual.” This workshop prompted subsequent meetings with faculty in engineering, history, and education as well as staff from the admissions office, who were all interested in student support. The BW Working Group morphed into a Studio Working Group and proposed and piloted a one-credit “Writing Studio” course, an elective opened to all students but advertised to (among others) multilingual and international students interested in an additional opportunity to reflect on language and the rhetorical situation of college writing. The Studio pilot followed a trajectory similar to the BW pilot: a diverse group of program stakeholders assessed student work during the initial offering and is currently engaged in analyzing the results and disseminating findings to various audiences on and off campus. While Studio does not have a curriculum that explicitly asks students to code-mesh, it is indicative of a burgeoning transcultural ethos by virtue of its mission to demystify a variety of conventions and its radical student-centeredness. Indeed, Studio largely lacks *any* content absent whatever artifacts students bring to class for critical discussion.

We are not holding up our own local situation as a model to be adopted wholesale in other contexts. Indeed, part of our argument is that Dearborn, like other cosmopolitan, 21st century sites, is idiosyncratic in ways that we were not fully considering—and in ways that still present imperatives for ongoing reflection. We also want to emphasize that the above, concrete

steps, though successes, did not materialize thanks to our own, individual or “novel” efforts. In fact, our Writing Program had already made valuable steps toward acknowledging global-local language use and material realities—including computer-mediated exchanges linking first-year and advanced writing courses with sections of English-language writing courses abroad (detailed in Arnold et al). We had hoped to extend these prior efforts in ways that even more systematically and more vertically involved students (especially BWs), and which moved toward fostering the “ethos” or “disposition” we have been describing, and in ways that sustained campus-wide relationships. Indeed the program writ large has sustained its relationship with the English Language Proficiency Program and has recently secured grant funding to collaborate across programs on a longitudinal study of the literate experiences of international undergraduates on campus. Like the Studio project, this initiative also seizes the momentum that started with the Working Group and has a spirit of collaboration around language diversity and continued program reform.

Further, we contend that the juxtaposition of student and instructor discourse in our study suggests that code-meshing has the potential to foster student agency *and* be a means of programmatic change. We recognize the imperative to continue a dialogic process of developing evolving, dynamic learning goals for BW. Students themselves are leading the way, demonstrating how they can deploy an array of language resources across forms, genres, and rhetorical situations. More specifically, we found that code-meshing as a performed, literate practice can foster vivid, detail-oriented prose and even critical self-awareness, though it does not always foster the types of analytic, *contextual* awareness that stakeholders like instructors wished to see. Likewise, program faculty are showing their own agency and responding critically and usefully to what they see and don’t see in student work. We saw the “measured comments” in our study as a small step in that direction, one we can more intentionally build on as we move forward.

A concern, rooted in our subject positions and our relationship to code-meshed student texts, persists as a caution of program reform, especially in how the two of us continue to work with faculty in our program. As we sought to include basic writers in our cultivation of a transcultural ethos, we still run the risk of commodifying student voices and place an undo burden on multilingual, international, and students of color. By giving (primarily Arab and Arab-American) students the option to code-mesh as part of the revised BW curriculum, to what degree have we perpetuated an Orientalist or racialized gaze (cf. Inayatulla; Matsuda, “Lure”), or what Matsuda calls “linguistic

tourism” (“Lure” 482)? Inayatulla warns that “reading for” certain elements in student writing can lead us to see what we want to see. If we encourage faculty to take up code-meshing pedagogy, they might “read for” those acts of meshing in ways that could celebrate them uncritically. They might see codes (say, for instance, a narrative composed in part using Arabic script, like Ali’s) as being merely *included* when our goal for student writing is similar to that of our programmatic changes: we want to change the space itself and craft an ethos, reflective awareness, disposition, and attitude.

We have steps still to take to continue the discussions about language that have begun within our program. In particular, we wish to continue interrogating our own practices at the *programmatic level*—to ensure we are moving beyond “linguistic tourism” (Matsuda, “The Lure” 482), or the uncritical iterations of code-meshing and translanguaging that are not mindful of social and theoretical context. For instance, our BW learning outcomes are still works-in-progress and could certainly better account for *the translanguaging turn*. Likewise at the *classroom level* we hope to remain mindful of similar, potential problematics raised by Inayatulla, who suggests that the literacy narrative alone can often fail to challenge assumptions or affect change. We recognize the imperative for greater structure on the literacy narrative as well as reader-response assignments to foster deeper engagement with readings and a deeper level of critique in line with *both* Inayatulla’s important call to contextualize critically and with faculty and programmatic expectations with respect to critical analysis and engagement with context. We underline that there is an ongoing, hopefully reciprocal, *negotiation* between ourselves as teachers and curriculum designers and our students. We hope that as we ask them to take risks and to be more aware of their own language choices, we are also taking risks and reflecting on our own choices as pedagogues.

However, just because we are invested in the work for material reasons and likewise are tied to the global narrative of the 21st century, our understandings and negotiations are limited by the political realities of BW, shaped by what we don’t know and can’t know. In terms of our own subject positions, as we stated at the outset we are mindful of our own status as mostly monolingual, white faculty members; though we have our own material and perhaps even personal connections to the language diversity of our BW communities, we continue to confront our own limitations and blind spots. As we consider these matters both within and beyond the context of the BW course, we have found that BW is an ideal site to *begin* conversations about language and language change.

Notes

1. As described in Jane Gallop's essay, "The Ethics of Reading: Close Encounters."
2. All student writing is used with permission and all participant names are pseudonyms.

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Appendix

Draft of COMP 099 Learning Outcomes

COMP 099: Writing Techniques

By the end of COMP 099 students will be able to:

- Use writing to make and support critical connections between texts and experiences
- Apply the practices of summary, paraphrase, direct quotation, and close-reading to integrate the writing of others
- Develop strategies for revision and editing in service of clarity
- Demonstrate an awareness of essay genres (as shaped by purpose, organization, and audience awareness)