

# CONTENTS

- 1 A Panoramic View of College Writing 1
- 2 Limited Purposes, Narrow Audiences: The Rhetorical Situations of College Writing 20
- 3 Social Action, Social Inaction: The Genres of College Writing 41
- 4 Each Course Is a Community: The Discourse Communities of College Writing 53
- 5 The Power of Writing across the Curriculum: Writing Assignments in WAC Courses 71
- 6 Implications for Teachers, Tutors, and WAC Practitioners 101

*Appendix A: Institutions Surveyed* 133

*Appendix B: Sample Coded Assignments* 137

*References* 141

*Index* 147

# 1

## A PANORAMIC VIEW OF COLLEGE WRITING

In “The Future of Writing Across the Curriculum: Consensus and Research,” Chris Anson (1993) traces the history of research in Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), from early evidence of writing across disciplines that was mostly anecdotal to current research that emphasizes case study and ethnographic methods. Anson approves of the recent qualitative WAC research that has moved beyond “anecdotes, testimonies, and reports from colleagues,” but he also calls for more large-scale research into disciplinary writing (xvi). Elsewhere Anson (1988) has argued for “larger scale measures of belief and practice” (24) that will explore questions such as, “What does it mean to write in a particular academic discipline? How do the criteria for good writing differ among diverse disciplines? What sorts of instructional beliefs about writing do scholars in different academic disciplines hold?” (3).

Some of the richest WAC research exploring Anson’s questions has come from ethnographic studies of students writing in a course or courses, such as Anne Herrington’s (1985) “Writing in Academic Settings: A Study of the Contexts for Writing in Two College Chemical Engineering Classes,” Lucille Parkinson McCarthy’s (1987) “A Stranger in Strange Lands,” and McCarthy and Barbara Walvoord’s *Thinking and Writing in College* (Walvoord and McCarthy 1991). Even more extensive are recent longitudinal studies of college student writers, such as Marilyn Sternglass’s (1997) *Time to Know Them*, Anne Herrington and Marcia Curtis’s *Persons in Process* (Herrington and Curtis 2000), Lee Ann Carroll’s (2002) *Rehearsing New Roles*,

Anne Beaufort's (2007) *College Writing and Beyond*, and studies conducted by Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz at Harvard (Sommers and Saltz 2004) and Jenn Fishman et al. (2005) at Stanford. These researchers followed a student or a group of students from their first year of college to graduation and beyond, using ethnographic methods to discuss everything from instructors' expectations for writing and students' writing processes, to relationships between composing and contextual factors such as race, class, and gender.

Ethnographic research into writing in the disciplines, however, hasn't provided a large-scale look at college writing in the United States. Other than a handful of researchers in the 1980s who conducted surveys or collected undergraduate assignments from faculty at a single institution or a small group of institutions (Bridgeman and Carlson 1984; Eblen 1983; Harris and Hult 1985; Horowitz 1986; Rose 1983), large-scale research into college writing that could serve as a complement to naturalistic studies has been rare in the field of composition. James Britton and his research team's seminal study of 2,122 pieces of student writing from sixty-five British secondary schools, reported in *The Development of Writing Abilities (11–18)*, has yet to be replicated at the college level (Britton et al. 1975). To use a film analogy, from the outstanding work of ethnographers of writing in the disciplines we have the close-up shot (studies of students' writing in a class or classes in the disciplines) and the mid-range shot (longitudinal studies at single institutions). What this book attempts to provide is the shot that has been neglected in composition research—the panorama.

Through a study of 2,101 writing assignments across disciplines in 100 American postsecondary institutions, I reveal patterns in the rhetorical situations, genres, and discourse communities of college writing that complement, confirm, and sometimes complicate the data from ethnographic research. Although this study sacrifices the pedagogical context and “thick description” (Geertz 1973) of ethnographic research (the panoramic view by its nature does not capture the level of detail of the close up shot), it provides what ethnographic

research cannot—the shot that pans wide enough that larger patterns in the landscape are revealed. These larger patterns concerning college writing in the United States are of interest to WAC practitioners working with faculty across disciplines, writing center coordinators and tutors working with students who bring assignments to their writing centers from a variety of fields, composition program administrators and first-year writing instructors who are interested in preparing students for college writing, and high school teachers looking to create a bridge between high school and college writing. In order to explore disciplinary writing on a larger scale than ethnography, and provide a view of the kinds of patterns in the landscape that will have relevance to all of these various stakeholders in academic literacies, I collected and analyzed one of the fundamental pieces of classroom discourse: writing assignments.

#### **WHAT WRITING ASSIGNMENTS TELL US ABOUT COLLEGE WRITING**

Writing assignments are revealing classroom artifacts. Instructors' writing assignments say a great deal about their goals and values, as well as the goals and values of their disciplines. Writing assignments are a rich source of information about the rhetorical contexts of writing across the curriculum—a source that few composition researchers have made the focus of significant study. Consider, for example, the following assignment from a European history course at Cornell University:

#### **ESSAY 2: DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS**

This assignment requires you to play the detective, combining textual sources for clues and evidence to form a reconstruction of past events. If you took A.P. history courses in high school, you may recall doing similar document-based questions.

In a tight, well-argued essay of two to four pages, identify and assess the historical significance of the documents in one of the four sets I have given you.

You bring to this assignment a limited body of outside knowledge gained from our readings, class discussions, and videos. Make the most of this contextual knowledge when interpreting your sources.

Questions to consider when planning your essay:

- What do the documents reveal about the author and his audience?
- Why were they written?
- Can you discern the author's motivation and tone?
- Does the genre make a difference in your interpretation?
- How do the documents fit in both their immediate and greater historical contexts?
- Do your documents support or contradict what other sources have told you?
- Is there a contrast between documents within your set?
- What is not said, but implied?
- What is left out? (As a historian, you should always look for what is not said, and ask yourself what the omission signifies.)

Because of the nature of the assignment, you will probably not have an overarching thesis, as you would in most papers. Instead, your essay will consist of two parts: the IDENTIFICATION and INTERPRETATION sections.

Even though this assignment is brief, it defines important rhetorical contexts for writing, such as purpose, audience, and genre. The assignment requires “analysis” and “interpretation,” and both thinking strategies are described in ways that are specific to the discourse community of historians. Although the primary audience for the assignment is the teacher, the implied audience can be seen as fellow historians, since students are asked to play the role of discourse community insiders (“As a

historian, you should always look for what is not said, and ask yourself what the omission signifies”). The genre of the assignment is also associated with the work of historians, and the instructor reminds students throughout the assignment that a documentary analysis is more than just a template: it’s a fundamental part of the work of historians. What is valued in this genre, and in this instructor’s notion of the work of historians, is clear from the questions students should consider when planning their essays: quality of analysis, integration of contextual knowledge, and close and careful interpretation.

I would argue that writing assignments like the documentary analysis above are as rich a source of data about college writing as instructor comments or student papers, and *Assignments across the Curriculum* provides a macro-level view of this fundamental classroom artifact. To frame the analysis of the 2,101 writing assignments in the data, I look at the rhetorical situation presented in each assignment (the purposes and audiences), the genres of the assignments, and what these assignments reveal about the discourse communities in which they are situated. The collection of writing assignments tell a complex story of college writing—one that is sometimes disheartening, sometimes encouraging, and hopefully always instructive to composition instructors, writing center tutors, and those involved in WAC initiatives. It’s a story about college writing in the United States that provides arguments for both the continued need for campus WAC efforts as well as the positive influence the WAC movement has had on college writing on campuses where WAC has truly taken root.

## THE RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to provide a panoramic view of college writing in the United States, *Assignments across the Curriculum* emulates the scope of James Britton and his research team’s landmark study (Britton et al. 1975). However, as a single researcher I knew it would be too burdensome to rely on surveying hundreds of instructors or trying to contact instructors individually. The

Internet, and the easy access it offers to instructors' writing assignments, provided the solution. Thanks to the Internet, I was able to gather a collection of artifacts of writing across the curriculum that equaled the sample size of that of Britton's research team. From 1999 to 2007, I collected 2,101 writing assignments from 100 postsecondary institutions across the United States. Because the assignments were collected from the Internet, the research has one important advantage over the surveys of writing across disciplines mentioned earlier. Chris Anson (1988) says of these WAC surveys, "Because most surveys are responded to by choice, even a relatively good return may still represent a skewed sample" (12). As Anson points out, instructors filling out these surveys may exaggerate the importance of writing or the amount of writing in their classes, either to put themselves in a positive light or in an attempt to give the researchers what the instructor thinks they want.

Despite the advantage of the ability to collect a large amount of writing assignments without having to ask for samples from instructors, conducting research via the Internet comes with its own set of problems. Although the assignments I collected were not given voluntarily, the fact that instructors published their assignments on the Internet means they were aware of at least the possibility of a more public audience. Instructors who create their own class websites could be considered "early adopters" of technology, and it's possible that their assignments are fuller or more explicitly laid out than the assignments of instructors who are not using websites. Despite these problems inherent in my study, the advantages of studying a large sample of assignments anonymously outweigh the disadvantages of collecting data from the Internet.

It's important to emphasize that although the assignments in this study were collected from course websites, none of the courses were delivered entirely online. In order to aim for a random and geographically disperse sample, I visited institutional websites through an index of the home pages of accredited colleges in the United States, found at [www.utexas.edu/world/univ/](http://www.utexas.edu/world/univ/). I entered the term "syllabus" in each institution's search

engine and used the first course syllabus that appeared in each of the four categories of natural sciences, social sciences, business, and humanities. An even number of institutions were surveyed in four categories based on the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education: doctoral/research universities, master's comprehensive colleges, baccalaureate colleges, and two-year A.A. colleges (see appendix A for a list of institutions surveyed). In addition to collecting writing assignments, I gathered other online course materials, such as course descriptions, rubrics, writing guides, etc.

*Assignments across the Curriculum* meets the bar set by Britton's large-scale research, but one cannot make generalizations about all of college writing in the United States from my sample. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there were approximately 4,300 US degree-granting postsecondary institutions in 2006–2007, the same time this study was being researched. This means that, with a 95 percent confidence level and 5 percent margin of error, a researcher would need to collect writing assignments from approximately 350 institutions—a difficult task for a team of researchers, much less a single researcher. Although I won't make claims from my sample about all college writing in the United States, I do feel that the prominence of certain patterns in my study can help us make stronger hypotheses about the purposes, audiences, and genres of college writing than we can make with data from a single institution or a handful of institutions. These patterns are discussed through a framework that begins with the rhetorical situations of the assignments—the purposes and audiences—and expands to include the genres of the assignments and the assignments' discourse community contexts.

#### **RHETORICAL SITUATION, GENRE, AND DISCOURSE COMMUNITY: A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING ACADEMIC DISCOURSE**

Given the desire to emulate the scope of James Britton et al.'s (1975) study, I naturally used Britton's influential taxonomy of

functions and audiences as one tool for analyzing the assignments collected. Britton's taxonomy was appealing in part because I wished to replicate Britton's work, applying his taxonomy to writing assignments rather than student writing, but still focusing like Britton did on purposes and audiences for writing. Britton's function and audience categories—and his divisions of writing functions into transactional, poetic, and expressive—are still used in WAC scholarship and faculty development workshops. For example, Britton's taxonomy is used throughout John Bean's (2011) *Engaging Ideas*, arguably the most popular WAC faculty development guidebook, and his taxonomy is referenced in a collection of essays discussing the future of WAC, *WAC for the New Millennium*. Drawing on Britton's taxonomy of discourse gives my research both a connection to the seminal work of the past and a usefulness in the present. Although this study draws heavily on Britton's taxonomy, the recent scholarship in genre and discourse studies has helped me expand upon Britton's taxonomy and present what I argue is a richer way of thinking about WAC—by moving beyond Britton's sole focus on the rhetorical situation of function and audience. Britton and his team conducted their research prior to the growth of genre and discourse studies, and any current analysis of college literacy should include these added dimensions. Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas Huckin argue, "One way to study the textual character of disciplinary communication is to examine both the situated actions of writers, and the communicative systems in which disciplinary actors participate" (Berkenkotter and Huckin 1994, ix). A framework of rhetorical situation, genre, and discourse community accounts for the "situated action of writers," the repeated and typified actions, and the disciplinary contexts that shape rhetorical situations.

Anne Beaufort's model of academic ways of knowing has been especially useful to me in shaping a framework that moves beyond Britton's taxonomy. Based on her longitudinal study of a student writing in college and the workplace, Beaufort (2007) created a model of five overlapping domains of situated

writing knowledge: discourse community knowledge, subject matter knowledge, genre knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, and writing process knowledge. Britton's taxonomy is useful in analyzing the rhetorical knowledge domain of writing assignments, but I also wanted to look at other domains discussed by Beaufort, especially genre and discourse community knowledge, which I saw as helpful additions to Britton's discourse taxonomy. Thus, in addition to the rhetorical situations of this study's writing assignments, I consider groups of assignments that ask students to respond in similar ways to rhetorical situations—"genres." I also consider the social context in which those genres operate—the discourse communities of different academic disciplines. Figure 1.1 provides a visual representation of this expanded framework for thinking about academic discourse. This framework is a tool for analyzing academic

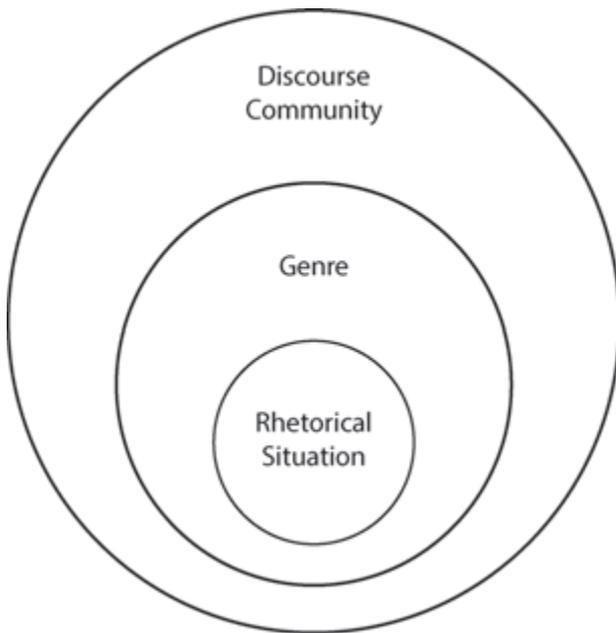


Figure 1.1. A framework for analyzing academic discourse

discourse, but it may also be useful in designing composition courses and WAC workshops, as I discuss in chapter 6. In the rest of this section, I discuss this framework of rhetorical situation, genre, and discourse community.

### **Rhetorical Situation: The Purposes and Audiences of College Writing**

James Britton's multidimensional taxonomy for analyzing written discourse—familiar to many readers of this book—divides writing into three functions, which roughly correspond to different points on the rhetorical triangle: composer (the expressive function), text (the poetic function), and audience (the transactional function). Expressive writing is informal and exploratory, with the self as audience. Poetic writing is imaginative, with a focus on the text as art form. The goal of transactional writing is to transact with an audience, and Britton further divides this function into writing that informs (informative) and writing that persuades (conative).

Based on Timothy Crusius's (1989) critique of Britton's categories, which Crusius feels lack a place for informal writing for an audience beyond the self, this study adds a fourth function to Britton's taxonomy: exploratory. Like expressive assignments, exploratory assignments are informal and focus on exploring ideas, but the audience is public rather than individual. Common examples in this study of exploratory writing are reading responses posted on an electronic bulletin board, which are read and often responded to by peers and the instructor. With the exception of the addition of this "exploratory" function, I utilize Britton's taxonomy to analyze the functions of the writing assignments in my research, but use the more familiar term "purpose" rather than Britton's "function."

This study also borrows from Britton's taxonomy in its analysis of the audiences students are asked to address. I divide audience into four categories: the self, the teacher, peers, and wider audiences. The teacher category is further subdivided into "student to examiner," in which the student provides the "correct" information to the teacher, and "student to instructor," in

which the student is not required to merely regurgitate information. Borrowing from Britton, I break the “wider” audience category into an informed, “insider” audience with specialized knowledge on the topic, a novice audience, and a generalized academic reader. Like Britton, I coded for the dominant purpose or audience when more than one was evident (see appendix B for sample coded assignments). Coding the purposes and audiences of assignments is an inexact science (Britton’s team of like-minded researchers could only achieve a 63.5 percent inter-rater reliability), but the dominance of certain easily recognizable genres with explicit purposes and audiences—especially short-answer exam writing to inform the teacher as examiner—made the task easier. In chapter 2, I discuss the results of my analysis of the rhetorical situations in various writing assignments.

### The Genres of College Writing

As Britton et al. (1975, 1) admits, “there is no satisfactory way of classifying pieces of writing”; although Britton’s taxonomy was a useful starting point, it didn’t capture the rhetorical features of the assignment, which were broader and more complex than purpose and audience. It also failed to provide a sense of which college writing rhetorical situations were common and “typified,” to use Carolyn Miller’s (1994) term for describing genres. Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway argue that Britton’s taxonomy is limited because it fails to consider the complexities of genre (Freedman and Medway 1994, 12), an understandable omission considering Britton and his team conducted their research prior to the growth of genre studies. Examining purposes, audiences, *and* genres is one way to begin to account for the complexity of the rhetorical features in college writing assignments.

Rather than simply classifying genres by formal features, as surveys of college writing conducted prior to the growth of genre studies had done (Bridgeman and Carlson 1984; Eblen 1983; Harris and Hult 1985), this study follows the lead of

recent work in genre studies (Bazerman and Paradis 1991; Devitt 2008; Miller 1994; Swales 1990) and defines genres as responses to recurring rhetorical situations rather than simple templates of form and format. As these theorists argue, genres are impossible to deduce from the structure of the discourse act alone. Rather than imposing static categories on dynamic uses of language by classifying genres by formal features, the aim of this study is to provide a sense of the rhetorical context of writing assignment genres: their purposes and audiences, their social exigencies, and how they vary from discipline to discipline and instructor to instructor. I focus on genre in chapter 2 with an extended look at the two most prominent genres in my study: research papers and exams.

### **The Discourse Communities of College Writing**

Any discussion of academic genres would be incomplete without consideration of the context in which genres occur: the communities of writers and readers who use genre to make meaning. As Beaufort (2012) argues, when genre theory is “used alone as a tool for assignment design and writing instruction, such theory conflates the construct of genres with larger social constructs, such as discourse communities or activity systems” (480). Beaufort suggests that discourse communities “need to be accounted for” in any WAC research (481), and in my research I discuss what writing assignments reveal about the discourse communities of academic disciplines, as well as the broader discourse community of academic writing in the United States, represented by the 100 institutions in the study. My research explores two primary questions regarding academic discourse communities: Is there such a thing as “academic writing”? And in what ways are expectations for writing similar and different across courses in the same discipline? These are the kinds of questions that lend themselves to the macro scale of this study.

To get at a suitable definition of the slippery term “discourse community,” I rely on the work of John Swales (1990), who posits the following qualities:

- A discourse community has a broadly agreed set of common public goals.
- A discourse community has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members.
- A discourse community uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback.
- A discourse community utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims.
- In addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired some specific lexis.
- A discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discursive experience. (24–27)

Using Swales's definition, I ask of the assignments in my research: Is there a broadly shared set of goals across all the assignments, or within specific disciplines? Are there shared academic genres across and/or within disciplines? What discursive experience is needed to be a successful academic writer?

My hope is that readers will find the framework of rhetorical situation, genre, and discourse community a useful update of Britton et al.'s (1975) taxonomy, one that takes into account the current scholarship in genre and discourse studies, while also largely retaining the taxonomy of his seminal research and replicating it at the college level. As discussed in chapter 6, this updated framework can be used by composition instructors as a way of thinking about curriculum design, by composition studies researchers as a means of analyzing academic discourse, and by WAC practitioners as a faculty development tool.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Chris Anson's (1988) questions regarding what it means to write in particular academic disciplines, and how criteria for good writing differ among diverse disciplines, were my foundation as I developed research questions that the data—the collection of 2,101 undergraduate writing assignments from four disciplines—could begin to answer. As I considered the landmark work of Britton, the more recent work of WAC ethnographers,

the scholarship in genre and discourse studies, and my own initial reading of the assignments in my collection, I shaped a number of research questions:

- What purposes are students asked to write for in different disciplines?
- What audiences are students asked to address? What role are they asked to play as writers? What role do instructors play as audience?
- What genres are students asked to write in? How do these genres vary from discipline to discipline and instructor to instructor? What is the rhetorical context for these genres?
- How do academic discourse communities differ? Is there a generalized definition of academic discourse that crosses disciplines?
- How do assignments vary across types of institutions, between upper and lower division courses, and between courses associated with a WAC program or initiative and those not connected to WAC?

From reading Britton, I knew that one of the benefits of a large-scale study of writing would be the ability to note significant patterns using a quantitative method. Britton's overwhelming quantitative data about the number of secondary school writing assignments that were merely informative writing to the teacher-as-examiner both depressed and impressed me, and the numbers in my research tell a similar—and similarly overwhelming—story. But numbers only portray part of the story, and the rich textual evidence found in the writing assignment descriptions—and related classroom artifacts such as grading rubrics, writing guides, and course outcomes—provide equally valuable qualitative data. I present both quantitative distribution tables of writing assignment characteristics as well as textual evidence from the assignments.

**WRITING TO LEARN AND WRITING IN THE  
DISCIPLINES: A MULTIPLE-LENS APPROACH  
TO ANALYZING COLLEGE WRITING**

In addition to using quantitative and qualitative data to analyze and report the results of the research, this study uses multiple

theoretical lenses to consider the implications of those findings. In order to present a sophisticated interpretation of the findings that takes into account the multiple approaches of the WAC movement, this study considers the purposes, audiences, and genres of the writing assignment through the two primary approaches (or lenses) to WAC: Writing to Learn (WTL) and Writing in the Disciplines (WID). The WTL approach focuses on bringing expressivist pedagogies—such as freewriting and journaling—to instructors across disciplines. Often associated with founding WAC movement theorists and practitioners such as Art Young (1982), Toby Fulwiler (Fulwiler and Young 1982), and James Britton (Britton et al. 1975), the WTL approach encourages teachers across disciplines to see writing as a tool for student learning and self-exploration.

The WID approach—sometimes referred to as “learning to write” or “learning to write in the disciplines”—is also focused on shifting more attention to writing across the curriculum, but emphasizes the investigation of writing in different academic discourse communities to help instructors initiate students into those discourse communities of their disciplines. WID theorists, such as Anne Herrington (1985) and Charles Bazerman (Bazerman and Paradis 1991) tend to focus on WAC as a means of helping students prepare for academic discourse. Part of this preparation includes understanding the sociopolitical contexts of initiation into academic disciplines.

Whether it was James Britton’s (Britton et al. 1975) discouragement over the absence of expressive writing required of British secondary school students, or Mike Rose’s (1983) creation of a first-year writing curriculum based on disciplinary writing expectations from his survey of UCLA faculty writing assignments, a number of prior researchers who investigated WAC on a large scale predominately used either a WTL or WID lens to consider the significance and implications of their research. Researchers looking at their data through a WTL lens tended to focus on what was missing from academic discourse, rather than fully considering the richness of the disciplinary knowledge reflected in their data. Conversely, researchers

looking at their data through a WID lens often fail to see some of the ways that academic writing might limit student expression or their ability to make personal connections to the subjects they are studying and writing about.

Prominent WAC theorists have claimed that this WTL/WID split in WAC research and practice is artificial, and they argue for a dialogue between the two approaches (Jones and Comprone 1993; McLeod and Maimon 2000; McLeod and Miraglia 2001; Thaiss 2001). McLeod and Miraglia (2001) discuss this need for integration in their chapter “Writing Across the Curriculum in a Time of Change” in the book *WAC for the Millennium*:

We cannot emphasize too strongly that it is an error to see writing to learn and writing to communicate as somehow in conflict with each other. Most of us who have been involved in WAC programs from the beginning see “writing to learn” and “writing to communicate” as two complementary, even synergistic, approaches to writing across the curriculum, approaches that can be integrated in individual classrooms as well as in entire programs. (5)

I agree with McLeod and Miraglia, that neither a WTL or WID approach alone is an adequate way of thinking about how composition instructors and WAC practitioners might approach the writing that happens across disciplines. Rather than viewing the results through a single, “terministic screen,” to use Kenneth Burke’s (1969) phrase, this study considers the assignments from both WTL and WID perspectives. This multiple-lens approach is especially valuable because the findings of the study suggest the influence of both approaches, as well as points of connection between them. For example, the research reveals a dominance of short-answer exam writing that both WTL and WID approaches can effectively address, and it indicates that both approaches to faculty development have had a powerful and positive influence on instructors who are teaching in courses explicitly linked with a WAC initiative, with the two approaches often working together in an instructor’s sequence of assignments. At the end of each chapter, and especially in

chapter 6, I consider the implications of my findings through both WTL and WID lenses, and I work to connect the two approaches.

In the following chapters, then, I provide a framework for thinking about academic discourse that expands on the work of Britton and integrates current scholarship in genre and discourse studies, as well a way to interpret findings from studies of WAC that takes into account and integrates the multiple lenses of WTL and WID.

### **OUTLINE OF THE BOOK**

In chapter 2, I discuss the rhetorical situations—the purposes and audiences—of the 2,101 writing assignments in the study. This chapter provides both a statistical breakdown of the purposes and audiences students are asked to write to in the assignments and a close textual analysis of these purposes and audiences. Included in chapter 2 are examples from assignment descriptions as well as related materials often available on the class websites, such as syllabi, rubrics, course learning outcomes, writing guides, etc. This chapter relies on Britton et al.'s (1975) taxonomy of function (purpose) and audience, while adding “exploratory” purposes for writing, defined as informal writing to a wider audience, such as electronic discussion board journal posts. My research, like Britton's, reveals limited purposes and audiences for writing, with informative writing to the teacher-as-examiner predominant across disciplines and at every level, from first-year introductory courses to senior seminars.

Chapter 3 moves from the individual rhetorical situations of the writing assignments to repeated, “typified” rhetorical situations with similar purposes, audiences, forms, and formats—“genres.” In light of recent work in genre studies, chapter 3 considers not the formal features of genres, but their social action—their rhetorical contexts and how they might shape students' experiences of various disciplines. To this end, rather than simply doing a head count of genres, I look closely at the rhetorical contexts of the two predominant genres in the study:

research papers and short-answer exams. I argue that the kinds of extended research writing found in the study might cause both compositionists and WAC theorists to rethink stereotypes of the research writing our students are assigned outside of composition classes. Unfortunately, the predominance of short-answer exams in the genre data confirms some of our worst fears about the limited ways instructors use writing outside of composition classes. This may cause WAC theorists to rethink current beliefs about the varieties of genres students encounter as they enter into and progress through their majors.

Chapter 4 discusses writing assignments in the broader context of discourse communities, exploring the question, “Are there qualities of academic writing that academic discourse communities have in common?” Chapter 4 discusses the ways these assignments reveal differences across academic discourse communities, including significant differences in what instructors within the same sub-disciplines value in student writing. This chapter presents a paradox that speaks to the complexity of academic discourse as represented in the assignments: there is a generic notion of academic discourse that cuts across disciplines, while at the same time there are significant enough differences between disciplines and among teachers in the same discipline that the term “discourse community” is slippery at best.

Of the 400 courses in the research, 12 were affiliated in some way with a WAC initiative. These were courses labeled “writing intensive,” courses offered by instructors in a multidisciplinary campus writing unit or connected to an adjunct peer tutoring program. Chapter 5 looks more closely at these WAC courses in order to support an argument for the important influence WAC has had on writing education. Chapter 5 illustrates that the writing assignments from courses connected to a WAC initiative truly stand out as richer and more complex. The WAC courses provide students with more sophisticated and more clearly articulated rhetorical contexts, a greater variety of genres, more opportunities for revision and feedback, and more writing overall than those not connected to a WAC initiative.

Although I build on chapter 5 to make an argument for the value of WAC in my conclusions in chapter 6, I also argue that the dominance of informing to the teacher-as-examiner, and the genre of the short-answer exam, point to the continued and pressing need of the WAC movement as a tool for reform. Because I view my results through the multiple lenses of WTL and WID, I argue for the significance of my findings on multiple fronts: WTL researchers would be pleased with the amount of exploratory journal writing I discovered, but would bemoan the continued absence of expressive writing. WID researchers would be especially interested in the kinds of extended research writing I found, and what the writing assignments reveal about academic discourse communities. Both WTL and WID researchers would see some of the limits of the assignments in the study—especially the predominance of short-answer exam writing—and the positive influence of WAC initiatives on writing assignments as arguments for the continued need for and value of WAC efforts. In this final chapter, I discuss the implications of my findings for first-year writing instructors, writing center tutors, and WAC workshop leaders.