An Informed Pedagogy:
Using the Writing Program Administrators Outcomes Statement to
Design First-Year Composition Curriculum

by

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ABSTRACT

The discipline of rhetoric and composition established the Writing Program Administrators Outcomes Statement (WPA OS) to fulfill a general expectation about the skills and knowledge students should be able to demonstrate by the end of first-year composition. Regardless of pedagogy used, academic preparation of the teacher, or preference of particular topics or types of assignments, the WPA OS is versatile. This dissertation employs a problem-solution argument showcasing methods to improve assignments through intentional use of the WPA OS for a fluid conversation throughout first-year composition and a more clear articulation of course goals.

This dissertation includes summation, analysis, and synthesis of documents that inform first-year composition curriculum from foundational organizations within the field, including National Council of Teachers of English, Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Writing Project, and Conference on College Composition and Communication. This study uses the WPA OS as a lens to examine and revise writing assignments that aid in students’ comprehension of the WPA OS with particular focus on the areas of rhetorical knowledge and critical thinking, reading, and writing. Framing assignment design with theoretically grounded content and the use of common topics throughout first-year composition is one way to operationalize the WPA OS. Using common topics throughout course content presents opportunities for teachers to include detailed scaffolding in
assignments that expand students’ literate practices and engage students as critical thinkers and writers.

This study explores how using the topic of family, a common topic to all students, provides a rich bank of social, historical, and cultural elements for research and writing. The topic of family seamlessly employs multimodal composition, which presents students with opportunities for developing rhetorical knowledge and expanding students’ literacies. This dissertation displays evidence of praxis of the WPA OS from assignment development to presentation of student samples. This study recommends the use of common topics and intentional application of the WPA OS to construct assignments that clearly articulate learning goals in first-year composition.
Dedicated to my family—the ones who raised me in life and the academy.

This work is written in memoriam of my grandmother
Emigene Price Rankins
the first person who believed
I would be “a real good school teacher.”

Nearly every memory I have of my childhood is with my grandmother. My most vivid and earliest memory of her is watching as she stood in front of the kitchen sink cutting an apple. As she gazed out the window at the large oak tree that stood releasing burnt orange leaves announcing the arrival of fall, one of her hands cupped a shiny granny smith apple while the other hand held a small kitchen knife gently like a pen, which slowly grazed the edge of the green peel. Half of the apple was naked while the other half dressed; a long green ribbon hung in one strand from the apple.

She held it just about the height of her waist while the ribbon hung nearly to the hem of her knee-length skirt. The morning sunlight beamed in the window onto her pale face. Her hand-towel lay across the edge of the sink as she turned and said to me, long before I was old enough to go to school, “Honey, I think you’re gonna make a real good school teacher.” What seemed like all morning I sat talking to her and watching as she delicately undressed the apples to bake a pie that I had requested for supper.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project brings into fruition the professional vision I had for myself when I began as a student in Ms. Mueller’s composition course at the University of Missouri-St Louis in the fall of 1994. I am grateful to the professional development, academic engagement, and personal support I have received along the way that has allowed this to happen. First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Duane Roen, my chair and mentor. Duane has been a parent to me in every sense of the word; he has advised me, provided opportunities for me, and always considered what was best for me. I am thankful to my committee members, Keith Miller and Claire Lauer, who have supported my ideas and this project. I am grateful to Keith for his endless encouragement and for role modeling the life of a scholar. Thanks to Claire who provided counsel on teaching with multimodality and for showing up in my classroom to teach the teacher.

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the motivation to complete this project through the countless hours she spent with me and my writing. She cheered me on in the moments I most needed encouragement.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

My objective in writing this dissertation is to call other writing teachers to rethink and redesign writing assignments for clearer articulation of learning outcomes, specifically the Writing Program Administrators Outcomes Statement (WPA OS) for first-year composition (FYC). The discipline of rhetoric and composition established the WPA OS to fulfill a general expectation about the skills and knowledge students should be able to demonstrate by the end of FYC. In this dissertation, I explain how using a common topic, such as family, as a thread through all writing assignments in FYC opens an array of opportunities for teaching and learning with the WPA OS; however, the focus of this project is student achievement of the WPA OS through intentional and pedagogical uses of specific areas of the WPA outcomes statement in writing assignments.

In “Beyond Outcomes,” Rich Haswell describes how outcomes are used for assessment. Assessment is often seen as evaluation conducted near the end of a course. I am arguing in this dissertation for outcomes to be at the forefront of the course and purposefully integrated in assignments with focus on the WPA OS throughout every step of the writing process; this includes but is not limited to: considering what topics are optimal for student achievement of the WPA OS, evaluating effective methods for engaging students with course materials to develop rhetorical and critical learning skills
through the writing process, designing student assignments as building blocks with an intentional focus on the WPA OS, and reimagining the array of student projects as a response to writing assignments based on all current available means. When this kind of focus is placed on the learning outcomes throughout the course, students are able to develop course portfolios that more clearly illustrate knowledge of the WPA OS.

This dissertation focuses not only on what students will do in their FYC courses, but also on how faculty must be meticulous in building curriculum for student engagement and participation. Through my research, I have found that very little has been written about the WPA OS, including methods for teaching with it. A slim stack of FYC textbooks have begun to include the WPA OS, while several FYC textbooks mention the WPA OS in the preface. The WPA Listerv hosts regular discussion around the WPA OS and continues to develop materials that support it. The WPA OS has been in circulation for more than ten years and has been widely accepted throughout the discipline of rhetoric and composition as the cornerstone of curriculum for FYC. A keyword search of “Writing Program Administrators Outcomes Statement” generated 2,110 results on Google; most of the results are references on English department Websites where some version of the WPA OS is being used for learning outcomes. However, there are few published articles or scholarly sources on understanding or teaching with the WPA OS. In a CompPile search of “WPA Outcomes
Statement,” the results yielded 47 items. Half, or 23 of those sources, are tied together in an anthology, *The Outcomes Book*. In his review of *The Outcomes Book*, Edward White says the WPA OS has “professionalized the first-year writing course” (113). The WPA OS is not only theoretical or strictly pedagogically-theoretical in nature, but also it serves as a practical tool that teachers can use to re-envision FYC curriculum development.

Regardless of pedagogy used, academic preparation of the teacher, preference to particular topics or assignments, the WPA OS is versatile. White says the initial concerns during the framing of the WPA OS were that the set of outcomes would “narrow the field, force teachers into the same curriculum, ignore vast diversity of American education or homogenize textbooks” (113). Due to a thorough integration of rhetorical language and theory within the WPA OS, I believe teachers trained in rhetoric and composition are at an advantage in being theoretical prepared to meet curricular needs of teaching with the WPA OS; however, this is not to suggest that teachers trained across the spectrum of English education or even in other disciplines could not be successful at helping students accomplish the areas outlined in the WPA OS. In other words, this document provides an equalizer for teachers prepared in a variety of disciplines to offer students a common understanding as foundation to the discipline.
The WPA OS is flexible enough to accommodate a variety of pedagogies, topics, and “favorite” assignments while still offering a sound theoretical and pedagogical assessment method that can be integrated throughout the tasks and projects assigned to students in any FYC course. For example, as a way to operationalize the WPA OS for students in my FYC courses, I began using family history writing as a topic to be explored throughout the duration of my courses. Students’ exploration of the common topic of family requires them, as writers, to engage with both primary and secondary research in order to blend family history with social history; this oftentimes leads to connections between many disciplines, such as composition, history, political science, anthropology, and sociology.

Writing about family throughout FYC presents students with reasons to explore language, culture, and influences on the family unit and society. Students can investigate the social construction of an individual, sometimes themselves, by looking at issues that influence the family within a historical and social paradigm. Family history writing presents the opportunity for students to investigate culture and literacy with a personal interest and emphasis. At the same time, using the topic of family provides teachers with a rich discussion about new ways to conceive of FYC curricula using a topic that is common to every student in every class. While family can be viewed from many lenses, I believe one of the benefits of using family is that students can examine the topic from not only an academic perspective, but also
from a communal and social perspective. I have found the topic of family to be successful for my students in responding to the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing section “habits of mind” (e.g., elements of: curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, and flexibility.) Students engage in writing experiences that “best prepare students for success” (CWPA, NCTE and NWP) both inside and outside the university, which are universal goals of FYC.

Hopefully readers can see application of their own interests based on this body of work where I use the topic of family. The primary focus of this project aspires to demonstrate methods for achieving the WPA outcomes while the secondary focus is to use common topics, such as family, to successfully achieve non-threatening, learner-centering education. The goal of my dissertation is not to convince readers to use family writing but rather persuade readers to consider how FYC curriculum needs to be reconsidered for teachers and students to be more intentional through integration and application of the WPA OS. While teachers could use a spectrum of topics, such as nature, pop culture, technology, or music, I believe it is important to select a topic that is common to all students in the course.

I have found the topic of family to be universal regardless of students’ nationality, age, educational preparedness for college, or set of goals and values. Family is a topic that can easily connect
disciplines across the university within the composition classroom. With the topic of family, students can see relevance of current global, social, and political issues to historical contexts. The multiplicity of this topic can assist in establishing for students that skills developed in composition are communicative and thinking skills that exist beyond the academy.

Family history writing presents students with opportunities for meeting the WPA OS, specifically in developing rhetorical knowledge through: determining effective ways to share materials often presented in multi-genres and multi-modes; asking students to construct texts that adhere to the needs of an audience, oftentimes extending outside of the classroom, as a multiple use of writing; comprehending the rhetorical situation and purposes for writing; interpreting appropriate formality and linguistic choices that meet the needs of the readers. This understanding promotes student engagement in the social-construction of a family, sometimes their own family, as a means of engaging critical thinking, reading and writing. Additionally, students are invested in the process that prepares them for other academic and professional endeavors. Writing about family brings a nearly seamless transition to source-based writing and using digital technologies in composition, which fosters the key components of both the areas of rhetorical knowledge and critical thinking, reading, and writing, and enhances students’ literacies, which adheres to the 21st Century Curriculum and Assessment Framework.
Using one topic—such as family—throughout the FYC course can help teachers be more intentional about the WPA OS. I believe, when teachers are more intentional about the WPA OS, using a common topic throughout a course will enable them to apply, discuss, teach, operationalize, and help students make a personal connection to the WPA OS. A combination of the WPA OS and a common topic, like family, provides a way for teachers to forge a meaningful context in which students can apply and personalize the WPA OS and then evaluate their work in achieving those actual outcomes.

Consequently, this dissertation makes several recommendations that aim to address: FYC teachers must use assignments as building blocks throughout their courses to help students achieve and work through learning outcomes; re-envision the use of "traditional" assignment formats, such as personal essays, is a necessity in helping students achieve understanding of rhetorical knowledge (one of the outcome areas of WPA OS); close examination of ordinary terms, like family, can engage students in critical thinking, reading, and writing skills. In this dissertation, I have placed specific emphasis on only three of the five outcome areas: rhetorical knowledge, composing in electronic environments, and critical thinking, reading and writing. I believe that process has become a staple in almost every composition teachers’ practice since the mid-1980s; therefore, I do not address uses of process throughout this project. I assume the use of process and discuss assignments through the application of process-based
instruct. Additionally, teachers have focused on integrating surface features (sometimes to a fault) and documentation issues in order to respond to the WPA OS area of knowledge of conventions, so this also has not become a focus for the scope of this project.

**Project Overview**

This dissertation begins by exploring conversations and documents that inform curriculum development for FYC, with specific focus on the Writing Program Administrators Outcomes Statement (WPA OS). This dissertation directly points to methods for developing writing assignments that meet the learning outcomes for 21st century writers. I designed this research project to examine the application of four current curricular documents within the discipline, which were developed to support the teaching of composition. With curriculum that uses the WPA OS as a foundational text and incorporates recommendations from “Multiple Uses of Writing,” “21st Century Curriculum,” and “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing,” the dissertation examines a writing assignment and offers steps for revising the assignment with the theoretical lens of WPA OS. This revision results in a careful, yet creative assignment for helping students to meet the WPA OS.

This dissertation offers methods of modernizing writing assignments to more clearly respond to the outcome concerning rhetorical knowledge described in the WPA OS. By using common topics to students, such as family history, students have the
opportunity for personal investment in the composition process while producing texts on topics that could be more meaningful to them. The concept of family offers a scaffold for foundational writing skills that resonate throughout writing processes as noted in the WPA OS.

An argument for using the topic of family is presented as a response to bringing together the either/or conversations within the discipline that have shifted between teaching social, critical studies and teaching personal writing. This dissertation expands these conversations and suggests that writing courses should employ both research-based writing along with topics of personal interest to students. Production of family texts is not foreign to the composition classroom. Students have been writing about the self and/or community for some time, but research and personal writing have not typically been brought together.

Textbooks have perpetuated the existence of assignments, like the personal essay, that are less effective in meeting the WPA OS. Traditionally in personal writing, students explore experiences of self, sometimes within families; however, family history writing moves the writer beyond the personal experience to the contextualized social, cultural, and historical experience. Students must access research to examine and develop a context, which employs the critical thinking, reading, and writing skills described in the WPA OS. With particular focus on students engagement with research and production of
multimodal composition, an argument for achieving stronger literacy skills for FYC students is offered.

**Chapter Organization**

Chapter 2, “Documents that Inform First-Year Composition Curriculum,” discusses what skill sets and knowledge composition teachers aspire for students to be able to achieve by the end of FYC. This chapter examines four key documents, “The Multiple Uses of Writing,” “21st Century Curriculum and Assessment Framework,” “Writing Program Administrators Outcomes Statement,” and “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing” that inform curriculum development; these documents come from the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the Executive Committee of National Council of Teachers of English, the Conference of College Composition and Communication, and the National Writing Project. The theoretical foundation of this chapter, and the dissertation project as a whole, is the WPA Outcomes Statement (WPA OS). This chapter aims to highlight characteristics located within the artifacts that should be used for composition course design for FYC. This chapter serves as an anchor for future chapters that show application of the theory from the artifacts, presented in this chapter.

In chapter 3, “Designing Assignments that Incorporate the WPA OS,” I demonstrate strategies for constructing effective writing assignments through the intentional use of the concepts and language of the WPA OS within writing assignment handouts. The chapter
provides guiding principles for developing assignments that clearly articulate to the student not only the learning outcomes of the project, but also the step-by-step scaffolding of the decisions students need to making within the assignment. The chapter illustrates the redesign of a family history writing assignment, which is defined, using the WPA OS.

In chapter 4, “Achieving Rhetorical Knowledge through Family History Multimodal Composition,” I argue for updating essay-based personal writing assignments to include family history writing projects that employ multimodality as a step toward teaching rhetorical knowledge. The chapter offers support for modernizing composition projects that include source-based writing projects on personally-invested writing topics with recommendations for using family history writing. The chapter includes a discussion of multimodal composition and offers an analysis of examples of student projects in all media.

Student work showcasing examples of using multimodal composition to meet rhetorical knowledge was selected from a sample group of 100 students of ENG 101: First-Year Composition classes that I taught, in the fall 2009, at a southwestern university. Data was collected from all students, and students were provided the Institutional Review Board (IRB) letter at the start of the term, which was included in my approved request (see Appendix A) from my university, stating that participation was optional. After final course grades were posted for the class, I requested exit interviews where I
obtained student signatures on consent forms, which allowed me to
discuss and show examples of work that focused on the theme of
family.

Chapter 5, “Engaging Students in Critical Thinking, Reading, and
Writing,” begins by offering a synthesis of supporting documents for
critical thinking, reading, and writing, which include, “The Information
Literacy Competency Standards of Higher Education,” “The Framework
for Success in Postsecondary Writing,” and “21st Century Literacies
Curriculum and Assessment Framework.” These documents provide
suggestions for student achievement of the learning outcomes desired
in the WPA OS section critical thinking, reading, and writing. The
chapter discusses how exploring and redefining the metanarrative of
family responds to the critical thinking, reading, and writing section
and promotes information literacy skills.

Chapter 6, “New Ways of Conceiving the FYC Curriculum,”
summarizes and elaborates the emphasis needed within curriculum
design through the concepts of the WPA OS. I make recommendations
and offer suggestions for future research not only in the area of
Teaching and learning with the WPA OS, but also the topic of family.

A couple of the terms used throughout this project may need
clarity; those include writing and text. When I refer to writing, I mean
to imply composing that could be used in any media. Writing is not
limited to a linear, alphabetic process; however, I purposefully use the
terminology “family history writing” rather than family rhetoric or
family composition due to the accessibility and potential interpretation of the terms. Another term I use throughout the dissertation is text, rather than paper or project, as I am referring to any type of composition that might be available in multiple genres or media.

This dissertation does not attempt to cover the basics of writing instruction or assessment. It is written with the assumption that teachers are familiar with the history of the discipline and instructional methods for teaching writing. Instead, this dissertation aims to offer suggestions for teachers to improve the possibilities for students to be successful and supported in meeting the WPA OS.
Oftentimes teachers of composition begin envisioning a course by thinking about what they want students to write about and then locating a textbook or source materials that support a specific type of assignment. Other teachers, perhaps teaching assistants, may consider topics, such as popular culture, or purposes for writing, such as argumentation, and then locate materials that support the topic and/or purpose; once the materials are in hand, then the teacher may begin to think, “What kinds of assignments might I ask students to write on this topic,” or “What forms of argumentation will I ask students to produce?” Many times the textbook a teacher locates has a range of assignments already included within the material, so the teacher may simply elect to assign the writing projects from selected chapters. The problem with these bottom-up approaches to designing a course comes to the surface when assessing how students have met not only course goals but also programmatic goals for first-year composition (FYC) because the course, or the assignments, was not developed with outcomes in mind.

While some teachers may understand that to develop curriculum, teachers must start with the learning outcomes for the course and then determine how students will meet those outcomes over the duration of the course, whether that is for one or two semesters; the development of individual writing projects or
assignments allow students to encounter the outcomes in smaller, digestible chunks. In designing curriculum for a course, teachers must keep in mind, “What do I want students to be able to do?” and “By what means do I hope students will approach the tasks at hand?” This thought may quickly bring a teacher to think about assessment, and while this section does not aim to discuss methods for assessment, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that course goals, project goals, and means for assessing learning should be developed in conjunction with one another. Once a plan is made for how students will meet the outcomes, assignments can be devised with a series of tasks that ask students to employ appropriate purposes for writing and selecting topics. It is only after these decisions are made that course materials can be selected. Developing a course plan is much like laying out a map for a journey from one destination to another; the mode of transportation, or materials used, to reach the destination can only be determined after the traveler decides the distance and terrain being traveled. This planning is similar to why it is critical for course goals and objectives to be decided prior to materials being selected.

Over the past year, I have had the opportunity to work in the field, visiting composition programs across the southwestern United States, to discuss course materials. My position as a field editor for one of the textbook companies required me to meet with teachers and administrators. Having been a writing teacher of ten years prior to holding this field editor position, I began conversations with teachers
and administrators about the type of text they would like to use by inquiring about their learning outcomes. The teachers and administrators I visited, on 97 college and university campuses during 14 months, replied with a variety of responses that parallel with one of the following statements, “We do not have uniform outcomes for first-year composition,” or “We are in the process of revising our program because we have used the same curriculum for ten or more years,” but very seldom did I hear, “We use a localized version of the Writing Program Administrators Outcomes Statement (WPA OS).”

For the majority of the programs that I visited and viewed syllabi for, there seemed to be an inconsistency between their use of the following terms: *course outcomes, standards and objectives*; these terms were used interchangeably on many syllabi. According to James Dean Brown in *The Elements of Language Curriculum*, goals, or outcomes, are defined as “general statements concerning desirable and attainable program purposes and aims based on perceived language and situation needs” (71) whereas objectives are “specific statements that describe the particular knowledge, behaviors, and/or skills that the learner will be expected to know or perform at the end of a course of program” (73). As Brown points out, the program as a whole must have outcomes while individual courses within the program will respond to the outcomes through objectives.

In “Outcomes are Not Mandates for Standardization” Mark Wiley adds that outcomes can be understood as “the knowledge, skills, and
understanding students have actually achieved as the result of their educational experience” (29). On a smaller-scale a course may have established outcomes while each assignment responds to the course outcomes, or goals, through the use of objectives for each assignment. Goals and objectives work together, but first goals must be established then a plan for responding to the goals, with objectives, need to be laid out. Tasks and activities are used in activating objectives. Goals, objectives, and activities/tasks are building blocks used together to achieve student learning.

Just as many teachers attempt to use the terms goals and objectives synonymously, the term standards are oftentimes confused with outcomes. The term standards is used when programs desire to demonstrate all students possess the same foundational knowledge. Standardization is problematic because it lends to a perception of “one-size-fits-all” and requires teacher compliance, which can be “managed and enforced through standardized testing” (Wiley 25). When programs want to determine “fixed, predetermined responses in a format that can be electronically scanned,” standardized tests can be “administered to large audiences with results quickly disseminated” (Brown, Teaching by Principles, 386). This large-scale assessment would require all writing teachers to teach the same content to all students with the same materials in the same way, and it runs the possibility to “reduce writing to its lowest common denominator, i.e., ‘basic skills’ of grammar, usage, spelling, and punctuation” (Wiley 28).
This form of assessment is evidence of a distant past on the historical timeline of teaching writing, so the continuation of using the term *standard* is evident of either programs that hold onto ideals of standardized grammar assessment tests, or ones that do not have clarity on how these concepts are drastically different.

In addition to discussing course and programmatic goals when visiting campuses, I asked various teachers, within the same programs, how the outcomes, or standards in most cases, were developed and when. I asked about how the standards were assessed, and many teachers gave lengthy discussions about pre-and-post tests. Most tests included multiple choice questions about basic elements of style and/or grammar, oftentimes generated by one of the textbook companies. Many departments I visited said that students are given the same test on the first day of class as on the last day of class to determine “how much they had learned.” Lastly, for any program where teachers did not mention the WPA OS, I asked if they were familiar with this statement since one of my employer’s aspirations was to assess and report back to the editorial team how widely known the WPA OS is. Wiley states, “these outcomes represent what the profession of composition values in terms of classroom practice” (30) and the discipline has agreed that all FYC students should be able to demonstrate learning in the five core areas of Rhetorical Knowledge; Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing; Processes; Knowledge of Conventions, and Composing in Electronic
Environments by the end of their FYC course sequence/experience (WPA OS). While my professional mission was to assess widespread knowledge, my personal curiosity about the WPA OS was two-fold: I not only wanted to see if teachers were aware and using the WPA OS to guide curricula, as theory indicates, but I also wanted to know if teachers had found a particular topic to operationalize the WPA OS, as I had in my own classroom with family history writing.

To further conversations about textbooks, I asked teachers to tell me about or, if willing, to show me their writing assignments, because oftentimes no mention of assignment content or guidelines were present within syllabi. Very few teachers were willing to hand over writing assignments, but most mentioned standardized assignments used throughout the department, oftentimes modes, or current-traditional method. I had wondered if Robert Connors was right when he said in *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory and Pedagogy* that “The question of writing assignments is uncomfortable for many teachers because it presents such a clear mirror of one’s individual philosophy of education. It is easy to feel that one’s teaching is not striking a good balance between writing meaningful to the student and making the student meaning to the community” (327). I had wondered if the teachers who I asked for assignments from did not want to show what they were asking their students to do was connected to concerns about the assignment was an indicator that the teachers were being too easy or perhaps too rigorous. Being able
to pinpoint what is included in composition curriculum has always been a challenge because curriculum is influenced by individual teacher pedagogy—that is no two teachers teach alike—and the needs of the students being taught must be taken into account. In closing conversations to help teachers locate an appropriate text for their class, I asked all teachers that I visited if they found any particular topics that worked best with their curriculum or for their students; the responses varied from pop culture to film to cultural studies to environmental issues.

After having visited nearly 100 campuses, I am interested to know why teachers select certain topics for students to write about and if students are interested in those topics (or if only the teachers are); in some cases, I wondered if students had any working knowledge in the topics teachers were asking students to write. In other cases, students had a wide-open range to select any topic, and I am curious if students simply selected topics from previous writing opportunities (e.g., high school and/or previous writing courses.) From the conversations I engaged in with the teachers and administrators, I observed that the majority of the teachers in the territory that I covered were “behind the times” in what the discipline of rhetoric and composition has agreed upon as learning outcomes for first-year writers.

All of this has given me reason to think about the following questions: “What are the necessary components needed in FYC
curriculum at any institution that would allow a student to meet the discipline of rhetoric and composition learning outcomes, the WPA OS?” and “What artifacts from the discipline inform this curriculum?” I am curious about the framework needed to develop assignments within this curriculum and if there are particular topics that are better suited for engaging students in FYC. While I experienced many conversations with teachers who had possibly not thought systematically about first-year composition, I question how many teachers have been provided, or received continued opportunities for professional development, with the scaffolding to methodically design courses and assignments around topics that invest students in the writing process while meeting the learning outcomes for FYC. As a result, this chapter provides a brief history of theories that have informed FYC curricula over the past five decades and makes observations about the artifacts teachers might use to develop curriculum for FYC. This chapter serves as foundation for all future chapters in this dissertation.

**Tracing Historical Patterns within Composition**

The values of a discipline shift over time, and as a ripple effect what is taught in the core courses of that discipline changes with those values. In the field of rhetoric and composition, what teachers desire for students to be able to demonstrate in writing has shifted over the past fifty years from single-themed essays with overall correctness to the development of multimodal documents that meet the needs of
specific rhetorical situations; this shift is drastic. Looking at the heritage and lineage of the discipline of rhetoric and composition can feel much like drinking out of a fire hydrant, so this chapter does not intend to delve into the historical landscape of the discipline; however, it aims to acknowledge what has been, and is being, valued as the major shifts have occurred. According to James Berlin, it was in the 1950s that rhetoric reemerged in the writing classroom along with the formation of Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in 1949; this brief history looks at dominant theories that informed what the discipline has valued from the early 1950s through the release of the WPA OS in the late 1990s. This history is not written to intentionally oversimplify the complex struggles of scholars who diligently worked in this field, nor is it intended to acknowledge specific theories or pedagogies (e.g., democratic, feminist, community-service) within the predominant frames of discourse at a particular time. I understand that there are no “neat categories” in which to place curricula, so this section is intended to highlight what many texts have stated prior to the development of this passage: particular patterns were dominate during specific points on the timeline of composition instruction, and the next several pages offers snapshots from this timeline.

While some frameworks of curriculum overlap with others, and traces of each theory may still be seen today, these overarching theories can be classified as product, process, post-process, and social
theories during the fifty years prior to origin of the WPA OS. Beyond the scope of recognizing this brief history, this chapter examines documents that currently inform the development of curricula in FYC, including WPA’s “Outcome Statement for First-Year Composition,” Writing Program Administration (WPA), National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and National Writing Project’s (NWP) collaborative text “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing,” NCTE’s “21st Century Curriculum and Assessment Framework” along with the CCCC “Multiple Uses of Writing.” These four documents collectively represent the most current information on values for shaping curricula from the core professional organizations within the discipline of rhetoric and composition.

In the 1950s, product-based approaches of current-traditional, or modes-based instruction, were still popular, which had carried over from the early 1900s. The method of current-traditional instruction originates from Harvard where students were instructed to write “a theme for each day using uniform theme paper [...] All themes were read and corrected with the use of a set of abbreviated marks of correction. The forms of discourse emphasized were description, narration, and exposition” (Berlin 37-38). This form of prescriptive writing was evaluated with a combination of objective diagnostic tests, and student work was graded for an individual occurrence of a single error (Berlin 41). This method remained dominant for nearly seven decades and is still seen in some writing programs throughout the
nation. The great “paradigm shift” from product-centered writing to writing as a process (Hairston 88) occurred in the early 1960s.

Process-orientated texts were prevalent throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The focus of learning and of the writing process was made popular by Harvard cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner. This shift from product-based writing to process-oriented writing was significant, because the theory supported the belief that, “Students should engage in the process of composing, not in the study of someone else’s process of composing” (Berlin 123) and “writing is an act of discovery for both skilled and unskilled writers” (Hairston 87). This period was known as the “progressive education movement” when writers like Ken Macrorie, Peter Elbow, Janet Emig, and James Britton publically criticized “nonpersonal writing assignments” (Connors, “Personal Writing Assignments,” 326). Students were encouraged to write on topics of their own experiences with their personal voices. Process theory can be found as either replacement or supplement of current-traditional theory in textbooks (Bloom, “The Great Paradigm Shift,” 33). While this movement is more about pedagogy—the methods for teaching students how to write—the process movement changed perspectives about the topics for writing and what teachers valued. “It was reality based, focused on actual writers—from the most sophisticated to the most naïve—in the act(s) of writing” (Bloom 33). This movement gave writing teachers concepts and language for talking about the production of a text through ideas and methods.
As time moved forward post-process theorists examined the limitations of process theory in saying that “no codifiable or generalizable writing process exists or could exist” (Kent 2). The post-process movement did not make the same splash that process theory made, and it lacked support from many scholars, including Susan Miller, who states, “Should the claims of post-process theory become a model for the field, its administration will be in the diffident hands of those with no general ideas about writing and no disciplinary mandate to develop them” (56). Thomas Kent and other post-process theorists have determined three characteristics of this movement to include: “writing is public,” meaning all communication is interactive and writing could not occur without language that is ever changing from situation to situation in different moments in time; “writing is interpretive” in that all writers are in an exchange of language that is both “reception and production of discourse” (2); “writing is situated” to be understood as no two people hold understandings, or sets of beliefs, in the same way (Kent 2-3). While post-process has not made its way into mainstream composition texts, the movement was significant on the timeline of composition.

The discussion in composition has moved from teaching a form (e.g., narration, description, comparison) to methods of teaching (process) or the lack of that method (post-process). David Smit, in his piece “Curriculum Design for First-Year Writing Programs,” states, “the kinds of writing that should be taught and the pedagogical strategies
that should be used to teach writing” have been widely debated over the past fifty years while “no consensus has emerged about the ‘content’ of introductory writing” (185). This conversation is up-dated by Richard Fulkerson, who identifies “contemporary composition practices […] taking three different emphases: composition as argumentation, genre-based composition, and composition as introduction to an academic discourse community” (671). The content of composition curriculum has shifted in methods, topics, assignments, and pedagogy.

In “Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century,” Richard Fulkerson says the landscape shifted to value social theories and critical/cultural studies approaches in the late 1980s and 1990s. Fulkerson states that this approach required students to read material about “cultural injustices inflicted by dominate societal groups and dominate discourses on those with less power” (659). While Fulkerson notes these are the patterns of what is being valued, he says there is a “genuine controversy over the goals of teaching writing in college,” in that the divide lies with whether to teach students to be “articulate critical outsiders” or “more successful insiders” (679). Perhaps the development of the WPA Outcomes Statement (WPA OS) places less of a focus on the need to determine what content to use in so much of what scholars have agreed upon is teachers can “expect to find at the end of first-year composition” (WPA).
In the late 1990s, a set of common goals that “more than 240 scholars” in our field collaboratively developed over a three-year period began with a single question (White, personal interview). Edward White, who launched the discussion on the WPA listserv in March 1996, proposed that the discipline needed, “a clear sense of what we are trying to accomplish” and “a clear way of discovering the degree to which we are accomplishing it” (interview). This document, which was released in April of 2000, is divided into five sections that is a culmination of highly theoretical and pragmatic content, which was informed by practice and written for “well-prepared college writing teachers” (WPA). Due to the versatility and diversity of pedagogies that can be used with the WPA Outcomes Statement, it has responded to Miriam Chaplin’s call in “National Standards and College Composition” of “high standards of excellence without standardization of instruction” (174). This year the WPA OS celebrates its ten-year anniversary, and has begun to find its way into composition textbooks.

**Documents that Inform 21st Century Curricula Development**

In a search for the latest research that examines “composition curriculum,” the ProQuest database of dissertations and thesis projects yielded 64 texts that explore various elements of curriculum from reading selections to use of personal writing to incorporating multimodal composition. These texts include case studies examining the kinds of writing taught (e.g., inquiry-based vs. source-based) and uses of content from folklore, creative writing, cultural studies and
gender studies. Writers have examined the ideas of using writing across the curriculum as a focus and how different types of learners (from first-generation to two-year students) within the composition classroom learn. Not only have dissertation writers in composition been studying this topic, but scholars who date back to Aristotle have also been debating what topics should be selected and content to cover when teaching writers how to write. It would take a rigorous study in gathering and examining data of thousands of documents to be able to identify what is included in United States composition curricula. Such a study is found in George Hillocks’ text Research on Written Composition: New Directions for Teachers that provides a “meta-analysis of teaching approaches” for mode and focus of instruction in writing.

Teachers who are educated in the same graduate programs are often taught to value similar types of pedagogies, but still may have different approaches and personalities. In A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers, Erika Lindemann attributes the irregularity of classroom content to the need for flexibility based on the needs of that particular group of students: “writing teachers discover with each group of students different ways to engage the process of teaching” (252).

Whether composition teachers differ by preference of content or diversity of educational and theoretical backgrounds (e.g., English Literature, Linguistics, Rhetoric and Composition,) it has been difficult to state what teachers value in FYC. The type of institution in which a
teacher instructs a diverse demographic group of learners will also determine curriculum and pedagogical approaches. For example, a teacher at a two-year college and a teacher at a small liberal arts college have different agendas along with student needs, backgrounds, and preparedness for higher education.

Historically, patterns, which have appeared in composition textbooks and scholarly articles on how teachers can engage students and what the best practices are for teaching composition, can be categorized representing what was valued at a particular time (see discussion above about historical trends.) For quite some time, scholars have indicated that these inconsistencies are problematic and need reform—even to the point that some scholars proposed the abolishment of the course (e.g., Lounsbury; Eurich; Campbell; Rice; Greenbaun qtd. in Connors, “The Abolition Debate in Composition”) or simply make the course an option, removing the requirement for first-year composition courses (Crowley). While most agree that abolishing the required first-year writing course is not the solution, teachers of composition continue to look to professional organizations for guidance on this issue.

Over the past three decades, the organizations, National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), and Writing Program Administrators (WPA), that govern the field of composition have made great strides to develop documents that influence curriculum development. In 1974
NCTE released “Teaching Composition: A Position Statement,” which was intended to “guide teachers in planning curricula and teaching writing.” The document included recommendations in eighteen areas from class size, grading methods, audience, usage, dialects, and grammar; the statement also discusses the need for “positive instruction, classroom writing, alternate techniques, and range of assignments” (NCTE, Teaching Composition: A Position Statement, 1974). The Commission on Composition seemed to be aware nearly thirty-five years ago that there was a need for more consistency in content to guide and direct curriculum development while advocating for freedom.

Ten years after the release of this statement, NCTE’s Commission on Composition updated the position statement and narrowed the recommended areas from eighteen to five “essential principles in the teaching of writing.” These five areas included: The Act of Writing; The Purposes for Writing; The Teachers of Writing, and The Means of Writing Instruction (NCTE, Teaching Composition: A Position Statement, 1985). Both of these statements look specifically at what the teacher should consider when developing curriculum; however, the documents did not assert what should be expected from students.

The WPA Outcomes Statement

In April of 2000, the Council of Writing Program Administrators released a statement (see Appendix B) that provided clarity for not
only what teachers could use as a guide, but also, and perhaps more importantly, what students could be expected to know. As Mark Wiley writes in *The Outcomes Book*, the WPA OS encourages “diversity” rather than “standardization of a one-size-fits-all curriculum” (25-26). Teachers can use the WPA OS to aid students in developing a foundation of skills beyond the first-year classroom and experience; courses that require first-year composition as a prerequisite can build on this foundational knowledge. Many programs have local goals (and general education requirements) in addition to the overarching disciplinary/ global goals of the WPA OS, which attend to the “common knowledge, skills, and attitudes” for first-year composition courses throughout the nation (CWPA). Teachers can use the WPA OS to organize reading selections and develop assignments, or to articulate the purposes for writing, in terms that make sense to their students, administrators, and other teachers within their program.

The Writing Program Administrators Outcomes Statement was developed to “regularize what can be expected to be taught in first-year composition” (WPA OS). Unlike what the discipline has ever had before, the WPA OS provides a response for what all courses within a program, and courses across the nation, can pinpoint to what students should be able to demonstrate by the end of first-year composition. With these outcomes in hand, any teacher can use any necessary (or desired) pedagogy, method and/or support materials to develop a course. For this dissertation project, this set of outcomes will be the
foundational text of reference for composition curriculum since the discipline acknowledges these five core areas (Rhetorical Knowledge; Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing; Processes; Knowledge of Conventions; Composing in Electronic Environments) as results all teachers should find from FYC students.

Curriculum and Assessment Framework for the 21st Century

Since the release and addition of the technology plank, the fifth core area, of the WPA OS: “Composing in Electronic Environments,” NCTE Executive Committee has adopted two critical documents that deal with literacy of the 21st century writer. A definition of 21st Century Literacies was released in early 2008, and the expansion of that definition in the form of a Curriculum and Assessment Framework for the 21st Century (See Appendix C) was released roughly eight months later, in November of 2008. This document can be used to support common expectations in the composing processes for students in the 21st century. Together with the International Reading Association, NCTE sought to establish “national standards for English language arts learners that anticipate the more sophisticated literacy skills and abilities required for full participation in the global, 21st century community” (NCTE). The key areas within the “Curriculum and Assessment Framework for 21st Century” include a call for students to:

- learn about and through technology
• demonstrate interpersonal skills in order to work collaboratively in both face-to-face and virtual environments to develop and use problem-solving skills
• be able to select, organize and design information to be shared, understood and distributed beyond the classrooms
• take information from multiples places and in a variety of different formats, determine its reliability, and create new knowledge from that information
• be critical consumers and creators of multi-media texts, and
• understand and adhere to legal and ethical practices as they use resources and create information (NCTE).

Teachers can use these key points in curriculum design as objectives for learning with technology as a literacy focus. More will be discussed on the uses of these concepts in chapter four of this dissertation project.

Multiple Uses of Writing

In what appears to be support of the WPA OS “Rhetorical Knowledge” section that calls for students to produce texts for different audiences, different kinds of rhetorical situations and write in several genres, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) statement on “Multiple Uses of Writing” (see Appendix D) is a document that “affirms that many genres and uses of writing must be taught well in the nation’s schools, colleges, and universities.” CCCC asserts this statement is a direct response to the
two opposing directions that teaching and learning of writing seem to be moving, “emphasis of the liberal education of citizens for the 21st century” and “the rise of standards-based education in the United States [...] works to compress curricula and learning into narrow indicators of teacher accountability and student achievement.” While achieving goals and offering education in a variety of formats, including online education, are critical, the idea of education is not simply to box-check skills sets; writing education is aimed at developing strong written and verbal communication skills that will serve students throughout their lives.

The statement on the “Multiple Uses of Writing” calls for teachers to include forms of: academic, workplace, civic, personal, cross-cultural and aesthetic discourse as “an expansive writing curriculum” (CCCC). This call asks teachers to consider all aspects of students’ lives and develop projects that are not only multi-genre but also texts that are “especially collaborative, visual and internet-based projects” (CCCC) to include multimodal composition. Multiple Uses of Writing can work in conjunction with guidelines for 21st century writers and key sections of the WPA OS to develop curriculum that engages a first-year writer and prepares the writer for life beyond the academy.

*Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*

To further extend the conversation of the WPA Outcomes Statement to all disciplines and subjects, WPA, NCTE, and the National Writing Project (NWP) have joined together to develop a “Framework
for Success in Postsecondary Writing.” (See Appendix E) This text has recently been developed not only for educators, but also stakeholders outside of classrooms; it’s intended to “connect expectations across educational levels and institutions” (WPA, “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing”). This document was developed to illustrate “habits of mind and the kinds of writing experiences that will best prepare students for success” (WPA). The significance of this document for teachers of writing is that it serves as a critical text not only for writing teachers, but also any educator who requires students to develop written texts as a course requirement. This shares the responsibility of fostering thoughtful writing assignments to all educators. While this document is composed of two important sections, writing teachers who are familiar with the WPA OS will quickly identify the section titled, “Experiences with Writing, Reading and Analysis” as this section demonstrates how teachers can incorporate the WPA OS into all writing assignments.

The first section of this document, titled “Habits of Mind” addresses approaches to learning that “are both intellectual and practical” for “college-level learners” (WPA). The habits include: curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility and metacognition. While the elements listed within this section may feel intangible for some teachers, this as an exciting list of characteristics that can be used to develop a writing project with the students’ interests in mind.
These four artifacts together, as offered by the discipline, are geared toward an informed process of development for first-year curricula. With the WPA OS at the center, the four documents can collectively and collaboratively serve teachers to develop curriculum, and students can metacognitively assess the success of how the content of the course allowed them “to step back and focus directly on their own literacy development” (Carroll 120). First-year composition is simply an introduction for many writers to the complex moves of a writer’s life. This dissertation project will explore the interconnectedness of these four texts through assignment development, with specific recommendations for family history writing as a topic.
Chapter 3: 
Designing Assignments that Incorporate the WPA OS

In chapter 2, I discuss four artifacts that offer content for course design in first-year composition (FYC) for 21\textsuperscript{st} century writers. Most specifically, the learning outcomes for first-year writers are illustrated through the WPA OS. This chapter aims to exemplify how to meet the WPA OS by carefully and creatively constructing assignments, with particular reference to and focus on a favorite writing assignment: the family history writing project. My experience adapting this particular assignment to incorporate all areas of the WPA OS could apply to any teacher’s practice, as the exercise of analyzing my assignment made me aware that my own expectations of what students should be producing were not clearly communicated. In this chapter, I describe an assignment as it was originally written, offering a rationale for using family history writing in FYC, and then I discuss the revised assignment through the lens of the WPA OS.

As I thought about how family history writing assignments ask students to conduct primary research through interviews with members of families, focus on writing about individuals, place, and culture, and incorporate historical and social secondary research, I realized that family history writing projects offer one method for operationalizing the WPA OS. Using the WPA OS to reconsider my assignment did not require me to modify the tasks that I ask students to do, but rather to clarify how and why I was asking students to do
them. Using the WPA OS to recast my assignment handout allowed me to see the scaffolding that students need to accomplish the desired goals of an assignment and meet the course outcomes. Using the WPA OS as a framework for assignment development has not only been useful for my students’ understanding of the assignment at hand, but has also indicated to me students’ need in understanding academic terminology. Based on the rhetorical knowledge section of the WPA OS, I recognized the importance of translating the academic language in understandable terms for students throughout the course and specifically within the context of each assignment.

However, the WPA OS was never designed to regulate content in the first-year composition classroom. As discussed in chapter 2, the WPA OS was developed to describe a set of skills and knowledge that students should be able to demonstrate upon completion of first-year composition, regardless of the content of the course. The OS was designed so teachers could develop assignments with particular learning goals for not only any given writing project but also over the course of a semester; the OS is a tool that, when used alongside portfolio assessment, can provide opportunities for students to demonstrate improvement in writing by the end of the semester. Of course, students who have been prepared at various levels of writing instruction will vary in the degree to which they can accomplish the outcomes.
Because the WPA OS is not a template for how to teach writing, but rather a set of learning outcomes for students to reach by the end of first-year composition, the outcomes can be met in many ways. The flexibility and clarity of the WPA OS can work to sharpen any effective assignment. In many first-year composition courses, the subject or theme used for writing topics is determined by the instructor. While many writing programs have a philosophical framework, set of goals, and perhaps a pre-determined textbook or a list of textbooks to choose from, ultimately it is the teacher’s responsibility to develop writing assignments that meet the larger, programmatic outcomes. With the WPA OS in mind, instructors continue to have the same flexibility and freedom regarding classroom content—which topics to cover and what types of documents students should produce—with the aims and goals of the program in which the course is housed providing additional context.

Some teachers may see any outcome as a standard that their students must meet, whatever their abilities or preparation, or, even worse, as formulas that force a specific way of teaching; perhaps those teachers have had experiences where outcomes were used to wrap the curriculum so tightly around the course that instructors felt as though they were teaching from a strait jacket. As discussed in chapter 2, these misperceptions mistake the essential liberation that outcomes afford for the rigidity of standards. Once a group of teachers has agreed on the curriculum, hopefully with the WPA OS in mind, they are
free to help their students meet course goals in whatever way (e.g., through assignment design, sequence, and activities) seems appropriate for their interests and teaching styles.

**Assignment Development**

A natural step in the process of curriculum design is assignment development, specifically through blueprinting a set of objectives for each assignment that respond to the collectively designated course goals. In “Writing Educational Goals and Objectives,” Brett Bixler, Penn State’s Lead Instructional Designer, says, “Think of objectives as tools to make sure you reach your goals. They are the arrows you shoot toward your target (goals).” Teachers may choose a variety of ways, with appropriate materials, to support these objectives; however, it is important that teachers are systematic in planning for how students will accomplish the outcomes and engage in activities.

A curriculum with structure and projects that include both specific goals and flexibility for students’ decisions will afford students with a workspace for growth. As Thomas Newkirk points out in *The Performance of the Self in Student Writing*, composition should “serve students by providing a writing workspace where they could grow as writers and readers, and it would also serve the large academic and public realms” (7). The classroom must be a space for students’ individual and intellectual growth not only within the academy, but also beyond for their lives in professional, personal, and civic spaces. While the outcomes for composition have been identified by the
Council of Writing Program Administrators, assignment topics are the blank slate that teachers can use for the workspace to prepare students with writing skills for life.

Because it is difficult to establish a specific set of guidelines that all writing assignments should follow, Erika Lindemann presents elements to consider when developing writing assignments; in her text, *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*, Lindemann says:

All writing assignments must account for more variables than a phrase or even one sentence can identify [...] some elements of the assignment, in some way must account for all of the following variables:

1. The students’ interest in and understanding of the subject.
2. The purpose or aim of the composition
3. The audience (which needn’t always be the teacher)
4. The role for the student to take with respect to the subject and audience
5. The form of discourse (which needn’t always be an essay)

The elements of purpose, audience, and form of discourse are addressed within the rhetorical knowledge section of the WPA OS;
additionally, responding to students’ interests and roles is a much larger task for teachers to tackle.

Not only is it important that students see application of the overall course content to both academic environments and beyond, but students must also see what they will gain from each assignment, or they may quickly lose interest. In “The Novice as Expert,” Sommers and Saltz indicate that writing matters most for students who compose to meet needs beyond simply completing an assignment, and students write more passionately on topics of “what they know and what they learn” (146). To be effective, assignments must allow students space to explore and develop topics that matter to them. It helps if students have some previous knowledge or interest on the topic and if assignments provide students with a chance to contribute something new to the conversation. Some teachers may feel the best way to meet these conditions is to give the students free reign to write on whatever they choose. However, openness of assignments too often allows the students to rest in their comfort range without much challenge, and it could also suggest that the course has no particular goals aside from the random production of text. In such cases the WPA OS becomes particularly helpful to the teacher and student because the WPA OS provides the scaffolding for strong assignment development while offering freedom of theme or topic.

The last recommendation that Lindemann suggests is that students understand teachers’ criteria for success, and this begins with
how the course goals, project objectives, assignment criteria, and grading measures are clearly communicated in writing to students. In “Preparing an Effective Syllabus: Current Best Practices,” Jeanne Slattery and Janet Carlson state that the “strongest course goals use action verbs (evaluate, analyze, create) rather than more passive and vague verbs (learn, recognize, understand)” (161). Certainly, these terms can be used in the course goals, but should also appear in assignment objectives, so that students can clearly connect what the assignment asks them to accomplish in relationship to the course.

Based on Bloom’s Taxonomy, Bixler offers a corresponding chart of action verbs that teachers can use to develop clear assignment objectives for students. Depending on what the teacher and/or writing program administrator desires for students to accomplish and whether this falls under knowledge development, application of knowledge, or an extension of knowledge, Bixler offers a variety of strong action verbs to choose from when developing assignment objectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Define, Identify, List, Name, Recall, Recognize, Record, Relate, Repeat, Underline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>Choose, Cite examples of, Demonstrate use of, Describe, Determine, Differentiate between, Discriminate, Discuss, Explain, Express, Give in own words, Identify, Interpret, Locate, Pick, Report, Restate, Review, Recognize, Select, Tell, Translate, Respond, Practice, Simulates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>Apply, Demonstrate, Dramatize, Employ, Generalize, Illustrate, Interpret, Operate, Operationalize, Practice, Relate, Schedule, Shop, Use, Utilize, Initiate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

43
Figure 1 Behavioral Verbs Appropriate for Each Level of Bloom’s Taxonomy (Cognitive Domain) (Data Source: Bixler)

Bixler’s list of verbs can be used in articulating to all stakeholders precisely what desired skills students should accomplish through a particular assignment. Skills for an individual assignment should be identified in an assignment handout, which should be distributed at the start of an assignment cycle.

As Edward White indicates in Assigning, Responding, Evaluating: A Teacher’s Guide, students need a written assignment that outlines “what the student is asked to accomplish” with “a description of the purpose of the assignment, its format, and the criteria that will be used in evaluating it” (5-6). It may be unclear how students interpret or understand the assignment, specifically the academic terms (as Bixler has provided in figure 1) being used in the assignment; therefore, as Jim Burke points out in “Learning the Language of
“Academic Study,” it is important to help students “unpack” the meanings of the academic terms being used, because “if students do not understand them, they will not achieve success on class assignments” (39). While many students may check a handout throughout the duration of an assignment to ensure they are “meeting the requirements,” it is critical that teachers include clear, concise instructions and expectations in assignment handouts as opposed to adding or relying on verbal requirements provided along the way. An assignment handout will provide students with an understanding of the assignment guidelines, which may result in less frustrated students and fewer disappointed teachers.

**Resisting McPapers**

In *Designing Writing Assignments*, Traci Gardner states, “good writing assignments result in good writing” (1). White offers practical advice in *Assigning, Responding, Evaluating: A Writing Teacher’s Guide* on what makes a “good” writing assignment “good.” He discusses the need for creativity and specificity in assignment development; White says “we must offer the best assignments we can devise in order to stimulate our students’ creativity and convince them to learn what we teach” (1). One of the reasons some students produce what White calls the “McPaper,” a document that is “a fast-food version of writing that offers little nutritional value to students and is frequently indigestible for readers,” is that writing assignments are often constructed without the details needed for students to produce better
work (2). The “McAssignments” that are often given to first-year writers lack the necessary guidelines students will need to generate worthwhile responses. Many assignments I have encountered, some of my own included, lack the following elements: the articulated goals students will be responding to in that particular assignment; the method and tools that will be used for assessment; the scaffolding needed for students to develop rhetorical knowledge, and a path on which to begin the critical reading and research that lead students to thinking and writing. Most importantly, weak assignments provide little motivation for students to write—beyond the elusive grade.

Instead of ordering up a McPaper, first-year composition classrooms should offer a starting place for helping students to develop a more robust understanding of academic discourse and academic literacies. When writing assignments are designed with this purpose in mind, instructors have the opportunity to challenge and socialize students into academic ways of knowing that can transcend the classroom. In support of this framework is James Moffett, who, in his influential, comprehensive theory of discursive practices, *Teaching the Universe of Discourse*, argues that writing instructors need to change their thinking about writing assignments:

> In many of our writing assignments, I see us feverishly searching for subjects for students to write about that are *appropriate for English* (emphasis in original); so we send them to the libraries to paraphrase encyclopedias, or they
re-tell the plots of books, or then write canned themes on moral or literary topics for which no honest student has any motivation. Although asking students to write about real life as they know it is gaining ground, still many teachers feel such assignments are vaguely “permissive” and not as relevant as they ought to be. Once we acknowledge that “English” is not properly about itself, then a lot of phoney assignments and much of the teacher’s confusion can go out the window. (7-8)

Asking students to write about real life has gained even more popularity in the decades since Moffett drew attention to the ways in which writing instructors often feel conflicted when students craft writing that seems to transgress the “accepted” borders of academic discourse. Writing assignments that are perceived to transgress the borders of academic discourse are still at issue today, particularly in many first-year composition classrooms; much of this is a result of the pressure to have students demonstrate writing that can fit within traditional norms of academic discourse. The WPA OS provides the theoretical scaffolding for what students should accomplish, while supporting Moffett’s encouragement for instructors to find other forms of writing that will not only help students to see academic writing in a larger context but that will also engage them in writing about topics that are personally meaningful to them.
If teachers plan to resist the distribution of McAssignments, the focus of what students will write about needs to be considered and carefully selected. In “Writing Assignments: Where Writing Begins” David Bartholomae says, “I believe it is important for teachers to consider carefully the subjects they present to students, and while I believe students write best about subjects that interest them—subjects they believe in, subjects they know something about, subjects they believe there is reason to write about and for which they can imagine an occasion for writing” (183). Finding topics that all students can relate to and know something about is a challenge, as students come with a variety of interests, talents, skills and backgrounds. Beyond the scope of finding a topic that all students have in common, is locating a theme that is interconnected to many other topics so that students still have the freedom to make decision within a subject area. I believe the concept of family can be used in this way. Students could write about topics such as sports, music or immigration while still responding to the overarching theme of family.

Florida State University writing faculty have tested the theoretical concept of using family as the theme of first-year composition in a study that explored student reaction to new types of research assignments; in “Building a Mystery” Davis and Shadle found students enjoyed writing about the theme of family as they had something valuable to say. Additionally, Daniel Melzer and Pavel Zemliansky discuss an online course titled “Writing Home and Family”
Melzer and Zemilansky engaged students through the use of both primary and secondary research methods where “students were to research their families and home communities.” Students had a starting point to begin the research, which was not overwhelming, as the students already knew something about their research subjects—family. Both of these studies show that students are interested in and have a common language and background for writing about subjects related to the theme of family.

Making a Case for Family in FYC

While chapter 5 of this dissertation thoroughly addresses using the concept of family, this section will serve to briefly introduce readers to family history writing and show how the topic can be used to engage student writers in the WPA Outcomes Statement. The institution where I have been teaching for the past seven years uses the WPA OS as the goals for first-year composition. In the fall of 2006, I began using the theme of family history writing in my first-year composition courses as a response to the WPA OS. Family history writing is work that contextualizes life stories in specific places at particular times and that examines, defines, and constructs the framework of a family’s history. Assignments can use all media (print, oral, and electronic) in a variety of formats or genres. When approaching first-year composition with a family history writing
emphasis, students are asked to become ethnographers of one of the most common elements to them—family.

Composition assignments present opportunities for students to become photographers of life through language. That is, students are asked to view the experience of people, places, and events through rhetorical lenses. Using family history writing in the first-year composition classroom presents a space where learning “promote[s] a personal connection between what was observed and the theoretical lenses through which the observation takes place” (Mayher, Lester, and Pradl 80). Family history writing calls for an examination of the significance of everyday life that culminates into a family’s history. Students come to family history writing with a common knowledge and language for thinking about family, in addition to personal experiences within familial structures.

In family history writing, students work to “persuade readers of the truth of a life, an experience or an insight” (Hobbs 18). Students can use family stories to reconstruct the past, so that they can catch a glimpse of what life was like for their ancestors. Students are also able to see the unit of family within the larger society of a community while seeing how the individuals fit into the family unit. This is an effective way for students to incorporate both primary and secondary research into course projects and to meet the critical thinking, reading, and writing section of the WPA OS. In “Remembering Great Ancestors: Story as Recovery, Story as Quest” Stuart Ching tells of
how he and his family “recover(ed) and construct(ed)” his family’s history (44). Ching visited his family’s homeland island to trace the oral traditions and stories of his family. Ching says recollection of family stories serve the purpose of “translating ‘oral into literary discourses’ to comprehend his ancestors’ experiences, express gratitude for their dreams of a better life, and bear their struggle” (42). Telling the stories preserves the memories and events for generations to come.

Ching presents the challenge to readers that family history writing offers recovery of “cultural and historical pasts” as support for “cultural identities in the present” (43). Exploring family stories not only allows for collecting information and understanding the past events, but it also provides family members an explanation of why and how their lives have come to this point. Through a combination of primary and secondary research, students can learn about the historical, social, and cultural background of a family. Primary research “empowers them to write with legitimate originality and conviction” (Downs and Wardle 562). Writers are more invested in the stories when collecting the data. By composing family history writing, students become the historian and story keepers of a family, perhaps their own.

One of the many advantages of using the topic of family is that students can be urged, or required, to write for an audience beyond the classroom: other family members, the larger community, or even
perhaps future members of the family. This is a key element for providing a way for students to truly understand rhetorical knowledge in the WPA OS, which will be more fully discussed in chapter 4. By having audiences beyond the classroom, the writing is applicable beyond a fictionalized exercise. For some students, the writing becomes higher stakes because outsiders to the classroom will receive the final copy of their projects. In *The Elements of Teaching Writing*, Katherine Gottschalk and Keith Hjortshoj state, “student writing does not have to be a hypothetical exercise, performed exclusively for teachers to demonstrate the potential to communicate with others. Students can actually write for other audiences, including one another, for purposes that extend beyond the completion of course requirements” (37). Family history writing requires students to think about an audience and purpose that extend beyond the scope of the writing class, as a means of operationalizing the rhetorical knowledge section of the WPA OS.

If a portion of an assignment calls for considering the degree to which students’ families have shaped their identities, the assignment also addresses the self and naturally elicits reflection about the self. As Edward Kearns describes his family writing assignment in “Assignment Prompt,” he asks students to locate “newspapers published on the day of their birth (or their parents’ or grandparents’ birth)” (150). He says the assignment “provides a bridge from personal narratives to formal exposition, to research, and to writing
with sources—while retaining the motivational values of personal writing” (151). While many teachers start with personal projects in FYC so that students have an entry point of familiarity that enables them to begin writing for the academy, family writing serves the same purpose, yet it distances the writer from what might be interpreted as expressivist work, and it allows for personally invested writing. Chapter 4 goes in-depth on expanding the personal writing assignment to family history writing to better establish rhetorical knowledge. Family history writing works well in first-year composition because it, like personal writing, “validates their [students’] inner lives and the specific social contexts within which their personal lives take place” (Stotsky 764). Family history writing presents the opportunity for students to investigate culture and literacy with a personal interest and emphasis while the concept of family provides a fertile ground for students to explore and write about the social construction of self and family. Teachers can incorporate both personal observations and cultural literacy through the theme of family.

**Connecting Student Learning to the WPA OS through Family History Writing Assignments**

The theme of family is valuable because it engages students with topics that they see as relevant, and students can successfully meet all areas of the WPA OS with this theme. I propose to demonstrate this by first describing a family history writing assignment
that I wrote and used in my ENG 101 class and then illustrating in the following section how I used the WPA OS to improve the assignment.

**Developing the Assignment**

Much like National Public Radio’s (NPR) Story Corps, I asked students to locate a subject, age sixty or older, who belongs to a family (perhaps to the student’s own family, if the student desired) and to then conduct an interview. Students were asked to develop research questions based on research from the interview subject’s life; this research could encompass geographical region and/or historical context. This would allow for the interview to be more of an informed conversation rather than a formal interview. Once this research was accomplished and interview questions were developed, students conducted an interview with the subject, which served as the foundation of the project. Using the primary and secondary research, students were asked to develop a biographical sketch about the individual.

In the original writing assignment handout (see Appendix F) distributed to students, I provided the following instructions about the writing process and product:

> You will write a nonfiction piece based on your interview to showcase this person’s life story. Use any pre-interview research you have conducted along with the interview content to develop a rich biographical essay that you would be proud to share with your interviewee. You will
submit your essay, no less than four-typed pages, to me by the designated timeline on the course calendar.

From this passage alone, it is not evident that students were asked to participate in peer review and write a reflective self-assessment; however, those requirements were addressed orally in class. Additionally, based on the way the assignment was originally written, students did not have any indication of how their work would be evaluated or what materials were expected for final submission. Elements that I am now able to see missing from the original assignment are activities or directions that asked students to actively read and discuss various biographies in an effort to critically analyze the rhetorical choices writers make within this genre of writing.

Elements from the WPA OS existed in what I had hoped students would do, but the WPA OS was not evident in the assignment handout. For example, students were asked to “find, evaluate, analyze, and synthesize appropriate primary and secondary sources,” a hallmark of the critical thinking, reading, and writing area of the WPA OS, but information helping students understand how to identify the types of research that were appropriate for their topics was not included. While the WPA OS does not specify how students should approach this process, I have found that novice writers are most successful, and can retain the skill set, if they are provided scaffolding when asked to participate in a task. Also, implied in the assignment was the idea of students integrating their own ideas, but the
assignment did not provide students with any direction on how to develop their own writing beyond anything more than a dull research paper, one that simply recounted their findings.

In the original assignment, students were provided with a purpose for writing (to showcase another’s life story), but the audience and rhetorical situation had not been identified or acknowledged clearly in the assignment description. The genre in the original assignment was an academic essay, but even to ask students to produce an essay was not very precise. When I revised the assignment (see Appendix G,) I directly applied all sections of the WPA OS, which allowed for a much more intentional learning experience for students. Even now as I review the material that I had originally presented for this assignment to my students, I notice that its vagueness must have been problematic for many students because perhaps most importantly, no project goals were identified.

After examining the assignment using the WPA OS, I can see that an essay may not have met the needs of the (undetermined) audience, and how this (undetermined) audience could be reached had not been considered—rather a default to what students have always produced; therefore, it would be more effective to allow students to determine the type of document to produce based on who they determined their audience to be and the method of delivery they chose. Additionally, elements of language choice (e.g., voice, tone, and level of formality), which are all determined by audience, were
unclear to the student from the way this assignment was originally written. The assignment, as it was written four years ago, does not indicate any process work; however, I did require students to submit drafts for peer review, revision work, and a pair share activity in which students “error-hunted” the surface features of a peer’s nearly finished draft. Nothing in the written assignment indicated to the students the idea of knowledge of conventions (the fourth section of the WPA OS) because the assignment mentions the completion of only one draft. Obviously the assignment lacked clarity of intentions, expectations and steps that students needed so that they could meet the outcomes.

When I originally developed the assignment, I wanted to appear flexible, so students had freedom to submit a project they felt best represented their interview subjects; however, I was not aware at the time that the way the assignment was written made it difficult for students to develop a plan and produce high-quality work. Often, teachers blame students for the ineffective writing they submit when the reality is that many strong writers have to struggle to decode a poorly written assignment—and many students guess incorrectly as they puzzle what teachers really want. This reinforces the need for strong development of the assignment with a clear set of instructions that communicate these desires to the student. Reflecting back to the first semester that I assigned this work, three particular students’ projects come to mind; the projects had interesting topics, but the projects themselves were underdeveloped, which may have been a
result of the unclear expectations. Several students who scored below average on this assignment revised for a higher grade, but the revisions did not show improvement in areas of rhetorical knowledge (developing a document for a directed audience and purpose) or demonstration of critical thinking. It wasn’t until I revised the assignment using the WPA OS as a guide that I could see a possible reason students were unable to improve their projects in developing a text that was constructed with a particular rhetorical situation in mind, in a media and genre that meet the needs of a specific audience and purpose.

*Revising the Assignment with WPA OS*

During a writing program administration course, I came to understand how important it is to use the language of the WPA OS not only in the assignment descriptions provided to students, but also in the assessment rubrics given to help students more clearly understand the learning objectives that I desire for them to reach. Using the WPA OS, I revised the family history biographical writing assignment (discussed above) for the following semester’s students. In the revision, I used the same assignment concept—asking students to write a biographical sketch by conducting primary and secondary research. My revision of the assignment started with articulating clear objectives that students should be able to accomplish by the end of the assignment that correlated to the course goals, the WPA OS.
In any assignment handout, one critical element for teachers to articulate is how the series of tasks students will complete combine to result in what they will learn. To make these project objectives transparent to the students, I added a small description of the project objectives near the top of the assignment handout, just below the project overview, as follows:

By the end of this project, you should be able to:

- Locate, evaluate, and use primary and secondary sources, specifically electronic sources, to produce a text that accurately integrates and represents the researched content
- Identify and relate social, historical, and cultural research to contextualize the telling of a life story
- Effectively employ appropriate voice, tone, and style to capture the human element of an interview subject
- Assemble evidence as support for your ideas in developing a biographical project, rather than allowing the research to drive the project
- Determine (and justify) an appropriate genre and medium based on the needs of an indicated audience, purpose, and rhetorical situation
- Engage in a series of composition tasks and multiple drafts, including peer review and proofreading partners, to develop a refined project
• Apply appropriate technologies throughout the research and composition process
• Demonstrate knowledge of conventions for documentation, format, and surface features

Each bullet point corresponds to one of the five areas of the WPA OS, along with incorporating strong action verbs as discussed in Bixler’s suggested verbs.

Additionally, I infused content from the “Definition of 21st Century Literacies” document from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the “Multiple Uses of Writing” document from the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). For example, the first three bullet points respond to types of research students should use along with guidelines “to integrate their own ideas with those of others,” both of which are hallmarks of critical thinking, reading, and writing (WPA). While the latter bullet points encompass other areas of the WPA OS, they require students to “create [... ] multimedia texts” (NCTE) and use writing in forms of “civic discourse” and “personal discourse that create and maintain relationships” (CCCC). While the project objectives seek to meet the course goals, they are also informed by the artifacts from the professional organizations, as discussed in chapter 2.

By using the WPA OS to interrogate and then revise the assignment, I have shifted the openness of the original assignment that once required students to write in response to an undetermined
audience for an unknown purpose to inviting students to get involved in making deliberate choices in responses to the area of rhetorical knowledge from the WPA OS (e.g., audience, genre, medium, etc.)

The revised assignment now asks students to locate a specific audience who would benefit from reading their project (e.g., family members of the interviewee, community and/or workplace associates of the interviewee). If students have trouble locating an audience, I provide a default audience to consider: “This person’s biography will be placed in a museum gallery that showcases ‘Everyday Lives of Ordinary People.’” Once students have located an audience and considered the needs of that audience, the assignment solicits students to generate a list of various formats that could be used to reach the student-selected audience and identify by which means those formats can be delivered to the audience. Students spend time exploring common formats for different kinds of texts and the technologies that support the various texts. The revised assignment clearly addresses components of rhetorical knowledge and critical thinking, reading, and writing, whereas the previous version of the assignment failed to articulate these essential elements altogether.

In addition to establishing clear project objectives and a foundation for rhetorical knowledge, I added several separate steps about conducting both primary and secondary research to the handout to offer scaffolding, a strategy by which students begin the necessary research prior to the composing of a draft. Because family history
research can be located within a variety of repositories, students have a wide range of research avenues, including online sources and databases, to develop a research plan. The revised assignment accounts for the recommended research skills—as discussed under the WPA OS umbrella of composing in electronic environments—of evaluating, organizing, collecting, and using materials from library databases, internet sources, informal electronic networks, and official databases. Students are asked to conduct research in two different steps: the first through close-ended questions and secondary research, and then through open-ended questions in the form of an interview.

The revised handout states:

**Part II: Holding an Information Session**

Once you have located an interviewee, you will need to gather initial information so your interview is a collaborative conversation. Contact your interviewee for a pre-interview information session.

**Questioning:** Ask close-ended questions that will allow you to locate the details of this person’s life socially and culturally through historical research. (For example, ask the interviewee to provide you with: date or birth, hometown, military service, name of elementary school, etc.) This will help you gather background data in order to formulate your interview questions.

**Listening:** People want to tell you their stories. In your pre-interview information session, listen for any information that will guide you to creating a context for this person’s life. Remember this is not the actual interview, but it is important to create an environment where they feel comfortable providing as much information as they want. *Set up a time and date for your interview.*
Part III: Conducting Primary and Secondary Research

Researching: Before the interview, you will need to conduct a little secondary research. Based on your background information, visit the Library of Congress’ “Chronicling America” newspaper project to locate social and historical events that were significant during your subject’s life. What was going on locally and globally when your subject was age 16, 18, 21, during their 30’s, 40’s, 50’s & 60’s? How has technology changed during your subject’s lifetime? What wars has your subject lived through, and what was his or her response to (or participation in) these events? Locate research that helps you conduct an interview that is a collaborative conversation; your goal in researching the times and places of his/her life is that you can be engaged during the collaborative conversation.

Interviewing: Develop open-ended questions based on your research that will guide your collaborative conversation with your subject. Conduct your primary research through interview; this should be a conversation (not a question/answer session) since you have already gathered pre-interview information. Engage your interview subject about the historical and social events of his/her life. As a starting point, it may be helpful to viewing photo albums together with the interviewee.

In the original assignment handout, students were not provided any information on how to gather the research. The original handout mentions “pre-interview research,” but it is unclear from the written assignment handout what type of pre-interview research students should conduct and how it will benefit them in writing the biographical sketch project.
Because many students often do not fully understand how to integrate their own voice with research, steps that provide an organizational plan for students during the early phases of the research process are most helpful. In Rochelle Rodrigo’s workshop, “Can You Digg It,” based on her textbook *Wadsworth Guide to Research*, she articulates six stages of research scaffolding, which include helping students (1) identify a topic through identifying a research interest, narrowing research questions, and making a research plan; (2) find and track sources by assisting students to distinguish types of information, locate authority and appropriateness of the source and track resources; (3) critically read and evaluate sources; (4) synthesize ideas and resources; (5) draft ideas, and (6) present ideas. Rodrigo’s steps, echoing several areas of the WPA OS, slow down the research process for students and show research as a series of tasks.

By incorporating these steps in the assignment, my goal was to foster activities that engaged students in critical thinking through reading and writing that would result in integration of students’ own ideas. While revising the assignment, I was informed by the WPA OS, but my work was not limited to the WPA OS, as I included other sources, such as Rodrigo’s work, CCCC’s “Multiples Uses of Writing” and NCTE’s “Definition of 21st Century Literacies.” The assignment now asks students to engage in a research process that allows for an exchange of ideas with sources to support the students’ concepts as
the central theme, which allows students to shift away from merely stringing together sources with no particular purpose in mind.

The original assignment did not explicitly reveal the process by which the assignment would evolve, even though I included peer review work in class. As a result, the revised assignment now states on its handout that students will work on several drafts including a rough draft for peer review, a revised draft for a writing center and/or teacher conference, and a third draft (prior to the final copy draft) used for partner proofreading. In her chapter “CWPA Outcomes Statement as Heuristic for Inventing Writing-about-Writing (WAW) Curricula as Intellectual Work,” Deborah Dew states, “We have worked deliberately to provide our students with the extensive practice they need as developing writers—we excel at teaching what it is that we want them ‘to do.’” The newly revised assignment goes on to state that students will submit all four drafts to show the progression of the student’s work, with a metacognitive self-assessment piece, which will serve as the cover piece for the project. The new assignment (and syllabus) makes clear that all students will have the opportunity to revise graded work for a higher grade prior to course portfolio submission.

Students learn in the writing assignment that they will engage in not only a self-review process (during the peer review process), but also a self-assessment on each project that asks them to account for how they have met the assignment goals and to explain the rhetorical
decisions they have made throughout the assignment. Although many teachers ask students to assess themselves in a course reflection that serves as a cohesive text for the portfolio at the end of the semester, I have found a self-assessment for each project is most effective as students are taking an inventory of how the project goals responded to the course goals. As a result, the end-of-the semester course reflection becomes a richer task, as individual project reflections can be drawn upon. This allows students to have a reference point for the ways in which each project moved them through project objectives and toward specific course outcomes.

My goals in revising the assignment were to directly incorporate the WPA OS into my assignment in an effort to allow students to see the application of the learning outcomes throughout the course, and perhaps more importantly, I sought to provide space for students to become independent thinkers and writers. I desire to see in my students what Stephen Wilhoit calls a "deep change" requiring "new ways of thinking" that are "fundamental and lasting." I want my students to break away from the "box checking" that they are accustomed to and to have minimal concern for font size or the number of mandatory sources as they assess their writing. My hope is to shift students from "bean-counting" the numbers of words on a page, paragraphs within the project, or pages within a document – activities that they may have engaged in prior academic writing environments.
Providing space for students to negotiate the project details starts when teachers provide a rich architecture for an interesting assignment—one that includes an audience that is broader than the teacher. I have found that students can achieve a strong grasp of writing for an audience outside of our classroom walls and develop projects that are real-life. Opposed to producing dull research essays as my original assignment warranted, my students produced family newsletters, glogs, Web sites, sound files and blogs when presented with the revised assignment. Students recounted in their self-assessment reflections how their families collectively contributed photos and stories as they worked on their writing projects. Students generated what one of my colleagues likes to call, “refrigerator-door-worthy stuff.”

I am convinced that using the WPA OS as a heuristic helped me to generate an assignment that not only provided the freedom and creativity for my students, but also aided students in meeting the WPA OS as course goals. Additionally, the revised assignment elicited higher-quality work from the students. When teachers use the WPA OS to develop assignments, students are provided clarity in what they are seeking from individual assignments; students see how the projects are connected to and allow them to meet the course outcomes. It was the WPA OS that provided a ladder for assignment revision, and consequently, increased student success.
In the next chapter, I build on the foundation, as discussed in this chapter, for effective assignment development using the WPA OS. Chapter 4 argues for a modernization of assignments by expanding traditional essay-based personal writing assignments with family history writing projects that employ multimodality for more intentional uses of rhetorical knowledge. The chapter also includes an analysis of student projects developed in response to the biographical assignment discussed in this chapter, the family history writing assignment.
Chapter 4: 

Achieving Rhetorical Knowledge through Family History Multimodal Composition

When considering materials that inform first-year composition (FYC) curriculum, as discussed in chapter 2, and how teachers develop writing assignments using those materials, covered in chapter 3, teachers may want to contemplate the most effective ways of helping students develop rhetorical knowledge, a cornerstone of the Writing Program Administrators Outcomes Statement (WPA OS) and the foundation of rhetoric. When determining rhetorical knowledge for a writing project, students need to decide who (audience), why (purpose), what (genre and media), when (rhetorical situation), and how (language/tone/style). When teachers develop writing assignments, they often dictate the choices that students should be making by including purposes for writing, the type of assignments, and particular documents students will generate, which oftentimes indicates an audience within an assignment handout. Teachers may not be aware of how the specificity in their assignment could be prohibiting student achievement of the WPA OS, specifically the area of rhetorical knowledge.

Course assignments should be building blocks for meeting learning outcomes. To closely examine why students develop particular projects that result in specific types of documents (e.g. essays,) teachers may want to think from the end of the course
backwards to the beginning starting with the question, “What do I want students to achieve by the end of this course?” Teachers then can develop a map that connects student learning from the end goals to the beginning of the course through a series of interconnected assignments. When examining the goals that each assignment will serve, teachers can consider the tasks students will need for completing each assignment and determine how the series of assignments will contribute to the course learning outcomes, as exemplified through assignment redesign discussed in chapter 3.

When the writing projects are not interrelated or developed specifically to support learning outcomes, there is often little to no opportunity for students to articulate how they have met the course goals in assessment materials, such as portfolios; however, the ownership for this failed learning is usually misplaced. Students are often held accountable for their inability to demonstrate knowledge in specific areas when in some cases teachers need to take a closer look at their assignments to determine if they provide opportunities for students to achieve the learning outcomes. If teachers, who serve as course designers, could think systematically about each project in the course in addition to how the projects work collectively to meet the outcomes, students may be more successful at demonstrating learning by the end of FYC. Additionally, teachers need a plan for how projects will be a “sequenced series of writing assignments designed to help students attain a clear set of writing goals, with the readings serving
as models and stimulation for those assignments” (White, Assigning, Responding, Evaluating: A Writing Teacher’s Guide, 4). This sequenced set of assignments can be thought of collectively as an interconnected path that will help students reach the learning outcomes.

Writing assignments can provide scaffolding for a project while simultaneously offering students choices to account for the learning outcomes; however, many assignments dictate to students the production of a specific format of writing (typically an essay) for an unidentified or assumed academic audience. Take for example the first writing assignment that is offered in not only one of the most widely-used textbooks in FYC across the country, The St. Martin’s Guide to Writing, but also one that has dominated the textbook industry for more than 25 years; this assignment asks students to produce “an essay about an event in your life that will engage readers and that will, at the same time, help them understand the significance of the event” (Axelrod and Cooper 43). This assignment dictates to students the purpose, genre, and medium and implies writing for an unknown audience. Regardless of purpose or situation in a writing assignment, when teachers determine that students should develop an essay, which is most often for a classroom based audience, all other decisions a writer must make (e.g., tone, style, genre conventions) are affected.
Formulaic writing prompts prohibit a writer from understanding the full spectrum of what the WPA OS calls rhetorical knowledge. It is through student participation in writing activities and assignments that students develop an understanding of rhetorical knowledge. For example, when students are asked to think of how to convey information to an audience, they must locate a medium of delivery. Because medium and genre are interrelated, when the student is considering what type of document best represents the information for the particular audience and purpose, she is also thinking about how the document will reach the audience. The foundation for students to begin making choices as writers comes from a combined understanding of how a rhetorical situation occurs and how writing is a response to that situation to fulfill a purpose with the needs of an identified, specific audience in mind. Additionally, this understanding and an intentional response to that understanding affects most of the choices a writer makes within a project. For teachers to provide a route for students in meeting the WPA OS, teachers may want to develop assignments that ask students to establish a purpose for writing with specific instructions that help students to use rhetorical knowledge to assess the rhetorical situation to which they are responding.

As discussed in chapter 2, the course curriculum can be a response to the kind of learning that should occur by the end of students’ FYC experience. When learning outcomes are selected and
narrowed based on the WPA OS, teachers begin developing assignments that meet the indicated outcomes. In chapter 3, I have demonstrated the importance of teachers developing an infrastructure, using the WPA OS, for meeting learning outcomes through carefully constructed writing assignments; when using the WPA OS to develop assignments, teachers generate each writing assignment as a building block for previous assignments in meeting FYC curriculum goals. In this chapter, I challenge two long-standing practices in FYC that I believe form obstacles for students’ ability in meeting the rhetorical knowledge section of WPA OS: first, the use of personal writing within the sequence of writing projects and second, the use of the essay, as the exclusive genre traditionally taught throughout all projects in FYC.

While chapter 3 offers methods for developing clear writing assignments through the use of the WPA OS, this chapter will build on that content by offering theory and application for revising and expanding the personal essay to family history multimodal projects. I do this in an effort to make the personal more public and to encourage teachers who have abandoned personal writing assignments altogether to select topics that are more meaningful to students. In the first half of my argument in this chapter, I provide readers with information about expanding the concept of the personal to encompass family as a means of teaching students to better understand the construct of audience and purpose within the rhetorical knowledge section; later in the chapter, I ask readers to consider the limitations of teaching only
one genre and medium, i.e., the academic essay, and readers are presented with an argument for using multimodal composition as students are challenged to understand choices of genre and medium, a hallmark of rhetorical knowledge. This chapter showcases student examples illustrating how students can achieve the WPA OS, specifically in terms of developing rhetorical knowledge, through the uses of multimodal family history projects.

**Uses of Personal Writing Assignments**

Many teachers use personal essay as the first assignment in the sequence of projects in FYC. According to Robert Connors in “Personal Writing Assignments”:

> From the 1890’s through today, personal writing assignments have remained central to the teaching of composition. Almost every writing course includes personal writing, most start with it, and many concentrate on it. Personal writing is not only widely assigned, but is widely accepted by students. (150)

The use of the personal essay, which most students are accustomed to producing in previous academic environments, helps students feel comfortable in an unfamiliar environment. Not only have they produced personal essays in previous scholastic writing experiences, but they are also comfortable with the topic of writing because they are experts on their own personal experiences. Because getting started with any kind of writing is often challenging for writers,
especially novice writers who are perhaps in their very first college writing class, methods for getting started and topics that seem approachable are important; however, the production of the personal essay in FYC has perpetuated artificial writing situations without the WPA OS in mind. The repeated use of one specific genre, the essay, does not present students with the opportunities to determine the needs of the rhetorical situation or develop rhetorical knowledge, specifically in determining audience, purpose, genre, and medium.

Personal writing began as a way to provide students with a topic on which they could elaborate and has proven to be meaningful for student writers. There are many benefits to using topics connected to personal experiences and community beliefs that will bridge students into college-level writing. Often teachers start FYC writers with a personal experience essay that relies heavily on students’ experiences with minimal, if any, sources but then quickly shift into project that requires integration of heavy source-based writing, which is used for the remainder of FYC. A concern with starting students with personal writing and shifting all future assignments to source-based writing is that the personal writing assignment becomes an isolated assignment, which is often disconnected from all other work in the course.

Even though some students may enjoy the personal essay assignment, when teachers do not connect an individual assignment to the larger series of course assignments, it reiterates to students that the personal writing task (i.e., personal essay assignment) was only
used as an introductory assignment to the “real” writing that they will
do in college. As Lynn Bloom states in “American Autobiography and
the Politics of Genre,” autobiographical writing has been seen as
writing that serves as “warm-up exercises at the beginning of the
semester” for which students select “safe and bland” topics (72). It is
critical for students to see all projects they complete as working
together in an effort to meet the course learning outcomes. In “Writing
Assignments: Where Writing Begins,” David Bartholomae says,
“Individual assignments should be part of a larger, group project”
(181). If all projects within the FYC sequence can be interconnected
by a theme and if the skills required for each project can build upon
one another, then students can see how what they are learning in
previous projects aids them in their current as well as future projects.
Students can also more readily demonstrate learning as a response to
the WPA OS.

Perhaps some of the hesitation or separation from personal
writing is a direct result of the vague terminology that has come to
define personal writing and what teachers associate with personal
writing. Maybe some teachers do not have a strong grasp on what
personal writing can be within the context of FYC courses. While the
reasons vary, I believe the answer is to rely on the benefits of using
personal writing and to re-envision the uses of personal writing to
include family history writing. Before I argue for an expansion of
personal writing to include family history writing, I want to more
closely examine the terms that have been used to identify personal writing and discuss the possibility of why personal writing is a highly contested topic in FYC.

**Personal Writing and Challenges with the Term *Personal***

The personal assignment benefits students by asking them to “write what you know,” and it provides students with an opportunity to write on topics about which they have intimate knowledge of and feel comfortable discussing. Thomas Newkirk offers a variety of reasons as to why personal writing empowers writers; reasons include: the ability to imagine selves as “coherent selves with coherent histories [...] therefore create stories” about the self; to see that “coherence, this ‘identity,’ allows for a sense of agency, a trajectory into the future;” the ability for writers “see the world in a distinctive way and have the ability to make a distinctive contribution to it,” and an interconnected relationship between knowing and feeling (98). Personal writing has provided students with a way of making meaning and understanding the world around them. It has served for many students as a tool for building confidence in composition. Most teachers do not assume that simply because students write on topics about which they are experts that students are being prepared for the demands of academic writing; however, personal writing is successful at getting students to start writing and allows teachers to help students with important attributes and features of academic writing during the process.
There seems to be many interpretations of what type of writing is classified as personal writing. This is due, in part, to personal writing, as a term, being obscure because it has functioned for several decades as one word with several different meanings; many academics are not talking about the same kind of writing when using this term and most do not have consensus about who the intended audience for personal writing is. Therefore, some teachers may quickly dismiss all personal writing as expressive writing. As discussed in “Language and Learning,” James Britton offers writers ways to discriminate between the purposes of writing with specific terms when identifying between the participant and spectator of language. Britton says writers produce transactional, expressive, and poetic language. Transactional language, also known as school language, is intended for transaction, or interaction, with an audience (140). On the other hand, expressive language is writing used to draft ideas or understand the self, and poetic language functions for creating verbal art (140). In regard to how personal writing is perceived by many FYC teachers, if the discipline of rhetoric and composition had retained the term transactional in mainstream writing classrooms, the understanding for the term personal writing might not be subject to such a variety of meanings.

In his piece “Exploring Problems with ‘Personal Writing’ and ‘Expressivism,’” Peter Elbow works to clarify these terms. He states:
There are four different dimensions of the personal that can be present in various combinations in any piece of writing. The *topic* can be personal or not; the *thinking* can be personal or not; the *language* can be personal or not; and the *function* or goal of the writing can be personal or not. (1)

As Elbow indicates topics can be of personal interest, but not necessarily based on personal experiences. The ideas and language used to discuss this topic may or may not be rooted in personal experience, but perhaps in personal interest. What the student intends to do with the writing might be used for personal reasons, or not. Notice, Elbow prefaces the dimensions of personal with the idea that these four elements work in combination, allowing some to be present and others not at different points in time based on the desires of the writer. One possible example of four dimensions at work for the FYC classroom might look like: a student might be interested to learn more about golf. The student may not have ever played golf, but all his interest in the area of golf drive him to develop projects around the topic of golf. If the student has played golf, he may have ideas and language that allow him to more thoroughly discuss elements of golf, such as the golf swing or golf etiquette. Again, the student would not at any point in time need to talk about his golf swing or his behavior on the course. Since the writing is for first-year composition and the
WPA OS indicates students write for multiple audiences, the student’s function would be to develop a text about golf for others to read.

For many writing projects, students are encouraged to select topics that are personal and to use language that offers an “authentic” voice. Students can also be invited to share reflective ideas and thoughts on their experiences, as a function of showing readers the communal relevance, or the “so what?” that answers *how does this matter to a general audience* on how these experiences have shaped the student writers’ lives. Elbow says that using personal writing allows the following to occur:

- When we invite personal topics, we invite people to write about events or experiences that they know better than any reader—even the teacher reader—and therefore have more authority about. When we invite personal thinking, we invite people to develop ideas by following their own personal and idiosyncratic thought processes—use hunches and metaphorical, associational, emotional thinking. Most people can produce richer and more interesting ideas this way than by trying to conform to disciplined thinking untainted by personal biases and emotions. Disciplined thinking comes afterwards during revising. When we invite personal language, we invite people to write by using whatever words come most comfortably to the tongue—instead of always pausing,
erasing, changing and worrying that they’ve probably used the wrong word. (17)

Elbow reinforces what many writing teachers already know and what Janet Emig stated in her piece “Writing as a Mode of Learning” about writing on topics that are important to students and they are knowledgeable about: “successful learning is also engaged, committed personal learning” (126). Students should be given topics in which they have personal investment.

In addition to looking at the purpose and audience of writing that Britton has offered or Elbow’s dimensions of personal writing, another way to understand the confusion of the term personal is to look at methods of production and emphasis. In “Argument and Evidence in the Case of the Personal,” Candace Spigelman says:

The evolution of the personal expressive essay to emotive or confessional writing seems to have arisen from confusion between methods (free writing, journals, workshop conversation) and emphasis (on individual voice and colloquial discourse) on the one hand, and a change in expectations about content, in which personal feelings and insights now gave the essay its own reason for being. (70)

I would argue that a widespread misconception about personal writing is central to Spigelman’s notations on emphasis and content; students’ lack of understanding on audience is central to the production of
personal writing versus expressive writing. When teachers do not make audience the foundational focus for first-year writers, students may not develop working knowledge on how content that is intended to generate ideas differs from writing that is intended to be coherent—ideas ready to be shared with an audience.

The term *expressive* is being used to identify *personal* in a variety of writing scenarios that occur in FYC. In expressive writing students present their personal interpretation, thoughts, and feeling about an experience, place, or person. Expressive writing is "close to the way the individual thinks when he is by himself" (Britton 141), and its purpose is self-actualization (Harris 29). Like any other type of writing, personal writing is developed with an audience in mind; the learning outcomes for FYC state that writing should "respond to the needs of different audiences" (WPA OS) and that the step of revision warrants writers to "re-see" and consider the needs of the audience. As defined here, expressive writing might work for students in invention work or early drafts where students are working through their thinking; however, personal writing is audience-centered and public-ready. A responsibility of the teacher in supporting the student learning for the WPA OS is to help students understand the differences in these types of writing and how different types of audiences shape the language and message of texts.

Personal writing has been beneficial because it provides "intrinsic rewards" of writing that students enjoy, the ability to
“improve the mechanical elements of writing as students strive to communicate a message that really matters to them,” and it increases students’ engagement with texts “since they can discover for themselves their values” (Hobbs and Berlin 262). Students develop transferrable skills in personal writing that go beyond writing that is simply enjoyable. Aside from the many benefits discussed about personal writing, it has been successful as a courier for teaching students critical concepts of rhetorical knowledge. In Peter Elbow’s *Writing without Teachers*, he professes that when students are taught writing with a personal approach, they learn about themselves as writers and see application for writing that can happen outside of the classroom, absent from a teacher, as a means of self-discovery. Rather than taking issue with the students’ responses, teachers can perhaps focus on the assignment given to the students. It is critical that students see writing as a life skill for communication not an academic box that has been checked next to a required course on a degree plan.

In my own classes, I have witnessed problems that arise for students who respond to vague personal writing assignments. When the writing assignment does not clearly and carefully assist the student in construction of rhetorical knowledge, students often interpret the assignment as an expressive writing prompt. One particular student I encountered struggled to receive constructive feedback on her work during both peer review and graded comments. She developed her
project around the birth of her child, which occurred during a difficult historical wartime in her homeland.

Because the student wrote her piece without a specific audience in mind and focused more on her emotions rather than the situation, location, and events that had occurred, the peer review was very difficult for other students to participate in. Due to the heavy emotional issues the student’s project included, the reviewers seemed to struggle in separating the writing from the event. While the peer review prompts clearly indicated that specific responses should have been given on content, organization, and focus (for example “author included substantial details for readers”), the reviewers had trouble dissecting the piece of writing. One reviewer wrote to me and said she did not feel she could respond to the work due to her overwhelming despair for the hardships that the writer had experienced. It was difficult for students, both the writer and reviewer, to separate the experience from the written representation of the experience, and the writer struggled to hear critical feedback on the writing or do the difficult work of revision that was needed for stronger storyline development and addition of much needed details.

While plenty of research (Belenky, 1986; Anderson, 2000; Barrington, 2002; Bloom, 1998) shows telling the story can free the student from the experience, the work that was produced was simply not appropriate in meeting the learning outcomes for a first-year composition classroom as the work did not account for audience and
purpose. Much of this can be directly attributed to the student’s lack of clarity about the importance of developing the text for a specific audience, and much of that lack of understanding is due to the absence of content in the written assignment that directs students to write for an audience. Once the student submitted the text, I provided her with feedback for improving the writing along with explanation for the grade. The student simply could not divide her experience from the quality of the draft of her writing that she had refused to revise from peer review. She perceived the B- as a rating of her experience rather than the unrefined draft. She said to me in conference, “The birth of my daughter is not a B-,” and what she struggled to understand was that it was the way the text had represented the experience that exemplified B- work.

Students can generate stories about people, places, and events that they have encountered in their lives without the exclusivity of an expressive focus, or, as Spigelman calls, confessional writing. Other writers (Faigley, 1995; Berlin, 1988; Harris, 1987) have taken to task the use of terms like “self,” “authenticity,” and “individual.” Perhaps it is the lack of clarity of ideas about what personal writing is and what terms associated with this type of writing mean that have brought contested uses to personal writing. However, I would like to argue that writing assignments can be helpful if they offer direction to the student writer on selecting topics for public audiences. As Ericsson and Muhlhauser discuss in “Techno-Velco to Techno-memoria: Technology,
Rhetoric and Family in the Composition Classroom” teachers must provide better infrastructure to an assignment and support:

- a pedagogy of techno-memoria [that] would bring students’ seemingly private, lived experiences into the classroom and would welcome narratives of memory. It would also welcome discussions about controlling private and public sharing of memories—of information—for different audiences. A pedagogy of memory and disclosure demands that the gap between what is private/memory/pathos and what is public/academic discourse/ethos be better understood.

This is an area where writing teachers have to work diligently when teaching personal writing is helping students see the construction of writer’s character, identity, and authority when telling stories for an audience.

In “Narrating Family,” Jody Kellas says, “People tell stories everyday, multiple times a day to entertain, understand, and communicate self against the backdrop of social and historical contexts”(5). Individuals learn how to tell stories very early in life to account for activities, and they learn why and what has happened in the world around them through story. Kellas states, “stories are both individual constructions, formulated to help people make sense of their identities and the events of their lives, but also collaborative constructions, acknowledged, celebrated, ratified, rejected, criticized,
questioned, influenced, and/or co-told by others such as family members and relational partners” (4). Composition teachers can build on these practices and skills to help students better develop the elements through narratology, the study of structure with focus on elements, patterns, and themes working together to communicate a story (Herman and Vervaeck 1). Perhaps composition practices can return to asking students to tell life experiences through a lens toward an individual’s ethos while considering the influences of the socially constructed individual experience. Beyond using narration to construct identities, students need to understand writing that is for a public audience, and students have responsibilities as they reconstruct events where others are involved.

In “Narratives of the Self,” Kenneth Gergen and Mary Gergen state that “narrative construction can never be entirely a private matter” (268). All narratives rely on not only the actions of others but also interactions with the individual who owns and tells the story. Gergen and Gergen say that narratives often require a “supporting cast” and “an actor’s success in sustaining any given narrative is fundamentally dependent on other's willingness to play out certain parts in relationship to the actor” (269-70). For example, the role of teacher hinges on students presence, participation, and perceptions. Gergen and Gergen note that “events themselves do not contain inherent valuation properties [...] whether any event is good or bad depends on the framework one employs for understanding” (260-61).
It is the individual that often assigns evaluation or value to events that occur, which position the narrative as one that keeps the narrator neutral, progressive, or digressive. In the example of a teacher’s narrative, her ability to see herself as a “good teacher” relies on the students’ perceptions and participation in the events of classroom learning. Narratives become much richer when multiple points of views are considered or acknowledged.

Personal writing assignments that focus solely on the individual’s perception and reflections are limiting because they do not push the writer to examine the socially constructed self. An expansion of personal writing to encompass family experiences would be beneficial to students in FYC because students could write about what they know and include researched historical information that locates the stories of self within a cultural, historical, and social context while developing texts for an audience. While personal writing has been seen by some as warm-up writing, or disregarded all together in an effort to focus on other types of writing, there is value in using topics that feel approachable and familiar to the student.

Family is a topic that can be offered with the many benefits of personal writing while providing a broader space for writers to examine socially constructed selves. For many of the reasons that the personal writing assignment offers avenues for teaching students elements of voice and style, while serving as an effective method for introducing students to the formats of academic writing, family history writing can
meet this need and expand upon personal writing by opening a world of inquiry and discovery about the world beyond the perception of the writer.

**Expanding Personal Writing to Family History Writing**

As the goals for FYC include teaching students not only the dance of academic writing for higher education but also communication skills for the rest of their lives, using the topic of family provides a similar opportunity as personal writing for students to share information about something they know. However, using the concept of family also allows students to examine personal lives within a larger context. According to Patricia Freitag Ericsson & Paul Muhlhauser:

> With our families, we learn the basics of rhetoric—how to wheedle, argue, charm, persuade. But when we enter the composition classroom, the basics our students have learned from their families are too often forgotten. Instead of forgetting what students know as they walk into the classroom, we would like to promote a pedagogy of remembering, recall—a pedagogy of memoria rather than one of oblivio. A pedagogy of memoria encourages students to remember and, through remembering, imagine the future. By encouraging students to remember their histories—as the scholars in *Techno-velcro to Techno-memoria* have done—we are giving students credit for what they already do and asking them to know
what they know about these memories and rhetorical practices.

Family is a topic about which students already have working knowledge, a developed language, and experiences that can be used to build upon. Like personal writing, writing about family allows students to build on what they know while encouraging students to examine more closely, become self-aware, and come to a new understanding of individuals within the structure of a family, a community, and society. Although writing about self and family is not a new concept, this dissertation project argues for student writing within a first-year composition classroom that is informed through research rather than subject to the writer’s interpretation of personal experiences; this allows for students to develop rhetorical knowledge of WPA OS.

While students can build on and examine memory, as Ericsson and Muhlhuser recommend, students can also explore the oral histories of a family. Lena Ampadu builds on the work of Walter Ong in her piece “Gumbo Ya Ya.” She says, “Writing and language can best be taught by emphasizing the interrelationship between orality and literacy and by teaching respect for the home language and culture of others” (73). Family writing provides students with opportunities to examine the relationship between language and culture not only about the family a particular student chooses to study, regardless if it’s the
student’s own family, but also about many cultures through the process of providing feedback to other writers.

Designing assignments around the topic of family goes beyond asking writers to construct a personal narrative; the topic of family requires writers to question roles, practices, and relationships that might be common to an individual in developing a multi-layered narrative. Several scholarly journals, such as Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly, Life Writing, and Family Communication, discuss the practices of using the concept of family in communication. Family writing has been given different names, such as life writing and recently the term family rhetoric has appeared; however, the use of the term family history writing is approachable language for FYC writers and the words family, history, and writing need little explanation for general comprehension.

Family history writing can be defined, as introduced in chapter 3, as work that contextualizes life stories of individuals located in specific places at particular times functioning within the large scheme of the historical, cultural, and social influences. The development of family history texts is intended to examine, define, and construct the framework of a family’s history and should not be confused with the term genealogy, which is tracing lineage. Genealogical research may be used to construct a family’s history, but family history writing exceeds the simple collection of data by the construction of a narrative.
The purpose of family history writing is to share the events of an individual’s life within the context of a place and time but also to reveal the social, cultural, and historical influences of the individual within a larger, connected unit—the family. While chapter 5 examines methods for critically examining the term “family,” students may come to a composition classroom with a common perception and, more importantly, an individual understanding for the idea of family. Using the topic of family offers the benefits from both cultural studies and personal writing pedagogies within composition; writing with the topic of family allows writers to see themselves as products of culture.

While personal writing can be a form of family writing, personal writing alone limits students to write about themselves, whereas family writing asks the student to look at the context of selves within the larger community of the unit. Most agree that individuals are socially constructed beings with language that they have inherited. In *The Elements of Autobiography and Life Narratives* Catherine Hobbs says, “Our identities emerge from within a community [...] the language we use to speak and write is not at first our own. It comes from our cultures” (5). Family history writing presents reasons for exploration of language, culture and influences of the family unit and society.

In family history writing assignments, students explore the social construction of an individual, sometimes themselves, by looking at issues that influence the family within a historical and social
paradigm. Ampadu says, “I realize[d] the importance of using story as a means to explore my cultural and linguistic background and to give others a window into this rich legacy” (74). As Ampadu points out, an assignment designed around writing narratives of family presents writers with the occasion of looking at the intersection of language, knowledge, and power, which is one of the items listed under critical thinking, reading and writing outcome area of the WPA OS. Like personal writing, family writing serves the community of writers within the classroom and the individual learner; however, family writing goes beyond the personal assignment by offering students a way to see social, cultural, and historical influences on individuals.

Students can learn about the social constructedness of an individual by exploring family writing. Gergen and Gergen indicate that “people with an extensive background in the history of their culture or subculture, or with an elaborated sense of their place in history, may possess more coherence among narratives than those with a superficial sense of their historical position” (264). The focus moving from the personal experience to the experience within the construct of the family, and society, will enrich a student’s capability to develop a narrative. Additionally, attention to elements of audience, purpose, and situation, hallmarks of rhetorical knowledge, differentiate personal writing from expressive writing. Family history writing assignments are beneficial in presenting students with opportunities of determining the best ways to share materials and in what kind of
language the text should be represented based on the needs of a real-world audience and the purposes of communicating with the audience. For example, a student might be more inclined to develop a newsletter to share information about traditions of the family that the student has researched.

Often writing about family requires students to engage in an understanding of the social-construction of a family, sometimes their own family. Family writing moves the writer beyond describing his or her own personal experience. While various types of writing can be encountered in family writing, students must critically determine why capturing a story helps students understand the communal relevance of sharing experiences through stories, or narratives. When using the topic of family, teachers can help students see their work has value outside of the classroom. The topic of family often invests the writer in the process as this topic is often represented in multi-genres and modes. Family writing brings a seamless transition to source-based writing.

**Constructing Family Narratives with Research**

Family writing is life writing where the author can be the narrator in texts such as autoethnography, culture-writing where the author is situated within the structure and power relationships of culture; chronicle, telling of events in chronological order; manifesto, a public position paper on the author’s stances; memoir, description of events or people; travel writing, narration outwardly describing
personal reflection on setting and culture (Hobbs 3-5). In *Teaching Life Writing Texts*, Fuchs and Howes expand this list to also include testimonio, which is a personal narrative that “bears witness [...] on behalf of a community under siege” oftentimes produced by indigenous people (5) and group biography, the history of an organization or group (commonly musical groups) (1). The wide range of genres that can represent family, or life writing, is extensive.

Family history writing has become an important part of “contemporary culture” through “critical attention [to] scrapbooking, trade-publication guides for conducting family history, do-it-yourself genealogy databases, memoir clubs and writing circles, contracted ghostwritten autobiographies for corporate leaders or even the corporations themselves, commercially prepared video biographies for weddings, anniversaries, and funerals” (Fuchs and Howes 11). With family writing, the author does not need to be the one who has experienced the events or even be a member of the family that is being examined; family writing can be conducted by an outsider with the same focus as if the writer was examining her own family, using similar methods for research, invention, and production.

Family writing is an accessible assignment because it offers students the opportunity to engage in writing skills with which they are comfortable from previous writing environments and presents a seamless incorporation of research. Family writing can come from writing about the self, while allowing students to learn about
community, heritage, society, and history. Students in FYC often use a limited slice of research methods, and family history projects expose students to many forms of research, such as primary and archival research, along with traditional forms of research often taught in FYC. Using the topic of family is multidisciplinary in nature due to the multifacets of culture when constructing and examining elements of family; this brings together writing across the disciplines. By incorporating family writing in first-year composition, students can bring in research that is at the fingertips of the family being studied to blend the family’s history with social history. Students gather the family’s history to determine what locations and timeframes to conduct social history. Family history projects show students the partnership that primary and secondary information possess.

Writers may assume that to begin telling a family’s story, writers should begin by reviewing information in archives, conducting web-based research in a family source program, or collecting vital records to verify relationships and factual content. Since the family records, located online and in libraries, will be there long after the family members are gone, it is best to start with what is oftentimes most accessible to students – the family members themselves and memorabilia within the family’s home. Families have access to a variety of household items and heirlooms that have historical significance to the family, including: letters, photographs, jewelry, dishes, or specialty artifacts like military service awards.
To start students in the direction of developing a family project, teachers can encourage students to start with questioning any living family members to record the stories and collect family artifacts as a foundation to the investigative work on the family narrative. Secondly, students can rely on any unpublished materials and manuscripts from archives for supporting details that authenticate the stories of the family members and locate the artifacts within a historical context. In her CCCC paper “Playing in the Archives: Pleasures, Perils and Possibilities for Teaching,” Erika Lindemann says projects that require students to use archival research teaches students that “research involves making knowledge, interpreting artifacts and sources, solving problems raised by evidence, and experiencing the excitement of discovery” (6). Many students are not exposed to the various types of research, and family history projects are a logical integration of primary and archival research into FYC research methods.

**Family History Writing as Multiwriting**

Not only does family history writing engage students in multiple formats of research, but also it is multi-disciplinary, incorporates the use of multimodal composition, and spans multiple cultures. Robert Davis and Mark Shadles call this multiwriting, or a call for alternative composition, which is an approach that “gets students excited about learning; leads to additional learning and ‘student retention’; makes them hungry for discourse; de-mystifies academic prose, and asks
students to be self-directed” (24-26). The topic of family is ideal in engaging students in multiwriting. Students who respond to family history writing are much more eager to do the necessary research to find the stories and learn appropriate formats for representing the story. In the FYC courses, I have taught with family history as the theme, student success rate and retention were high, and students were able to clearly articulate meeting learning outcomes.

The study of family requires students to look through various disciplines for answers and perceptions on the subject being studied. For example, if a student is interviewing an individual for a biographical project, students may consult historical documents, use anthropological understanding of culture to explain an event or tradition, or seek advice from sociological theory to understand the interactions of individuals within various social structures. Additionally, students may want to know more about the language used or referenced within the interview, so perhaps the student can learn more about how language is shared, shaped, and influenced through linguistics.

Family writing allows an individual to capture multigenerational knowledge through what Suzanne Rumsey calls heritage literacy. Rumsey defines heritage literacy as “an intellectual inheritance, a collection of thinking and meaning-making patterns” that can be traced through every generation (575). When students are given the charge of identifying heritage literacy, or understanding how the
historical and cultural influences impact current views and practices, students may be more invested in the research and writing processes of discovery, understanding, and construction of new knowledge.

Outside of meeting learning outcomes for a course, work that can be classified as multiwriting is the type of writing that engages students in understanding writing as a communication skill that will be used throughout life. The use of family history writing as multiwriting encourages teachers to re-imagine the writing classroom as a space for discovery and present applications for preparing and connecting students to real-world writing, academic inquiry. Students can see the importance of lifelong learning through family history writing, which merges composition texts from inside the classroom with life outside in the community.

**Employing Multimodality in FYC**

Family history writing is a versatile topic that is practical subject matter to work with in addressing the outcomes in first-year composition. The topic can accommodate a vast array of assignments, research methods, genres, modalities, and learning outcomes. Family is diverse and ubiquitous. Ericsson and Muhlhauser state it is most effective to use assignments based on techno-rhetorical heritage, which is “developing assignments that connect rhetoric to students' knowledge and their uses of technology in and with their families. Families, after all, are part of an important extra-curriculum in students' lives” (Ericsson and Muhlhauser). It is not only the use of
family that will provide a facelift to personal writing but also the critical
step of shifting writing assignment to include multimodal composition.

Perhaps because the terms personal writing and essay seem to be synonymous with each other for a large number of both FYC students and teachers, the term narrative has regularly defaulted to the production of essays; however, to truly update assignment prompts to meet the WPA OS, teachers need to consider expanding writing assignments beyond the very limited offering of one genre—essay—and one medium—print—to include the possibility of all genres and media because by the very act of students having to make the choices requires careful examination of rhetorical knowledge. For this dissertation, essay is defined as academic prose with written text on a page that follows a structure of paragraphs arranged around a central idea with supporting details. This section of the chapter is not intended to be an either-or conversation that devalues the essay; I aim to point out that students are most often exposed to very limited rhetorical options when teachers offer writing assignments that ask students to “develop an essay.” When a writing assignment states a student must respond with an essay, the student has not been given an opportunity to explore the rhetorical knowledge of the assignment, as indicated in the WPA OS; students must choose from the various media and genres.

A central concept of rhetorical knowledge is to engage students in the fundamentals of rhetoric. In “The Challenges of the Multimedia
Essay” Lester Faigley asks teachers to “think about rhetoric in much broader terms. We have no justification aside from disciplinary baggage to restrict our conception of rhetoric to words alone. More important, this expansion is necessary if we are to make good on our claims of preparing students to engage in public discourse” (187). Faigley encourages teachers to think about the purpose of teaching students to compose beyond their immediate needs at the university. This purpose extends beyond the academy, so the types of documents students develop should exceed text-based projects, such as the exclusive production of essay. In “A Multimodal Task-Based Framework for Composing,” Jody Shipka says, “Students have a much richer imagination for what might be accomplished in the course than our journals have yet even begun to imagine, let alone to address” (282). She calls for reconceptualization of production, redelivery, and reception of student work so that students are “better equipped to negotiate the range of communicative contexts they find themselves encountering both in and outside of school” (283-84). This is particularly useful when identifying that students should learn to write in several genres, respond to the needs of different audiences, and learn common formats for different kinds of texts (WPA OS).

Through the exclusive production of essay, students miss the ability to see the larger scope of how a writing course is preparing them for life beyond the class or a grade to enrich their educations as literate beings. In “Expanding the Concept of Literacy,” Elizabeth
Daley says the common assumption of literacy is the ability to “read and write, to understand information, and to express ideas both concretely and abstractly. The unstated assumption is that ‘to read and write’ means to read and write text” (33). The evolving concepts used to define text have expanded away from alphabetic\(^1\), print based texts. In “Accumulating Literacy: Writing and Learning to Write in the Twentieth Century” Deborah Brandt says, “Literacy is always in flux. Learning to read and write necessitates an engagement with this flux, with the layers of literacy’s past, present, and future, often embodied in materials and tools and just as often embodied in the social relationships we have with the people who are teaching us to read and write” (666). As technologies and tools for developing texts change, the types of literacies students develop from working within the technology broadens.

Not only can teachers of writing build on what students already know, but teachers can and must also adapt assignments and language used within those assignments to ensure students are prepared for literacy in the 21 century. Daley says that language must acknowledge “one ‘creates’ and ‘constructs’ media rather than writing it, and one ‘navigates’ and ‘explores’ media rather than reading it” (36). As discussed in chapter 3, assignments must clearly indicate what teachers desire for students to respond to, but teachers must

\(^1\) Influenced by Selfe’s ideas of multimodal composition
also be considerate of language that limits student activities, capabilities, and expansion of literacies. Deborah Brandt’s work *Sponsors of Literacy* addresses the “literacy crisis,” or “the perceived gap between rising standards for achievement and people’s ability to meet them” (567). All teachers across all colleges and universities have a responsibility to students to address the literacy crisis, and I believe it can begin in FYC by building on prior knowledge and through the development of texts that teach students the elements of rhetorical knowledge.

To ensure the gap between what students come to college knowing, what they will need to know throughout college, and what will serve them for life beyond college, “compositionists should conceive of multimodal writing assignments as having wide-ranging and forward-thinking parameters, in order to invite the greatest possible range of student responses” (Brickmore and Christiansen 230). Because some students may not have been previously engaged in an academic environment with multimodal writing assignments, the topic of family can offer a comfortable, creative way to develop texts, while further developing the students’ literacies for the 21st century.

Ericsson and Muhlhauser believe:

Family is the cradle of our rhetorico-compositional literacies and the first classroom of multimodal composing. In addition, we commiserate with Selfe and Hawisher’s lament concerning “how little teachers of
English, composition, and communication know about the many literacies students bring to the classroom.” “As a result,” they claim, “we fail to build on the literacies that students already have.”

Family history writing is a way to capitalize on students’ existing literacies along with developing knowledge and skills. Teachers must be aware of and open to all available modes of representation and locate resources to aid students in multimodal composition. Student projects can and should include images, audio, and video to “expand the notion of control beyond the page that they [students] could think in increasingly broad ways about texts [...]” to include multimodal assignments (Takayoshi and Selfe 2). Multimodal assignments are “texts that exceed the alphabetic and may include still and moving images, animations, color, words, music and sound” (1). Writing projects should present students with ways to engage their critical thinking skills in determining how best to respond to the rhetorical situation as presented in the writing assignment. “Teachers who compose the best assignments, then, don’t outline a step-by-step procedure for students to follow; instead, they create assignments that prompt writers to think in new ways” (Hess 29). It is more likely that students will understand the importance of rhetorical knowledge if the type, or genre, of document they are being asked to produce is determined by the student for a particular purpose and audience
rather than by an assignment that just asks them to “develop an essay.”

Helping students understand medium and genre can enable them to better gauge the rhetorical knowledge for any given writing assignment. One way to explain the concepts of medium and genre to students is with the following scenario: If a traveler desires to go from Phoenix, AZ, to St. Louis, MO, there are many options for transportation. Perhaps a traveler will consider taking a train, bus, car, or airplane, which are all thoughtful choices for traveling this distance; however, other methods of transportation are available, such as skateboard, horseback, bicycle, or by foot. Depending on how much time the traveler has to get to the distance, goals of the trip, and resources available will all factor into the decision of transportation. In other words, the options of transportation for the traveler are what genre is to a writing project.

The medium is the fuel that powers the form of transportation. Obviously, the same fuel that powers an automobile cannot be used to power a skateboard, horse, train, or plane. Students must understand that genres propelled by the power of print are differ when the same genre is developed in sound or electronic platforms. While some students might have previously developed multimodal documents, most students cannot articulate the various capabilities that multimodal projects present and most students have not considered elements of genre and medium in text selection. Students’ lack of
knowledge surrounding genre and media is a result of the automatic use of essay in most writing classes. Multimodal assignments open the possibilities of what students can produce while also building upon literacies students may already possess; additionally, multimodal composition develops technological literacies that students may not possess.

If a student develops a writing project around the element of home, that student may struggle in an essay to bring in the spatial, sensory details of sounds; a soundscape\textsuperscript{2} would allow the student to capture the sounds of the busy home while incorporating narration about the location. In “The Movement of Air, The Breath of Meaning” Cynthia Selfe says, “a single-minded focus on print in composition classrooms ignores the importance of aurality and other composing modalities for making meaning and understanding the world” (2). In another type of project, a student may be writing an informative project on what American living was like for her Irish immigrant ancestors. She can build a web page that links to information on the potato famine, a common reason that many Irish settlers came to America, and keep the document focused on her family’s new life as Americans in Boston during the late 1800’s. A Web page provides the possibility for a student to include a video clip from the History

\textsuperscript{2} Soundscapes are “an audio on-location essay that tries to portray the aural nature, spirit, or essence of a particular place” (Selke, Fleischer, and Wright 20). This is one of three audio projects described in “Words, Audio, and Video: Composing and the Process of Production.”
Channel about life in Ireland or common struggles Irish-Americans faced as the 20th century began. An essay may demand that the student include summation of this historical content, while a Website can incorporate more layers including images, videos, and sounds of life for the student’s ancestors’ life in Boston.

In “Thinking about Multimodality” Takayoshi and Selfe recommend that students “need to be experienced and skilled not only in reading (consuming) texts employing multiple modalities, but also in composing in multiple modalities [...] because this type of instruction is refreshing, meaningful and relevant” (3-4). Students currently encounter and engage in a multimodal world; however, students do not need to be limited to digital possibilities for a project. Jody Shipka says the student work “need not be digital but might be made, or as I prefer to put it, purposefully engineered3, out of anything (15) or, should students be interested in introducing multipart rhetorical events, out of any number of combinations of things: print texts, digital media, live or videotaped performances, old photographs, ‘intact’ objects, repurposed (i.e. transformed or remediated) objects, etc.” (300). The type of text a student could develop is open to all possibilities, and teachers should be developing assignments that provide the flexibility for projects to be based on the available means and student-determined rhetorical knowledge. The topic of family

3 Based on Anne Wysocki’s definition.
lends itself to all forms of multimodal composition due to the various types of artifacts that are accessible. When designing writing assignments, teachers have to broaden the scope about what kind of documents push students to be independent thinkers and consider the kinds of texts that engage students in the technological world in which they already live. Brandt believes that “family is one of the gateways to technological literacy” (672). I believe there is an interesting connection between family and uses of multimodal composition that does not exist with many other topics; however, other topics can be investigated.

An example of how one scholar has tied together her passions for digital composition and the topic of family is represented in “The Olive Project: An Oral History Composition in Multiple Modes,” which illustrates through sound, video, and print-based text how to compose memory. Erin Anderson says from conception through production to circulation she composed memories from her “grandmother’s life told as a story.” Anderson said the project was a response to a class assignment in a graduate level multimodal composition course. She says her text is not about the product but about “process, and at its core it is also about you, about your encounter with it, and about your participation in the ongoing process of composing memory.” Anderson’s text represents both the ethos and pathos of technomemoria as discussed in Ericsson and Muhlhauser. It is projects like the Olive Project that illustrates at the highest quality of not only the
meaningful production of texts about family but also the writer’s awareness of her audience, purpose, and rhetorical situation. Not all students are provided with opportunities to take risks and play with technologies, as Anderson did. Many of my students have been eager and excited to take-on projects that provide freedom when presented assignments that state genre and medium are determined by the audience, but some composition teachers, who are set in their ways or fearful of the unknown, are unwilling to foster an environment for taking these risks.

When incorporating multimodal projects into first-year composition courses, there may be hesitation to multimodal composition and default to essay for teachers who may prefer traditional essay-based assignments, including: personal preference about what students should be learning, which is often affected by faculty’s academic backgrounds; teaching what they have taught in the past; perceptions of what teaching students “to write” (opposed to composing) means; and not questioning or considering how production of text influences literacy. Primary reasons for not teaching multimodal composition may be that some teachers are concerned about justifying how their teaching time is spent and the teachers themselves may not know how to develop these types of multimodal texts. Bickmore and Christiansen say, “A dilemma with multimodal compositions arises when instructors have little direct knowledge of producing multimedia writing, understandably feeling themselves out
of their depths” (239). Some teachers who teach multimodal composition for the first time do not try to teach a particular kind of document production but rather rely on what students may already know or be willing to try on their own.

Many teachers claim that using new kinds of technology would distract classroom instruction from focusing on writing elements. Some have even argued that first-year composition does not seem like the appropriate place for allowing students to use these technologies when the real goal should be teaching strong skills in rhetoric and literacy. However, the purpose of first-year composition is not solely to prepare students for college writing; therefore, according to the “Multiple Uses of Writing” and “21st Century Curriculum and Assessment Framework,” students should be exposed to multiple types and purposes of writing. A much larger conversation of what teachers view should be taught in FYC is on-going, and fortunately the WPA OS has identified this.

Takayoshi and Selfe reinforce what teachers should be teaching in first-year composition: “The classical basis of composition instruction involves teaching students how to use all available rhetorical means of communicating effectively” (6). While this statement dates back to Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric, and while most teachers agree that teaching rhetoric is the charge of first-year composition, many teachers continue to require only one form of one type of writing—the print-based essay. The concept of available means is continually fluctuating and teachers have a responsibility to students
to offer production of text within the most-current available means.
While the available means have changed over time, teachers continue
to write composition assignments that “have remained essentially the
same for the past 150 years” (1).

If the course learning goals, through the WPA OS, clearly
indicate students should be charged with developing rhetorical
knowledge, then the print-based essay cannot be the only option.
Using the concept of family can open the doors on genre and media
selection because, like a service learning course, the audience of is
real—not an artificial classroom teacher. Family history multimodal
assignments will allow first-year composition assignments to include a
variety of documents while engaging students in a topic about which
they have previous working knowledge, are passionate about and
interested in, and see as exciting to explore.

While teaching and expecting the genre of essay has been
comfortable for teachers and students alike, continuously developing
the same kinds of texts hinders students’ growth as writers. To provide
an illustration of how students can develop texts in a variety of genres
in all available media as a response to the same writing assignment, a
family history project illustrated in chapter 3, the following section will
demonstrate three student projects from my ENG 101: First-Year
Composition Course in fall 2009.
Merging Family History Writing and Multimodality: Illustrating the Student Achievement of Rhetorical Knowledge

My first-year composition class structure is fairly standard: students write multiple drafts for each of the four projects. Each draft is reviewed by either a class member, consultant of the university writing center, or the teacher. Each course project must include a self-assessment piece that accounts for the rhetorical decisions made in addition to how the student met the project goals. After projects are evaluated and returned, students can revise for a higher grade. At the end of the semester, students submit a course portfolio, as an assessment tool, that includes all drafts and projects, along with any other relevant materials that demonstrates how the student met the WPA OS.

This chapter section aims to showcase how students responded to one of the class projects, a family history multimodal assignment. The examples in this section represent various responses to the same writing assignment, which is discussed at length in chapter 3 and located in Appendix G. The project is a biographical sketch, which asks students to develop a project about a person who is at least sixty years old. The interview subject can be a member of the student’s family or a person who belongs to a family that the student is interested in learning more. Students had to determine and articulate in a self-assessment the choices made surrounding rhetorical knowledge of the text, including audience, purpose, situation,
medium/genre, and voice, tone, and formality. Classroom workshops offered students appropriate activities and exercises specific to the various stages in the writing process, from invention to research to production to delivery. Students were provided with materials, which were supplementary to the assignment handout, on developing texts within each medium\(^4\). Examples of projects within each medium were available to the students in the course Blackboard shell. All students engaged in peer review; projects, regardless of genre and medium used, were graded with the same grading rubric, which was based on the WPA OS.

Sample #1: Emma’s\(^5\) Electronic-Based Website

Emma interviewed the wife and children of a cultural leader in her community. The interview and project focuses on the life and death of their tribal leader, who had passed away just weeks before I assigned this writing project. Based on her interview information, artifacts from the family of the tribe leader, and her secondary research, Emma developed a website (see figure 2) that included audio from the interview. Emma divided the project content into four sections: home, career, later years and death, and awards and honors. Each section had its own page within the Website. In the awards and honors section, Emma showcased images, including photographs from

\(^4\) The three media for production are print, electronic and sound.

\(^5\) All student names have been changed to pseudonyms per IRB statement to protect students’ identities.
life and the artwork that the tribal leader had produced. The project is testimony to the family’s love for their father and the man behind the community leader that everyone else knew. Emma said she developed the project for the family, both immediate and distant.

Figure 2 Emma’s web project.

Emma accounted for the organization and genre selection based on the project requirements to engage with examples; this content can be found in the critical thinking, reading, and writing section of the WPA OS. In the self-assessment, Emma said:

I drew my organizational style from examples of other biographies online. I wanted to try making my piece look like any other biography. I liked how the biographies online separated the information into different categories,
and therefore did the same with mine. Before looking at other biographies and how they were layout [sic] I simply just typed out the information I had in an essay form and uploaded as so. I noticed it was a little plain and I got bored half way through. So I changed it around and added navigation and links and divided my information into four categories: life, career, later years and death, and awards and honors.

During the peer review stage, Emma developed an essay for this project. When I asked her on peer review day why she had selected that particular genre, she said it was because that’s [essays] what she knew how to do. We spend time talking about the audience and how she would deliver the content to the audience she had selected.

While Emma had numerous options, I encouraged her to keep in mind the audience and how that audience would access and interact with the document she was producing. I showed her a simple platform, Google sites, which would allow for a slow learning curve. The electronic space allowed Emma to represent her content with family photographs, cultural music, interview clips, and links to secondary information on the tribe and locations that the leader had visited through interactive layers, a feature that print would not have afforded the student project. Emma said her project took what would have been "a formal, impersonal format" on a topic that she cared deeply about, and transformed the project by preserving the memory of her
cultural family member through the space selected as an interactive display of his life. While the purpose of the project was writing to inform, she also wanted a document to serve as a part of the tribe’s heritage literacy.

Sample #2: Jordan’s Print-Based Newsletter

Jordan, like Emma, decided to focus her project on an individual who is not what many would call “immediate family,” but someone that Jordan had included in her first-week of class definition of what family meant to her. Jordan developed a print-based product that highlighted her subject’s battle with breast cancer and story of survival. Jordan’s project discussed her family’s tradition of participating in the Susan Komen Breast Cancer weekend. Jordan used a newsletter (see figure 3) not only as an informational text, but also as a persuasive text soliciting funding for the upcoming year’s walk. Jordan said she wanted to develop a document that not only told the story of survival but also that of continued support from friends and family members. Jordan provided information for readers to donate and register for the upcoming year’s walk.
Figure 3 Jordan’s newsletter

Jordan interviewed family members, included images from the walk, and brought in secondary source information about breast cancer support. Jordan said:

Instead of writing just the normal essay I created a newsletter because it better suited my audience and purpose. I wrote about the Breast Cancer 3-Day walk and why I was taking part in it. My audience was my family and friends therefore a newsletter could be read easily and it’s appealing to most. Also, it can be mass produced to send out all over the country to my relatives. For this project my rhetorical knowledge not
only shaped my project but also was the main foundation for it.

While the medium for this project was print, the student looked to other genres that more appropriate met the needs of the audience and fulfilled the purpose of her project.

Sample #3: Cecelia’s Audio-Based Sound Portrait

Cecelia decided that she would like to develop a text centered on the topic of what makes a successful marriage, specifically her parents’ marriage. Cecelia developed interview questions to investigate both of her parents’ perspectives and conducted interviews separately on how her parents met, fell in love, and survived 25 years of marriage. Responses from her mother and her father were kept confidential and shared in a public forum several weeks after the student’s project was produced.

Cecelia indicated that her parents were aware that each person was being interview, but both believed it was only for a class project. With an upcoming celebration of her parents’ 25th wedding anniversary, she wanted to produce a gift for her parents; the sound portrait6 was shared with her parents for the first time at the couple’s 25th anniversary party. The student has a twin sibling who developed

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6 As indicated in a previous similar footnote, sound portrait is a term that is defined as “an audio essay that focuses on some aspect of a person’s life. It is often biographical (Selfe, Fleischer, and Wright 20).
a PowerPoint of images to accompany the sound project; however, this section will focus only the on the sound portrait.

To listen to the student project, please see the sound file in Appendix H. Cecelia’s project begins with her parent’s wedding song, which played throughout the project. The project provides one parent’s responses to a question, which listeners do not hear, and then quickly the response from the other person is provided after listeners hear from the first speaker. From the responses, listeners gather an idea of what was asked, but more importantly the narrative is the focal point rather than the questions used to drive the research. In her self-assessment, she says:

I decided to switch back and forth between my mom and dad throughout the project. I decided to do this so they could both hear the other’s responses to the same questions. I also played one of their favorite songs in the background. I had this idea from the beginning and decided to stick with it. I elected this perspective because I felt that it was the best way to portray the answers of both my mom and dad. (Cecelia)

As the project begins, listeners hear content on how the student’s parents met; listeners are given an opportunity to hear from each person the thoughts and feelings of seeing each other across the room at a social dance and learn about the couple’s first encounter, which was a slow dance. The next snippet of text offers information
about a date that was intended to determine if the student’s father thought the mother was “a fun girl.” He said, “I took her to my house to jump on the trampoline and have BBQ.” The project takes listeners to the next scene, which is the marriage proposal at an overlook where he “popped the question” with a kiss, ring, and rose. In the project, the father expresses his nervousness while the mother indicates her surprise. This project allows listeners to peek into the moments of Cecelia’s parents’ memories through their reflective responses, which are all captured through intonation of voice and vocalization of emotion.

The next section of the project brings listeners inside the couple’s first apartment acclimating to married life; ironically, both used the same terms to describe that time during their life. Each stated “it was [an] enjoyable time” in their marriage. In the next scene, listeners are taken into the doctor’s office to learn about the couple’s first conception, twins, and in the very next snippet we learn the couple later has a “second set of twins.” The project closes with the couple’s reflections on what each person values, which parallels in focus around their family and the four children.

In this project, Cecelia allowed the responses to narrate the storyline. The passage of time feels seamless, and the student stated in her reflection the importance for her to be able to use sound to represent this project: “With print documents, I often have a hard time getting the emotion to come across and also trying to use the right
words so the readers can paint the image in their own minds.” Using
sound-based projects is particularly engaging because an author has
the ability to capture tone of voice, emotion, atmospheric sounds,
including significant music, as represented by Cecelia’s project. Using
the medium of sound provided capabilities for this student’s project
that print could not have afforded the project.

For example, the student illustrates the excitement through the
couple recounting of when they learn they would be having a second
set of twins; this tone would not have been able to be captured in any
other medium. Each parent shared the details of learning about the
pregnancy’s result and the emotions they felt when the doctor and
ultrasound revealed the second fetus. The student had to account for
how she believed her project responded not only to the project goals
but also the learning goals of the course. Cecelia said:

I was able to help my readers understand the topic in a
new way by presenting my topic in a sound portrait
verses in a written paper. I want my readers to gain
better understanding of this topic because my parents are
my intended readers and through this project I am able
to help them remember their past together. I have
become a more critical thinker, reader and writer through
this audio essay because I learned how to develop and
show emotion in a different way other than words. I also
learned that through prepared interviews one can reach
the answer he/she is looking for. I was able to come up with questions where the interviewee had to explain and respond with more than a yes or no answer.

Throughout the project, Cecelia stated that she had some trouble editing two separate hour-long interviews down to a three-minute audio file. She said she struggled in determining what to keep and what to delete. Cecelia also said that she learned about ethical practices of using both primary and secondary research. At the end of the semester, when I interviewed Cecelia, she said this project was not only the most enjoyable for her, but it was also the project on which she worked the hardest. She said while working on the project she did not think of how demanding the requirements were, but she believed if she had been required to write an essay she would have been irritated with the amount of work she was required to do for this project (Cecelia). She said that this project mattered to her because she was going to share it with so many people, and Cecelia said, “I liked that you used family for this class because everyone has that in common and we can relate it what you are asking us to do” (personal interview). For Cecelia it was the combination of family history writing and multimodal composition that made the project enjoyable.

Each student seemed to clearly understand why she was selecting the genre and how medium affects genre. These students are a very small example of what students who were offered multimodal options generated. These projects illustrate what students
will do when they are given writing assignments that put them in the driver’s seat. The students’ ability to excel seemed to be due to not only the topic of family but also the options of multimodal composition. Students were excited in class to work on the projects and present their projects to one another. As Jane Danielewicz notes about her own students in “Personal Genres, Public Voices,” students “behave more like professional writers in that they pay attention to audience and experience writing as an active relationship between readers and writers” (443). Students showed a great deal of personal satisfaction with the projects, and the students were able to articulate meeting the WPA OS through this project.

Opening the personal essay to include family history multimodal composition can be an important step in making what has been seen as private writing to become public, and perhaps this will encourage teachers who have abandoned the personal to revisit meaningful writing to students through family history multimodal composition.

This chapter has shown how family history writing offers students the opportunity to produce text for an audience beyond the classroom and for a purpose that reaches outside of the classroom walls. The charge of collecting and telling a family’s story can connect students to the class community and build a strong bridge within families.

Family history writing instills a strong sense of pride as students know the work will be seen by the family they are writing about, and students see how important it is to be precise in details through both
the research and accuracy in narrating. Family history writing also offers options for using both primary and secondary research and to develop various types of writing. While many teachers have been asking first-year composition students to tell personal stories, family writing offers the benefits of personal writing while allowing students to see the social, historical, and cultural significance of the family being examined.

Expanding personal essays to family history multimodal composition is about developing students’ literacy skills and offering opportunities to respond to the WPA OS. While this chapter has addressed exclusively the modernization of the personal essay to family history multimodal projects, in the next chapter I discuss why the topic of family works well in first-year composition to engage students as critical thinkers. Chapter 5 explores the use of common topics, specifically the concept of family, to aid students not only in the critical thinking, reading and writing section of the WPA OS, but also in developing student information literacy skills. The next chapter illustrates through using postmodern theory student-designed definitions can be constructed to understand family as relevant for each individual writer.
Chapter 5:

Engaging Students in Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing with Common Topics

The Writing Program Administrators Outcome Statement (WPA OS) intends to provide programs with the ability to customize each of the five outcome areas based on local situations and needs. The introduction to the WPA OS indicates that the outcomes cannot be “taught in reduced, or simple ways” (WPA). Therefore, each of the five outcomes includes suggestions for how to meet the outcome area. These action items are intended as recommendations, not edicts or policies. One area of suggestions, based on the area Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing (CTRW), seems to need more elaboration for student action and comprehension than any other section. This section addresses sophisticated skills of information literacy, which are briefly addressed in four bulleted points. In the CTRW section, students are asked to demonstrate their understanding of:

- reading and writing for inquiry, learning, thinking and communicating;
- writing assignments as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing primary and secondary sources;
- integrating their own ideas with those of others;
- understanding the relationship among language, knowledge, and power (WPA OS).
The language used provides much flexibility. The references in what students should be able to demonstrate for critical thinking, reading, and writing are vague through this list. The tasks that students should participate in using readings and researched materials are not clear. While teachers have placed a heavy focus on interaction with outside texts, methods for assisting students in meeting this particular outcome area could be made clearer to both students and teachers.

To further complicate the responsibility for students to learn methods for critical thinking and engagement with texts, some faculty members make false assumptions about student understanding and capabilities on how to actively read and respond to texts; locate, evaluate, and synthesize research; and integrate outside texts as support for their texts. It is paramount for student success that faculty design writing assignments so that students are asked to complete tasks that enable students to function in the role of critical thinker, reader, and writer. This chapter begins by exploring documents that can be used to supplement the CTWR area of the WPA OS for clearer methods in how to assist students on a journey of information literacy. The second half of the chapter looks at using the topic of family for students’ exploration and construction of knowledge.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the concept of family works well in first-year composition (FYC) because students come to FYC courses with common knowledge and language for thinking about and understanding family. Family stories offer FYC students opportunities
for connecting the personal to the academic, or as Deborah Mutnick
advocates: “the opportunity to articulate a perspective in writing on
their own life experiences can be a bridge between their communities
and the academy” (84). Also discussed in Chapter 3, students can use
family history multimodal composition as a way to explore the
importance of determining what rhetorical knowledge they bring to a
writing task and what rhetorical knowledge they may need to gain to
successfully complete a writing task.

Family can also be used as a topic that engages students in the
process of critical thinking and reading to result in critical writing. This
chapter offers an in-depth exploration for students’ critical thinking
skills by examining the concept of family through multicultural,
historical, and social aspects. The chapter acknowledges the
metanarrative7, or ideas that have been seen as fundamental truths
within society, of family to demonstrate how students can deconstruct
concepts through critical reading and research using theoretical lenses
from multiple disciplines, including but not limited to history,
communication, and sociology. The chapter closes with an argument
for student-constructed definitions of family as evidence of the
students’ abilities as critical writers.

7 Term by Jean-Francis Lyotard that will be defined and discussed later
in the chapter.
Teachers of composition can assist students in the role of critical thinker throughout the writing process by requiring reading and researching activities, such as dialectical journaling, synthesis, summarizing, questioning, locating, evaluating, and interpreting texts. As Linda Alder-Kassner and Heidi Estrem note in “Critical Thinking, Reading and Writing: A View from the Field,” students need a “wide variety of experiences that would stretch their literacy” (60). As discussed in Chapter 4, literacy activity occurs not only in the production but also in the consumption of texts. Students can develop literacy by interacting with others’ texts and analyzing those texts to see what kind of decisions other writers have made regarding rhetorical knowledge, process, and knowledge of conventions. According to Mark Hoffman, students’ ability to think critically comes in stages of curiosity to learn more, knowledge to discriminate different types of information and discern if those sources are valid, and the capability to digest and interpret the content. All of this starts with the act of discovery or desire to seek out information, so using topics that are interesting and familiar to students is an important first step in engaging students.

It is important for students to question content through thoughtful approaches prior to making choices about rhetorical knowledge, drawing conclusions about information and topics, and
constructing new knowledge on a topic. As students determine elements of audience, purpose, and situation that suit their rhetorical knowledge of the assignment to which they are responding, students employ critical thinking, reading, and writing skills to make these decisions. For example, for a student to specify an audience for her text, she may be asked to begin by evaluating similar types of texts in order to analyze how texts are constructed specifically to appeal to and meet the needs of a specific audience. She may also be asked to look at elements of ethos, or authority, as represented in various texts to learn about rhetorical decisions and strategies that other writers have made in order to establish her authority or credibility with readers. Through these interactions that students have with other texts, students can begin to analyze and synthesize content in an effort to plan and participate in responding to writing assignments; therefore, teachers must be intentional in preparing students for these tasks by including methods of interacting with texts into writing assignments. Students must participate in the recursive process of information literacy throughout the writing process.

In “Preparing for the Tipping Point: Designing Writing Programs to Meet the Needs of the Changing Population,” Ana Preto-Bay and Kristine Hansen state that the WPA OS outlines skills students need “to attain their academic literacy” (49). While students can meet areas of academic literacy through the instructional use of the WPA OS, students can also gain critical skills that will be used beyond the
classroom exercises of higher education. Because a core mission of higher education is lifelong learning, the skills students acquire in FYC need to serve them well beyond their academics. Therefore, the WPA OS is instrumental in helping students develop information literacy, a lifelong skill. The category of critical thinking, reading, and writing from the WPA OS specifically addresses information literacy skills—the ability to locate and decipher information to use as support in sharing new ideas.

In “Information Literacy and the WPA OS,” Barbara D’Angelo and Barry Maid examine the intersections of the WPA OS with Information Literacy Competency Standards of Higher Education. According to the Association of College and Library Research, the Information Literacy Competency Standards of Higher Education (ILCS) were released in early 2000 and endorsed by the American Library Association and American Association for Higher Education; this set of standards (see Appendix K) is intended as indicators for teachers and administrators to determine if a student is informational literate. The WPA OS and ILCS are similar in structure; the WPA OS has five core statements with twenty-six suggestions for responding to the outcomes, while the ILCS has five standards with twenty-two performance indicators. Additionally, both documents could be used for assessment purposes.

The audience for these documents varies because the WPA OS is written for a specific discipline, whereas the ILCS is cross-disciplinary.
Framing for the ILCS differs greatly, specifically in the uses of standards by one text opposed to outcomes for the other. The framers have made clear by that the WPA OS are outcomes, not standards (Yancey, 2005; Wiley, 2005), and it is not appropriate for the WPA OS to be viewed as standards. While the WPA OS covers a much broader scope of skills that students need, the ILCS can be used as one document to complement particular areas of the WPA OS, specifically critical thinking, reading, and writing.

The performance indicators of the ILCS may be useful for teachers who are considering how to engage students in the outcome area of critical thinking, reading, and writing. D’Angelo and Maid argue that the ILCS “emphasize inquiry and research processes in greater detail [than the WPA OS] from topic selection through communication of a final product.” The ILCS is much more specific in articulating methods for achieving information literacy. D’Angelo and Maid match the standards of the ILCS to the WPA Outcome Statement areas, but I believe the ILCS standards can used to consider ways of explaining methods and articulating goals for individual projects. As illustrated in Chapter 3, assignments need project goals based on the WPA OS to demonstrate to students what they will accomplish by the end of the project. Teachers can use the following selected standards from ILCS as goals for a particular writing project:

- Identifies a variety of types and formats of potential source information
Selects the most appropriate investigative method or information retrieval system for accessing needed information

Articulates and applies initial criteria for evaluating both the information and its source

Validates understanding and interpretation of the new information through discourse with other individuals, subject-are experts, and/or practitioners (ILCS).

The steps listed are specific and helpful in engaging students with material to demonstrate learning of the WPA outcome area of critical thinking, reading and writing. For example, to meet the ILCS objective of identifying “a variety of types and formats of potential source information,” students can engage in research that requires them to find multiple types of sources, e.g., scholarly articles, primary sources like interviews, documentaries, or government documents. This would assist students in meeting the WPA outcome area of CTRW.

Information Literacy Standards is only one example of a document that could be used to supplement and provide clarity for the WPA OS outcome area of critical thinking, reading, and writing. Another document, as discussed in Chapter 2, which can be useful for assisting teachers in providing clearer methods for engaging in critical thinking, is the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Education (see Appendix D).
According to the Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project, the “framework describes the rhetorical and twenty-first-century skills as well as habits of mind and experiences that are critical for college success,” and is “based in current research in writing and writing pedagogy,” (CWPA). The Framework for Success in Postsecondary Education contains two sections. The first section is titled Habits of Mind, which refers to “ways of approaching learning that are both intellectual and practical and that will support students’ success in a variety of fields and disciplines” and are “crucial to success in college” (CWPA, NCTE and NWP). The second section looks at methods for using critical writing, reading and analysis through each of the five WPA outcome areas.

The Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing promotes using “critical writing and reading to develop and represent the processes and products of their critical thinking [...] Through critical writing and reading, writers think through ideas, problems, and issues; identify and challenge assumptions; and explore multiple ways of understanding” (CWPA, NCTE and NWP). The Framework for Success states that students can receive support and opportunities from teachers through the using the following tasks in writing assignments:

- read texts from multiple points of view (e.g., sympathetic to a writer’s position and critical of it) and in ways that are
appropriate to the academic discipline or other contexts where the texts are being used;

- write about texts for multiple purposes including (but not limited to) interpretation, synthesis, response, summary, critique, and analysis;
- craft written responses to texts that put the writer’s ideas in conversation with those in a text in ways that are appropriate to the academic discipline or context;
- create multiple kinds of texts to extend and synthesize their thinking (e.g., analytic essays, scripts, brochures, short stories, graphic narratives);
- evaluate sources for credibility, bias, quality of evidence, and quality of reasoning;
- conduct primary and secondary research using a variety of print and nonprint sources;
- write texts for various audiences and purposes that are informed by research (e.g., to support ideas or positions, to illustrate alternative perspectives, to provide additional contexts); and
- generate questions to guide research (CWPA, NCTE, NWP).

This list provides specific steps students can take in critically examining and using sources to construct new knowledge. These steps would be useful in developing project goals to ensure students
are provided with opportunities for meeting the WPA OS by the end of the course.

A third document that can used to elaborate methods for respond to the outcome area of critical thinking, reading and writing is NCTE’s 21st Century Literacies Framework, also discussed in Chapter 2. NCTE’s 21st Century Literacies Framework contains six areas of focus, one of which references students’ interaction with, “Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneously presented information.” This area specifically offers questions for students to inquire, locate, and use information “from multiple places and in a variety of different formats, determine its reliability, and create new knowledge from that information “(NCTE). The questions for this section include:

- Do students create new ideas using knowledge gained?
- Do students locate information from a variety of source?
- Do students analyze the credibility of information and its appropriateness in meeting their needs?
- Do students synthesize information from a variety of sources?
- Do students manage new information to help them solve problems?
- Do students use information to make decisions as informed citizens?
These questions require teachers to think critically about their approach and what students are being asked to do. As Ana Feldman states in *Making Writing Matter: Composition in the Engaged University*, faculty should “rethink their writing activities as they rethink traditional approaches to the production of knowledge” (6). Feldman states that teachers can “design student writing projects that emphasize how specific situations-real or simulated-shape the use of language in those settings” (4). Much of what the WPA outcome area of critical thinking, reading and writing does is ask students to be accountable for interactions and uses of language. Students cannot do this alone though, as students’ interactions and uses are reliant on writing assignments and tasks that students are given in FYC.

Teachers can use these three documents to develop assignments that provide students with opportunities to meet the WPA outcome area of critical thinking, reading and writing. Through the selection of activities listed below based on appropriateness for a specific assignment, teachers can more clearly assist students in meeting the WPA outcomes area for critical thinking, reading and writing. To illustrate to teachers how these documents can be used as collective support for the WPA OS, I have attached tasks and exercises from each of the three documents discussed earlier in this chapter to the outcome area of critical thinking, reading, and writing from the WPA OS. In the following content, the Writing Program Administrators Outcomes Statement of critical thinking, reading and writing is the
umbrella text, listed in **black**. Sections extracted from ILCS specific to critical thinking is indicated in **orange** text. Material on engaging writers in critical thinking through their educational experiences from Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing is noted in **blue** text.

NCTE’s 21\textsuperscript{st} Century Literacies Framework is listed in **green** and has been changed from questions to statements.

**Critical Thinking, Reading and Writing:**

- **reading and writing for inquiry, learning, thinking and communicating:**
  - read texts from multiple points of view (e.g., sympathetic to a writer’s position and critical of it) and in ways that are appropriate to the academic discipline or other contexts where the texts are being used;
  - write about texts for multiple purposes including (but not limited to) interpretation, synthesis, response, summary, critique, and analysis;
  - synthesize information from a variety of sources.

- **writing assignments as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing primary and secondary sources**
  - select the most appropriate investigative method or information retrieval system for accessing needed information
  - articulate and apply initial criteria for evaluating both the information and its source
o evaluate sources for credibility, bias, quality of evidence, and quality of reasoning;
o conduct primary and secondary research using a variety of print and nonprint sources;
o generate questions to guide research.
o locate information from a variety of sources.
o analyze the credibility of information and its appropriateness in meeting their needs.

- integrate their own ideas with those of others;
  o validate understanding and interpretation of the new information through discourse with other individuals, subject-matter experts, and/or practitioners
  o craft written responses to texts that put the writer’s ideas in conversation with those in a text in ways that are appropriate to the academic discipline or context;
  o create multiple kinds of texts to extend and synthesize their thinking (e.g., analytic essays, scripts, brochures, short stories, graphic narratives);
  o write texts for various audiences and purposes that are informed by research (e.g., to support ideas or positions, to illustrate alternative perspectives, to provide additional contexts)
  o create new ideas using knowledge gained.

- understand the relationship among language, knowledge, and power
  o identify a variety of types and formats of potential source information
  o manage new information to help them solve problems.
Because writing assignments are intended to help students demonstrate knowledge of the WPA OS and achieve literacy, teachers will want to design assignments that provide students with opportunities for reading, conducting research, and being exposed to texts as students make decisions as they construct their projects.

The color-coded content provides many options for activities for student learning and clearer teacher specificity in response to the critical thinking, reading, and writing area. The following section of this chapter will examine a specific topic, discussed in depth in two previous chapters, regarding the accessibility and activation of the WPA OS. Integrating the concept of family into FYC writing projects makes it even more functional and beneficial to use or adapt the ILCS standards, Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing and 21st Century Literacies through the WPA OS.

**An Argument for Using the Topic of *Family* for Critical Examination**

American society is captivated with the concept of *family*. Not only do media sources look to demonstrate the construct of currently existing and evolving units, but individuals also strive to define *family* so that it parallels their personal values, beliefs, and practices. Although many individuals within a particular country or culture often have a similar understanding of *family*, the notion of *family* is much
broader than most could imagine. Family is not a fixed form, so the term “family” must embody an individual’s perception of the term, as family is not a “concrete thing responding to a concrete need” (Cheal 12-13). Perhaps the fluidity of the term family, as James Holstein and Jay Gubrium discuss in their article “What is Family? Further Thoughts on a Social Constructionist,“ is attributed to the idea that family is “constantly under construction, obtaining its defining characteristics somewhere, somehow, in real time and place, through interpretive practice” (4). Much in the same way that literacy is in flux and evolves (see Chapter 4), so does the concept of family.

The concept of family is not only about an individual’s construction or understanding about family, but it is also about the exposure that individuals have to socially constructed understandings of and articulation about family. Students in FYC can use the concept of family to employ critical thinking, reading, and writing skills. Using cultural, historical, and social research of the term to closely examine the construct of family is a first step in students’ engagement of critical thinking and reading.

In “Learning (Teaching) to Teach (Learn),” Malea Powell points out, “race, gender, ethnicity, class, orientation, ableness, etc. are not [simply] ‘topics’ to be introduced in the classroom […] they are lived realities that are always already present in the lives of students who sit in classrooms” (579). Therefore, it is important to take a careful approach when asking students to examine and write about various
facets of family represented in multicultural elements; however, a rich discussion of these elements using research can help students see how the social constructedness of the author affects a text in terms of its audience, organization, and information presented. Because students bring a diverse background with them into classroom settings, family acts as a common thread to students’ individual stories.

Adler-Kassner and Estrem say reading can be used for students to “support their ideas;” “oppose their ideas;” and “frame new ideas” (66). This requires writing assignments that ask students to reach beyond what they believe they already know and to conduct research that enables them to provide evidence of what they know. The topic of family is effective in responding to the critical thinking, reading, and writing (CTRW) category of the WPA OS because so much assumed knowledge comes with the topic of family. The topic of family connects and relies on multiple disciplines, so it is useful for students to see the different ways in which academic disciplines can study a similar topic from different angles or perspectives. Additionally, students may be less intimidated to conduct research on a topic which they feel they already have a strong grasp; however, teachers can help students become critical investigators on a topic that has so much to explore.

Many students come to college just beyond high school, and the ideas students are exposed to within their homes can be identified as “normal,” or unexamined. Students may not have challenged the
ideas, the sameness of the individuals, or the environment to which they were previously exposed. When students explore elements of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity, they are “forced” to “give up old ways of thinking and knowing” to learn new approaches (hooks 43) and see a multicultural world. In “Local Pedagogies and Race,” Amy Winans looks at how students’ exploration of race “helps students learn to think and write critically” (472). Many students, especially white students, do not understand how “racial identity is learned and how it can change” (Winans 485). The examination and acknowledgement of race and ethnicity provides space for the study of nonmainstream language usage, practices, and traditions.

A starting point for students to critically examine race and ethnicity is through the cultural determination of family structures. Students can find the intersections of “language, knowledge, and power” through the careful study of cultural influences on familial dynamics and how language is used to communicate and continue culture. Long-standing cultural elements such as faith, traditions within ethnic groups, and historical elements of surname can be entry-points for students to come to understand culture and participate in critical thinking, reading, and writing skills.

**Cultural Examinations of Family through Ethnicity, Faith, and Surname**

Looking at the practices and language of one particular ethnic group within American culture provides a starting point for examining
how family can be defined through cultural understandings of family. In October of 2009, I was in Hawaii where I had a conversation with a native about the Hawaiian concept of family, ohana. Jon Akana told me about the Hawaiian language for family and the various ways by which an individual comes to be a part of family. During my discussion with Akana, he told me about how the Hawaiian culture has various ways to “enter” a family. Biological or legal/common law marriage means are recognized, but Hawaiians also accept family members through hānai, which is similar to foster or adoption, but without legal acknowledgement (Akana). For example, if a teenager has a child for whom she cannot care, the family would care for her child. The family member to help the girl raise her child would not necessarily be the infant’s grandparents (as we have seen an increase in the past twenty years in the US); perhaps it would be an aunt, cousin, or grandparent of the teenager. Hawaiians believe it to be their responsibility to care for one another; for this reason, they are more likely to co-habitat with extended family members—specifically by the representation of multigenerational homes of grandparents, parents, and children.

My conversation prompted me to do a little investigation about the terms and ideas surrounding family in Hawaiian culture. According to “Beliefs and Values on Being Hawaiian:”

Ohana is defined as a group of both closely and distantly related people who share nearly everything, from land
and food to children and status. Sharing is central to this value since it prevents individual decline. Built upon the foundation of the ohana, the family, Hawaiian culture ensures the health of the community as a whole. The Western concept of "immediate family" is completely alien to indigenous Hawaiians. The Hawaiian ohana encompasses not only those related by blood, but all who share a common sense of aloha (love and compassion).

The family’s sense of connectedness to community and view of connection to others differs from mainstream American culture where individuality is valued and the boundaries of family may more closely align with the concept of "immediate family." According to Stern et al. in “A Macro Portrait of Hawaiian Families” sponsored by the Center on the Family at the University of Hawaii-Mānoa, Hawaiians are known for “greater family-centered characteristics” and more families are multigenerational, because Hawaiians value kōkua (cooperation) (88). Ethnicity plays a strong role in how members of a family view themselves, and unless critically examined, individuals may not consider questions such as: Who is considered family? What language is used to identify family? What are the obligations and roles of families?

Because culture encompasses many elements beyond ethnic group, traditions and practices including religious elements can be used as a topic that influences students understanding of family and
shapes students’ lens in develop knowledge about family. In “[Not] Losing My Religion: Using *The Color Purple* to Promote Critical Thinking in the Writing Classroom,” Donald McCrary demonstrates that students can enhance their literate practices and critical thinking skills if they are encouraged to bring their private discourses into academic spaces. Through research, students may find that religious texts provide some of the earliest references to individuals through family, which are often identified and acknowledged through lineage. For example, in the Bible, individuals are identified through historical roots to Adam and Eve (*Genesis* 5), while in the Book of Mormon, individuals seek to know their ancestral line of Abraham (*1Ne 5.14*), and in the Koran, individuals of Muslim faith trace ancestry to the prophet and messenger, Nuh[^8] (*17.3*). Critical examination of texts that reference family can be a starting point for students to consider how families have been defined, but I believe if students choose to see faith-based materials as a source, it is important that the text is one of many sources—not THE source—for how families can be identified or constructed. Additionally, holy texts often not only refer to individuals through lineage, but also establish definitions and purposes of family (e.g. families are for procreation, and only women and men can constitute a family) which can be examined against the current social norms.

[^8]: Nuh is an Arabic translation of Noah
Because many individuals throughout time have been acknowledged through lineage in a variety of sources, students may be interested in the critical examination of families’ surnames. Students might explore the origins of families through surnames, or references that were made about an individual’s family of origin through profession, birthplace/location, or kinship. In “An Essay on the Origin and Import of Family Names,” William Arthur says surnames date back to the year 1000 AD in France and 1066 AD in England (16). Surnames began as an identifiable marker of where an individual’s family lived, called location names, which are tied to the county or town of origin (i.e., Corke or Sutton); family names marked through kinship (i.e., Johnson for son of John, or MacSherry for Son of Sherry); profession names (i.e., Millers or Bakers) or race based names (i.e., White or Brown.) Students can use a surname as an entry point to learning more about historical demographics and family make-up throughout the etymological family history. These topics require students to question, think about, and resist the social norms, but first students must come to an awareness of these norms.

Because critically thinking and researching are not acts that just happen, and because thinking through texts with multiple perspectives when the writer’s own bias are so prevalent, students must be encouraged to drill down to deep levels meaning, language usage, and understanding of who has power to form socially accepted ideas. Many students come to the writing classroom with the idea of the “right” and
“wrong” way of writing. Writing is used for learning, so faculty feedback can be helpful in pointing students to various texts or helping students question the texts.

Regardless of the aspect of culture used for critical thinking, reading, or writing, the process for students’ examination and dissection of the content is the process for critical thinking, and it is important that teachers not impose personal views about who should belong to a family or opinions on other cultures during students’ critical examination process. If teachers can open up as many possibilities so that students can wade through the waters of confusion, students will be able to grapple with ideas and construct their understandings of these concepts. Through this process, information literacy is more likely to occur. A learning outcome for students in FYC, according to the WPA OS, is interactions “among critical thinking, reading and writing,” and using the family structure can provide students with these interactions.

**Deconstructing the Metanarrative through Critical Reading and Research**

The word *family* is used in many contexts. Mathematical equations may belong to the same family, and biological plants, animals, or organisms are classified by family. Language from the same root or origin comes from a family, and products made from the same manufacturer are referred to as *family*. These classifications are more clear-cut because the elements being classified are objects, but
the most common way in which the word *family* is used refers to people, which is perhaps the most complicated. While the idea of *family* is universal, the understanding and definitions for family are not. A variety of relationships can be suggested by the single term, *family*. *Family, clan, kin, sib, folks, and ancestors* are all words used for family, but all represent some slightly different meaning. Family is so highly valued that the first words most children learn are familial terminology/concepts (mama or dada), and for many individuals, a life-long goal is to have a family of his/her own.

As indicated in the WPA OS, students need to see the “relationships between language, knowledge and power” and this can become more evident for individuals who study a construct like family. “Family life relates to our own sense of ‘who we are’ and how we ‘fit into’ the lives of others. Critical analysis of family lives inevitably involves examining our beliefs about ourselves (which we usually call reality), our beliefs about others (which we often call ideology), our position in society (location) and the nature of society itself (or social structure)” (Bernardes 29). Through deconstruction of the metanarrative, students can consult various texts that look at the intersections of how families come and stay together, the ideas surrounding family and the beliefs about roles of family. Writing projects that provide students with these opportunities will present opportunities for critical thinking and information literacy; the acts will
also present more informed student texts that allow the students’ ideas to be central and research to be secondary.

In the 1940’s, when anthropology and sociology scholars of family began defining the term family, it was much more clear-cut than what currently exists. In 1949, George Murdock wrote in his text *Social Structure*: “The family is a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults” (1). Murdock theorized about structures of family, like atoms in a molecule, as combined with a large whole and who coined the term “nuclear family” for “a married man and woman and their offspring” (1). It would be challenging to find any American who is not familiar with this term or ideological construct of nuclear family. In her article, “Do we Mean the Same by the Concept of Family?” Jan Trost found that 90% of individuals identified the term family by labels associated with the nuclear family when asked, “When you think of your family, whom are you thinking of?” (434-35). This idea is so deeply rooted in American social history that it has become widely accepted as the metanarrative for family.

In *Postmodern Condition*, Jean-Francois Lyotard discusses the notion of a construct that has been centrally agreed upon as a metanarrative (xxv). For example, in the US, *family* carries a *metanarrative* of the nuclear family or individuals linked together by
legality or lineage. In “The Challenge of Family History,” Stephanie Coontz cautions readers to be aware of how the concept of family has been “mythologized” in the sense that no family can live up to the American 1950s “family” as identified by Murdock’s term, nuclear family. While Murdock may be responsible for constructing the American metanarrative of family, the acceptance of this construct has been perpetuated by many. This idea has become a fundamental truth; however, the family portrait has changed significantly over the past fifty years in the US, specifically in the last twenty years a push is being made for the metanarrative to shift.

In the past decade, there has been movement for equal representation of evolving familial units; evidence of the shift in family structure ranges from laws that grant acknowledgement and equal rights for same-sex couples to the public representation of familial structures on television programs that illustrate families that are more representative of current American society. Television series such as Modern Family showcase not only the diverse structures (e.g. same-sex couples, inter-racial marriages, and multigenerational families) but also the complex issues that families struggle with (e.g., autism, divorce, infidelity, and drug usage) as represented in Parenthood and The Good Wife. These shifts are dramatic when compared to popular programs of families as represented by All in the Family in the 1970’s, Family Ties in the 1980’s, Growing Pains in the 1990’s, and Everyone Loves Raymond in the 2000’s, which showcased the white, nuclear
family with topics that primarily surrounded parenting and marriage. In specific regions of the US, namely the south, society still has a very long way to go to reconstruct and deconstruct the metanarrative of family due to deeply rooted faith-based and political constructs of the family. Laws still govern and constrict individuals who self-identify in families, which prohibit individuals from marriage, medical, adoption, inheritance, and/or educational privileges to name a few.

Students’ lives can be tied to and affected by many of the issues that surround family, so some students will have a personal investment in studying the topics and issues surrounding family. More importantly the FYC classroom is a space for emphasizing the lifelong relationship between critical thinking and effective communication. In *Making Writing Matter: Composition in the Engaged University*, Ann Feldman says, “First-year writing classes should provide university students with a set of footprints, the first of many, marking a path that makes writing matter wherever they go and whatever they do” (1). More important than any topic that students use to construct and articulate arguments, students need the foundational skill of critical thinking. As illustrated here, family offers many avenues for student exploration.

**Characteristics for Evaluating and Constructing Family Definitions**

*Family* can be loosely defined as a social group connected by emotional and/or physical ties and held together for a common
purpose. In *Black Sheep and Kissing Cousins*, Elizabeth Stone says family connections are not only about *having* the “physical attributes” or “blood connection.” It is about *sharing* the beliefs (40). Although ideas about families are loosely defined, many have more definite ideas on the boundaries of who can be considered family to one another. Gubrium and Holstein state that “not anyone or anything can be called family” (662); a description, or “methodological criteria” must be used to make sense of the concept (White and Klein 27). To help students to deconstruct existing ideas about family and construct personal definitions of family, they need a guide to decipher the various types of social structures. Sociologist and leading scholar in family theory, research, and methods, James White has constructed criteria for thinking about and closely examining both the abstract and individualized theories on family.

In *Family Theories*, James White and David Klein offer a criterion that can be used for distinguishing features of a family in comparison to and opposed to the dynamics of other social groups. White’s criterion has four distinct features: duration of membership, intergenerational members, legal and common law relationships among members, and links to larger kinship organizations. White and Klein say, “Families last for a considerably longer period of time than do most other social groups.” They say that we normally “think of our families as lasting throughout our lifetimes” (17). Individuals often are born into a family that they never leave, and many individuals join a
family mid-way through life and hold dual-membership in those families until death. Of course, events such as estrangement or divorce may sever ties for some individuals, but others may consider themselves still to retain membership in the family.

In addition to lifelong membership, White and Klein state that families are often intergenerational and care for one another for the duration of the membership. Much like the Hawaiian culture described earlier in this chapter, family members care for one another throughout their lifetimes, specifically early in life. White and Klein explain that when life begins at infancy a caretaker is needed “for providing nurturance during the early years of life;” families are the only social group that “virtually guarantee” fairly large age differences for the members of the group (17). Any family may have members who range in age from one day to one hundred years. White and Klein say the caretaking allows for “producing and sustain[ing] persons and personhood” (18). Without the care for individuals within the unit, family membership would be shortened, and the emotional dynamics of family is affected. Family members often care for one other because they have an emotional connection to each other.

The third criteria that White and Klein use to describe families is through “the social side of creating a person,” within the family through means that individuals leave or enter, which includes agreements, such as marriage, birth, adoption, or divorce (18). Events occur that initiate membership into an already existing unit. Families
are a “social institution” which include foundationally similar cultural “beliefs and practices,” and a connection with extended members through “the ties of kinship [that] create the potential for lineages and collateral (e.g., within-generation) family relationships” (18-19). Many of White and Klein’s criteria for family hinge on one other, for example entering the family has a direct relationship for the ability to care for others and be connected to the extended members. The duration of the membership also has direct impact on the events of families, such as birth, marriage, divorce, or death.

White and Klein further state that families are tied to “history, tradition, and multiple generations of group members” (19). This element provides students to do investigation of the histories to examine how the past affects the structure. Having these identifying factors, or criteria, to understand the concept of family (and how it varies from other forms of social groups) is helpful for student in examining a unit that identifies as family. White and Klein states that determination of families can “begin to envision what counts as a family concept” through descriptions of the following:

- composition, or size, and configuration, of family membership,
- structure and process of interaction (between the members),
- ways families relate to their environments,
- the whole family as a group,
- the family as an institution,
• nature of the ties between two or more members within the family group. (20)

This is a helpful list for students to use to evaluate groups of individuals while consider their own list of features necessary for a family.

Examining existing guidelines such as White and Klein’s and constructing features that define family can be used to engage students in “writing as a critical thinking method” (WPA OS). Although White does not provide details, such as two or more people constitute a family or what type or intensity of ties between the individuals need to exits, he does indicate that questions surrounding size and the nature of the ties be closely examined. For this examination to occur, students must get to the root of fundamental ideas of family, including “theoretical assumptions, propositions, concepts, and ways of thinking about family phenomena, purposes, functions, and relations to society” (McBride, et al 571). Because these elements shift over time, students can compare historical constructions of family to those students may be more familiar with now. Experiences and exposures to specific cultures, including aspects of ethnic groups and faiths, shape individuals’ understanding and the language used for thinking about and communicating the meanings of those experiences. Through critical examination of sources and texts, students can question societal norms and come to an understanding of what is family for them by developing their own definitions.
Another particularly helpful lens for understanding *family* is through establishing criteria of relationships. In “Defining the Family Through Relationships,” family communication specialists, Ken Floyd, Alan Mikkelson, and Jeff Judd, identify relationships that individuals participate in, which can be identified through the lenses of role, sociolegal, or biogenetic. Floyd, Mikkelson, and Judd are intentional in taking a more broad approach in understanding family, but clearly they state that the criteria offered are not the exclusive perspectives of defining family (26). Unlike White, who offers a list of features, Floyd, Mikkelson, and Judd state that “emotional attachment and patterns of interaction (role lens), their legally sanctioned status (sociological lens), and their shared genes and/or reproductive potential (biogenetic lens)” are a method for setting boundary conditions for research (26). This criterion offers a particularly interesting, and almost postmodern approach, to examining family.

Floyd, Mikkelson, and Judd indicate that emotional and social interactions with others are as important as features such as legality and genetics (27). The lens of social and emotional ties could support students’ construction of definitions that explain relationships with pets, significant others, and friends. Because the metanarrative of family is so strong, oftentimes individuals use terminology like “My ‘real’ mom” when referring to birth parents or parents who raised the individual as opposed to a step parent. Because of the application of critical thinking and reading of texts on family, students can feel
confidence through the production of knowledge and texts regarding family by saying, “This is my family,” rather than the uncertainty of labels for their personal relationships based on someone else’s definition or criteria; students have located and examined the ideas associated with family and language used to construct their definitions rather than accepting the metanarrative.

**Shattering the Metanarrative**

From the range of criteria used to define family as discussed in the previous section, there is some kind of common understanding about what can be identified as family and perhaps what cannot. In “What Phenomenon is Family?” Irene Levin says, “Some sort of agreement seems to exist about what family means. At the same time, however, the individual’s social construction of family suggests that not only one, but numerous concepts of family exists” (93). Although there is an understood construct of family, the individual understandings vary.

This provides a rich topic for FYC writers, as no “right” or “wrong” answer can exist when asking and answering questions regarding familial structures. In “Understanding the Concept of Family,” Irene Levin and Jan Trost state, “It is essential to challenge the concept of family. At the same time, it is equally important to distinguish what family is for one person and what it is for another” (351). Leaning on postmodern theories, any response can be an appropriate one; however, a reason, perhaps criteria as provided by
White in the above section, will provide students with a methods for explaining how they came to a particular understanding about family and the definition of family.

Trost says there is a common understanding for the term, but she argues that there is little consistency in the concept. In another article by Jan Trost, “Do we Mean the Same by the Concept of Family?” she studies the results of 1,000 surveys to find that “there is an enormous variety among the lay members of our society when classifying what is family and what is not” (441). It seems as though the same language is being used, but not the same definitions or understanding for the term. Therefore, starting with the metanarrative of nuclear family is a good starting point for FYC writers when employing critical thinking on the topic of family.

Rather than subscribing to a monolithic definition of THE family, students can be encouraged to develop personal definitions of family based on the students’ terministic screens, or their filters of reality, which are often used for defining and understanding the world around them (Burke). Terministic screens are shifts in understanding based on position, perception, and experience. The language that individuals use to share the event or define the experience may be similar but not the same. Bernardes states, in “We Must Not Define 'The Family'!,” that there is a common misunderstanding that people share common experiences of any given situations; for example, in motherhood even though the circumstances are similar, the “experiences are varied and
diverse” (26). No two women experience the same senses of motherhood; as they are different, their perceptions are different, and their circumstances are different. However, the experience is common enough that women relate to one another about events such as childbirth, nursing, or rearing activities. Additionally, the language used to identify the events is the same. All of this makes defining familial terms more difficult for students and all the more a robust activity for helping students to meet the learning outcomes of CTRW defined in the WPA OS.

Although having a concrete definition of family may make discussions about family easier, perhaps part of the students’ abilities to be critical thinkers and writers is to construct personal definitions of this term and to then test them out with others. Trost suggests that “each person in the audience makes his/her own personal definition of family” (351). As Kenneth Burke indicates in *Language as Symbolic Action*, “there are two kinds of terms: terms that put things together, and terms that take things apart” (49). Because family serves in the dual role of both building and dividing, students can scrutinize existing definitions and determine criteria for family units while constructing a working definition: “No one’s explanation of family matters are judged correct or incorrect. Rather, each and every one is viewed and being in command of a set of practical understandings that they use, for better or worse, to assign meaning to their relationships” (Holstein and Gubrium 15). Holstein and Gubrium suggest that a master narrative
about understanding of family isn’t really appropriate, and through critical thinking students can examine ideas and beliefs about family. Through critical reading and writing students can come to develop a new understanding about family and shatter preconceived notions that currently exist.

Evidence of Students’ Abilities as Critical Writers: Student-Constructed Definitions

In my FYC course, I ask students, as the first activity of the semester, to arrive at the determination of family for themselves by producing definitions of family. This is important for a variety of reasons; one being that all other projects in my classes ask students to write based on family, so students need an understanding of family from which to work. Another purpose is to establish the critical thinking needed to construct knowledge. The definition assignment synopsis invites students to think about the following:

What do you mean when you say the word “family”? What features are needed for people to be considered family? Who is allowed to be a member of this group? How can family be divided? Does family mean something different now from what it did in the past? What other words mean about the same as family? What are some specific examples of family? Who gets to be considered as family?

Students are encouraged to locate definitions and are required to read articles from the fields of communication, sociology, history, and
anthropology to develop personal definitions of family. Students are reminded that definitions link or compare a term to an illustration of how that term should be applied.

Many students struggle to find the appropriate language to define family. Perhaps this was due, in part, to the students’ ability to separate out the functionality of family from the individuals they associated as being family. For example, if a family is defined by a mother and father with children, then terms, which have a social implication attached to them, must be examined. For example, the word “mother” carries an association: “We cannot strip a word or idea of the layers of meanings without being presumptuous” (Settles 220). Students are asked to look at the association of the terms being used and determine who is most appropriate to classify within the definitions they are constructing.

One of my students came to associate the term mother with a woman who was not her biological parent, even though she was raised throughout her life by her biological mother; as a result, she said she felt a sense of betraying her “real mother” for using the word mother to describe another person. In class, she wrote about the role of mother and her understanding of the term mother, but said she felt it would be too hurtful if her “real mother” had heard the daughter using the term with anyone else regardless that she felt another person had meet many of the criteria for mother.
Although many students produced definitions that stayed very close to the criteria of genetics and legality, some students constructed definitions based on Floyd’s role lens of emotional attachment. One student wrote, “Any person that you love and put your whole trust in. No matter if they are related to you by blood or not. They need to be someone who will be there with you through thick and thin. An example of people I consider family are my roommates, close/best friends along with my blood relatives.” For this example, my students and I discussed labels like friends and roommates being different terms with different meanings. These terms are not the same, so saying that someone is a family member is different than labeling the person as a friend or even “like family” to the student. In another student-constructed definition on family, the student wrote:

Family: a group of people in which one loves and cares deeply for either biologically formed, brought together by marriage or adoption;
2. Group of people who have a deep connection emotionally, mentally and spiritually; church congregation or lifelong friends;
3. Someone who loves unconditionally, supports all that one does, and is always there for them.

Although student definitions could include any elements that students saw appropriate, they had to justify their definitions and decisions by
providing evidence of questioning, grappling with texts on family, and constructing a term based on student-developed criteria. Students wrote self-assessments reflecting on the decisions they made; these reflections then served as evidence of their critical thinking and information literacy skills.

Much of critical thinking requires students to uncover the many layers of their assumed knowledge so that they can better understand and articulate how individuals have been influenced or socialized to carry meanings in text or labels. Family offers an opportunity to sort through “one’s heritage, one’s communication baggage” (Wolff 13) to construct new understandings about family. This is a skill that certainly will benefit students well beyond the composition classroom, as are the intentions of all areas of the WPA OS. The WPA OS was not only developed by leading scholars in the field but also the document incorporates many concepts based on current composition theory; therefore, it is important to see the outcomes statement as a highly theoretical text.

Through the application of the WPA OS theory for the past five years, I have found that the section of critical thinking, reading, and writing needs supplemental clarity for student understanding more than any other section. Because critical thinking is a complex task, it requires teachers incorporate step-by-step support throughout writing assignments for students to achieve this set of critical skill. This chapter is intended to give teachers ideas for incorporating critical
thinking, reading, and writing strategies into their curriculum along with supporting documents to supplement and further explain the WPA OS.

In the next chapter of this dissertation, readers will see the overall conclusions and implications of the research presented from suggested curriculum design, effective and intentional assignment design based on curriculum, and the uses of the topic family that is intended to be used as a tool for achieving the WPA OS. Continued research threads based on the work in this project will be discussed, along with recommendations for the discipline and limitations of this research are offered.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

The work in this dissertation attempts to demonstrate how the Writing Program Administrators’ Outcomes Statement (WPA OS) as well as other foundational documents can be used to improve assignments and assist students to better meet learning outcomes. Even the most effective writing instructors can strengthen their writing assignments through careful examination of curriculum development. Writing must be designed with students’ needs in mind for it to be purposeful to them; additionally, assignments should not only be designed based on the overall curricula needs, but also an understanding of the skills that will serve students in future academic and professional environments. Outcomes should be the starting point for not only teacher development of curriculum, but also student response to an assignment.

This dissertation offers four foundational documents from the discipline of rhetoric and composition to inform FYC practices and curricula. Of these documents, the WPA OS is central, as the discipline has determined that the outcomes are the cornerstone to what students should be able to achieve by the end of first-year composition (FYC). Supporting documents for putting the WPA OS into action include the Framework for Postsecondary Success, which was collaboratively developed by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), National Council of Teachers of English.
(NCTE), and the National Writing Project (NWP). Included in this dissertation are methods for implementing the WPA OS into FYC courses. For example, the NCTE 21st Literacies Framework and Conference on College Composition and Communication’s (CCCC) Multiple Uses of Writing can each be used to develop assignments. Each of these documents was developed by the discipline to help instructors design assignments and curricula that can help expand student critical thinking and writing skills to meet the demands of the 21st century. By being aware of and adhering to these documents, educators can develop assignments that more clearly address learning goals.

Designing assignments using the four documents, with specific focus to the WPA OS, can improve the quality of assignments, which will yield in richer student-developed writing projects, improve students’ overall writing skills, and increase students’ abilities to meet the course outcomes. Also critical to assignment design is the sequence in which assignments are introduced to students. By using a common theme throughout the course, and by building one assignment on another, students can apply and practice skills developed in previous assignments, which will inform and improve their responses to future assignments, as new outcomes and course goals are introduced to students. This dissertation argues that assignments need to be carefully evaluated and revised to ensure that both assignments include the WPA OS and student products meet the
WPA OS. As evidenced by my own work in revising a previously written assignment using the four foundational documents from the discipline, with specific concentration on the WPA OS, teachers can see an example of how to move students to produce better quality work and more specifically respond to the course outcomes.

The second half of the dissertation places particular emphasis on two of the outcome areas from the WPA OS: rhetorical knowledge and critical thinking, reading, and writing. For students to be successful at achieving rhetorical knowledge, the kinds of documents teachers ask students to develop should be carefully considered. By expanding current perspectives on the genre of the personal essay to include family history multimodal composition, teachers can be more successful in placing students in a rhetorical decision making position and providing opportunities for students to become more aware of the decisions they make as writers, including audience, purpose, genre, medium, and language.

When using family history multimodal composition, my students were able to successfully demonstrate their ability to produce work that shows comprehension and application of rhetorical knowledge. Using a common topic, such as family, with which students are familiar allows for students to focus more intently on developing rhetorical knowledge; the course concentration is directed to writing and thinking skills rather than shifting focus back and forth between developing writing skills and requiring students to learn a new, unfamiliar body of
literature. The topic of family opens opportunity for using multimodal composition, which can deepen the quality of work being developed and connections to the WPA OS for students.

Common topics provide students with a widespread basis of developing and negotiating knowledge on the topic while offering comfort to venture out and explore multiple genre and media. Building on students’ preexisting knowledge, specifically with regards to the topic of the course, is beneficial for student learning. To illustrate how student learning can be achieved, this dissertation showcases three student projects with excerpts from the students’ self assessments. While students in my classes were successful with family writing, students could meet the outcome area of rhetorical knowledge with other topics; however, the topic would need to be common because classroom conversations can more readily focus on core issues of rhetoric rather than majority of instructional time being devoted to deciphering content of readings.

To further the conversation on this particular common topic for all students, faculty can use the topic of family to engage students and provide opportunities for them to demonstrate knowledge in the area of critical thinking, reading, and writing. The topic of family is a rich base for students to engage in the critical process of interacting with outside texts to develop their own texts. Because teachers and students alike may perceive that students have a deeper understanding about the concept of family, students can deconstruct
and analyze elements of family from a social aspect and become aware of the consequences or implications of a *metanarrative* of family. Students can showcase their critical thinking, reading, and writing through defining family based on their own individual *terministic screens*.

**Limitations of Study**

This dissertation is directed toward writing faculty as a call to methodically build, engage, and participate in curriculum. This project only begins the process of exploring pedagogical methods in response to the WPA OS. The work here is limited by the minimal amount of scholarship written directly about the WPA OS and information regarding possible uses for the WPA OS as cornerstone curriculum. When using the topic of family to engage students in WPA OS, lenses of postmodernism and social construction present a challenge in being able to directly establish what can be seen as fundamental truths that cut across institutional contexts. For example, in chapter 4, I propose a curriculum around the concept of family history writing assignments, but in the very next chapter I problematize the lens for understanding *family* and argue for this term to be subject to interpretation by the writer. However, it is this very act of problematizing the concept of family that invites and challenges students’ engagement with their own texts. Yet, this makes academic sense in supporting a curriculum that desires for students to demonstrate rhetorical knowledge and critical thinking, reading, and writing skills.
New Ways of Conceiving WPA OS and Family

While a forthcoming anthology *The WPA Outcomes Statement: A Decade Later* will be a much needed addition to the scholarship on the WPA OS, additional reflective and theoretical texts for experienced teachers, novice teachers, and first-year writers will be needed on the subject of teaching with the WPA OS. I see opportunity to develop texts for first-year writing teachers, through an extended first-year writing course I am currently teaching. At my university, first-year writing course is offered in the following three options: a stretched out version that takes places over three semesters; the more traditional route of two semesters; an accelerated course where all of FYC is offered in one semester. If a student is placed in the three-semester course sequence, he or she completes six writing projects over two semesters, and a third semester with four projects, opposed to four writing projects over each semester.

The course I am currently teaching is the stretch version of the course, and students have completed a semester and a half of first-year composition. It is around the midterm mark of the second semester in my stretch course, and students appear have a much stronger grasp of concepts within the WPA OS than students who are taking a traditional ENG 101, or two-semester sequenced course, with me. Because the stretch students have had the opportunity to spend an additional semester with the WPA OS, the students seem to be excelling a much better rate; however, research, on the content of the
students’ portfolios over a longer and much broader scope, would be needed to allow for determination if students are more success at meeting the WPA OS in three-semesters opposed to two. This model may open discussion about using the WPA OS in developmental and basic writing courses.

At the institution where I work, data have been collected about pass rates and grades of the students in the stretch-courses opposed to traditional students, but I would like to look specifically at comprehension of the areas of the WPA OS to evaluate portfolios. Additionally, there is very little scholarship that directly addresses portfolio assessment, self-assessments on individual projects, and the WPA OS collectively; therefore, I believe that a body of work that brings together all three of these theoretical areas would be helpful to teachers and administrators.

Texts that address teacher training in areas of WPA OS would be helpful for teaching assistants and new practicum advisors. In “The Outcomes Statement as Theorizing Potential: Through a Looking Glass,” Ruth Overman Fischer attempts, but notes she was unsuccessful, at providing “a section on the theories/theorizing that influenced the framers in constructing the document [WPA OS]” (171). This seems like a worthwhile exercise because it may be helpful for novice teachers to see the direct correlation between theory of composition and rhetorical studies and the WPA OS. While it may be counterintuitive to look for the presence of a particular theorist in the
WPA OS, (e.g., where is Shaughnessy present?) it may be helpful to have a collection of commonly taught theories for the TA practicum for teachers of rhetoric and composition that is divided into five sections, each section representing an outcome area of the WPA OS. For example, for a section entitled rhetorical knowledge articles that address how teachers help students understand elements of audience, purpose, rhetorical situation, genre, media, and language choices may help teachers think more systematically about helping teachers coming into the discipline be intentional about praxis for student achievement of the WPA OS.

Another research project based on the WPA OS that would be useful for first-year writers is to collect outcomes used across the nation in writing programs that are based on the WPA OS. A close examination of the language used, specifically if programs include the highly theoretical language that was developed for writing teachers in WPA OS, will determine what is the most accessible language for students; this could be achieved by working with student focus groups. I have continuously served as a mediator to FYC students about concepts of the WPA OS, even when using textbooks that directly use the WPA OS. Depending on the findings of already existing textbook materials, an article or text materials that use less academic language and more student-friendly language is needed for students.

One area of research that may be of particular interest is the intersections of technology and curriculum for FYC through the
investigation of using electronic spaces for teaching and learning with the WPA OS. A close study of best practices in online education for achieving WPA OS may be helpful because an increasing number of universities are moving first-year composition courses online while increasing the number of students per section. A study toward how the four foundational texts discussed in chapter 2 apply to best practices for online teaching of first-year composition would be important to investigate. This would inform the CWPA if the current WPA OS should be used regardless of the method of delivery for FYC.

When I was collecting data for this dissertation, I noticed that students who self-identified as second language speakers and writers produced better quality sound and electronic projects opposed to the same students’ print-based projects. Because this dissertation did not segregate native writers from second language writers, I did not focus specifically on this observation; however, for further knowledge of teaching with multimodal composition in student achievement of rhetorical knowledge and composing in electronic environments, I would like to track students’ learning through multimodal composition in both traditional courses and courses that are designed specifically for second language speakers and writers.

Because I spend time focusing in this dissertation on how valuable the topic of family has been for my students, I would like to further examine the topic of family in the teaching of writing. First, I would like to examine how the metanarrative of family is established in
popular sitcoms, representing specific family models for each decade since the idea of “nuclear family” was conceived. The work would focus specifically on how the concept of family is represented and communicated through sitcoms. This project would build on the work I started in a course titled Language and Gender with Karen Adams in 2005. My project would look at a broad 50-year snapshot of families in media, which includes: *Leave It to Beaver* (50s); *Brady Bunch* (60s); *All in the Family* (70s); *Family Ties* (80s); *Growing Pains* (90s); *Everyone Loves Raymond* (200s); *Modern Family* (2010); *Parenthood* (2010) and *The Good Wife* (2010).

In addition to how media portrays family, looking at how technological advances are affecting the interchange of communication for families is a particular interesting subject to me. In *The Saturated Self*, Kenneth Gergen discusses the idea of how different historical developments have shaped the social impacts of families, specifically: (1) railroads in mid-1800s; (2) public postal services, widely flourished with advent of railroads; (3) automobile in 1920s; (4) telephone placed within homes in 1950s; (5) Radio broadcasting near 1925; (6) motion pictures, and (7) printed books (50-52). Moving into current technologies, I believe social media has affected and connected families, as significantly as the items on Gergen’s list, and in particularly the role of Facebook.

This platform has rapidly connected families through sharing more daily information. This technology has not only enhanced
communication for families across the globe connecting family members who could not otherwise share information so readily, but it has also affected some families in a negative light, as it provides family members with the capability to share information that other family members perceive as private. To successfully examine the roles of Facebook and families, a case study that analyzes and synthesizes postings of all members of a very limited number of individuals and his/her self-identified family members, along with surveying all individuals involved, would be a starting point. This project could see the positive and negative impacts of communication and information shared, along with determining if previous forms of communication (e.g., holiday newsletters summarizing highlights) or seasonal cards/letters are distributed less due to the use of Facebook.

The work presented in this dissertation aspires to influence teachers in ways that would challenge them to revisit their assignments and determine if they are intentional with their assignments. This focus on assignments would result in clearer articulating to students the expectations of how to be successful in the class and increase student learning. With particular focus to not only student achievement of nationally recognized learning outcomes, but also expanding student literacies for the 21st century, FYC becomes a relevant course for students that serves students throughout and beyond their academic careers.
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To: Duane Roen  
Santa Cata  

From: Mark Roosa, Chair  
Soc Beh IRB  

Date: 06/12/2009  

Committee Action: Exemption Granted  

IRB Action Date: 06/12/2009  

IRB Protocol #: 0985004050  

Study Title: Family Writing in First-Year Composition  

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(1).  

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Writing Program Administrators’ Outcomes Statement

Introduction

This statement describes the common knowledge, skills, and attitudes sought by first-year composition programs in American postsecondary education. To some extent, we seek to regularize what can be expected to be taught in first-year composition; to this end the document is not merely a compilation or summary of what currently takes place. Rather, the following statement articulates what composition teachers nationwide have learned from practice, research, and theory. This document intentionally defines only "outcomes," or types of results, and not "standards," or precise levels of achievement. The setting of standards should be left to specific institutions or specific groups of institutions.

Learning to write is a complex process, both individual and social, that takes place over time with continued practice and informed guidance. Therefore, it is important that teachers, administrators, and a concerned public do not imagine that these outcomes can be taught in reduced or simple ways. Helping students demonstrate these outcomes requires expert understanding of how students actually learn to write. For this reason we expect the primary audience for this document to be well-prepared college writing teachers and college writing program administrators. In some places, we have chosen to write in their professional language. Among such readers, terms such as "rhetorical" and "genre" convey a rich meaning that is not easily simplified. While we have also aimed at writing a document that the general public can understand, in limited cases we have aimed first at communicating effectively with expert writing teachers and writing program administrators.

These statements describe only what we expect to find at the end of first-year composition, at most schools a required general education course or sequence of courses. As writers move beyond first-year composition, their writing abilities do not merely improve. Rather, students' abilities not only diversify along disciplinary and professional lines but also move into whole new levels where expected outcomes expand, multiply, and diverge. For this reason, each statement of outcomes for first-year composition is followed by suggestions for further work that builds on these outcomes.

Rhetorical Knowledge

By the end of first year composition, students should:
  o Focus on a purpose
  o Respond to the needs of different audiences
  o Respond appropriately to different kinds of rhetorical situations
Use conventions of format and structure appropriate to the rhetorical situation
Adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality
Understand how genres shape reading and writing
Write in several genres

Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing
By the end of first year composition, students should:
- Use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating
- Understand a writing assignment as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing appropriate primary and secondary sources
- Integrate their own ideas with those of others
- Understand the relationships among language, knowledge, and power

Processes
By the end of first year composition, students should:
- Be aware that it usually takes multiple drafts to create and complete a successful text
- Develop flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proof-reading
- Understand writing as an open process that permits writers to use later invention and re-thinking to revise their work
- Understand the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes
- Learn to critique their own and others' works
- Learn to balance the advantages of relying on others with the responsibility of doing their part
- Use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences

Knowledge of Conventions
By the end of first year composition, students should:
- Learn common formats for different kinds of texts
- Develop knowledge of genre conventions ranging from structure and paragraphing to tone and mechanics
- Practice appropriate means of documenting their work
- Control such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Composing in Electronic Environments
As has become clear over the last twenty years, writing in the 21st-century involves the use of digital technologies for several purposes, from drafting to peer reviewing to editing. Therefore, although the kinds of composing processes and texts expected from students vary
across programs and institutions, there are nonetheless common expectations.

By the end of first-year composition, students should:
  o Use electronic environments for drafting, reviewing, revising, editing, and sharing texts
  o Locate, evaluate, organize, and use research material collected from electronic sources, including scholarly library databases; other official databases (e.g., federal government databases); and informal electronic networks and internet sources
  o Understand and exploit the differences in the rhetorical strategies and in the affordances available for both print and electronic composing processes and texts
APPENDIX C

21ST CENTURY CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK
In the 1990s, the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association established national standards for English language arts learners that anticipated the more sophisticated literacy skills and abilities required for full participation in a global, 21st century community. The selected standards, listed in the appendix, served as a clarion call for changes underway today in literacy education.

Today, the NCTE definition of 21st century literacies makes it clear that further evolution of curriculum, assessment, and teaching practice itself is necessary.

Literacy has always been a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared among members of particular groups. As society and technology change, so does literacy. Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the twenty-first century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies. These literacies—from reading online newspapers to participating in virtual classrooms—are multiple, dynamic, and malleable. As in the past, they are inextricably linked with particular histories, life possibilities, and social trajectories of individuals and groups. Twenty-first century readers and writers need to

- Develop proficiency with the tools of technology
- Build relationships with others to pose and solve problems collaboratively and cross-culturally
- Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes
- Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information
- Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts
- Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments
Elements of the Framework

Applied to students of English language arts, the literacy demands of the 21st century have implications for how teachers plan, support, and assess student learning. Teachers benefit from reflecting on questions associated with 21st century literacy demands.

Develop proficiency with the tools of technology
Students in the 21st century should have experience with and develop skills around technological tools used in the classroom and the world around them. Through this they will learn about technology and learn through technology. In addition, they must be able to select the most appropriate tools to address particular needs.

- Do students use technology as a tool for communication, research, and creation of new works?
- Do students evaluate and use digital tools and resources that match the work they are doing?
- Do students find relevant and reliable sources that meet their needs?
- Do students take risks and try new things with tools available to them?
- Do students, independently and collaboratively, solve problems as they arise in their work?
- Do students use a variety of tools correctly and efficiently?

Build relationships with others to pose and solve problems collaboratively and cross-culturally
Students in the 21st century need interpersonal skills in order to work collaboratively in both face-to-face and virtual environments to use and develop problem-solving skills. When learning experiences are grounded in well-informed teaching practices, the use of technology allows a wider range of voices to be heard, exposing students to opinions and norms outside of their own.

- Do students work in a group in ways that allow them to create new knowledge or to solve problems that can’t be created or solved individually?
- Do students work in groups to create new sources that can’t be created or solved by individuals?
- Do students work in groups of members with diverse perspectives and areas of expertise?
- Do students build on one another’s thinking to gain new understanding?
- Do students learn to share disagreements and new ways of thinking in ways that positively impact the work?
• Do students gain new understandings by being part of a group or team?

**Design and share information for global communities that have a variety of purposes**

Students in the 21st century must be aware of the global nature of our world and be able to select, organize, and design information to be shared, understood, and distributed beyond their classrooms.

• Do students use inquiry to ask questions and solve problems?
• Do students critically analyze a variety of information from a variety of sources?
• Do students take responsibility for communicating their ideas in a variety of ways?
• Do students choose tools to share information that match their need and audience?
• Do students share and publish their work in a variety of ways?
• Do students solve real problems and share results with real audiences?
• Do students publish in ways that meet the needs of a particular, authentic audience?

**Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneously presented information**

Students in the 21st century must be able to take information from multiple places and in a variety of different formats, determine its reliability, and create new knowledge from that information.

• Do students create new ideas using knowledge gained?
• Do students locate information from a variety of sources?
• Do students analyze the credibility of information and its appropriateness in meeting their needs?
• Do students synthesize information from a variety of sources?
• Do students manage new information to help them solve problems?
• Do students use information to make decisions as informed citizens?

**Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts**

Students in the 21st century must be critical consumers and creators of multi-media texts.

• Do students use tools to create new thinking or to communicate original perspectives?
• Do students communicate information and ideas in a variety of forms?
• Do students communicate information and ideas to different audiences?
• Do students articulate thoughts and ideas so that others can understand and act on them?
• Do students analyze and evaluate the multimedia sources that they use?
• Do students evaluate multimedia sources for the effects of visuals, sounds, hyperlinks, and other features on the text’s meaning or emotional impact?
• Do students evaluate their own multimedia works?

Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by complex environments
Students in the 21st century must understand and adhere to legal and ethical practices as they use resources and create information.

• Do students share information in ways that consider all sources?
• Do students practice the safe and legal use of technology?
• Do students create products that are both informative and ethical?

Implications of the Framework for Assessments
Assessments need to take into consideration both traditional components and elements that may be different for 21st century student work.

Traditional elements of assessment of 21st century student learning
The traditional elements for assessing 21st century student work include relevance and reliability of information used in the work; significance of new information or understandings communicated throughout the process and in the final product; effectiveness of the work in achieving its purpose; impact of the work on the audience; creativity or aesthetics demonstrated in the final product; creativity, initiative, and effectiveness demonstrated in solving problems; efficiency and effectiveness of the student’s process; and the student’s legal and ethical process and behavior.
Newer elements of assessment of 21st century student learning

Assessment of 21st century products of learning may be different because of technological tools. Some elements to consider include:

- extent of students’ access to 21st century tools both in and out of school
- range and depth of information readily accessible to students
- facility of students with technology tools
- extent to which tools can make artists, musicians, and designers of students not traditionally considered talented in those fields
- extent to which images and sound may amplify text
- extent to which student products can emulate those of professionals
- extent to which students receive feedback from experts in the field
- potential interaction with and impact on a global audience
- students’ selection of tools or media that most effectively communicate the intention of the product
- students’ level of ethical and legal practice as they remix products
- level of ethics and safety exhibited in students’ online behavior

Assessment practices of 21st century student learning may need flexibility and responsiveness to situations such as:

- students’ greater proficiency with tools or formats than the teacher, which may generate outcomes not anticipated in an assessment rubric
- technology glitches beyond students’ control that negatively impact the quality of the final products
- scope of collaboration, in the classroom and globally, leading to a greater need for processes that assess progress and achievement of individuals and groups
- support and celebration of the increasing diversity in students’ talents, imagination, perspectives, cultures, and lived experiences
- recognition that the processes of learning and doing are as important as the quality of the final product
- students’ self-evaluation and reflection on process and product integrated into the learning process and contributing to students’ continued growth
- ability of students, parents, and teachers to examine growth over time in authentic ways
APPENDIX D

CCCC STATEMENT ON MULTIPLE USES OF WRITING
Multiple Uses of Writing

Conference on College Composition and Communication,
November 2007

Two recent movements in American education are working to pull the teaching and learning of writing in contradictory directions. On the one hand, a new and critical emphasis on the liberal education of citizens for the 21st century aims to help us better respond to the size, speed, and global interconnectedness of changes in economics, science and technology, politics, environmental issues, and a host of cross-cultural concerns (Association of American Colleges and Universities). On the other hand, the rise of standards-based education in the United States, especially following the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, works to compress curricula and learning into narrow indicators of teacher accountability and student achievement. At the same time writing instruction is being called upon to multiply its vision and expand student abilities, to move outward from its traditional emphasis on academic contexts and forms to include public, cross-cultural, professional, personal, and artistic contexts and forms, it is also under increasing pressure to employ high-stakes assessment procedures which research shows encourage an over-emphasis on correctness, formulaic writing, unoriginal thought, and test-driven teaching (Armein & Berliner; Hillocks).

To restrict students’ engagement with writing to only academic contexts and forms is to risk narrowing what we as a nation can remember, understand, and create. As the world grows smaller, we will live by words as never before, and it will take many words framed in many ways to transform that closeness into the mutuality needed to pursue peace and prosperity for our generation and those to come. Bearing all this in mind, the Conference on College Composition and Communication affirms that many genres and uses of writing must be taught well in the nation’s schools, colleges, and universities:

- forms of academic discourse that document with integrity what is known, while recording principled inquiry into the unknown, including analyses, reports, exploratory essays, essay exams, case studies, summaries, abstracts, and annotations;

- forms of workplace discourse that observe established conventions, though never at the expense of failing to convey ideas that enlighten and compel, including memos, proposals, evaluations, oral presentations, lab and progress reports,
letters, reviews, instructions, and user manuals;

- forms of civic discourse that energize all manner of inclusive deliberation, the ideal product of which is just relations among the citizenry, broadly conceived, including arguments, commentaries, charters and manifestoes, surveys, debates, petitions, and editorials;

- forms of personal discourse that create and maintain relationships, including a relationship with one’s self, as a means to social and emotional well-being, including journals, personal narratives, memoirs, reflections, meditations, conversations, dialogues, and correspondence, all in various media;

- forms of cross-cultural discourse that bridge the divides among speakers of various Englishes as well as speakers of other languages, especially collaborative, visual, and internet-based projects, including websites, wikis, blogs, newsletters, interviews, and profiles.

- forms of aesthetic discourse that encourage the individual imagination to engage with diverse cultural traditions, including poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, drama, screenplays, and songwriting.

The CCCC hereby calls together—and calls to action—all those who share its vision of a future in which an expansive writing curriculum, backed by ample resources, attends unyieldingly to the difficult work of helping students use good words, images, and other appropriate means, well composed, to build a better world.
APPENDIX E

FRAMEWORK FOR SUCCESS IN POSTSECONDARY WRITING
Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing

Executive Summary

The concept of “college readiness” is increasingly important in discussions about students’ preparation for postsecondary education. This Framework describes the rhetorical and twenty-first-century skills as well as habits of mind and experiences that are critical for college success. Based in current research in writing and writing pedagogy, the Framework was written and reviewed by two- and four-year college and high school writing faculty nationwide and is endorsed by the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project.

Habits of mind refers to ways of approaching learning that are both intellectual and practical and that will support students’ success in a variety of fields and disciplines. The Framework identifies eight habits of mind essential for success in college writing:

- Curiosity – the desire to know more about the world.
- Openness – the willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking in the world.
- Engagement – a sense of investment and involvement in learning.
- Creativity – the ability to use novel approaches for generating, investigating, and representing ideas.
- Persistence – the ability to sustain interest in and attention to short- and long-term projects.
- Responsibility – the ability to take ownership of one’s actions and understand the consequences of those actions for oneself and others.
- Flexibility – the ability to adapt to situations, expectations, or demands.
- Metacognition – the ability to reflect on one’s own thinking as well as on the individual and cultural processes used to structure knowledge.

The Framework then explains how teachers can foster these habits of mind through writing, reading, and critical analysis experiences. These experiences aim to develop students’

- Rhetorical knowledge – the ability to analyze and act on understandings of audiences, purposes, and contexts in creating and comprehending texts.
• Critical thinking – the ability to analyze a situation or text and make thoughtful decisions based on that analysis, through writing, reading, and research;
• Writing processes – multiple strategies to approach and undertake writing and research;
• Knowledge of conventions – the formal and informal guidelines that define what is considered to be correct and appropriate, or incorrect and inappropriate, in a piece of writing; and
• Ability to compose in multiple environments – from traditional pen and paper to electronic technologies.
APPENDIX F

ORIGINAL FAMILY HISTORY WRITING ASSIGNMENT
Portrait Project:

Your writing assignment for the second paper is to showcase another person and their story. While the first assignment has given you a chance to write about your own life, I would like to invite you to write the story of another person’s life. It may be a good idea to select a close family member, as you will be required to conduct an interview as the source of your information.

1. Locate an interview subject: Select a person who you are interested in learning more about. (Consider a parent or, if still living, a grandparent as this will help you learn more about yourself and family history.)

2. Research before the interview: Do background research on events that have occurred during this person’s life. For example, if I interview my grandmother, I will want to learn what historical events have occurred during her lifetime. Such events might include Civil Rights and the climate in the south during that time; the Korean War, which my grandfather served in while they were married; WWII; the crash of the stock market in 1929, etc. I will also look at what happened on or around her 16 and 21 birthdays. What was the cost of: bread, stamps, milk, cars, houses, etc. during her lifetime.

3. Develop interview questions: You will want a list of 10-15 interview questions to ask your person. Based on what you have learned and what you may think you already know about this person, develop questions that allow your interviewee to see their life through their eyes.

4. Set up and conduct your interview: You will want to set aside about two hours so that you can listen to your interviewee talk. Encourage him/her to share photographs with you (as these are great conversation starters). If time allows, spend the day with your person so you can get underneath the surface. I hope this is a wonderful experience.

5. Write up biography/essay: Of course like everything else in this class, you will write nonfiction. Use the research you conducted and the interview to develop a rich essay/biography that you would be proud to share with your interviewee. You will submit your essay (in no less than four typed pages) to me through the digital drop box on the designated due date (as posted on the calendar.)

6. Thank you note/letter: You will write a thank you letter to your interviewee. While I know that this will most likely be a personal interview, so you will want to handwrite your note, I will be happy to review any letters (if you want.)
Project #2: Profile

Project Description:

For your next assignment, you will write a biographical sketch about a person who is at least sixty-years-old. This person can be a family member, or the person can be someone from whom you are interested in learning more.

Project Goals:

By the end of this project, you should be able to:

- Locate, evaluate, and use primary and secondary sources, specifically electronic sources, to produce a text that accurately integrates and represents the researched content
- Identify and relate social, historical, and cultural research to contextualize the telling of a life story
- Effectively employ appropriate voice, tone, and style to capture the human element of an interview subject
- Assemble evidence as support for your ideas in developing a biographical project, rather than allowing the research to drive the project
- Determine (and justify) an appropriate genre and medium based on the needs of an indicated audience, purpose, and rhetorical situation
- Engage in a series of composition tasks and multiple drafts, including peer review and proofreading partners, to develop a refined project
- Apply appropriate technologies throughout the research and composition process
- Demonstrate knowledge of conventions for documentation, format, and surface features

Throughout this project, you will respond to the following WPA OS clusters:

- **Rhetorical Knowledge**
  - **Audience**: The writer will select an audience. Note: The teacher is NOT the audience; she is a reader.
  - **Purpose**: Writing to Inform
  - **Genre/Medium**: Based on the audience, the writer will select an appropriate genre in a medium that supports the genre.
  - Select appropriate voice and tone based on audience
Critical, Thinking, Reading and Writing

- Engage in critical reading of texts that demonstrate not only examples of similar work, but also work that ignites ideas for invention.
- You will complete a series of connected tasks.

Process

- Each student will generate multiple drafts for this project (see syllabus for deadlines) and integrate feedback from peers, teachers, and other readers on the following documents:
  - Idea List/Timeline
  - Interview Questions
  - Rough draft
  - Revised draft
  - Editing draft
  - Final draft with Self-Reflection, found in McGraw Hill Guide to Writing

- Students will work collaboratively to provide feedback
- Use technology to address audience

Knowledge of Convention

- Adhere to format of selected genre
- Control surface features
- Document in MLA when necessary

Part I: Selecting an Interview Subject

Decide who would be the best subject for this project. If you do not have (or want to write about) living relatives over the age of sixty, reach out into your discourse communities (churches, workplaces, academic environment) and find someone who fascinates you. Write a journal entry on what you already know about this person and design a plan to write “from the inside” about the life of your subject. You may want to spend time listening to the interviews on NPR’s StoryCorps “Recording America” Project at: http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4516989

Part II: Holding an Information Session

Once you have located an interviewee, you will need to gather initial information so your interview is a collaborative conversation. Contact your interviewee for a pre-interview information session.

Questioning: Ask close-ended questions that will allow you to locate the details of this person’s life socially and culturally through historical research. (For example, ask the interviewee to provide you with: date
or birth, hometown, military service, name of elementary school, etc.) This will help you gather background data in order to formulate your interview questions.

**Listening**: People want to tell you their stories. In your pre-interview information session, listen for any information that will guide you to creating a context for this person’s life. Remember this is not the actual interview, but it is important to create an environment where they feel comfortable providing as much information as they want.

*At the end of your information session, set up a time and date for your interview.*

**Part III: Conducting Primary and Secondary Research**

**Researching**: Before the interview, you will need to conduct secondary research so that you are able to write interview questions. Based on your background information, visit the Library of Congress’ “*Chronicling America*” newspaper project to locate social and historical events that were significant during your subject’s life. What was going on locally and globally when your subject was age 16, 18, 21, during their 30’s, 40’s, 50’s & 60’s? How has technology changed during your subject’s lifetime? What wars has your subject lived through, and what was his or her response to (or participation in) these events? Locate research that helps you conduct an interview that is a collaborative conservation; in researching the times and places of your subject’s life events, you can be engaged during the collaborative conversation.

**Interviewing**: Develop open-ended questions based on your research that will guide your collaborative conversation with your subject. Conduct your primary research through interview; this should be a conversation (not a question/answer session) since you have already gathered pre-interview information. Engage your interview subject about the historical and social events of his/her life. As a starting point, it may be helpful to viewing photo albums together with the interviewee.

**Important Notation**: If possible, record your interview (it is important that you gain permission from your subject to record and use the content of your interview for your project.) See your text for tips on recording. I strongly encourage you use a digital recorder, which will allow you to embed audio into digital documents. Once you have completed your interview, you will want to go through your notes,
research, and recording to decide what material you want to use and/or omit. Keep in mind all of this information constitutes your data.

Part IV: Composing the Profile

**Writing:** Your job is to build a biographical piece about this person that is interesting and compelling. If your subject was nominated to be in a museum as someone who has experienced “everyday life,” consider this assignment an opportunity to represent your subject’s life. Be mindful about how you begin this project; many students choose to start chronologically, “Martha-Ann Rostin was born on May 26, 1912 in Montgomery, Alabama.” This is not typically the most interesting to readers; your job is to hook them. Explore why this person was interesting and start there.

**Final Product:** Select the most appropriate medium for your project by considering the audience that you have selected. If writing a traditional paper is best then you should do that; if building a Web site, soundscape, or wiki is better then you should do that. The final project is up to you as long as it is a text-centered document that gives readers an in-depth view of your subject’s life based on both primary and secondary research. Adding visuals is an option, but not a requirement. Use MLA for your citation style.

**NOTE:** The guidelines for the written portion may feel “open” to you—this is the intention. This project is designed to provide you with freedom to represent your subject with the skills you have. Have FUN with this project! When I completed this project, I enjoyed getting to know my grandparents. While I have “known” both of them my whole life, this project provided an opportunity to learn how they met, what kinds of childhoods they had, and about the significance of the traditions of our family. If you choose to interview someone in your family, this assignment allows you to learn more about your heritage.

**Helpful Resources:**

*Chronicling America-Library of Congress:*
http://www.loc.gov/chroniclingamerica/ This site allows you to search and read newspaper pages from 1900-1910 and find information about American newspapers published between 1690-present.

Hearing Voices: http://www.hearingvoices.com/ Hearing Voices is a Web site and a radio consortium of independent public radio producers who create public radio projects. The site features ethnographic recordings such as “Neighborhood Stories,” “Crossing Borders,” and “Bike Diaries” along the Lewis and Clark Trail.

Grading Criteria:

It is critical that all drafts are submitted with the final copy and the self-reflection for any major project to be accepted. All projects will be evaluated on the areas how the project:

- responds to rhetorical knowledge (20%);
- incorporates process (30%);
- shows evidence of critical reading, thinking, writing (10%);
- adheres to knowledge of conventions (10%).

All projects are required to include a self-reflection that corresponds to content (10%). Due to the nature of this assignment, all projects must employ evidence of both primary and secondary research (10%) and make a significant point with cohesive, developed content (10%).
APPENDIX H

CECELIA’S SOUND PROJECT

[Consult Attached Files]
APPENDIX I

INFORMATION LITERACY COMPETENCY STANDARDS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Standard One

The information literate student determines the nature and extent of the information needed.

Performance Indicators:

1. The information literate student defines and articulates the need for information.

   Outcomes Include:
   
   a. Confers with instructors and participates in class discussions, peer workgroups, and electronic discussions to identify a research topic, or other information need
   b. Develops a thesis statement and formulates questions based on the information need
   c. Explores general information sources to increase familiarity with the topic
   d. Defines or modifies the information need to achieve a manageable focus
   e. Identifies key concepts and terms that describe the information need
   f. Recognizes that existing information can be combined with original thought, experimentation, and/or analysis to produce new information

2. The information literate student identifies a variety of types and formats of potential sources for information.

   Outcomes Include:
   
   a. Knows how information is formally and informally produced, organized, and disseminated
   b. Recognizes that knowledge can be organized into disciplines that influence the way information is accessed
   c. Identifies the value and differences of potential resources in a variety of formats (e.g., multimedia, database, website, data set, audio/visual, book)
   d. Identifies the purpose and audience of potential resources (e.g., popular vs. scholarly, current vs. historical)
e. Differentiates between primary and secondary sources, recognizing how their use and importance vary with each discipline.

f. Realizes that information may need to be constructed with raw data from primary sources.

3. The information literate student considers the costs and benefits of acquiring the needed information.

**Outcomes Include:**

a. Determines the availability of needed information and makes decisions on broadening the information seeking process beyond local resources (e.g., interlibrary loan; using resources at other locations; obtaining images, videos, text, or sound).

b. Considers the feasibility of acquiring a new language or skill (e.g., foreign or discipline-based) in order to gather needed information and to understand its context.

c. Defines a realistic overall plan and timeline to acquire the needed information.

4. The information literate student reevaluates the nature and extent of the information need.

**Outcomes Include:**

a. Reviews the initial information need to clarify, revise, or refine the question.

b. Describes criteria used to make information decisions and choices.

**Standard Two**

The information literate student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently.

**Performance Indicators:**

1. The information literate student selects the most appropriate investigative methods or information retrieval systems for accessing the needed information.

**Outcomes Include:**

a. Identifies appropriate investigative methods (e.g., laboratory experiment, simulation, fieldwork).
b. Investigates benefits and applicability of various investigative methods
c. Investigates the scope, content, and organization of information retrieval systems
d. Selects efficient and effective approaches for accessing the information needed from the investigative method or information retrieval system

2. The information literate student constructs and implements effectively-designed search strategies.

*Outcomes Include:*

a. Develops a research plan appropriate to the investigative method
b. Identifies keywords, synonyms and related terms for the information needed
c. Selects controlled vocabulary specific to the discipline or information retrieval source
d. Constructs a search strategy using appropriate commands for the information retrieval system selected (e.g., Boolean operators, truncation, and proximity for search engines; internal organizers such as indexes for books)
e. Implements the search strategy in various information retrieval systems using different user interfaces and search engines, with different command languages, protocols, and search parameters
f. Implements the search using investigative protocols appropriate to the discipline

3. The information literate student retrieves information online or in person using a variety of methods.

*Outcomes Include:*

a. Uses various search systems to retrieve information in a variety of formats
b. Uses various classification schemes and other systems (e.g., call number systems or indexes) to locate information resources within the library or to identify specific sites for physical exploration
c. Uses specialized online or in person services available at the institution to retrieve information needed (e.g., interlibrary loan/document delivery, professional associations, institutional research offices, community resources, experts and practitioners)
d. Uses surveys, letters, interviews, and other forms of inquiry to retrieve primary information
4. The information literate student refines the search strategy if necessary.

**Outcomes Include:**

a. Assesses the quantity, quality, and relevance of the search results to determine whether alternative information retrieval systems or investigative methods should be utilized
b. Identifies gaps in the information retrieved and determines if the search strategy should be revised
c. Repeats the search using the revised strategy as necessary

5. The information literate student extracts, records, and manages the information and its sources.

**Outcomes Include:**

a. Selects among various technologies the most appropriate one for the task of extracting the needed information (e.g., copy/paste software functions, photocopier, scanner, audio/visual equipment, or exploratory instruments)
b. Creates a system for organizing the information
c. Differentiates between the types of sources cited and understands the elements and correct syntax of a citation for a wide range of resources
d. Records all pertinent citation information for future reference
e. Uses various technologies to manage the information selected and organized

**Standard Three**

The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system.

**Performance Indicators:**

1. The information literate student summarizes the main ideas to be extracted from the information gathered.
Outcomes Include:

a. Reads the text and selects main ideas
b. Restates textual concepts in his/her own words and selects data accurately
c. Identifies verbatim material that can be then appropriately quoted

2. The information literate student articulates and applies initial criteria for evaluating both the information and its sources.

Outcomes Include:

a. Examines and compares information from various sources in order to evaluate reliability, validity, accuracy, authority, timeliness, and point of view or bias
b. Analyzes the structure and logic of supporting arguments or methods
c. Recognizes prejudice, deception, or manipulation
d. Recognizes the cultural, physical, or other context within which the information was created and understands the impact of context on interpreting the information

3. The information literate student synthesizes main ideas to construct new concepts.

Outcomes Include:

a. Recognizes interrelationships among concepts and combines them into potentially useful primary statements with supporting evidence
b. Extends initial synthesis, when possible, at a higher level of abstraction to construct new hypotheses that may require additional information
c. Utilizes computer and other technologies (e.g. spreadsheets, databases, multimedia, and audio or visual equipment) for studying the interaction of ideas and other phenomena

4. The information literate student compares new knowledge with prior knowledge to determine the value added, contradictions, or other unique characteristics of the information.

Outcomes Include:

a. Determines whether information satisfies the research or other information need
b. Uses consciously selected criteria to determine whether the information contradicts or verifies information used from other sources
c. Draws conclusions based upon information gathered
d. Tests theories with discipline-appropriate techniques (e.g., simulators, experiments)
e. Determines probable accuracy by questioning the source of the data, the limitations of the information gathering tools or strategies, and the reasonableness of the conclusions
f. Integrates new information with previous information or knowledge
g. Selects information that provides evidence for the topic

5. The information literate student determines whether the new knowledge has an impact on the individual’s value system and takes steps to reconcile differences.

Outcomes Include:

a. Investigates differing viewpoints encountered in the literature
b. Determines whether to incorporate or reject viewpoints encountered

6. The information literate student validates understanding and interpretation of the information through discourse with other individuals, subject-area experts, and/or practitioners.

Outcomes Include:

a. Participates in classroom and other discussions
b. Participates in class-sponsored electronic communication forums designed to encourage discourse on the topic (e.g., email, bulletin boards, chat rooms)
c. Seeks expert opinion through a variety of mechanisms (e.g., interviews, email, listservs)

7. The information literate student determines whether the initial query should be revised.

Outcomes Include:

a. Determines if original information need has been satisfied or if additional information is needed
b. Reviews search strategy and incorporates additional concepts as necessary
c. Reviews information retrieval sources used and expands to include others as needed
Standard Four

The information literate student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.

Performance Indicators:

1. The information literate student applies new and prior information to the planning and creation of a particular product or performance.

   Outcomes Include:
   a. Organizes the content in a manner that supports the purposes and format of the product or performance (e.g. outlines, drafts, storyboards)
   b. Articulates knowledge and skills transferred from prior experiences to planning and creating the product or performance
   c. Integrates the new and prior information, including quotations and paraphrasings, in a manner that supports the purposes of the product or performance
   d. Manipulates digital text, images, and data, as needed, transferring them from their original locations and formats to a new context

2. The information literate student revises the development process for the product or performance.

   Outcomes Include:
   a. Maintains a journal or log of activities related to the information seeking, evaluating, and communicating process
   b. Reflects on past successes, failures, and alternative strategies

3. The information literate student communicates the product or performance effectively to others.

   Outcomes Include:
   a. Chooses a communication medium and format that best supports the purposes of the product or performance and the intended audience
   b. Uses a range of information technology applications in creating the product or performance
   c. Incorporates principles of design and communication
d. Communicates clearly and with a style that supports the purposes of the intended audience

**Standard Five**

The information literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.

**Performance Indicators:**

1. The information literate student understands many of the ethical, legal and socio-economic issues surrounding information and information technology.

   **Outcomes Include:**
   
   a. Identifies and discusses issues related to privacy and security in both the print and electronic environments
   b. Identifies and discusses issues related to free vs. fee-based access to information
   c. Identifies and discusses issues related to censorship and freedom of speech
   d. Demonstrates an understanding of intellectual property, copyright, and fair use of copyrighted material

2. The information literate student follows laws, regulations, institutional policies, and etiquette related to the access and use of information resources.

   **Outcomes Include:**
   
   a. Participates in electronic discussions following accepted practices (e.g. “Netiquette”)
   b. Uses approved passwords and other forms of ID for access to information resources
   c. Complies with institutional policies on access to information resources
   d. Preserves the integrity of information resources, equipment, systems and facilities
   e. Legally obtains, stores, and disseminates text, data, images, or sounds
   f. Demonstrates an understanding of what constitutes plagiarism and does not represent work attributable to others as his/her own
g. Demonstrates an understanding of institutional policies related to human subjects research

3. The information literate student acknowledges the use of information sources in communicating the product or performance.

Outcomes Include:

a. Selects an appropriate documentation style and uses it consistently to cite sources
b. Posts permission granted notices, as needed, for copyrighted material