

Writing Plan Narrative, 1st Edition

Please retain section headers and prompts in your plan.

Introductory Summary:

Education (EDC) as a department has essentially two “tracks”- students who will be licensed to teach in elementary and secondary classrooms and students who are majoring or minoring without the intention to pursue teaching immediately. Historically, classes intended for licensure *only* have writing assignments focused on fieldwork, reflections, and lesson planning. Non-licensure courses often have a reflective component, focus on writing as a way to think, and may have research-based writing projects, such as literature reviews, research reports, grant requests, and creative endeavors, such as children’s literature. These courses may also include lesson and unit planning as well. Our senior capstone, which all majors take, focuses on forward-facing writing (modeled off the Calderwood seminar) but is not currently taught by a permanent (core) faculty member.

We also have a wide range of students within our courses, as our curriculum is not highly structured; we may have first years with seniors in the same classes; many of our courses are cross-listed with psychology and linguistics or count for the concentration in community engagement, so we also cannot assume disciplinary expertise in upper-level classes. We also have an MAT program where students take courses with undergraduates, but we assess MAT students at a more rigorous (graduate) level.

In the past several years since COVID, we had many retirements and new hires, and we have an impending licensure accreditation review and a departmental decennial review in the next three years. Thus, it was an excellent time to work together to review curricular priorities for our department and prioritize what *kinds* of writing we expect from students and what *quality* writing looks like.

Our main findings are:

- We view writing very broadly and focus on its communicative aspects. In sum, we value various types of writing-- academic, personal/reflective, lesson planning, and forward-facing-- and our students may move through the major without encountering extensive experience in academic, lesson planning, or forward-facing writing. We need to understand our writing assignments better, coordinate similar efforts (such as having faculty that require lesson planning meet and decide what *must* be included in lesson planning regardless of the course or purpose of the lesson), and norm what good writing looks like.
- Because we value linguistic diversity in the field, as well as have a variety of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and experiences, we need to



determine *how* we want to evaluate writing to reduce linguistic bias while acknowledging that in forward-facing writing within schools, the audience will often be an older white woman who will be assessing lesson and unit planning. We also want to consider the role of UDL (Universal Design for Learning) in our courses, which explicitly states that learners must have choices and that only requiring academic-style writing may not support students with various learning differences and disabilities.

- Finally, many of our courses allow students to choose to work with groups on projects that involve writing. In addition, many of us have student research groups where group writing and co-writing are necessary for producing academic work. However, we agree that while we can work one-on-one with students as co-authors, we have fewer experiences working with multiple students on professional academic writing tasks and group writing assignments in our classes.

Section 1: DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC WRITING CHARACTERISTICS

The discipline-specific writing characteristics applied in education are broad and depend on the particular education genre previously discussed- licensure track, policy-focused, research-focused, etc. In our writing survey, which asked both students and faculty to comment on descriptive characteristics of writing within the field of education, more than half of the faculty endorsed seven out of nine writing characteristics (interpretive or evaluative, reflective, descriptive, explanatory, instructive, analytical, persuasive, visual, and collaboratively offered) and around one-third of the faculty also endorsed writing as expressive, exploratory, and innovative. In sum, the faculty endorsed all of the provided characteristics. The faculty agreed on the top two most important types of writing- reflective, which is true across all education courses, and instructive, which is a particular focus in teacher education. For our writing curriculum map (M2), we focused on the writing assignments that are commonly included in our required courses, which included reflection assignments, academic writing (literature review, research literacy, general academic writing skills), public-facing writing assignments, and curriculum related writing assignments, which we will provide greater detail in the section below.

I also want to highlight that in the discipline of education, we define communication broadly, as well as literacy (literacies); education in action is a communicative process; communicating with self, with parents, other teachers and support staff, students, student work communicating meaning to the teachers, the general public. In education, we endorse Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which suggests that there are many means of communication, and writing, academic writing in particular, is only one means. I highlight this because some of our discussions focused on 'what counts as writing' and if writing is a proxy for communicating, are there other modes and forms of communication that we should be considering and work to develop with our students? We acknowledge that the requirement of 'standard English' can hinder students from various backgrounds who are more familiar with other dialects. Thus,



culturally and linguistically diverse students may need more support when asked to communicate their ideas using standard English. Still, standard English often acts as a gatekeeper within education (master's programs, research, etc.), and we all agree that we should teach academic writing in our courses. Still, we are divided on how to weigh and assess it in our rubrics.

Section 2: DESIRED WRITING ABILITIES

Regarding writing abilities that students, upon graduation, should be proficient with, almost all faculty endorsed reflection and curricular planning; less than half of the faculty endorsed co-authored texts and solving complex problems, which are more aligned with the research strand of education (youth, community, and policy), as well as occurring in our research lab groups rather than our courses. Overall, faculty include various writing assignments in their courses, and often multiple assignments within the same course- writing to learn, scholarly writing, and public writing. We want to highlight four desired writing abilities that EDC faculty believe students in our major should be proficient in when they graduate while acknowledging that specific strands within our major (teacher licensure, policy, child development, global education) may also have desired writing abilities that are not reflected here.

- **Reflection Assignments:**

- **Writing Abilities:**

- Provides clear descriptive observations
 - Connects observations to course content or personal experiences
 - Analyzes observation in light of course content or experience
 - Incorporates multiple perspectives
 - Makes conclusions or recommendations based on above connections

- **Academic Writing Assignments:**

- **Literature Reviews:**

- **Writing Abilities:**

- Defines topic and sets the context including scope of topic and the author's point of view
 - Identifies relevant and ethical sources
 - Organizes paper into major topics & subtopics, rather than by article/book
 - Reviews research, highlights strengths & weaknesses in an area of study
 - Avoids summary
 - Provides directions for future research or implications for practice

- **Research Literacy:**

- **Writing Abilities:**

- Identifies theoretical framework



- Explains approach to gathering evidence
 - Consistently aligns evidence and procedures within theoretical framework
 - Includes enough details so that another person could replicate the study precisely, without consulting the author.
 - States positionality in relation to research and clearly discusses impacts of design or interpretation of findings
 - Explains how evidence relates to conclusions
 - Considers application of findings to classroom practice, policy, etc.
- **General Academic Writing Skills:**
 - Writing Abilities:**
 - Uses in-text citations and reference pages
 - Crafts introductions that orient readers to relevance of the topic
 - Presents an arguable thesis statement or question
 - Thesis statement guides orientation and presentation of writing
 - Follows writing conventions
 - Connects sources with each other and with experience
 - Integrates sources into the argument
 - Acknowledges counter-argument
 - Conclusion answers the question ‘so what’
- **Public-Facing Writing Assignments:**
 - Writing Abilities:**
 - Demonstrates clear purpose
 - Writes with clarity even when informal
 - Uses evidence and/or experience to build a narrative
 - Integrates sources in a way that is accessible to the intended audience
 - Uses personal stories, narrative, current events, etc. to engage & pull in the reader
 - Writes to a specific, identifiable audience and pitches level of discourse accordingly
- **Lesson Plans, Unit Plans, Curriculum Writing Assignments:**
 - Writing Abilities:**
 - Includes learning objectives and/or essential questions
 - Learning objectives are accessible to students
 - Translates curriculum and standards into meaningful learning
 - Includes enough details so that another person could teach the lesson without consulting the author
 - Learning activities reflect the learning objectives
 - Student-facing materials reflect grade level and learning needs (audience awareness)



- Identifies relevant and ethical sources

Section 3: INTEGRATION OF WRITING INTO DEPARTMENTAL CURRICULUM

Although faculty agreed that writing was essential and multiple assignments that cover the various writing abilities outlined above should be included in our courses, there was confusion about what it means to ‘teach’ these skills within a class. In our curriculum mapping from M2, many of the skills we identified as necessary we labeled as “implicitly taught.” There was no general agreement on what it means to “explicitly teach” particular skills. The only genre of writing that was “explicitly taught” across multiple faculty was lesson and unit planning (except elementary methods math and science, which, at the time, was taught in the spring semester, and students needed to have lesson planning skills already before they begin student teaching in the spring). Because there is no required course ‘structure’ (no required sequence), it was difficult to discuss what skills should be taught in what classes. We did note that two of the three core courses (required for all majors regardless of track) focus on academic writing skills, with literature reviews and general academic writing explicitly taught in Introduction to the Learning Sciences (EDC 238) and research literacy explicitly taught in Child and Adolescent Growth and Development (EDC 235). Notably, public-facing writing assignments occurred in courses that often counted for the “context requirement,” but at the time of the WEC, nine courses counted for context; this year, only two courses are counting: EDC 243 Multicultural Education, EDC 278: Race and Education, and both of these courses include reflection assignments and public-facing writing assignments, although the skills are implicitly taught. Students have choices for what courses to take within and across the strands, and no two education pathways are similar, except for those in the teaching licensure track. Even then, many of our courses that include lesson planning (for secondary subject matter methods courses) are taught by adjacent faculty under another department. Currently, we do not have a say over what is included in those courses and how those skills are taught.

We are being reviewed by DESE starting this year for our licensure accreditation, and we are going through the required courses for licensure and making adjustments where necessary. Thus, our curricular review will help us understand how we explicitly teach writing genres in our licensure-track classes and whether we believe students will be proficient in those genres by the time they graduate.

Section 4: ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT WRITING

We want to highlight that students who took our survey (divided into licensure track and non-licensure track) agreed with faculty that reflective writing and writing for thinking were types of writing that students should be proficient in when they graduated. Licensure-track students were



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more likely to endorse all kinds of writing as important compared to faculty and non-licensure students, perhaps because teaching requires fluid writing abilities. Surprisingly, licensure students also rated grammar far below non-licensure and faculty perspectives, which is surprising given that many licensure students will teach and correct grammar as part of their profession. In terms of student self-reported and faculty-reported writing abilities, there was mostly agreement with students (licensure and non-licensure) and professors rating students as satisfactory or strong on writing to deepen thinking; there was disagreement in the ability to use field-specific terminology, with professors and licensure students reporting satisfactory or strong, and non-licensure students identifying themselves as weaker. The difference in the importance of field-specific terminology is not surprising as licensure students must learn field-specific terminology to communicate with each other and with their mentor teachers; non-licensure students may experience a broader view of the education field, and thus, the terminology they are exposed to is context/course specific, rather than generalizable as our major requirements are broad. Professors also rated student abilities to integrate in-text citations and ideas as lower than all students; it is possible that faculty's expectation of academic writing is not aligned with course expectations since students are only provided opportunities in a few classes to practice this particular skill set.

Most students find writing instruction consistent across courses and are generally satisfied with the quality of writing instruction they receive. Most faculty identify that students are satisfactory in their writing abilities, except for the types of writing our courses do not often include (e.g., solving complex problems, representing data, reporting, and explaining complex data). Most faculty feel comfortable with fair grading and drafts, and there were no concerns (from faculty or students) about grading practices. Students reported that they receive a grade with comments and an explicit rubric with comments and mainly discuss grading criteria before an assignment's due date. Most faculty use rubrics tailored to the particular assignment. They are explicit in their expectations, as we must model this for our students so that they can engage in these same practices when they become classroom teachers.

We quickly devised a menu of desired writing abilities (presented in section two and replicated here). We were able to be very detailed in our expectations (perhaps because we are used to this work when we design rubrics for our classes) and focused on types of writing that all or most students would encounter in the major: reflection, academic writing, forward-facing writing, and lesson plans. Thus, this section's menu of writing abilities replicates what we presented in section two, as we decided to continue with that level of detail.

- **Reflection Assignments:**

- Writing Abilities:**

- Provides clear descriptive observations
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- **Public-Facing Writing Assignments:**

- Writing Abilities:**

- Demonstrates clear purpose
- Writes with clarity even when informal
- Uses evidence and/or experience to build a narrative
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- Uses personal stories, narrative, current events, etc. to engage & pull in the reader
- Writes to a specific, identifiable audience and pitches level of discourse accordingly

- **Lesson Plans, Unit Plans, Curriculum Writing Assignments:**
Writing Abilities:
 - Includes learning objectives and/or essential questions
 - Learning objectives are accessible to students
 - Translates curriculum and standards into meaningful learning
 - Includes enough details so that another person could teach the lesson without consulting the author
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 - Identifies relevant and ethical sources

Section 5: SUMMARY OF IMPLEMENTATION PLANS, including REQUESTED SUPPORT

To coordinate efforts across our curriculum, we need to better understand the writing that occurs in every course, not just the courses required for all licensure students. We also need to understand *what good writing looks like* for our major writing assignments: reflections, academic writing, forward-facing writing, and lesson planning. In particular, because our secondary methods licensure courses are taught outside of EDC, and students in this track may not be majors, we need to ensure that all courses that count for the licensure track have similar expectations for writing as lesson plans.

We propose:

- Creating and using a group Google folder to share our course writing assignments and rubrics.
- A departmental norming meeting for different levels and different types of writing
- A series of departmental workshops on lesson and unit plans for licensure-required courses, including licensure-required courses that are housed in other departments (such as the teaching of literature, history, etc.), as well as non-licensure-required courses that include lesson planning

We agree that tensions exist between UDL, which considers culturally and linguistically diverse learners, and academic writing, which prioritizes standard English. Yet, we are still determining how to evaluate writing (in general) and scholarly writing in a way that reduces bias but still holds students to high standards when writing in academic prose.



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We propose:

- A workshop on linguistic diversity/ anti-racism
- A workshop for how to meet writing requirements while utilizing a UDL framework within our courses
- Departmental discussion on how to support writing for all students, including developing guidelines/resources that will be accessible and support all students, including those with reading and writing-based disabilities.

Although we did not extensively discuss collaborative writing in our meetings, students and faculty noted this is challenging. As our department begins to mentor more students in research, we need to develop guidelines about group-based writing projects and best practices for evaluating co-authorship (for grading and authorship purposes in publishing).

We propose:

- A workshop on co-authorship/ group project
- Developing departmental guidelines/requirements for group-based writing projects with support from the Jacobson Center.

Section 6: PROCESS USED TO CREATE THIS WRITING PLAN

All five core faculty members (that is, faculty that are tenure track and who are responsible for the department's curriculum) were invited to each WEC meeting. We invited part-time faculty members to meetings 3 and 4, as they were less pertinent to accessing departmental writing goals. Attendance at each meeting:

M1: All five core faculty

M2: Three core faculty (although all five core faculty members completed the course writing grid)

M3: Four core faculty members and one part-time faculty member.

M4: All core faculty and one part-time faculty.

We invited all five core faculty and two lecturers (faculty that teach two or more courses consistently in our department) to take the implementation survey. Out of the seven faculty members we invited to take the survey, four responded (three core faculty and one lecturer), and faculty who did not respond to the survey but who were at the department meeting (one core faculty member and one lecturer; one faculty member was on sabbatical), as well as others who are department adjacent (members of the campus school administration), provided in-person feedback to the survey choices.

The final version of our Writing Plan was assembled post-deadline in the fall and received no meaningful feedback from faculty prior to submission, but the implementation ideas present in the writing plan were agreed upon in the December department meeting. As a small department with heavy service responsibilities, we decided that the designing and writing of the plan should



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be left to the liaison, and the implementation of ideas should be based on faculty consensus. We also agreed that faculty members can participate in activities that reflect their particular practices (for example, all faculty implement reflection in some form, but not everyone includes scholarly writing or lesson planning) and that these faculty will serve as writing experts who will speak to expectations as we complete a curricular review and plan for our DESE accreditation.



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