

FROM THE GROUND UP: BUILDING THE FIRST-YEAR WRITING PROGRAM AT A  
POST-SECONDARY CHRISTIAN INSTITUTION, THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL  
CONSIDERATIONS FOR HIGHER ENGLISH EDUCATION

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## **ABSTRACT**

This project aims to theoretically and pragmatically examine religious, specifically Christian, composition curriculum and pedagogy decisions in a Christian post-secondary institution. This project proposes first-year writing curricula for a new Christian post-secondary institution (Highlands College). Although there is much discussion surrounding religion and composition studies, there is not a discussion regarding how to address the context of a Christian institution specifically. The research questions that drive this project are “What theoretical and practical recommendations can be made when considering Christian composition curricula?” “What existing curricular models already exist and how can that knowledge be used?” And finally, “What writing expectations do ministry professionals have for colleagues and how can these curricula consider these expectations?”

By using the theory of pragmatism forwarded by Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, I argue that Christian writing topics should be encouraged in secular and religious composition courses based on educational and ethical benefits. Pragmatism can offer a view and framework that would benefit instructors in teaching and responding to student work.

This project incorporates two sets of qualitative interviews. The first set of data is from composition instructors currently teaching in Christian institutions. The goal of these interviews was to uncover helpful knowledge and models in existing composition curricula. I then discuss the idea of ethics through a Christian lens as a discussion stemming from research data.

The second set of interviews focuses on ministry professionals' expectations for professional writing. Highlands College students are being trained for vocational ministry, so this institution's goals include high relevance of assignments to future learning. I argue that workplace genres (like email, for example) may be used in composition for increased relevance and transfer efforts in student learning. I also argue that transferring knowledge to different contexts is possible with certain methods.

Finally, the project proposes first-year writing curricula. The curricula include pedagogy goals, course philosophies, themes, assignments (instructions and rationales), textbook recommendations, and other course considerations. I hope this project will add to the curricular options for Christian institutions and urge non-religiously affiliated institutions to allow religious and academic discourse to cooperate productively.

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to Andy, my favorite. Your presence in my life has made all the difference.

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## **CHAPTER 1: PROJECT OVERVIEW AND FOUNDATIONS**

### **Introduction**

Chapter One begins as a project overview, stating the goals of the project, which include a programmatic investigation for faith-based Christian first-year writing curricula at a specific Christian institution. The chapter articulates the research questions, the pertinent standards to consider in creating a first-year writing curriculum, and the cornerstone texts that drive this project.

Chapter One begins by discussing the exigence of this project. It introduces Highlands College as an institutional site and outlines the approach the project will take. I begin with the question, “How can the theories and best practices of the field of composition be best considered in the creation of a first-year writing curriculum in a Christian institutional setting?”. I then defend the intellectual rigor of program design by articulating a theory of praxis that merges theory and practice in a continual re-working of how each is understood and applied. If writing program design is seen as a trial of theories, in which thoughtful reflection and critique are practiced regularly, this can be particularly engaging scholarly work. Program revision requires incisive awareness of theory and practice and a continual re-examining of whether theory should be refined to reflect the current practices of the program.

Chapter One then builds a more specific context for Highlands College. Since Highlands College abides by different standards as a religious institution, Chapter One outlines the standards that Highlands College must consider as they pursue their accreditation with the ABHE. I then consider Highlands College’s mission statement, the goals of first-year writing

from the NCTE, and the first-year writing standards from the WPA's "Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition." The chapter discusses why the standards chosen benefit the specific student body at the Highlands College institutional site. Finally, the chapter discusses the values, structure, and culture of Highlands College.

## **Project Purpose**

The purpose of this project is to investigate and create a proposal for faith-based, Christian curricula in first-year writing courses. The main foci of this dissertation are the pedagogical decisions involved in the following areas: teaching with Christian student writing, viewing ethics for an instructor through a Christian lens, and the possibility of transferring writing skills in first-year writing to professional writing contexts. I will also propose a new first-year English curriculum for Highlands College, a Christian higher-education institution located in Birmingham, Alabama. To accomplish this project, three different levels of research will be pursued: theoretical foundations and best practices from composition, curricular models from sister institutions and their examples of program decisions, and professional writing expectations from local faculty members and ministry professionals on site at Highlands College.<sup>1</sup> The goal is to create a curriculum that embodies the strongest theoretical foundations from composition while adapting to the specific needs of Highlands College as an institution and the students' future writing endeavors.

In this study, I will answer the following questions:

- 1) What theoretical foundations and best practices do the field of composition offer for writing

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<sup>1</sup> By "professional" or "vocational" writing, I mean writing genres typically required in the daily writing tasks in one's vocation (after the completion of academic training). Rather than a five-paragraph essay or Rogerian style paper, when I use this term, I am focusing on everyday workplace genres such as emails, reports, letters, staff memos, meeting notes, etc.

and English skill development in Christian institutions? How can those skills be both transferable and functional for ministry professionals?

- 2) What curricular positions are currently used by first-year writing programs at sister institutions?
- 3) What writing expectations do ministry professionals have for a colleague's writing skills and products, and how can those expectations be integrated into the curriculum?

The goal by the end of this project is to produce a curriculum that would go into effect at Highlands College. Relatively little research in composition currently exists on combining religious, specifically Christian, and compositional goals in a Christian setting. I hope this project will provide a model for Christian genre-based or interest-based seminars in the first-year writing pool of options.

By pursuing this project, I will be working to provide a much-needed curricular model for this institution, but also contribute to the repertoire of models on which to base the first-year writing experience.

### **Defense of Subject**

As of Fall 2014, 20.2 million students enrolled in a degree-granting, postsecondary institution in the United States (Snyder et al. 8). Of this group, 1,888,140 students enrolled in a religiously-affiliated institution as of Fall 2014 (Snyder et al. 476). These religiously affiliated institutions may vary in size, scope, or purpose, but each seeks to equip students with higher learning and knowledge that they will use in their lives and future professions. As a field, composition studies currently holds relatively few publications bridging the gap between the theories and best practices and applying composition studies in Christian settings. This project seeks to capitalize on the paradigms of modern composition pedagogy and utilize them in

productive learning endeavors in Christian higher education specifically as well as some general principles that can be used in non-religiously affiliated institutions.

I would like to argue that although this project has a writing program deliverable, the considerations involved in composing a curriculum offer scholarly opportunities for thought and critical investigation.<sup>2</sup> Building curricula requires intellectual work in several areas: theory, models, and practice at the very least. Writing program administrators and researchers have struggled for decades with the theory versus practice dichotomy and the hierarchies traditionally assigned to theory and practice. I would like to argue that good practice, or better practice, is intricately involved with theory and cannot be separated from it. Practice itself does not equate to theory, but intentional practice certainly can and does blend with theory and necessitates intellectual rigor. The addition of practice to an academic endeavor does not lower the necessity of theory; on the contrary, it only increases the need for theory that is held accountable, or theory that explains observations in congruence with the arguments of reality and experience. Theory held accountable in this way is theory that is re-evaluated, scrutinized, and honed to promote a better understanding of practice. By using reflection, evaluation, revision, and theory reconstruction, the implementation and continuation of writing programs encourage the un-divorceable concept of theory and practice.

Before proceeding, I would like to establish certain parameters for the term “theory.” I would like to use a definition of theory for the purposes of this project provided by Irwin Weiser and Shirley K. Rose. They describe “one of the most fundamental criteria of a theory [as] its

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<sup>2</sup> It should be stated that by using the term “critical,” I do not mean to imply critical pedagogy in the politically-driven sense. I rather mean the standard dictionary meaning of the word, thinking that works towards analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of thoughts and ideas, or scholarly engagement in general.

applicability to multiple situations or cases, or what Argyris and Schon refer to as ‘generality.’ A theory if it is to be useful, must be a generalizable explanation of similar events” (184).

Weiser and Rose understand the theoretical and practical nature of attempting to reconcile the practical implications of beliefs. When Christian students are asked to grapple with their own personal theories of scripture interpretation and applying their values to ministry tasks, they will be seeking a theory that as Weiser and Rose define it, aids them in creating a framework that increases their understanding of their own beliefs and actions. Weiser and Rose are among those who acknowledge with disdain the traditional view of theory as “higher” and practice as “lower,” and the negative consequences of separating the two. Reconciling our theory and practice is immensely difficult intellectual work. They state, “integrating thought and action effectively has plagued philosophers, frustrated social scientists, and eluded professional practitioners for years. It is one of the most prevalent and least understood problems of our age” (186).

A writing program, whose goal is to meet the needs of students, must understand the creation of a writing program as a trial of theories: a collection of trials and successes and failings that ultimately create new learning for students and instructors. The figure of the writing program director must be one of joined theory and practice. This person must encourage and participate in the building of theory and the revision of theories. Without this element, our understandings of what we observe are limited. Weiser and Rose state, “We are constructing the figure of the writing program administrator as a theorist, that is, as a reflective agent seeking explanations of phenomena and situations in order to understand them better and to act on that understanding in a particular context for a particular purpose” (183). This view of a writing program leader pushes towards what Patricia Sullivan and James Porter argue for in the term “praxis,” or in their words, “a reflective, thoughtful practice that has critique and questioning



built into its operation, an activity that merges theory and practice, and that adds to repeatability and transferability a further notion: revision” (188). Through evaluation, revision, questioning, theory reconstruction, and reflection, practice takes on a very tangled meaning, from which theory and intellectual endeavor cannot be separated.

Reflection is a very powerful term, as it asks us to reconsider and rearticulate theory. Kara Taczak notes the difference between cognition and metacognition in her essay, “Reflection is Critical for Writers’ Development”: “to recognize what they are doing in that particular moment (cognition), as well as to consider why they made the rhetorical choices they did (metacognition)” (Kassner and Wardle 78). Howard Tinberg separates the two as the difference between intentional choices and the awareness of why certain decisions were found to be more effective than others. He states, “performance, however thoughtful, is not the same as awareness of how that performance came to be” (Kassner and Wardle 75). Reflection may seem intuitive, but it raises some interesting challenges. While feelings are important in the writing process, realizing these feelings are not the primary goal of reflection. Taczak states, “Reflection is a mode of inquiry: a deliberate way of systematically recalling writing experiences to reframe the current writing situation.” Taczak’s invocation of experience here ties into a pragmatic framework, which will be the theoretical base for this project. Pragmatism, as forwarded by William James, Charles Peirce, and John Dewey, argues for the value of using experience as the vehicle by which we achieve greater knowledge. This is how we achieve a greater depth of thought. Using reflection to systematically recall experience through writing means we are locating writing and writing concepts and writing processes into our experience-driven semantic memory. Semantic memory is the culmination of our experiences and our language— to “recall, reframe and relocate knowledge and practices” (Kassner and Wardle 79) is another learned skill

that asks the writer to study, interpret and analyze the components of their own mind. It asks for greater self-awareness, sensitivity, imagination, problem solving, questioning and incisive thinking regarding experience.

Reflection can be particularly demanding and incessantly difficult to grasp because reflection asks the writer to study what is constantly changing based on the current exigence. There may be patterns or familiar components, but the act of reflective practice is to push the writer's current models into new, more context-specific models that should better equip the writer in the future. Teaching these skills is possible, but understanding their fullest implications can never be achieved. This is because the target is always moving as long as the writer is writing and continues to reflect. (Unless the writer proclaims they are finished writing, and does not intend to write [ever] again; but then, if the claim is untrue, the process continues, and more implications are realized.) Asking the writer to re-theorize for each exigence, to revise and reflect again, is the goal of substantive reflection.

Regarding Yancey et al.'s application, when used by writing program administrators, the use of intentional reflection offers extensive intellectual opportunities for the theoretical revision of a writing program. Donald Schon coined the term "reflection-in-action" in his address at the AALS Conference in 1992. He describes the term as the automatic reaction we have when we respond in real time to a scenario unfolding before us. Schon's point is that we often use knowledge that we have but cannot articulate readily. (Schon) He describes this as "reflection-in-action" but perhaps a better term would be response-action or reflexive-action, since he differentiates between the spontaneous, immediate response that cannot be articulated, and the application of thoughtful reflection on that action later to determine what knowledge was used. Nevertheless, Schon's concept of reflection-in-action is very powerful for educators

because it shows the importance of making tacit knowledge explicit. Without this step, we cannot teach others because our tacit knowledge is not accessible.

Intentional reflection can increase and promote theory. Popham, Neal, Schendel, and Huot describe many examples of reflection and how it can be used for theoretical expansion and intellectual examination. They describe their theoretical reflection efforts:

We believe that using reflection helps eliminate many old structures of hierarchy and power. By encouraging reflection from/to administrator and to/from teachers and to/from first-year students, we show that all of us are in constant states of learning, critically engaging with our world and the structures around us. We develop programs constantly fluid and changing according to changing needs, by using the knowledge of our field to develop our practices. (20)

Without this intentional reflection, why should we ever be persuaded to change anything we are doing? Unless someone explains a “why” to us that we haven’t understood before, what reason would we have to change our current pursuits? The “why” changes everything. Theory *is* the why—and a program will not reach its potential without it.

Through a series of reflective practices, much intellectual work can be accomplished that contributes to a comprehensive understanding of applied theory. Popham et al. use several examples of this reflection-in-action strategy. Popham et al. suggest feedback reflection, where instructors examine the feedback they have given on student drafts. Their feedback is categorized based on whether it is positive, negative, form, or content-based (26). This gives instructors immediate feedback on the quality and focus of their comments to students. Another example for reflection includes exercises on assignment instructions, and how instructions can change the way assignments are graded (26). Instructors are asked to evaluate an assignment with a set of instructions. Then, the set of instructions are altered, and instructors are asked to reflect on how the change affects their grading. Another reflective exercise offered by Popham et al. is a technique used by graduate students in their department. They prepare their future

teachers with semester-long observation activities, in which graduate students visit classrooms and observe for a semester. The students then create a presentation and identify issues in classrooms they would like to address (27). These are just a few examples of reflection being used as intellectual work in order to solidify theory and practice or used as the exigence to change them. After all of these efforts, reflection sessions are held to examine bureaucratic, theoretical, and practical implications.

By using some of these strategies and examples, I argue that the formation and regulation of a writing program is an endeavor of scholarly inquiry: by allowing intentional reflection and using that reflection, the writing program can be revised and new knowledge can be created. Writing programs provide a continual opportunity for new knowledge when faculty and administrators seek to apply an understanding that generally explains what has been seen and the reactions involved. This is the same understanding of theory as in a scientific sense: that we will test and seek to understand our practices in theoretically sound ways. If an observation does not fit within the theory we are using, it forces us to reflect, re-examine and seek to understand new ways of knowing. Writing program faculty consider, evaluate, and revise models that will serve us in the pursuit of thinking, communication, and writing development for our students. Models serve as a basis or starting point at which theory can be applied. Models provide attitudes to pursue and practices to implement. Practices are an intentional intellectual choice, in that they should be planned, investigated, and evaluated. Practices without these elements are less intellectual in nature. Practices should be re-visited, reflected on, and challenged to ensure that our practices are meeting the needs of learners. How many different ways of learning are there? How many options are there for implementing and running a writing program or curricula?

Intentional pursuit of theory, models, practice, and revision will provide a glimpse into the potential for scholarly inquiry in program-building work.

### **Highlands College as an Institutional Site**

Highlands College is a Christian ministry-training institution that is currently partnering with Southeastern University to offer SACS accredited baccalaureate degrees; Highlands College functions as a satellite campus of Southeastern. However, since 2012, Highlands College has experienced rapid growth (approx. 330% since Fall 2012) independent of partnerships with other institutions. This growth at Highlands College has led to a reconsideration of institutional identity, structure, and academic plans. As a result of this re-evaluation, Highlands College began seeking its own accreditation in 2014. According to their website, “Highlands College holds applicant status with the Association for Biblical Higher Education Commission on Accreditation....Applicant status is a pre-membership status granted to those institutions that meet the ABHE Conditions of Eligibility and that possess such qualities as may provide a basis for achieving candidate status within five years” (Highlands). As a result of these accreditation efforts, new curriculums and programs need to be established that meet the demands of ministry students and marketplace professionals.

In the Fall of 2016, the Vice President of Academic Affairs at Highlands College, Tim Spurlock, requested a new English curriculum that focuses more intently on the professional goals of the students attending Highlands College. Currently, the composition courses are secular in nature, and they offer an English composition curriculum that focuses on writing objectives common to both religious and non-religious institutions, including the process-based approach to writing a topic-driven research paper, literary analyses from the American literature canon, a collaborative team project, understanding and applying MLA formatting, and other

common first-year writing objectives. In the development of a new curriculum, several of these objectives will be maintained; however, changes will be based on the specific needs of Highlands College students. There is a plethora of aspects to consider when designing any new curriculum, but my main concerns include bridging the gap between the current composition curriculum and one that will benefit students going into ministry vocations. One of the main goals of this project will be to explicate the institutional goals of Highlands College and examine pedagogical best practices for the design and implementation of new Composition 1 and 2 (first-year) curricula.

Theoretical investigations, explorations of hurdles to religious inquiry in the classroom, and the investigation of pedagogical best practices will comprise the first focus of this project. I will then research sister institutions that possess similar academic goals and analyze their own curricula and faculty input for guidance. Finally, I will interview in-house faculty at Highlands College and other ministry professionals for their writing skill and development expectations in academics and the professional spectrum. Considering all of these sources, I hope to construct a first-year writing curriculum that addresses needs in the most beneficial way possible.

### **Conceptual Framework for Program Development**

The conceptual foundations of the curricula will be based on a few texts that function as cornerstone pieces for this project. The first cornerstone text is provided by the accreditation agency with which Highlands College is currently partnered, the Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE); the second is the Highlands College mission statement and other articulated institutional goals; the final texts are combined with the goals for first-year writing programs as articulated by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA), the National Writing Project, (NWP), and the Conference on

College Composition and Communication (CCCC), and will form the foundation for the curricula.

The first cornerstone text is supplied by the accreditation organization that Highlands College has chosen to pursue, the ABHE (Association for Biblical Higher Education) Accreditation Agency. One of the most important features of the new curricula will be the design and implementation of an assessment system with intentional reflection on theoretical frameworks, models, and practices used in the curricula. Standard 2 from the ABHE Programmatic Accreditation Standards states:

[An accredited] program demonstrates that it is accomplishing and can continue to accomplish its objectives and improve performance through a regular, comprehensive, and sustainable system of assessment and planning. Central to this plan is the systematic and specific assessment of student learning and development through a strategy that measures the student's knowledge, skills and competencies against institutional goals and programmatic objectives. (Programmatic 3)

Standard two aligns with the belief held by Edward White, Norbert Elliot, and Irvin Peckham that first-year writing programs should not only create outcome statements but should also regularly evaluate and assess the success of these outcomes. White, Elliot and Peckham's text, *Very Like a Whale: The Assessment of Writing Programs*, describes the planning steps required for successful assessments to be implemented and completed regularly. To begin a writing program, they discuss curricular aspects for consideration and articulate the commonalities in many universities' writing program components: "a defined construct model; a pre-enrollment assessment and placement; required writing courses; a writing center; a writing-across-the-curriculum faculty in-service program; writing intensive course requirements; a writing program administrator; a financial plan; [and] an articulated research agenda..." (18-19). They also state that a program needs a strategic plan that states its "mission, priorities, objectives, strategies, targets, metrics, accountability, and impact" (19). These considerations outline the basis of the

writing construct and applying evidence to the program in beneficial analyses and assessments. The tenets outlined by White, Elliot, and Peckham follow numbers 1-9 of standard two as outlined in the ABHE Programmatic Objectives; by choosing to implement the assessments and revisions recommended by White, Elliot and Peckham, I can implement the strategies that will uphold the ABHE standards and create an evaluation schedule that will benefit the program long-term.

The next standard articulated by the ABHE that is most applicable for the goals of this project is under standard 9: Faculty. Standard 9B is titled “Faculty Decision Making” and this standard outlines the importance of “A faculty that is involved in academic-related decision-making processes especially related to admissions criteria, curriculum, and student development” (Programmatic 7). White, Elliot and Peckham’s goals for holding regular assessments of the curriculum should also involve the in-house faculty so that faculty are involved in the curriculum development and development of students. Ensuring that faculty are involved in the creation of the curricula (which is happening currently) and ensuring that faculty voices are heard during the construction of the curricula is imperative for faculty sponsorship and the ultimate success of the curricula. For this reason, I will include as many faculty members as possible in the interview portions of this project.

Undoubtedly the most pertinent standard articulated by the ABHE is Standard 11a: Curriculum. Under standard 11a many aspects will be important to this project:

1. Evidence that academic programs exhibit the *content and rigor characteristic of higher education*, and a *level of analytical research and communication skills* needed for life-long learning commensurate with the level of education offered.



2. A written statement of *program-specific student outcomes* for each academic program and *a coherent program of study* to achieve the student outcomes.
  3. Evidence that the integration of curricular components enables students to achieve a *biblical worldview*.
  4. A program taught with *sensitivity to the cultural context in which students serve*.
  5. A process of *regular review by faculty* to ensure that curricular objectives for each academic program are being realized.
  6. Evidence that course sequence progresses from foundational to advanced studies appropriate to the degree and level of education offered.
  7. Curriculum content and level of education appropriate to the degree offered.
- (Programmatic 8, emphasis added).

All of these tenets will be incorporated as the curricula are created. To ensure that numbers 1-7 are met, I refer to the second cornerstone text I plan on using for the project: the WPA's "Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition." According to this statement, revised in 2014, the four foundations of the first-year composition are rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, reading, and composing; knowledge of processes; and knowledge of conventions (WPA). I plan to use this outcomes statement as a major planning structure for the pedagogical portion of the project because of the transferability of the skills described in the "Outcomes Statement." These goals will benefit students in a variety of settings and, with appropriate methods, will transfer to the different writing situations they will encounter in their vocations.

*Rhetorical knowledge* is the first facet of the WPA Outcomes Statement. Understanding the rhetorical situation is the basis for all writing endeavors; improving the recognition and application of the facets of purpose, audience, context, and conventions in different situations

should be the crux of the first-year writing experience. It is imperative that students learn context awareness so that they have success in their writing endeavors. The council states, “Writers develop rhetorical knowledge by negotiating purpose, audience, context, and conventions as they compose a variety of texts for different situations.” These practices will ready students for their college and professional writing. The application of rhetorical knowledge into a curriculum satisfies points 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7 from the curriculum standards quoted above from the ABHE.

*Critical thinking, reading and composing*, the second facet of the outcomes assessment, also comprises a set of skills that students need in the Highlands College context. The Council states that writers are thinking critically when “they separate assertion from evidence, evaluate sources and evidence, recognize and evaluate underlying assumptions, read across texts for connections and patterns, identify and evaluate chains of reasoning, and compose appropriately qualified and developed claims and generalizations.” The council states that “These practices are foundational for advanced academic writing” but I would argue that these basic skills are needed for ministry students to evaluate religious texts, mindsets, audiences, and conversations in order to lead and teach others, understand the viewpoints of others, and explore issues with a more open, deliberate, and meticulous mind. Highlands College students are required to understand cultural beliefs at an intentionally thoughtful level in their rhetorical environment, and for this reason, critical thinking skills must be cultivated. Integrating critical thinking and cultural awareness satisfies numbers 1, 3, and 4 outlined above from the ABHE.

Facet three of the WPA’s statement is *Processes*. One of the main goals of the Highlands College curriculum will be for students to make any implicit writing actions explicit, and therefore articulate and understand their own writing process. Being able to articulate a set of

processes that produce a student's best writing is an invaluable professional practice. The Council states, "successful writers can adapt their composing processes to different contexts and occasions." Adapting these processes to different contexts will be another curricular goal, with the intent to foster longitudinal knowledge transfer. Kathleen Blake Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak outline the possibility of transferring writing knowledge in their text, *Writing Across Contexts: Transfer, Composition, and Sites of Writing*. Yancey et al. agree with the council's statement, as they discuss applying reflection to a first-year writing course to increase transfer efforts. However, Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak warn against reflection that simply asks students to discuss their writing processes; they urge for "what we might call big-picture thinking, in which [students] consider how writing in one setting is both different from and similar to the writing in another, or where they theorize writing so as to create a framework for future writing situations" (4). The writer's work in the classroom expands to outside applications when used in this way, and hopefully points students to the writing demands in their future vocations. My current goals for developing a student's writing processes are outlined by the WPA statements and Yancey et al.'s words above and correspond to the value of "metacognition" in the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing. Metacognition, as described by Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak, should help students to achieve an awareness of their own processes, the textual choices they have made, and also how they can improve their writing on subsequent projects (Framework 4). Students should complete first-year writing with an understanding of a "framework for future writing situations" (Yancey et al. 4) so that for writing a letter for mission trip sponsorship, writing a sermon, or drafting a staff memo, students know a process that will benefit their final product and improve their communication in the workplace.

Finally, the last criterion of first-year outcomes is *knowledge of conventions*. The Council states, “Most obviously, conventions govern such things as mechanics, usage, spelling, and citation practices. But they also influence content, style, organization, graphics, and document design.” Highlands College students are encouraged to strive for excellence in their work, and composition scholars are aware of the common reactions to errors in vocational writing (Beason). One of Highlands College’s core values is excellence, and understanding conventions will prepare students to project excellence in their academic and vocational work. In conjunction with the first tenet of the Outcomes Statement, students should examine the rhetorical situation and apply the correct format and design to any composition they produce. Curricular goals should reflect these outcomes as described in the Statement since this is such a foundational piece for first-year outcomes.

The last cornerstone text to build on is Highlands College’s own institutional mission objectives. A curriculum for first-year writing (Composition 1 and 2) for Highlands College should foster the key factors they have articulated for their mission statement, which include:

1) commitment to the knowledge, interpretation, and integration of the Bible; 2) the possession of a biblical worldview; 3) intentional pursuit of truth; 4) creative problem solving; 5) the discovery of and devotion to personal calling; 6) the development of leadership and vocational skills; 7) stewardship of time and resources; and 8) commitment to finishing well. (Highlands)

These values will be amalgamated into the existing foundation of goals as the new curricula are created. Based on the Highlands College mission statement, one goal of the new curriculum would be to encourage students to cultivate writing skills and awareness of genres that will equip them for their vocational and civic futures. This may include a focus on developing a biblical worldview through the use of Christian principles as applied to the teaching of writing (for the instructor) and the act of writing. Their writing assignments may include ministry writing endeavors, such as sponsorship letters, mission trip logistical reports, sermons designed for

specific audiences, and other ministry-related forms of writing. These considerations will focus on points 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 of the Highlands College mission statement articulated above.

One of the goals of the mission statement as articulated by the Highlands College Academic Director, Sherrill Larson, is to create lifelong learners (Larson). Her statement aligns with the mission statement above, and aligns with the NCTE, NWP, and WPA's Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing's principles of cultivating "habits of mind." "Curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition" (Framework 4) are crucial for students to develop the lifelong learning practices as envisioned by Larson and the Highlands College mission statement. By examining each of these points, I will show that applying the habits of mind from the Framework of Success to the values already present in the Highlands College mission statement are imperative for future ministry professionals (see Chapter Two).

Curiosity, "or the desire to know more about the world" (Framework 1) is a foundational skill for a ministry student seeking to enact change at a local or community level. Curiosity about the culture around them and genuinely engaging with that worldview allows authentic relationships to be formed through mutual understanding and respect. The Framework for Success acknowledges the importance of increasing student ownership by asking questions and developing student curiosity (4). Students should recognize a "process of inquiry" (4) that enables them to ask questions that are relevant and pertinent to their environment. They should know how to seek "relevant authoritative information" (Framework 4) and learn to "communicate their findings" (Framework 4) to relevant audiences. Curiosity development is vital for a student to succeed in a ministry vocation because of the changing atmospheres they will find themselves in. Ministry may take on a variety of shapes and forms, from a

congregational pastor to a missionary on another continent. Developing an initial curiosity and being able to familiarize themselves with a process of inquiry and communicating their findings, therefore, should be taught as a foundational skill during the entirety of their college experience.

Openness and engagement, points two and three in the Framework, are crucial to a ministry professional both in writing and in their daily endeavors because of the need to be relevant and compassionate to the world around them. Openness is a concept that students should learn to embrace and apply not only in writing but also outside their academic endeavors. Church of the Highlands and Highlands College are known for their community activism. To continue this legacy, students *must* be open to viewpoints different than their own, especially those that clash with a biblical worldview. “Considering new ways of being and thinking in the world” (Framework 1) is imperative; without this openness, students will miss the potential for establishing relationships with the people and the communities that they want to serve. Beginning this principle in the writing classroom may allow students to realize its benefits and further apply it to their vocational efforts. Openness itself allows students to engage genuinely with the people they interact with, and true engagement is the heart of ministry. The goals of engagement include, “mak[ing] connections between their own ideas and the ideas of others...finding new meanings, and acting upon the knowledge they have discovered” (Framework 4). Highlands College students desire to rebuild church culture, dismantling common perceptions of “church” and changing those perceptions to one that is involved, loving, serving, and “life-giving” to all people. A major part of this goal of engagement is to be as inclusive and accepting possible, and that goal in and of itself requires acting on new knowledge and new ideas. A large part of Highlands’ efforts already goes to community outreach; writing assignments with public engagement components would be welcomed as relevant ministry

engagement. Openness and engagement mutually work together to ensure the future success of the students in ministry.

Persistence and responsibility, points five and six in the framework, are also crucial for ministry students because “sustaining long and short-term projects” and “understand[ing] that learning is *shared* among the writer and others” (Framework 5) is needed in any vocation, but especially when relying on teams and other people to get work done. Highlands College does the vast majority of its programs, from small groups to athletics to ministry practice, in teams. This often does not exclude academic courses. Often these teams require some kind of brainstorming process that concludes with a written deliverable product. Students are required to write sermons, speeches, team memos, mission trip information, event logistics, informative pamphlets, argumentative essays, evaluations, and other forms of deliverables as a team. They should learn as early as possible that their performance is not isolated; everyone on their team is affected by their decisions, learning, and commitment. Students should also see their own writing efforts increase in quality as a result of working with others, and the very act of writing as collaborative. As Kevin Roozen points out, “Writing puts the writer in contact with other people...it encompasses the countless people who have shaped the genres, tools, artifacts, technologies and places writers act with as they address the needs of their audiences” (Adler-Kassner & Wardle 18). Working together as a team physically demonstrates a foundational writing principle to students: writing is a social activity. The “team” in some form is always present. By drawing on their knowledge of the genre, audience, and purpose, students should engage with the threshold concept of the rhetorical nature of writing. Students must learn commitment, follow through, and consistency to refine their writing endeavors to ensure the best written product possible is given in every scenario.

Balancing responsibility with flexibility, point seven in the framework, is also key for any team situation or when working with people. Learning to apply these skills in their writing allows for the student to build into their skills of “approach[ing] writing assignments in multiple ways, depending on the task and audience” (Framework 5). Students in Highlands College are asked to balance very different demands on their time, so taking ownership of the roles set before them gives them a chance to learn responsibility; understanding these different demands based on audience and context requires flexibility as an essential habit of mind.

Finally, metacognition and creativity, points four and eight from the Framework for Success should be considered. Metacognition will be pursued in the manner described above, according to Yancey et al.’s descriptions of reflection (Yancey et al. 4). Creativity will also serve Highlands College students well as they learn to “take risks by exploring questions, topics and ideas that are new to them” (Framework 4). They should understand the value of being able to represent what they have learned in different ways depending on audience and context (Framework 4).

In this curriculum design, I maintain that a holistic writing program involves all other courses, faculty, and fields other than English or composition. One of the concerns raised by White, Elliot, and Peckham is that of “inoculation theory” or the belief that the first-year composition sequence will definitively develop student writing skills to the necessary level for collegiate and professional success (17). Writing is a skill that should be embraced by the entire university community; and, by integrating writing into all courses and fields, students will have access to informed practice that will equip them for post-collegiate success. White, Elliot, and Peckham argue for a holistic approach for the writing program, pointing out the pitfalls in the inoculation mentality, which undermine the “writing as process” approaches and the goals of



creating lifelong learners and writers. Highlands College will need to embrace a holistic design since students are only required to take Composition I and II courses. The rest of the students' writing takes place in religious studies, psychology, history, or other types of courses; for these reasons, it is crucial that the faculty understand the value of a holistic institutional writing effort. To ensure this unified effort, the program must be relevant to stakeholders (White, Elliot and Peckham 21), as articulated in standard 9B, "faculty decision making" from the ABHE.

For these reasons, the "habits of mind" as articulated by the WPA, the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing, the Highlands College mission statement, and the ABHE's accreditation standards will serve as foundational texts for the curriculum's design and implementation. These cornerstone texts will serve as models and guides to ensure that the curricula reflect the best practices of the field and also retain value and relevance to a Highlands College ministry student.

### **Values, Structure, and Culture of Highlands College**

At Highlands College, there is a Christian, Bible-believing student body majority. I would use the term "evangelical" to describe the students at this institution. Jonathan Merritt, in his article "Defining 'Evangelical,'" cites David Bebbington's definition of evangelical as one of the most widely accepted. It is made up of four main components: "Biblicism: a high regard for the Bible; Crucicentrism: a focus on Jesus's crucifixion and its saving effects; Conversionism: a belief that humans need to be converted; and Activism: the belief that faith should influence one's public life" (Merritt). In this particular space, students typically state that they believe the Bible and are seeking to act in obedience to Jesus's command to "go into all the world and make disciples of all nations" in accordance with the mission of the college; students sign papers stating this is what they believe prior to admission. Highlands College students are typically

eager to learn more about the Bible and applying its principles in their lives, as they have selected majors that are largely comprised of biblical and church ministry/vocational courses. The belief systems in place within the student body include a range of conservative and liberal political viewpoints, but students and faculty alike seek to unify under the Bible and the Christian values of unity, love for others, bringing news of peace and grace to those who have not heard the gospel, and inclusivity, rather than division, hate, anger, violence or degradation, which the college acknowledges as directly acrimonious to the goals of the college and the church itself.

The students of Highlands College largely have vocational rather than scholarly goals; while the institution offers SACS accredited two and four-year degrees (through a partnership with Southeastern University), most students seek placement in ministry positions after their second year, or after earning an associate degree in Christian Ministry. The composition sequence of English 101 and 102 will be the only writing-designated courses in the two-year trajectory. Students will engage in other writing requirements in biblical and theological studies courses, history courses, and psychology courses, but none of these are designated writing courses. Currently, there is not an upper-level course targeted at vocational writing, but students are asked to write heavily in many of their academic courses.

Highlands College is a non-denominational Christian college that aligns itself with the beliefs and practices of Church of the Highlands, based in Birmingham, Alabama, USA. The college mission statement, as quoted from the Highlands College website, is “A biblical higher education institution that exists to supply the church with leaders to fulfill the Great Commission” (Highlands). The vision of the college is stated as such: “Highlands College will

be a premier college developing biblically-educated ministry leaders to advance the mission of the church” (Highlands).

The college bases this mission on the book of Luke, chapter ten, verse two, when Jesus said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few” (*New International Version*). Highlands College believes that more well-trained leaders are needed to advance the mission of the Church. One method to fulfill the Great Commission is to create an environment in which leadership, biblical knowledge, practical ministry training, excellence, and self-discipline are fostered, and then sending those leaders out to other churches to fill needed gaps in ministry. Highlands College seeks to build leadership by equipping students for success mentally, physically, practically, and spiritually through academics, sports, and athletic training, ministry work, and spiritual growth. Highlands College seeks to develop each of these areas by instituting very structured schedules (similar to the military), designed to cultivate the leadership potential in each student.

Highlands College focuses on mental development through academic study. The Highlands College website states, “Students at Highlands College are lifelong learners. Each week students engage in academic classes where they are challenged to grow in their knowledge, interpretation, and integration of scripture. [F]aculty present a biblical worldview in a classroom setting” (Highlands). One of the main goals of the Christian classroom is to understand a biblical worldview and apply it to educational growth.

In addition to academic growth, Highlands College also hopes to cultivate physical discipline through regular athletic training. Students participate in weekly athletic activities as well as one endurance challenge each semester. Every fall, students participate in “HC Expedition,” which involves physical and team-building challenges on an eight to twelve-mile

course. Every spring, the students compete in a half-marathon. Highlands College believes that physical training teaches discipline and a healthy lifestyle and is therefore integrated as part of their education program.

Building on their mental and physical training efforts, Highlands College seeks to give every graduate hands-on ministry training. Every student chooses a “practicum” or an area in the church, such as technology, production, children’s ministry, student ministry, or other areas, and works on-site at Church of the Highlands for two or more days a week. Through this experience, students are asked to participate in real projects being completed in ministry settings and are exposed to every aspect of the ministry area they have chosen. Through these practicums, students are mentored by several different church staff members in that area. When students graduate, they have been working in a church area for two years or more. This is a core value of Highlands College: in addition to leadership training, academic knowledge, and physical discipline, students graduate with real ministry experience and can immediately join an existing church staff to share and modify the models they have learned.

The most important component of growth at Highlands College is spiritual growth. Highlands College as an institution works “to develop a personal devotion to God and a commitment to live out the Great Commission” (Highlands). Highlands College seeks to mentor students in discipleship small groups, regular chapel services including worship and biblical lectures, and mission trips that engage and serve with local and international communities.

Highlands College seeks to grow students into the future leaders of the Church across the globe.

As a Christian College, Highlands College states its beliefs openly. Highlands College believes in the sanctity of the Holy Bible, the co-equal and co-eternal nature of the Trinity, and the sonship of Jesus Christ. They believe Jesus was born of a virgin and is the key to redemption

for all mankind. They believe that salvation is a gift from God that cannot be earned but only accepted. They state that by repentance, regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and an ongoing process of sanctification, believers receive salvation and grow in Christian maturity. They believe in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as the Sacraments of Holy Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Marriage. They believe in God's healing, God's provision, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead, Heaven, Hell, and the second coming (or return) of Jesus to Earth. (Highlands)

The culture of Highlands College is based on that of Church of the Highlands. Pastor Chris Hodges, the lead pastor of Church of the Highlands, has stated that "church" should be "authentic, relevant, enjoyable, accepting and powerful." ("Story") The church has built a culture based on these traits, which also form the foundation of Highlands College culture. Students are encouraged to be honest and authentic in their relationships, relevant to others around them, possess a contagious positive attitude, accept people where they are, and to act powerfully in others' lives.

The culture at Highlands College, although different from Church of the Highlands, is similar in many ways. Several terms describe the college culture, including "life-giving," energetic, purposeful, relational, and excellent. A life-giving culture is one in which students are empowered. Relationships with faculty and other students are seen as vital and students are expected to pursue mentor and peer relationships. Instead of "religious" or legalistic mindsets, the college seeks to empower students with encouragement, passion, new growth, and new learning through genuine encounters with God and others. A life-giving culture seeks to build the potential in each person to see their purpose and make a difference in the lives of other people, recognizing the failures and flaws in each person, but seeking to encourage them to learn,

grow and change. The worship services, speakers, and events at the college are what could be classified as “high energy.” The music is loud, the activities are intense, and students are encouraged to be passionate about God, their purpose, and what they are pursuing academically and professionally.

The culture at the college is also purposeful because faculty and students at the college are encouraged to discover their purpose (or what they were meant to do) and carry out that purpose (to be literally “full of purpose”). The students take assessments, practice ministry, and serve where they are most effective and most fulfilled. Students are encouraged to be passionate about their strengths, to focus on these rather than their weaknesses, and to pursue a discipline of excellence in their lives.

Highlands College creates a culture of excellence, where students are held to high standards in academic and personal life. Excellence is a primary value of the college that faculty and students seek to embody in all of their endeavors. Both the church and the college seek excellence because they see it as an act of worship to God. They base this off of the New Testament which says, “Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people” (*New Living Translation*, Col. 3.23). There are many values and attitudes that make up any culture, but these are some of the most prevalent at Highlands College.

All of these cultural, academic, theoretical, and spiritual considerations will be taken into account when the new curricula are designed. Based on William James’s notion of pragmatic belief as a philosophical frame, the foundational texts outlined in this chapter, and the input from colleagues in composition and rhetoric and other scholars and ministry professionals, I hope to assemble relevant and useful curricula for Highlands College. Christian-driven curricula and

teaching philosophies will offer more specific and accessible writing goals for students who are pursuing careers in Christian ministry. I desire to create curricula that interrogate and explore not only the Christian worldview but other worldviews currently in conversation with it.

Students will benefit from a diverse exploration of not only their own faith, but how to apply their faith in realistic settings. Creating spaces where students can think through their beliefs and what kind of actions those beliefs require will align with James's philosophy of pragmatism and will also benefit students greatly as they seek to serve those with vastly different worldviews or beliefs in their ministry service.

## **CHAPTER 2: THE RELIGION QUESTION: HURDLES TO OVERCOME**

### **Introduction**

A composition course taught in a biblical higher education institution may raise some immediate questions. First, why is it necessary for biblical institutions to have a first-year writing curriculum that is different from a secular institution's curriculum? What is different about these spaces and should these audiences be treated differently? Is it productive to incorporate religious goals into composition? Can students benefit from combining faith and writing? Do faith-based writing topics (specifically Christian) create dead-ends in student writing? Can the Bible be used as a productive rhetorical text in the classroom? These questions should be explored thoroughly for their relevance to this project; these questions will form the outline for this chapter.

Chapter Two addresses the hesitations composition instructors may feel before engaging with Christian student writing responses, but argues that by allowing student autonomy in writing topics, instructors embrace a pedagogical view that respects student identity and student beliefs in any first-year writing institutional setting, which allows for greater intellectual freedom.

Chapter Two outlines the current literature on Christianity and composition and introduces the philosophy of pragmatism (as articulated by James and Peirce) as the theoretical framework for the project. Chapter Two outlines why pragmatic methods would be a productive lens through which to address Christian student writing. A pragmatic lens aids the instructor in suspending judgment, taking the "truth" claim off the table, so that the focus is the implications



or the practical effects of personal belief. This lens will also aid the instructor in expanding, rather than narrowing, a rhetorical conversation by working with James's notion of "solving names" and how terms can be re-opened through a pragmatic lens.

Chapter Two acknowledges that religious discussions are often very heated, but if we avoid them, we may be missing one of the greatest areas of student passion. I then defend Christian-based student writing by pointing out that all writing has strengths and weaknesses. I address common arguments against faith-based writing: a lack of logic, diction that is "preachy," the use of appropriated language, or a lack of audience awareness. However, because of the nature of faith, instructors should consider the need for different pedagogical efforts. Emotionally damaging tactics, identity deconstruction (separating parts of self out of the classroom or certain academic spaces), efforts of deconversion or de-moralization are intensely damaging pedagogical practices. Chapter Two then offers some rhetorical heuristics to better engage Christian students, including an example of a pedagogical result of applying a pragmatic lens: a student's successful dialogic with his experiences and faith exploration. I argue that these principles are true in any academic space, religiously affiliated or not.

Chapter Two then segues into addressing first-year composition concerns at Christian institutions specifically. First, Christian students need to acknowledge the polarity involved in discussions of faith: how those who do not subscribe to Christianity view Christians and the Christian narrative. I argue that there is a Christian rhetorical reputation that could be used as a productive investigational site to explore the concepts of the Christian community narrative. Students could use the rhetorical reputation as a site of tension to examine and see where they themselves fall in the narrative.

Next, I address the needs of Christian curricula to look different since these students have different goals. Christians at Highlands College specifically have goals to present their worldview to others, which includes skeptics and people of radically different beliefs. For this reason, students should investigate their worldviews to further their faith-based rhetorical effectiveness, using pragmatism as a heuristic for productive critical inquiry.

I then argue that composition courses can partner with religious studies courses in building a more rhetorically effective student, but composition can offer specific benefits to students seeking to sharpen their awareness of personal worldview. Focusing on audience, learning through writing, integrating faith with academics, and applying compositional concepts to their faith are all benefits to integrating Christianity in composition.

I then address the benefits to a more unified religious site. Christian institutional spaces offer different learning environments to Christians that may allow for more productive learning. I address the concern of indoctrination through an apologetic view of Christianity: questions and doubt should be used as fuel to seek out further knowledge and nuanced understandings. In Christian institutional spaces, students expect to discuss religion and are not afraid to bring up religious topics for fear of being antagonized by other students or instructors. It allows instructors to take on a coaching role instead of an antagonist role.

I argue that ultimately, it is the instructor's responsibility to cultivate a tone and attitude of appreciation for different belief systems and that there are methods that could allow access to different worldviews, such as civic engagement or campus visits. I also site Elbow's believing game as a tool to help students engage with different beliefs, since they are already familiar with the concept of belief. They could apply belief to other worldviews, looking for their positive

traits. Finally, I argue that the Bible is a fertile source of academic exercise. It is a faith that is heterogeneous: textually rich and theoretically complex.

Dead ends happen in all writing. Pedagogical stances that make room for all kinds of dead ends are going to be more beneficial to students.

Lastly, instructors should not be expected to have biblical knowledge. I think incorporating biblical principles or worldview using key concepts (love your enemy, etc.) is a site where even if someone is not a biblical scholar, they can incorporate worldview teaching through a different lens.

The majority of this project focuses on the work to be done inside religious institutions, but the call is just as sound for those in secular institutions to recognize the hesitations and distaste regarding religious discussions in composition and to allow for religious investigation (generally) within student writing. I acknowledge that religious, and evangelical Christian interactions specifically, can create problems in the classroom. There are good reasons why instructors often are not receptive to religiously-themed papers or faith-based class contributions. However, instead of hesitation to engage with Christian topics, instructors should not only allow but encourage these students' efforts for the genuine academic growth that could be offered to these students through these situations.

## **Literature Review**

Since 2001, many scholars have argued for religious or faith-based efforts to become more accessible within composition and academic spaces in general (See Carter, DePalma, Ringer, Peters, Zaleski, and Rand). I would like to join the scholars who have recently argued for the value of using religion for positive communicative, rhetorical, and critical awareness goals (Carter, Bizzell, Perkins, Ringer, Hairston, DePalma, Rand, Crowley, Earle, and Vander

Lei). These and other scholars believe there is a method that allows writing to be taught more effectively which involves embracing student beliefs rather than overlooking or dismissing these beliefs. Critical thinking can be cultivated using subjects which support student investigation of personal identity. I would like to argue for these perspectives and others that support Christian-based compositional efforts and the benefits it can bring to Christian students.

There have been many scholars that cast serious doubt regarding the compatibility of religious discourse and academic discourse. Keith Gilyard, for example, states, “I doubt that high-volume creativity is going to flow from fundamentalist or evangelical students. Their religiosity tends not to be of the prophetic, social ameliorative type but the conservative, George W. Bush type” (58). Sharon Crowley agrees with Gilyard, stating that certain religious people are prone to a certain unflinching rigidity that creates hurdles in achieving academic thought: “postmoderns, liberals, and other skeptics can more easily abandon portions of their belief systems than can apocalypticists” (196). Crowley nuances her argument by also claiming that rhetoric might be used as “a possible anodyne” to the turbulent and tenuous relationship between religion and academia, if only different rhetorical methods were accessed. Crowley sees the potential in rhetoric as a bridge-building field for these discussions to begin, despite their troublesome past.

When scholars assume the incompatibility of these discourses, this creates the main obstacle in any bridge-building efforts between religious and academic discourse. Priscilla Perkins argues that academics jump to conclusions quickly regarding religious discourse in student writing but that instructors would benefit religious students by asking them to use the tension they are experiencing as a place for investigation between their own worldviews and those of the academy (586). Elizabeth Vander Lei agrees and argues that the tension between

faith and academic learning can be a vehicle to re-open our “solving names” (to use a Jamesian term),<sup>3</sup> suspend our preconceived answers, and re-examine the terms for new compatibilities.

Chris Earle echoes this by partnering these efforts with civic and rhetorical responsibilities:

Yet we do students a disservice if our pedagogies ask them to assert their convictions without regard for what counts as good reasons for others. In such cases, more is at stake than students’ persuasive powers. Instructors also miss a crucial opportunity to cultivate the civic and rhetorical responsibilities to listen to those with whom we disagree, to talk with rather than at or past the other side. (134)

Earle sees value in asking non-religious students to engage with religious discourse since it assuages the view of religious voices as an “intrusion on public life” (134). Earle recognizes that even non-religious students will be faced with religious discourse at some point, and to steer clear of this contact zone only perpetuates uncivil relationships in the public domain. Michelle Zaleski’s research works in the same vein, working with the fact that religious discourse is often interwoven in our conceptions of literacy. Zaleski shows the importance of recognizing the once interwoven nature of religion and education and how these histories have affected the field. Zaleski states, “...the field has yet to fully explore how religious belief shaped historical understandings of literacy” (162).

The efforts of joining academic and religious discourse concentrate largely on the rights students have to educational freedom: since students learn writing best when they are invested in their writing topics, allowing the freedom of religious discourse in composition holds the potential for students to learn writing more effectively. Maxine Hairston argues that student choice should drive course content, rather than instructor choice. Hairston acknowledges the power that the instructor holds, and she states that to push any agenda outside of student-driven agendas would be an abuse of that power.

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<sup>3</sup> “Solving names” as a pragmatic term is defined on page 41.

Student freedom and choice means that instructors also consider the effects of excluding religious rhetoric on account of their own preferences, or reacting to it in ways largely negative and condescending to their students. Jeffrey Ringer considers the consequences for students engaging with faith in composition. He describes deconversion efforts and their psychological effects, how academic mindsets (that value reason and mind to the point of ignoring passion and will, in Jamesian terms) impact students of faith. He also describes efforts that focus on rhetorical engagement instead of deconversion efforts, or discussions regarding the validity of a certain text over another. For classroom application, he advises discussions on effective modes of evidence and considerations of audience, for example, to keep the discussions focused on rhetorical concepts.

There are also many scholars that emphasize the complicated, nuanced, and academic material that a Christian religious discourse has the potential to deliver. Lizabeth Rand, in agreement with Shannon Carter and Elizabeth Vander Lei, argues for the potential of using the Bible to develop rhetorical dexterity. Rand states that religious students should be able to articulate why biblical discourse is so central to them. In conjunction, Vander Lei hopes that evangelicals would not "alter what they believe," but instead "learn to use tension between faith [...] and academic inquiry as a way of learning more and learning better" (Vander Lei 8). Partnering faith and academic inquiry in healthy ways would aid religious and non-religious students in their personal and academic development.

In an effort to further lessen the gap between religious students' writing on issues of faith and instructors who struggle with allowing religious discourse in the classroom, Heather Thompson-Bunn writes to give a voice to Christian students. Hearing these students speak, unmediated by another voice, is one of Thompson-Bunn's main goals: "This allows a particular

group of Christian students to speak for themselves, using their own words” (Thompson-Bunn 374). In Thompson-Bunn’s study, Christian students speak about the perceived effect on their instructor when the instructor learns of their Christian faith. She hopes to inform others to student fears, perspectives, and successes in order to further open the possibilities of fruitful efforts in religious discourse and academic discourse. Michael-John DePalma also works to lessen the gap between instructor preference and student voice in his article, “Re-envisioning Religious Discourses as Rhetorical Resources in Composition teaching: A Pragmatic Response to the Challenge of Belief.” DePalma admits that Christian students sometimes struggle to negotiate intersections of faith and academic writing, but they are also capable of drawing from religious discourses to “engag[e] in the kind of sophisticated praxis that is often sought after in academic writing” (234). DePalma works to provide a framework for instructors to better aid students in realizing when their religious discourse efforts are not as effective as they could be. DePalma states that by asking students to articulate their own views in relation to those very different from their own, students will be acquiring critical awareness skills.

DePalma’s tactic of using pragmatism to assuage concerns associated with religious discourse in the composition classroom inspires the theoretical foundations for this project. DePalma “forwards a Jamesian pragmatic framework for re-envisioning students’ religious discourses as rhetorical resources in composition teaching. His goals include re-negotiating the discourse currents between academic and religious discourse and changing pedagogical stances toward student texts that involve religious discussion” (DePalma 221-222). DePalma states that when unproductive distinctions and separations occur between academic and religious discourses, academic discourses are more highly valued in an academic sphere, so it limits the ways that compositionists can respond to religious discourses and student texts that engage

religion. (223) DePalma argues that when pragmatism is applied, in James's view specifically, religious discourses can be valued as an addition to academic discourse, a truer and better active pluralism that acknowledges the mind, will, and emotions "working out things together" (227). DePalma states that "Not only is this stance [of relying wholly on reason or the mind] theoretically indefensible, but it also lacks pragmatic sense in that it limits the possibilities of knowledge making and cuts off a rich resource of knowledge for a significant number of students" (228).

In alignment with DePalma's efforts to use pragmatism as an effective framework to negotiate the reconciling of religious and academic discourse, I would also like to expand the discussion involving pragmatism and how it might be used productively to respond to religious, specifically Christian, discourses in composition.

### **Pragmatism as a Theoretical Framework for Secular Institutions**

When instructors in a secular space are faced with religious student writing,<sup>4</sup> what are the best practices to create an educative experience for the student? How can an instructor grant power to the student's efforts while cultivating strong academic principles? By using pragmatism as a working framework, religious students can investigate their beliefs in scholarly ways, and the instructor can respect student identity. When the instructor uses pragmatic methods, faith-based writing can become an opportunity to examine beliefs and worldview through a productive critical lens.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This project concentrates on Christian topics in student writing, but most of the principles, such as student freedom and autonomy in writing topics, applies to any belief system.

<sup>5</sup> I do not mean that the subject of the course should be pragmatism. Rather, the instructor can use the critical methods (overtly or not) of pragmatism as heuristics to negotiate the writing/grading/feedback relationship with students. The instructor may also use pragmatic



The instructor's perspective and word choice are very important when handling faith in the classroom. Asking a student to *investigate* their belief system is a more productive tool than asking them to *doubt* their belief system. Pragmatism may be an effective tool for instructors in secular spaces because it changes the questions involved with faith-based discussions. Instead of "is this truth?" pragmatism asks, "what is this truth asking of me?" Beliefs under investigation are not beliefs under fire: asking students to understand their beliefs more deeply can aid them in making decisions that more accurately reflect those beliefs. Implementing William James's notions of pragmatism, DePalma states that pragmatism offers a beneficial framework for investigating attitudes on academic and religious discourse as well as pedagogical responses to faith-based student writing (Re-envisioning 221). DePalma argues that there are productive academic methods, in alignment with Peter Elbow, other than "the doubting game."<sup>6</sup> James's pragmatic view holds that the doctrine of "objective evidence" or the supreme privileging of the mind and reason above all else as the foundation for belief, severely undermines "passion" and human will—factors that are inextricably involved in our decision-making processes (James, "Will"). "Were we scholastic absolutists, there might be more excuse. If we had an infallible intellect with its objective certitudes, we might feel ourselves disloyal to such a perfect organ of knowledge in not trusting to it exclusively, in not waiting for its releasing word" ("Will," Section X, para. 10). James argues that our minds and understanding of reason are limited, and to ignore other aspects of our identities as human beings is a mistake. A pragmatic view prioritizes experience, passion, and will as a valid source of epistemology. Experience and our interpretation of it should be a source of knowledge *and* a view of knowledge: this view of

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methods to aid students in reaching deeper cognitive levels of their own thoughts and beliefs within safer limits.

<sup>6</sup> A definition of "the doubting game" as defined by Peter Elbow is given on page 46.

experience forces us to admit that our knowledge can only ever be partial and limited. This view gives religious students alternatives to simply interrogating or criticizing their faith; instead, it can be utilized as a legitimate discourse where, as DePalma explains, “its value is measured by its ability to adapt to the un-reproducible experience of [the] language user” (224). Adapting to student experience, or allowing students a chance to more fully understand their own experiences, is one productive site of engagement for the pragmatic implications of religious belief. Applying pragmatism in this way mirrors what James originally intended. In “What Pragmatism Means,” James explains:

The pragmatic method is primarily a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable. Is the world one or many? – fated or free? – material or spiritual? – here are notions either of which may or may not hold good of the world; and disputes over such notions are unending. The pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences. (James 45, Lecture II)

Rather than trying to answer the interminable matters at hand, James finds it more valuable to trace the consequences of the belief on the individual and weigh the effects themselves. This perspective takes us beyond agreeing or disagreeing, or simply trying to debate age-old topics to ultimately “prove” or “disprove” a matter that has never been agreed on. This perspective offers instructors a more productive discussion that seeks the true meaning of a thought or belief by examining the behavior it creates: examining belief in action. James gives credit to Charles Peirce, who said,

Our beliefs are really rules for action...to develop a thought’s meaning, we need only determine what conduct it is fitted to produce: that conduct is for us its sole significance. And the tangible fact at the root of all our thought-distinctions, however subtle, is that there is no one of them so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice. To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve – what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. (James 46-47, Lecture II)

Making meaning, for James and Peirce, consists of understanding the different consequences behind actions and the beliefs that drive those actions. Reciprocally, in my view, thoughts are only understood through actions, and motives, or true intentions, are discerned through making meaning of action. As James states,

[Pragmatism] means, they say, nothing but this, *that ideas* (which themselves are but parts of our experience) *become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience*, to summarise [sic] them and get about among them by conceptual short-cuts instead of following the interminable succession of particular phenomena. (58)

Beliefs can be investigated through this lens for their practical implications, rather than if they would hold under the doctrine of “objective evidence.” Applying this definition, students will only understand the truth of their own beliefs to the extent that they can reconcile it with other “parts of their experience,” or the accumulative perception of truth they have from all areas of experience—their relationships, other worldviews, and their own decisions. The use of pragmatism urges students to grapple with the truth claims and the consequences of those claims in order to fully know the truth they claim as their own.

Inviting religious discourse allows religious stigmas, misunderstandings, and common misconceptions to be more fully investigated by students genuinely seeking to understand their own beliefs in fuller ways. In doing so, students can pursue more informed actions than they would have otherwise. This idea may connect with action-based pedagogies in composition. Different actions are needed if the current perspectives and connotations regarding religious views are going to be changed in a positive way. Students may come to know new facts, new actions, and more powerful steps in those decisions because they are more informed decisions.

Applying pragmatism may offer another benefit in adapting our models of critical thinking to religious discourse: by nature, approaching faith pragmatically (thinking through faith using a pragmatism model) would allow opportunities for students to re-open matters that

they may have considered already closed. When students are encouraged to re-open topics they already thought to be “closed” or even “off-limits,” they are being empowered. Empowerment in this way *expands* the already-present base of student knowledge. It allows the student to continue to build on, rather than tear-down their existing intellectual structures. Many religious students may see the religious question as “solved” or “closed” but James addresses this issue specifically: He says that, outside the pragmatist framework, terms like, “‘God,’ ‘Matter,’ ‘Reason,’ ‘the Absolute,’ or ‘Energy’” function typically as “solving names,” or terms that when you have decided on them, they provide a finality. As James states, “You can rest when you have them. You are at the end of your metaphysical quest” (51). The expansion in the conversation occurs when the pragmatic method is applied:

But if you follow the pragmatic method, you cannot look on any such word as closing your quest. You must bring out of each word its practical cash-value, set it at work within the stream of your experience. It appears less as a solution, then, than as a program for more work, and more particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be changed (James 52-53, emphasis added).

This is a crucial expansion for any student pursuing college-level education; pragmatism asks students to reconsider the “solving names” they have been relying on and expand their knowledge base. This is a fine-tuning of existing belief. When a new idea is examined through this lens, “This new idea ...preserves the older stock of truths with a minimum of modification, stretching them just enough to make them admit the novelty, but conceiving that in ways as familiar as the case leaves possible” (James 59). This allows students to stretch and slowly modify their beliefs in the context of their own understanding and experience. James, Schiller, and Dewey point out that this process of questioning is more productive because, rather than forcing different views violently upon students (like two rams locking horns), the student is given space to maintain what they already hold to be true. “The observable process which Schiller and Dewey particularly singled out for generalization is the familiar one by which any

individual settles into new opinions. The process here is always the same. The individual has a stock of old opinions already, but he meets a new experience that puts them to a strain” (James 59). The clash and power struggle caused when two completely different worldviews engage often is not a productive site for students, because they only hold on desperately to what they already believed was true or feel as though they are deserting their cherished beliefs by abandoning their prior belief systems.

Contrarily, the pragmatic method is a healthy endeavor in many ways: DePalma also urges us to look past our “closed systems” as James describes them, and turn toward the facts of the consequences of belief, the actions devout students will take for their faiths, and the power in unearthing the fullness of identity and a flourishing human being—these are the possibilities of engaging with a pragmatic view of religious discourse. James articulates some very important values when he states, “[The pragmatic method] turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad *a priori* reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. [The method] turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action and towards power” (51). Students regain power as thinkers and agents when they understand the motives and deep reasons for their actions in their lives. They also develop a mode of inquiry that constantly questions new problems in light of how they relate to former beliefs. Instructors should aim for this kind of empowerment.

### **Limiting Tendencies: Experiences**

I sat, awkwardly, unsure of exactly how to proceed. Elizabeth continued to cry, and I once again was caught off guard during my office hours. I was a teaching assistant in a liberal arts program at a large state university, listening to another student’s story. Elizabeth, like several other students I had spoken with during that semester, felt that she could not complete the

minor she had originally chosen and was ready to leave her program. This, in turn, would impact her academic future, her living accommodations (as the program allowed students to live in a certain residence hall on campus), and her current relationships in this residence hall and classes. Why? Because her Christian beliefs had been belittled in an academic space by professors and her non-religious peers, and she would rather leave the program and make these (pretty major) changes than try to stick it out.

Elizabeth had been a quiet student. I was surprised to see her in my office hours at all. The few things she had contributed to our class discussions were overtly Christian, and when asked to defend her view, she had fallen silent. It seemed as though she was a passionate person of faith but lacked the critical vocabulary to voice the “why” behind her beliefs. She did not understand that questioning her faith may have positive results; she was too afraid to do so under the circumstances. I assured her that if she would stick it out, I was sure she could research answers to the questions that were troubling her and encouraged her that both religious and non-religious communities had excellent arguments for their worldviews. We discussed her research interests, and she shared that her future career plans included pastoring and preaching. I encouraged her that a faith with questions answered would certainly benefit her and her future plans—and could be something we could work on in our course together. She left encouraged, tears halted, and thanked me. I was disheartened to learn she dropped the course one week later.

Similar experiences happened with several other students. As a teaching assistant, I felt unsure of what I could do, since I wasn’t “in charge” but was still in a position of authority. I reflected back on my own experience, remembering how emotionally difficult it was for me as a young adult to question my own Christian faith and find difficult answers to difficult questions. I remember receiving a low score on an assignment in an upper-level literature course, taught by

a professor who was, quite frankly, brilliant, open-minded, highly-respected, and one I loved. I had applied a religious lens to a poem we had read and was disappointed in the low grade I received. A religious reading was “trite, over-done” in her words. I never attempted another religious paper.

After receiving my master’s degree, I began teaching in a Christian institution. On the first day of class every semester, I (still) take time to meet the students and try to get to know them. As an icebreaker, I ask the students where they are from, what courses they are interested in pursuing, and why they chose the institution. After teaching at this institution for several years, I became familiar with the response, “Well, I transferred here from \_\_\_\_\_ University.” When asked why, many students were forthright enough to admit that they had experiences ranging from emotional trouble to outright religious discrimination regarding their faith in their higher education pursuits. This led me to the question, how common is this experience? Have we allowed students to write about their beliefs in “open” spaces? Have they silenced their own interests, knowledge pursuits, or questions for fear of being rejected or being asked to reconsider their beliefs without the needed support to do so? Upon undertaking this project, I have found several testimonials similar to the ones I’ve experienced personally. The question is not “how common is religious discrimination?” but isn’t one instance enough? I hope to show that even in secular spaces, students should be allowed to engage in religious writing topics in the composition classroom.

### **Application of Pragmatism in Composition: A Defense of Religious-Themed Writings**

Allowing space for faith-based writing in the composition classroom affords the opportunity for students to pursue a better understanding of identity while pursuing an education that will serve education’s highest purpose: allowing a person to flourish, rather than seeking to

deconstruct identity through the doubting game or other antagonistic practices towards personal beliefs. As DePalma points out, this doesn't mean there will not be issues with religious writing. But it should be acknowledged that just like all writing, there are risks and benefits to engaging with any view. First-year writing students may have difficulties in dealing with the complexities of their topics—but this is not limited to evangelical students. Being open to the opportunities for student identity to become more established allows a student to be rhetorically and intellectually engrossed in a topic for which that they have genuine interest and could develop a working, more informed vocabulary. A more informed vocabulary includes academic tools such as depth of knowledge, logic, and citing evidence, hopefully leading to more fruitful arguments and critical thinking. Purposefully neglecting these areas of investigation for a student of faith neglects important intellectual and personal connections that should be included in higher education.

Before proceeding, I want to acknowledge the justified hesitations about allowing “religious” student writing in a composition class at all. In a secular academic space, (one not regarded as overtly religious), one of the main reasons for resistance to faith-based writing is the intense emotion and differences of opinion that these discussions produce. Patricia Bizzell addresses these issues in her response to Peter Elbow’s pinnacle text, “The Believing Game or Methodological Believing.” Elbow’s text establishes the differences between the doubting game, or the skeptical, questioning, critical mode of investigating ideas, with the believing game. In Elbow’s believing game, “instead of scrutinizing fashionable or widely accepted ideas for hidden flaws, the believing game asks us to scrutinize unfashionable or even repellent ideas for hidden virtues” (Elbow 2). Elbow moves one step beyond Carl Rogers (in Rogerian argumentation) in that he is not asking for views to be articulated *fairly*, but actually *believed*



(momentarily) for the sake of more depth in critical thinking. His methods echo Peirce's pragmatic views to strive for depth in thought, rather than breadth. In pragmatic terms, Elbow's believing game moves one step closer to "clear" and "distinct" thoughts as Peirce would have defined them.<sup>7</sup> This idea of depth, rather than a confused mass of unexamined notions, is especially beneficial for critical work regarding religion. Central critical thinking objectives instructors have for students involve this effort of making un-examined thoughts clear and distinct. Earle states, "While critical thinking is dialogic, the primary purpose of student writing is to reflect upon, clarify, and articulate beliefs—not to deliberate with differently situated audiences" (135). Peirce, Earle, DePalma, James, and Rogers argue that clarifying beliefs—understanding them more fully—is a worthy academic goal, and coincides with the believing game and its wide applications.

In her response to Elbow's "believing game," Patricia Bizzell urges instructors to embrace the believing game because of its ability to counter extreme emotion. In addition to this asset, the believing game places value on diversity and the interconnected nature of identity and the mind. She describes the mind of a religious person as a web in which everything connects back to religion in some way. And then she asks a haunting question: "What if there is intellectual work to be done that can only be done by what Carter calls the "Christian mind"—or Jewish, Moslem [sic], or Buddhist mind?" (35) Students deserve a judgment-free (and emotionally managed) space in which the entire "web" of inter-workings that make up their

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<sup>7</sup> A "clear" thought, according to Peirce, is "one which is so apprehended that it will be recognized wherever it is met with, and so that no other will be mistaken for it." On the matter of a distinct thought, he says, "A distinct idea is defined as one which contains nothing which is not clear. This is technical language; by the *contents* of an idea logicians understand whatever is contained in its definition. So that an idea is *distinctly* apprehended, according to them, when we can give a precise definition of it, in abstract terms." (286)

beliefs, interests, and passions is utilized. “Permitting such a development will require academic discourse to come to terms with emotion yet again, big-time, as we are still struggling to do when other emotionally charged topics come up, such as those relating to race and gender” (Bizzell 35). As instructors work towards emotional control regarding such heated topics, we should acknowledge that by facing this difficult obstacle, we will be working towards a new level of intellectual freedom for students of faith.

This is by no means easy: Bizzell confronts the inherent difficulty in asking students and instructors alike to consider and embody a strand of logic, thinking, or idea that arouses intense emotion and is also counter to their current worldview. (Bizzell 29-30) But as professionals, instructors must learn to guard their reactions: it requires practice and training not to react in overtly emotional ways, especially when students are very passionate but unknowledgeable on their topic. Doug Downs provides an example of the frustration he feels when encountering student writing that is full of “unproductive” religious themes:

Congratulations! You’ve just written the most indoctrinated, closed-minded, uncritical, simplistically reasoned paper I’ve ever read!... You haven’t deeply examined the situation. You’ve gone and found the evidence . . . that would support your long-held preconceptions...[and] never questioned the assumptions you have. (Downs)

Downs’s response is honest and representative of the emotional struggle present when instructors are presented with writing that may lack a critical lens, fair research, consideration of audience, or is simply very different from their own views. Too many of these experiences understandably may trigger a knee-jerk response of prohibiting religious writing or discussions. Instructors may feel defensive or the need to steer students in the direction of considering alternatives, pluralism, and other values of the academy to prevent reliance on unexamined ideas. However, the emotional reactions religious discourses trigger often signal that the “passion” or “will” in Jamesian/pragmatic terms has been prioritized over reason or objective evidence, and of course,

there should be a balance between these forces. Those who oppose religious discourse immediately abandon reason, the same reason that they insist is applied to all other ideas. The believing game would be a heuristic for allowing reason, passion, and will to work together in a productive pragmatic framework in this instance.

Furthermore, the “web” that Bizzell describes has implications for identity and education. Since belief shapes so many facets of a person, beliefs also ultimately shape the core of identity. Educators should consider the person, their identity, as utmost in their educational pursuits. Because of the nature of faith and the connection of faith to identity, we should consider faith-based writing for the benefits of these students. I am not arguing for a wholly religious agenda in secular composition courses, like a course theme or assigned readings. What I am arguing for is a reconsideration about the possibilities of fruitful investigation using religious discourse and faith-based writings. Faith-based writing opportunities give a student a chance to become a more well-informed member of both of these communities. Hairston urges that students will write better if they are interested in the topic and are encouraged to take risks in a low-risk setting (189). Hairston also urges that abiding solely by the instructor’s political agenda “severely limits freedom of expression for both students and instructors” (190). In agreement with Hairston, keeping religious writing as an option maintains student choice rather than instructor choice in writing topics.

Another large hurdle that keeps instructors from allowing faith-based discussions (in class or in writing) is a lack of consensus or lack of “logic” in a faith-based discussion. Bizzell acknowledges this issue of consensus and argues that we all subscribe to different belief systems, but that doesn’t preclude secular, scientific, or other arguments from being made in an academic space. She points out that on the contrary, these secular systems of logic ensure that “approved,”

“mainstream,” and “dominant” discourses prevail as “more sound” in the classroom. Bizzell points out the temptation to see the academic and religious positions “as one of reason contesting against unreason...” respectively. Bizzell offers a counter to this view:

For one thing, a rather large number of the audience members in a particular classroom may in fact be born again, or for other reasons quite amenable to faith-based arguments. And there’s the additional problem that this line of argument clearly valorizes some kinds of thinking that resists the mainstream over others. Certainly traditional academic skepticism is not a mainstream view and does not immediately appeal to many audience members—whether students or other adults—but we usually tend to defend it and dignify it with the adjective ‘critical.’ (Bizzell 30)

Bizzell’s comments show that a religious argument may offer excellent evidence or logic but may be prematurely judged or rejected. Intellectual freedom as a value should not be selective. Compositionists need to acknowledge that dominant discourses are limited to the expression of only some groups; religion is often dismissed in the composition classroom because of a lack of relevance in a composition course, a lack of “rational evidence,” or the experience of encountering student writing that may be myopic, “preachy,” or otherwise problematic. However, students shouldn’t have to censor their worldview in their writing endeavors. Horner and Lu call for intentional reflection regarding why certain terms in composition receive favor over others, and why each of us defines “writing,” “English,” and “literacy” with specific slants. These slants often unproductively counteract intentional broadening of terms and limits possibilities that would “make productive re-workings of rhetorical and composition possible” (Horner and Lu 473). We need to acknowledge the preferences in our academic systems of skepticism (and the doubting game) and challenge the way we view opportunities for student writing as well as the terms surrounding evidence and logic. “Literacy” for religious students, and specifically students seeking religious vocations, should include the option of critical investigations into their personal beliefs and values that comprise their identities. They should develop literacy that allows faith-based writing because this comprises much of who they claim

to be--and compositional efforts that encourage identity development can be very powerful educational tools.

### **Why Some Methods are More Effective Than Others for Christian Students**

Instructors in secular and religious contexts should address their pedagogical methods and allow space for religious students to function more healthily, productively, and intelligently as they engage with their identity and beliefs in an academic space. Confrontational, questioning, traditional methods of uncovering critical skills in academia may not be the most fruitful endeavors for Christian students. These things may be pursued to a degree, but the main problem with these methods of academic rigor is that faith is something that impacts the entire person—and can be lost. Losing one's faith can cause fundamental changes to identity and can cause severe emotional repercussions, like feelings of extreme failure, doubt, mistrust, guilt, betrayal, anxiety, and/or depression. Because of the intricate connections to a student's identity, relationships, community, and worldview, faith in academia should be handled differently. Pedagogical choices should be handled foremost with respect for the student's current identity. There are certain academic practices that may be more beneficial for religious students; they focus on seeing the value in student beliefs and applying Christian rhetoric and discourse in productive ways. These methods should meet academic standards as well as respect the religious beliefs of students.

On the other hand, negative methods can cause distress, reclusiveness, or withholding of ideas and engagement in the classroom. Confrontational pedagogy outlined by Ronald Strickland, for example, should be seriously questioned. In civic-minded efforts in composition, confrontation should be used very carefully, so that the instructor does not abuse their position of power. Hairston states, "The real political truth about classrooms is that the teacher has all the

power; she sets the agenda, she controls the discussion, and she gives the grades. She also knows more and can argue more skillfully. Such a situation is ripe for intellectual intimidation” (188). Is it our purpose to ensure that our own agendas are advanced at the expense of someone who is trying to gain access to an education that we have been privy to and working with for much longer? Furthering our own agendas is a way to steer students away from their own interests. Intellectual intimidation can come in many forms, and Jeffrey Ringer, in his article, “The Consequences of Integrating Faith into Academic Writing: Casuistic Stretching and Biblical Citation” examines these forms. He identifies efforts to “dislocate,” “demoralize,” or “de-convert” students as extremely unhealthy. Ringer asks the question: what are the academic effects on student identity when they engage with academic concepts and methods? How do we strike a balance between striving for academic goals of pluralism and respecting student beliefs? Ringer states, “I am certainly not advocating that we encourage students to see only one perspective as valid and reject all others. But I am advocating that writing instructors come to terms with the potential implications of asking evangelical students to adopt a pluralistic view” (278). Confrontational or dismissive attitudes work against active learning and may cause emotionally damaging effects on students.

Pedagogy will not be effective if students are experiencing identity crises or other emotionally damaging effects because of our teaching methods.<sup>8</sup> There is often a direct impact on identity and emotional stability when students encounter antagonism toward their beliefs.

DePalma and Carter discuss that when the Bible is engaged in most academic contexts, usually

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<sup>8</sup> I want to point out the difference between healthy academic rigor and emotionally damaging tactics. One is a healthy push that allows students to rethink concepts and take gradual steps toward refining ideas. The other destroys the foundations of a student’s faith system and leaves them nothing to stand on.

the responses range from unappreciative to threatening. In response to this, “Many such students believe themselves to be playing an artificial role” (Carter 576). These negative reactions encourage students to separate their religious selves out of their academic work because it is not considered credible, appropriate, or productive. The clear message to students is that this part of their identity should be packed away; it is “lesser than” since it is not acceptable or accessible in an intellectual sphere. As academics, we should understand the sacrifice we are asking these students to make and what we are communicating to them. When we limit a student’s freedom to write on their own religion, we have allowed our own view to dictate that student’s intellectual growth. Vander Lei actually classifies negative reactions to faith as “emotional and intellectual violence” to students.<sup>9</sup> Vander Lei describes the harmful effects of silence, but antagonistic attention, viewing students with opposing views as “ideological enemies” (Vander Lei 91), is terribly damaging. Instructors should recognize that healthy academic pursuits include emotional protection, and this protection of students should take precedence over any academic agenda.

One method to engage students productively would be to focus comments on the rhetorical strategies in the topics that students pursue. If students are citing sources written from a biblical worldview, how could they improve their research to acknowledge more than one viewpoint? How can instructors encourage students to see many sides of an argument? If students are evangelizing in a paper, how could they be more attentive or persuasive to their audience? If they are repeating religious jargon or using unclear “church-ese” terms, how can

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<sup>9</sup> Vander Lei’s uses an example to demonstrate this principle of emotional and intellectual violence. Her student, Marty, describes the violence he feels from the experience of trying to write on a biblical topic and encountering redirection and resistance from his instructor. During an in-class writing exercise, Marty describes writing as a harmful endeavor, where he is captive to the wounds created by his teacher’s comments and his own emotional state in the process.

instructors encourage them to rewrite in clearer ways, using their own voice more effectively? If they are using the Bible unproductively, how can we teach better critical reading skills? There are many solutions that respect a Christian student's faith while encouraging them to pursue academic goals. Donald Murray states, "We have to respect the student, not for his product, not for the paper we call literature by giving it a grade, but for the search for truth in which he is engaged" (5). In pragmatic terms, the question of whether or not we agree with the student's truth should be suspended; instead, we should be allowing the student to incorporate more depth of thought to the truth they have chosen.

### **Pedagogical Results of Pragmatism**

Applying pragmatism in composition pedagogically yielded excellent results for DePalma. DePalma's student, Thomas, whose vocational goal was to become a pastor, utilizes a personal essay, a critical analysis essay, and a persuasive research essay to explore the process he has undergone regarding his evangelical Christian faith. He utilized his writing assignments to pursue a deeper understanding of his religious convictions initially because he was pursuing a career in ministry. According to DePalma, Thomas grew to realize through his writing how religious ideas have shaped his understanding of truth in his experience. His writing encouraged him to examine the relationship he had with his faith and the consequences of believing certain doctrines. His ideas about Christianity, himself, and his relationships to others were more fully understood because of his writing engagement with those topics. In Thomas's case, the application of his religious beliefs produced a better understanding of identity, purpose, and motivation for his academic pursuits. Instead of viewing religion as an "un-dialogic," religious conviction instead fueled Thomas's academic interests. (DePalma 228-229, 231-234)



Thomas shows us that higher educational goals can be met when pragmatism and Christianity are used in conjunction. DePalma praises and recognizes the advanced use of dialogic with scripture that Thomas employs, and praises the parallels of Thomas's work with higher academic strivings: "From a Deweyan perspective, such an experience would be deemed 'educative' because it is inspiring future learning and inquiry. In asking questions such as Who am I? Who am I going to be? What is my calling? Is it worthy? and How could I ever know? Thomas is initiating the kind of lifelong process of inquiry that higher education aims to inspire" (DePalma 235). DePalma calls out the value and the revisions the pieces need, and by allowing Thomas space to pursue academic projects related to personal interests, there is a relevance for Thomas because he immediately connects his current efforts to his future ministry work, empowered by his new-found perspectives and knowledge on his beliefs.

Applying a pragmatic lens holds potential for a secular composition environment as well as a religious environment. Although the majority of this project works towards Christian institutional goals, I hope that instructors will consider allowing their students to engage with religious writing for its vast potential. Students should retain their power and right to choose their writing topics, and that means enriching their identities through constructive pedagogical efforts rather than dismissing beliefs that offer potential for effective writing learning.

Up to this point, I've articulated general principles that should be applied in any academic space: respect for student identity, protection of choice for student writing topics, and applying pragmatism productively to engage with religious writing. However, there are some issues that should be addressed regarding Christian institutional spaces specifically.

## **Application in Christian Institutional Spaces**

I also want to address some major concerns that Christian institutional spaces may procure. The rest of this chapter responds to questions regarding the specific context-sensitive matters for this institutional site.

### **#1: The heavy burden of religious reputation: can we engage with it productively?**

There has been much discussion regarding religious rhetoric and the reputation of religion in composition. DePalma cites Crowley and Gilyard regarding this issue, and states, “[incorporating Christian rhetoric] has the potential to undermine capacities that are essential to civic-minded rhetorical education and civil public discourse—namely, discussion, intellectual inquiry, and the advancement of knowledge”—values we hold dear as scholars (DePalma, “Reimagining” 254). Instead of ignoring these realities, or trying to shield Christian students from the negative perceptions surrounding past Christian reactions to non-traditional ideas, I believe students in Christian institutions will be better prepared if they acknowledge the current perceptions of Christian rhetoric and seek opportunities to participate in a more productive mode. Bizzell points out one of the most cited conflicts about introducing religion into the classroom, and that is the blaring fact that religion brings images into the minds of many scholars of hatred, violence, discord, and crimes against humanity, or as Bizzell states, “the heinous crimes being committed around the world today in the name of religion” (30).

Instead of seeing this issue of “rhetorical reputation” as a hurdle, we can use it as a site for investigation. The tension is an opportunity for students to address the historical accounts of violent religious people, for example, and the actions of those who are not. As Vander Lei points out, often voices claiming to be “Christian” are not functioning as a dominantly Christian voice, but more as a political or culturally-constructed voice (98). These voices too, get swept up in the

chaotic dissonance that makes up society's understandings of religious discourse and they too, are not usually examined and exposed for their lack of continuity between claim and execution. Vander Lei asks, "What would happen if we help students, all students, recognize academic writing as renovating a story rather than building one new? We might help them feel that even far from home they are not alone and that their voice speaks for, through, and against a community of voices" (96). The opportunity is present for religious students to recognize the force of the voices that surround them and to be critically aware of where they themselves fall in the narrative.

By encouraging students to work with Christian rhetoric, they can examine where they themselves fall in the narrative, but also see where the narrative is lacking. We can point students to resources that use scientific evidence for biblical worldviews or events, for example. We can enrich the rhetorical space for Christian discussions by offering more thoughtful resources and options for students to consider. We can create new vocabularies for students to work with and against—and all of this should be done and can be done best through the context of student writing.

The students of Highlands College desire to be ministry professionals. As ministry professionals, they should be able to articulate their beliefs, understand the depth of what they claim, be open to thoughtful and investigative learning, and listen to varied presentations of the narrative that they have chosen to be a part of. These efforts will prepare them to explain their own beliefs to those who do not share them and teach them to listen with seriousness to views different than their own. Students who claim to believe the Bible need to have the opportunity to examine their own beliefs in light of personal experience or in rhetoric contrary to "church-ese" and their own cultural norms.

## **#2: Why is it necessary for a Christian composition curriculum to look different from a secular composition curriculum?**

I would like to address the question, “Why can’t the already-existing plethora of composition pedagogies and writing curricula satisfy the needs of Christian ministry students?” The short answer is that it can. It is already doing so. Many religious institutions employ secular curricula for first-year writing and see plenty of success with their students. Instead of competing with extant curricula, I want to offer the final product of this project, faith-driven curricula, as an additional option that is more targeted and specific for ministry students who have Christian or ministry-related vocational goals. A Christian-conscious approach will more specifically prepare these certain student groups for their academic and professional efforts.

This specific curricular engagement is even more important in religious institutions. Students of Highlands College are seeking an education that will equip them for service to the *world*—and that includes skeptics, scholars, academics, people of different religions, beliefs, and worldviews. As an instructor, I believe it is in students’ best interests to create a Christian curriculum, so they can investigate their own beliefs and how those beliefs have been formed since this is better preparation for work in ministry. If students do not accomplish this goal, they will be less informed and less prepared than they could be for their future work. Genuine opportunities to work out doubts, questions about faith, the relationship of faith to everyday applications (like relationships, politics, or decision-making), should be included in their research and writing opportunities.

While a secular curriculum may purposefully steer clear of religious topics, a Christian curriculum can purposefully target religious intellectual quandaries that are best addressed through research and writing. A Christian student’s philosophy of writing, for example, could include faith-based reasons for writing, since identity, morals, and standards are often unified in

many ways. Students should realize, as DePalma states, the reality that political views, morals, and actions are often founded in religious beliefs. While some prefer to avoid discussing “faux pas” or uncomfortable subjects, they still have a responsibility to be knowledgeable and active citizens that can specifically identify and understand the implications of their beliefs.

### **#3: Why should composition be the place where this is addressed? What about religious studies courses?**

These methods are best employed in composition in partnership with other religious studies courses. Both of these fields can be used as sites for productive student writing topics and fuller realization of the implications of beliefs. Composition is included in this partnership for the main reason, first, that composition focuses on the writing process, which allows students to develop their understanding of the rhetorical situation, through analysis and synthesis writing. As Janet Emig states, analysis and synthesis “develop most fully” through writing. The writer is asked to conceptualize an audience (Ong) that is not present (Emig) and then is asked to re-understand that audience based on feedback. These foci in composition allow students to focus on understanding the rhetorical situation, and the rhetorical situation facing these students in their future vocations is the nature of addressing their faith publicly. Invoking this “public” audience asks students to address their faith through the lens of those with different viewpoints. Allowing faith-based writing into composition creates a “safe” place for students to make mistakes, receive feedback, and see the impact their writing has on peers who have similar goals.<sup>10</sup> In few other courses will students have the opportunity to use the writing process with their faith-based writing and receive critical and thoughtful feedback on the nature of their voice,

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<sup>10</sup> I do not mean “safe” in that there will be no risks involved. Elizabeth Ellsworth explains that it takes much effort to make a place “safe” in the full sense of the word. I simply mean that an academic space offers a space to consider the fictional “audience” (described by Ong) and at least receive feedback before interacting with audiences in their careers.

content, and purpose. Religious studies courses may not be as attentive to these vital communicative points in the same ways. Composition specifically allows Christian students to mature into writers and speakers who utilize the crucial skill of understanding audience.

Instead of students attempting to write their first sermon or ministry letter in their first weeks on staff at a church and enduring harsh reactions from their audience (which can be very costly in any church setting), they should learn these critical skills in writing in the academic setting that should prepare them for this exigence. A composition course's focus on audience is irreplaceable: it gives students the chance to consider how their voice affects others' reactions to their worldview and beliefs. For anyone of faith, it is crucial to consider the effect of our thoughts and actions on others due to the communal nature of faith congregations; asking students to consider different audiences is a vehicle to accomplish this aspect of critical thinking. This is a basic and necessary rhetorical skill for anyone pursuing higher education. This focus on audience is typically not a goal of religious studies course, and students are often not asked to write for audiences other than their instructor. In this way, composition prepares students for real-world engagement in a way that no other course can.

In composition, writing creates more incisive knowledge on one's personal thoughts as well as the thoughts of other scholars/writers. The nature of writing is such a powerful learning tool for these students: using writing, students can investigate their *own* responses to their worldview or values (rather than regurgitating thoughts from biblical commentaries or religious studies texts as would be the case in a typical religious studies course). The goal of a religious studies course is to know religious texts and doctrines, and the writing goals are to cultivate awareness of doctrine. A composition course, on the other hand, allows students to think through ideas by writing, allowing them to come to their own conclusions by thoroughly learning

what they think, because, as composition scholars know, writing unearths beliefs. Often we are surprised by the words we see on the page in front of us; our own beliefs don't crystallize until we work through them in mind and word. This effort follows the pragmatic mode of "making ideas clear," described by Peirce: "It is terrible to see how a single unclear idea, a single formula without meaning, lurking in a young man's head, will sometimes act like an obstruction of inert matter in an artery, hindering the nutrition of the brain, and condemning its victim to pine away in the fullness of his intellectual vigor and in the midst of intellectual plenty" (Peirce 289).

Writing efforts give students an opportunity to apply a different form, a more revealing form, of academic study to ideas that they have internalized without fully knowing them for their full potential and depth. Peirce states, "For an individual, however, there can be no question that a few clear ideas are worth more than many confused ones" (288). Students' core beliefs, in this context, have an opportunity to become more than both "clear" and "distinct" as Peirce describes. In composition, students can "write their ideas clear" in this sense; students can access a mode of learning (Emig) that can lead them to more incisive truth. In other courses without a focus on writing and working through ideas in this manner, typically students are not asked to move beyond Peirce's articulation of "distinct." They will be learning definitions and applying those definitions (of biblical terms, beliefs, doctrine, etc.) without striving for the "clearness of thought of a far higher grade" (Peirce 289). Without an opportunity to write on their beliefs, students miss an opportunity to access depth of thought on a certain topic. In a secular composition course, students might be asked to write genres such as a literacy narrative, a research paper, or topics like a political stance. In these examples, students have an opportunity to unearth various facets of their identity. Giving students the opportunity to write about their beliefs allows them to think through claims in a different, deliberate way.

Another reason for these methods in composition is that they encourage students to write about their faith; these methods prevent students from “censoring” their writing of any religious influences. Take the literacy narrative, for example. How did religion play a role in the books they read as children? Christian students should ponder these literacy practices involved with their religion to more fully understand these traditions and how they now feel about those traditions. Writing is a powerful connecting force for the student to recognize and understand how and why they have been taught. Writing allows us to more fully understand our own thoughts, emotions, and reactions to certain beliefs and should be a critical component in a Christian student’s education. In this way, instructors can utilize the “web” of inner-workings that Bizzell highlights and more fully equip the religious mind to perform its best work.

Finally, composition studies use a perspective that is different from religious studies courses. As a field, composition uses the concept of communities and voices and may equip students to study their religious communities differently. Students have the opportunity to learn which communities of voices are currently present in religious discourse, and how to write with or apart from the community of voices that have shaped their beliefs up to this point. They have the opportunity to learn to examine texts and opinions for themselves and choose which narrative strands they will be associated with and excluded from. Writing and personal research efforts offer them this opportunity in ways that are unique, and allow for students to not only see where they stand on an issue, but time to reconsider and revise based on research and feedback. Composition gives students an opportunity to research various sources (rather than just the Bible or commentaries) and engage different perspectives on issues. The goals of awareness of the rhetorical situation, research, and personal discovery are more specific to composition than other



courses. For these reasons, composition should be the foundation for students in Christian institutions to investigate different facets of their faith.

**#4: What is different about Christian institutional spaces? How can these spaces be more effectively utilized?**

So, what is different about Christian institutions, and Highlands College specifically, that would provide the exigence for more specific curricula? This raises another question, mainly that if the student body appears in many ways uniform, how will different worldviews and perceptions be genuinely investigated? The academic values of critical thinking and seeking for deeper understanding—how will they be met in such a space? How will students who may have been sheltered from other points of view be willing, or even able, to investigate differences in worldviews and beliefs in a positive and thoughtful manner?

There are obvious drawbacks to a more unified religious student body, the first being that a lack of representatives of different viewpoints precludes a personal defense of these groups. When students meet those who hold different beliefs, it allows them to humanize those with differing views. These types of interactions (as long as they are relatively healthy) with peers allow for beliefs to be interrogated; this can inspire students to consider their own views and the views of others while attaching a real person to those views, rather than dealing with beliefs only abstractly. Separating beliefs from people can be dangerous and is a drawback to a unified religious space. The second major concern about these spaces is that they can turn into spaces for indoctrination, in which students only cement their belief system without regard for audience, critical inquiry, or pragmatic considerations of how their views affect their actions or others.

I would like to argue that, despite these drawbacks, there are several ways these concerns may be assuaged. By examining and revising certain views and goals, I believe there are

compatible spaces for religious conversations and composition to be productively amalgamated in Christian institutions.

Instead of seeing a Christian institution as a site for indoctrination, these institutions can offer an extremely engaging space, where rhetorical development is crucial for students. One of the main differences between a secular institution and a Christian institution that may aid this type of engagement is the expectations of faith discussions: in a secular institution, religious discussions may be avoided or frowned upon, but in religious institutions, faith conversations are *expected*. On the Highlands College campus, at a minimum, religion is openly discussed, is a viable student writing topic, and is considered a site for fruitful investigation. Students often utilize these rhetorical options and meet with contrasting views and interpretations of Christian beliefs, political views, and scripture interpretations. Cultivating interactions of this sort aids students in furthering their own understanding of the various doctrines and interpretive views contained in Christianity alone.

Avoiding indoctrination effectively is in the method. If Christian institutions believe that their goals include sheltering students, keeping them from engaging with other worldviews, or only solidifying the beliefs that students already hold, they are doing their students a serious disservice. If faculty believe they are adequately preparing students by ignoring the current sociopolitical climate, nationally and internationally, and current debates and discussions regarding marriage, sexual orientation, the death penalty, cloning, abortion, women's rights, and other topics, I would question their teaching motives. These subjects cannot be neglected because when students complete their college education, they will be asked not only to have a viewpoint but a reaction to *and* interaction with people whose viewpoints may be radically different than their own in ministry settings. I am not suggesting that all of these topics should

(or could) be addressed in a first-year writing sequence, but I am suggesting that to shelter, steer clear, or avoid presenting multiple perspectives on issues *because of religion* is severely crippling students who are preparing for vocations in fields where their beliefs and actions may be interrogated frequently.<sup>11</sup>

Unexamined Christianity will only perpetuate common misconceptions, inattentiveness to other views, and ignorant arguments that have currently created distaste for religious discourse. Jonathan Morrow, a biblical apologist, outlines principles for biblical questioning and encourages Christians to question their faith. He states that a religious environment where questions are discouraged is “toxic” and in these types of toxic environments “what [was] encountered was not biblical Christianity” (14). On the contrary, he states that the Christian God is the one who says, “Come now, let us reason together” (*English Standard Version*, Isa. 1.18). Morrow also states, “When it comes to Christianity, the most important question we need to help people ask is not will it work for them or help them feel better, but rather is it true?” (23) Morrow urges Christians to ask questions about their faith because if Christianity isn’t true, there is no use believing it. He urges that the Bible does not encourage blind faith (24), and that according to Matthew 22:37, “engaging our minds as Christians is an act of worship and part of loving God with all of our minds” (27). One step toward a solution is for religious institutions to be bold enough to challenge their students to examine the evidence, doctrines, and discourses surrounding Christianity and to actively put those discourses in conversation with other worldviews. Anything less will not be adequately preparing students to engage with their own

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<sup>11</sup> The argument is the same for all institutions, religious or not: whatever the reason for avoiding religious discourse in composition, either exclusion or sheltering, we need to re-examine these pedagogical weaknesses.

belief system outside the walls of their college institution; students will not be prepared to be effective citizens or effective ministry workers.

Another part of the solution lies in deconstructing some assumptions we may have about higher education. The assumption inherent in the current secular education model is that students learn critical thinking best in environments where all kinds of beliefs are present, in confrontational or argumentative environments, or in environments where students are pressured by professors to consider views very different from their own. I am not saying that these environments are not beneficial; on the contrary, it was how I received my own education and in many ways, it can be very beneficial. I am saying, though, that for many students, there are other learning options and other methods by which critical thinking can be cultivated.

A (predominantly) Christian space may offer Christian students a learning option that allows more intellectual freedom than an especially diverse space.<sup>12</sup> An engaging space does not look the same for every student. If an evangelical student senses antagonism from their peers toward their personal beliefs, does that student still have equal opportunity to become actively *engaged*? Has the space become engaging by offering opposing worldviews or has it become threatening? Some students may withhold their entire worldview because they do not have answers to every question they fear may be asked of them (this was the case for my own student, Elizabeth). A Christian institution may offer the atmosphere required for an otherwise fearful or timid student to participate because they are in a space where religious discussions are welcomed by fellow peers and instructors. They are welcome to ask questions and examine their faith without worrying that they will be attacked (as in some secular spaces) for it. Christian students

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<sup>12</sup> I say predominantly because there is no guarantee that all people are genuine subscribers to any belief, despite their professions of faith, college attendance, or forms required upon admittance to a religious college.

who have not applied a critical lens to their own belief systems have an opportunity to be more engaged in a Christian space.

As a result, students who feel supported by other students and faculty while they examine their beliefs have a higher chance of successfully achieving critical examination, especially when instructors recognize the importance of exposing students to different worldviews and belief systems and use productive methods to do so. Instead of interactions where students may leave feeling confused or attacked, instructors could use other rhetorical methods to encourage students to consider their own and other beliefs more critically. Especially when presented by faculty in an intentional way, students can be asked to seriously consider other views and may be more willing to grapple with the view, knowing there will be less risk of offense taken during the exchange.

One method instructors (in secular or religious spaces) should capitalize on is coaching rather than confrontation. Instructor actions may often impact students in much deeper ways than we immediately realize. Students may have a positive reaction when challenged by an instructor and feel encouraged to pursue education, or they may feel silenced, and withdraw to avoid the danger of losing face. They may feel defensive of what they know, yet unprepared to defend or question their belief systems knowing that their instructor disagrees with them. There is a difference between someone partnering with you to encourage your development versus challenging you to abandon your beliefs for the cause of academic rigor. In Christian composition settings, where students are invited to write about faith and are encouraged to question their beliefs in healthy ways, instructors can partner with students rather than intimidate them into reconsidering their beliefs.

Confrontational tactics are the opposite from the coaching, mentoring tactics encouraged by Donald Murray when he states in “Writing as a Process” Implication No. 2, “The student finds his own subject. It is not the job of the teacher to legislate the student’s truth...the teacher supports but does not direct this expedition to the student’s own truth” (Murray 5). We also should consider the positive aspects of engaging with a student where they are and how this can be very productive for their educational development. As instructors, our job is to respect students enough to allow them to occupy themselves intellectually where they currently stand.

Another way the problem of a more unified institutional space may be assuaged is with intentional civic-engagement methods. Especially within the inclusive, outreach culture at Highlands College, one heuristic for students to engage with others with different beliefs could be a scheduled trip to another college campus, where students meet with other students and listen to (rather than discuss or debate) the beliefs that other students hold. Instructors could arrange visits to other nearby college campuses where students may interact with other students who hold different worldviews. Even just a few of these outings could provide motivation for students to study and consider other worldviews more seriously. Timing these outings intentionally in the semester also encourages students to engage with the culture and the reality of the different beliefs around them corresponding to the material being studied.

Community involvement requirements are already present in the Highlands College degree; this should only heighten the need to investigate religious rhetoric and urge students toward responsible, informed responses and thoughtful discourse in their community interactions. Community involvement looks different for a Christian student: they are propelled by a faith-reason for serving others. When people ask, “Why are you here?” these students will be more effective toward their vocational goals if they are prepared with a thoughtful answer.

Applying Elbow's believing game is another productive option in a religious space. Since students are already familiar with the concept of belief and what led them to that belief, using belief as an academic tool may be an effective learning method. Students could consider other worldviews, like naturalism or agnosticism, and consider them for the positive aspects that they hold. Partnering these efforts with a pragmatic framework, students could consider their own experience and how belief in these different presentations of the world would change their identity, familial structure, relationships, their view of academia, etc. The believing game as a tool could be another rich source to encourage students to think critically about their own beliefs and other beliefs.

Finally, even in a religious institution, it should be stated that the Bible is a fertile source for academic exercise. Many viewpoints/interpretations are complex and debatable. As Vander Lei states, we need "to open ourselves to accept Christianity as a faith that is heterogeneous: textually rich, theologically complex, and passionately debated among its adherents" (Vander Lei 99). Instead of viewing the use of the Bible as a practice of indoctrinated thinking, the text could be viewed as a site where, as Mary Louise Pratt states, viewpoints can "meet, clash and grapple with each other." Even if the student body agrees on "the Bible," this text offers many opportunities to cultivate argumentative or critical thinking skills.

The students of Highlands College specifically are seeking employment within local churches; a position title alone ("pastor," for example) invites religious and therefore controversial discussions potentially on a frequent basis. If we are to teach our students how to communicate effectively, the rhetorical opportunities in a religious institution should not be overlooked but should be used as effectively and intentionally as possible. The methods listed above should help to cultivate the critical awareness these students need to successfully perform

roles in ministry. For all of these reasons, different composition curricula will greatly benefit these students.

#### **#5: How can common issues with faith-based writing be handled?**

Faith-based writing causes problems, often seen as “dead-ends” because of their difficult nature to address. But dead-ends also happen in writing that is not faith-based: students fail to grasp a concept of academic audience, voice, or style before they leave our classrooms despite all efforts. Students struggle with their grammar. Instructors run out of time trying to teach the writing process. The issue with faith-based writing comes when instructors are unprepared (or unwilling) to handle the issues common to these types of writing.

DePalma offers several methods to handle common faith-based writing issues. “Thomas,” DePalma’s student, (referenced above) produced writing with several major weaknesses, including using scripture without interpretation or explanation of scriptural context, his appropriation of spiritual language, and his lack of explanation regarding the details of his spiritual experiences (231). Instead of seeing these errors as insurmountable, DePalma focuses on the beneficial aspects of these writing pieces. DePalma says that Thomas “explor[es] the complexities of personal belief” (233), various aspects of his identity, including a fluctuating faith through lived experience, and comes to terms with his future career goals and aspirations. Thomas and DePalma articulate different writing goals for their time together, including developing a religious vocabulary, support for students’ religious values, and adopting pedagogical strategies that allow student writing to be viewed in productive ways. (DePalma 220) When students cite scripture without engaging context, appropriate spiritual language or fail to describe spiritual experiences adequately, this is an invaluable opportunity to discuss compositional goals of persuasion, argument, evidence, voice, word choice, style or tone, and



other strategies to strengthen arguments. The student's language may be off-putting, jargon, or misused, but we should recognize that students often are trying to reconcile the pressures and urgings they feel in connection to their faith in an academic environment. In this opportunity, instructors can encourage students to consider an academic audience and how to appeal more strategically to that audience.

Hairston offers a heuristic that could incorporate religious discourse and composition through a pragmatic framework productively. Hairston suggests incorporating writing exercises that discuss a student's experience coupled with the interplay of relationships he or she constantly negotiates in daily life. "Family or communal rituals, power relationships at all levels, the student's role in his or her family group, their roles as men and women, the myths they live by, and cultural tensions within groups" (191) are cited by Hairston as particularly fruitful topics for investigation because of the partnering of individualistic and community concerns. These topics would be beneficial for ministry students cultivating critical thinking and audience awareness. These topics will also support the modes of learning promoted by James and Dewey's use of pragmatism to understand the practical implications of belief systems, and allow for what DePalma calls for as "a lifelong process of inquiry," which also aligns with the Highlands College goal of creating lifelong learners (Highlands). This heuristic will allow students to create connections between the relationships in their lives and how their faith impacts those relationships. Male and female roles are certainly another fruitful site for investigation, and cultural tensions offer opportunities to understand the multiple interpretations of beliefs across different cultures. A curriculum that incorporates these concerns will allow students to build connections between writing, relationships, roles, culture, and their faith in their lives.

These are important understandings when searching for their own goals for learning and achieving competency for their vocational futures.

In an institution like Highlands College, where students are preparing to be vocational ministers, this can be an exceptionally valuable experience. When an instructor redirects the student's efforts to effective writing and rhetorical strategies and asks questions that encourage more effective methods, ministry students will learn more effective, communicative writing.

#### **#6: Can the Bible be used effectively in composition classrooms?**

Using the Bible as a primary text may create problems for students because they may not see how to separate discussing their faith in their own words and citing the text. Other major pitfalls include using the text for evangelism, teaching, or moral instruction. Highlands College is governed by the ABHE tenets (outlined in Chapter One), which require academic work toward the cultivation of a biblical worldview. So, how can this need be reconciled with the fact that composition instructors are professionals in writing and not religious texts? How can a composition instructor be expected to handle biblical exegesis and hermeneutics on top of composition and rhetoric? My short answer is that composition instructors should not be expected to hold a biblical studies degree, and therefore should not be required to handle biblical studies or research in composition courses. However, this engagement should be based on the instructor's level of expertise: if instructors are knowledgeable on the topic, they may feel comfortable allowing students to cite the Bible in their written work. I would like to advocate for effective ways to incorporate a biblical worldview instead of using the Bible as a primary source. For this project's purpose, a biblical worldview means applying principles from the Bible to outside applications. Common Christian principles may help students bridge their faith with academic goals.

Using biblical principles and worldview may be effective pedagogical tools in composition. Referencing a biblical principle, like loving one's neighbor and loving one's enemy, for example, could be an impetus to pursue research differently. This principle could encourage actions of listening, respect, and engagement. Vander Lei quotes Miroslav Volf's idea that the doctrines of Christianity can be used to promote self-discipline, peace, and hospitality toward different people (100). The high calling to love those who are different, or with whom you would always disagree, comes from scripture itself, and for that reason, Christians should take particular heed of the command: "You're familiar with the old written law, 'Love your friend,' and its unwritten companion, 'Hate your enemy.' I'm challenging that. I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst...Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you" (*The Message*, Matt. 5.43-44, 48). Showing others respect in the face of disagreement embraces these principles and encourages Christian students to uphold a standard of action. This principle should urge students to write differently, to consider an opposing audience with love. This principle impacts the tone, the modes of persuasion, and the general efforts towards harmony in our writing practices.

Another application of a principle from scripture could be made from 2 Corinthians, chapter five: Christians are asked to make an appeal and persuade in order to *reconcile*. (*New International Version*, verses 18-20, emphasis added) Students could apply this in learning to appeal to academic, skeptical, and unbelieving audiences, especially in Rogerian argumentation. When one takes on an "ambassador" (verse 18) role, one should be informed and intentional, since you are representing someone and something greater than yourself. The Christian gospel was not created to be exclusive, but rather inclusive, and these principles show that Christians are responsible for changing these perspectives by changing the way they present Christ to others. I

am by no means a Bible scholar, but even I can apply the principles of these passages. Using principles to base the writing motives, writing agenda, writing methods, or other curricular goals could provide positive connections that would aid students in producing academic work and seeing their faith applied in a different context and through a different lens.

The Bible calls for Christians to respond in more thoughtful, strategic ways. Partnering scripture with this academic pursuit of genuine listening and bridging gaps should provide mental stretching for the students of Highlands College and should offer another productive opportunity. Working these concepts out through writing and civic engagement can be very powerful and revealing for students.

## **Conclusion**

Both secular and Christian institutions would benefit from allowing students to either engage in faith-based writing topics (in secular spaces) or more extensive Christian worldview compositional foci (in Christian institutions). By applying pragmatism as a lens through which the instructor views Christian rhetoric in student texts, instructors in secular environments have a set of heuristics that allow them to focus on the writing issues at hand and improve the students' rhetorical learning. Applying a pragmatic lens in a Christian environment may allow Christian students to understand not only what they believe, but also live out critically examined belief in culturally relevant ways. Christian worldviews and perspectives can be used to promote civic-minded rhetorical efforts and civil public discourse. If instructors choose to isolate students from their beliefs in academic settings, voices will be missed that could contribute to academia in different ways. Instructors will be ignoring an opportunity to equip a specific group of students from being rhetorically effective with working vocabularies and critical thinking pertaining to specifically Christian environments. Composition and religion should be working together to

rectify these problems; both can benefit the other. Instead of telling Christian students, “Don’t think; just believe,” appealing to “the Bible says so” approach, or falling back on “Christianity is true for me,” students in Christian institutions should learn to welcome pluralities in ways that do not damage their faith. They can learn that doubt that leads to resolution actually strengthens faith rather than weakening it. (Morrow) Christian students should not assume that faith is simplistic, but rather that it takes real effort of engagement in language, history, culture, self-examination, and living out respect for others.

Composition scholars should embrace religious conversations because allowing identity to be explored in education embraces the student. Identity should not be separated from education. Education at the core should be about how to flourish as a human being. One key aspect of education is how to process information and express a view on that information; articulating a view and expressing a position on anything is part of the process of being human. Expressing oneself effectively is a cornerstone of engagement, and engaging each other makes us more human. Education is not the learning of many individual skills—this is how we separate identity from education. Education requires humanity and humility: instructors should recognize the difficulty of separating concepts of identity and education and Christianity for a Christian student and leave the choice of writing topics to the student. We should invite our students from a Christian societal culture to learn to apply their faith in an academic culture.

## **CHAPTER 3: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS WITH ENGLISH FACULTY**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of Chapter Three is to examine first-year writing course models from other institutions that share common faith-based and academic goals with those of Highlands College. Chapter Three focuses on the viewpoints and programmatic content of other Christian institutions that may be beneficial to Highlands College. Chapter Three includes the research methods and results of a set of qualitative interviews, conducted in the summer of 2017, that asks composition faculty members to identify and reflect on their composition programs.

The chapter begins with the data regarding the interview participants, the sites of the institutions represented, how these sites were chosen, and the goals of these colleges to integrate a Christian worldview into all aspects of learning. The goal of the interview process was to gather information and perspectives from faculty at established Christian institutions for further pedagogical exploration, to glean from current institutional wisdom rather than trying to “re-invent the wheel.” This chapter is not an exhaustive reference of relevant composition methods, as this would produce a never-ending search for applicable ideas. However, the sites and faculty interviewed provided rich and varied perspectives on first-year writing in Christian institutions that may be applied to the Highlands College curricula project.

The data is presented in summary by topic, according to the amount of data given by each of the interviewees. The topics included are curricular structure/program design, faith integration, assignments, assessments, teaching philosophy, technology, community engagement,

and skills and objectives. The information in these sections is presented at face-value for consideration in building first-year writing curricula.

Chapter Three then presents an interpretation of the themes presented in the interviewee data. The main themes included academic versus professional genres (writing across the curriculum or religious-themed writing topics included), faculty autonomy versus departmental standards, epistemology as gleaned from a created order or constructed knowledge, and finally, how identity impacts educational instruction and the subjectivity of the Christian instructor.

I then argue that if an instructor chooses to embody a Christian worldview, this also implies a certain Christian ethos and ethic. Building off of John Duffy's definition of ethics, I argue that a Christian's concept of audience is fundamentally different and requires different applications. If an ethical Christian lens is applied, it changes the view of work and failure. I articulate the need for humility in this Christian ethic, and connect humility to many different undercurrents in the field of composition, including writing as a process, freewriting, Shaughnessy's model of "diving in," Elbow's believing game, teaching argumentation (classical and Rogerian) and finally plagiarism. I argue that by pursuing humility, we ultimately embrace a view of others that grants them respect and dignity and allows for a fuller view of our humanness and humanity, invoking grace on other people, and how this changes our pedagogical view and choices when applying this ethical lens.

## **Research Methods**

In order to build a composition program that borrows from strong models already in place, I conducted qualitative interviews to inquire how other institutions and faculty viewed and conducted their first-year writing classes and curricular goals. The goals of these interviews are for programmatic exploration and pedagogical exploration more so than qualitative research

supported with triangulation. I plan to use this information to create a suggested curriculum for Highlands College. The data presented in this chapter reflects interviews conducted in the summer of 2017 from five faculty members representing six different Christian institutions in the United States. The interviews discussed the structure and philosophy of first-year writing courses, and the choices in assignments, course structure, pedagogy, and the integration of faith and worldview. The interviews focused on assignment sequences, textbook selection, the instructors' philosophies, course themes or topics, and the integration of faith into the curriculum. The interviews were exempted by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Alabama.

### **Research Sites and Participants**

The interviewees were chosen from various regions around the United States and represented different denominations within the Christian faith. The interviewees' qualifications are included as well as size of the student body where the faculty members were currently employed at the time the interview data was collected. The table below summarizes the details of these categories.

All of the interviewed faculty had experience teaching composition or first-year writing courses and some had experience designing the program itself, working in the institution's writing center, designing the writing center model at the institution, or teaching other English courses (namely literature). Four of the interviewees were tenure-track professors at their respective universities, and three were the directors of the university writing center.



Table 1  
Interviewee Qualifications

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Geographical Region</b>	<b>Associated Denomination</b>	<b>Size of the Student Body</b>	<b>Pedigree/Qualifications</b>
Bridgett	Midwest	Christian Non-denominational, evangelical	2100 undergraduates	Ph.D. in Comp/Rhet; Professor (Tenure Track); Dean of Faculty Development; Writing Center Director; < 5 publications
Dali	Mid-Atlantic	Christian Non-denominational; Liberal Arts	2400	Ph.D. in English; Director of Writing; Professor of English; < 15 publications
Cathy	South-Atlantic	Christian, Wesleyan-Holiness Tradition	1600	Director of Writing Center; Assistant Professor of English; < 3 publications
Marge	Midwest	Christian, Baptist Tradition	3400 undergraduates	Assistant Professor of English; Ph.D. in English; < 5 publications
Lucy	Deep South	Christian Non-denominational and Public two-year community college	1900; 7000 undergraduates	Master's degree in Education; focus on teaching rather than research

### **Criteria for Interviewee Selection**

In order to locate models with strong overall reviews and general similar religious and academic goals, national and regional rankings were considered from US News and World Report and Christian Universities Online.org. Institutions were chosen based on their high rankings and criteria from these websites. US News and World Report offered several classifications, including the schools' ranking within their geographical region, overall value (quality of education for the price) of the school, and other areas including excellence in teaching or the success of individual programs/departments. US News and World Report cites the following as their "ranking indicators," followed by the percentage weight for each category:

“graduation and retention rates” (22.5%), “undergraduate academic reputation” (22.5%), “faculty resources” (20%), “student selectivity” (12.5%), “financial resources” (10%), “graduation rate performance rank” (7.5%), and “alumni giving” (5%). (Morse et al.)

US News and World Report uses “statistical quantitative and qualitative measures that education experts have proposed as reliable indicators of academic quality.” These categories were chosen “based on U.S. News' researched view of what matters in education” (Morse et al.). “Graduation and retention rates” are calculated based on first-year retention and six-year graduation rates. One of the more subjective categories, “undergraduate academic reputation,” is determined by seeking peer institutions’ opinions of “intangibles” such as faculty dedication to teaching. In this opinion-seeking process, high school counselors are also asked to evaluate undergraduate program reputation (Morse et al.). To evaluate “faculty resources,” US News and World Report examines class size, faculty-to-student ratio, faculty salary, the percentage of faculty with terminal degrees, and the percentage of faculty who are full-time. The “student selectivity” category gauges the standardized testing scores of entering students (ACT and SAT), the number of students in the top ten percent in their high schools (ranking in their class), and the ratio of students to applicants. “Financial resources” are measured by the school’s spending on instruction (only) per student. “Graduate rate performance” is measured by:

[the] effect of the college's programs and policies on the graduation rate after controlling for spending and student characteristics, such as standardized test scores, high school class standing and the proportion receiving Pell Grants. U.S. News measures the difference between a school's six-year graduation rate for the class that entered in 2010 and the rate U.S. News had predicted for the class. (Morse et al.)

And finally, the “alumni giving” rate is used as an indirect measure of student satisfaction (Morse et al.).

Another site used to compare institutional rankings, Christian Universities Online, ranks colleges based on the following components: personal attention to students, selectivity, readily

available financial aid, and overall student satisfaction (Orr). Christian Universities Online selects colleges and universities based on their affiliation as members of or in agreement with the values held by the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (the CCCU). The CCCU holds three values for higher education institutions: first, the belief that Christianity should be integrated into every academic discipline and not only religious studies or related fields; second, that students should receive “moral and spiritual formation” (Council for Christian Colleges) in every area of life, including academics, athletics, the arts, etc.; and third, the belief that students should be agents for the good of humanity and an active force of “redempti[on] and restorati[on]” in the world. (Council for Christian Colleges) The other ranking measures used by Christian Universities Online were gathered by pulling public data “in the categories of 1) Faculty-to-student ratio, 2) Percent of full-time beginning undergraduates receiving a grant or scholarship aid, 3) Selectivity, 4) Overall retention rate and 5) Overall graduation rate” (Christian Universities Online). The website did not state the percentages given to each category.

Since Christian Universities Online uses the CCCU as a standard for selection, and the CCCU standards align with Highlands College’s mission and values, these rankings were considered for the selection of participating institutions in the research study.

Admittedly, the success of a composition or first-year writing program cannot be wholly determined by using these rankings; many composition programs may be outstanding but located in a marginal university, and vice versa. These rankings were used as a starting point, to see the holistic success of the institution and hopefully the composition program as a large piece of the freshman year experience.

Of the faculty who agreed to participate in this study, the rankings of these institutions included #1 in Undergraduate Teaching, #1 in Best Colleges for veterans, #2, #13, and #15 in their respective regions, and #13 in Best Value from US News and World Report (“National University Rankings”). Four of the six institutions represented in the study received top ten rankings from Christian Universities Online.

### **Procedure/Data Collection**

Using these websites, the researcher non-randomly selected eleven different institutions from both or either of these websites and their varied geographical region. I then selectively emailed composition, first-year writing, or writing center faculty asking for participation in a phone interview, using the publicly available email address from their institutional websites. Of the faculty who were emailed, the five who responded positively have been outlined above. Each faculty member was interviewed once and asked to describe various elements of their composition courses or first-year writing models. The interview questions focused on the faculty member’s use of course texts, theme, assignments, faith integration, course philosophies, online components, and course assessments. Each faculty member was asked to speak about other aspects that were important to them specifically, so commentary also included the topics of writing centers, technology, community engagement, course skills, and course objectives. Each instructor was contacted for the interview via their institutional office telephone. Each interview lasted between 25 and 75 minutes, depending on instructor availability. The interviews were conducted over the telephone and were audio recorded. They were then transcribed verbatim and were coded and analyzed.

Additional data was collected through one shared syllabus and one shared text list from different instructors. These documents were used to supplement the information shared during the interviews.

## **Data Analysis**

The transcripts from the interviews were coded, allowing the observations to speak for themselves and allowing codes to be grouped into topical categories for consideration. The coded material was sorted to determine which topics were most frequently discussed or to see if there were similarities between techniques used. Codes were chosen based on the frequency that topics were discussed by the interviewees and were content-based to best answer the research question, “What curricular positions are currently used by first-year writing programs at sister institutions?” Since interviewees often discussed their curricula by describing assignments, goals, evaluations, etc., summaries of the data were organized topically. The topics were related based on general components of a first-year writing curriculum (such as objectives, assignments, evaluations, etc.) as well as any religious considerations for the course that were mentioned. This organization of data allows the researcher to examine the components of each curricula individually, outside of thematic considerations, and then apply her own thematic interpretation.

Nine categories emerged during data analysis to be considered for the Highlands College curricula: Course Structure/Design, Faith Integration, Assignments, Course Assessments, Core Values, Writing Centers, Online Components, Community Engagement, and Skills/Objectives. The following sections summarize the data gleaned from the interviews.

### **Curricular structure and program design**

Inquiries about the structure of the composition courses unveiled two common trends: in every institution represented, courses were one full semester in length (typically sixteen weeks),

and faculty were given some level of autonomy in course design. Often, as long as instructors met standardized requirements, they were free to determine the readings or texts used, the lessons in their own classrooms, and how to break down or scaffold assignments. However, most institutions held common goals across courses for types of genres to assign, objectives to meet, or length and number of papers required in the course. Another commonality in the course structure was that most courses allowed three to four weeks for each assignment. Some faculty members chose to spend less time (around two weeks) on less complicated assignments (like a narrative) and more time (more than 4 weeks) on more complicated assignments (like a researched argument).

Course placement was similar in three institutions; these institutions used a placement writing assessment for all incoming freshman, requiring one writing course unless the student placed into basic writing. There was only one institution that required two writing courses.

### **Integration of faith in the classroom**

Several methods were used by instructors to integrate faith into courses. All instructors held that their identity as Christians should impact how the course was approached and how faith was integrated. All of these interviewees use faith to fuel their academic teaching and writing and encourage their students to expand their knowledge base in these ways.

The belief of being made in God's image was applied by three interviewees in conjunction with ethics. These instructors discussed the importance of teaching argumentation and plagiarism with the highest principles possible. Marge stresses accountability of these religious principles to demonstrate not only the academic consequences but also the spiritual consequences of plagiarizing. Dali's personal view was that human life has immense value, and this impacted how he taught academic argumentation in the course. He stated,

We recognize that all human beings are created in the image of God and therefore have intrinsic value. And then from there...what are these differences, and what does social justice really look like and where does natural law and natural law theory interconnect here, and how can we use biblical notions and natural law to understand some of these bigger questions?

Often, the assignments possessed biblical foci to create different outcomes than assignments given at a secular university. As Marge states, “In the researched argument, I ask them to specifically look at a question from a biblical worldview. So they do need to contextualize their argumentation with not only reasons from research, but scriptural standards, and be able to do that well.” Dali asks his students to write an academic book review which asks students to read a book written by a Christian scholar and evaluate the text for their final exam. Lucy also mentioned incorporating vocational ministry writing tasks, like a church service bulletin and a short devotional. Lucy’s curriculum also assigned a group project in which students were asked to retell a biblical story in a different mode or medium, reworking the story as a news article, film, report, or other form, working with genre, mode, and presentation.

One instructor, Cathy, does not include texts with overt Christian worldviews inherent in them but applies Christian worldview in class discussion. She purposefully includes texts with mature or difficult thematic content, based on the belief that “our faith calls us to that,” because she believes in a Christian principle of engagement and advocacy. She holds that Christians should not shy away from difficult matters because they are Christian, but rather empathize and show compassion to others. Cathy’s institution has a faith tradition strongly rooted in justice and advocacy, so the intentional choice of authors and texts reflects these Christian calls-to-action. Cathy uses Mary Rowlandson’s captivity narrative and *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom as examples of women who sustained their faith through extreme difficulties.

Modeling certain forms of scholarly engagement as a Christian was also a concern. Dali believes that engagement for instructors is functioning as a role model, showing students how to

carry out certain academic activities in a Christian way (like ethics, argumentation, etc.) as well as their day to day activities. “And I think it’s good... to have them realize that spirituality and the life of the mind are not mutually exclusive, that you don’t have to check your mind at the door when you go into a church and conversely you don’t have to when you come into a college classroom.” Dali’s beliefs were inseparable from his teaching. Teaching students to apply intellectual vigor to their faith was one of Dali’s main goals.

Instructors often used reflection on their own teaching habits to understand the implications of certain assignments and tasks from the point of view of Christian identity. One institution currently requires instructors to take a “Faith Integration” course which asks them to consider how their faith identity and values tie to their discipline and how they can help their students make the same connections.

Other methods of incorporating faith elements in class included prayer or short devotions during class time, discussing the religious history of the institution, or using religious topics for essay assignments. Dali, for example, focuses on the topic of religious freedom for his students’ persuasive paper. Some insights from Dali also emerged regarding the goals to create a first-year writing course that was Christian-focused yet also was not so different that students could not transfer in credit from other colleges. These examples of religious/faith integration are not all-inclusive, but provide examples of how faith is used by the interviewees.

### **Assignments**

In each interview, many assignment types were discussed. Commonalities for a one-semester course included at least four papers or essays, around three to four pages each. Institutions often did not mandate specifics of the genre of writing as long as it fits into certain



broader classifications, such as informative, description, narration, analysis, persuasion, or research.

The most common assignment was the research paper or a researched argument. Every institution required some form of researched argument, asking students to use outside sources, synthesize, and argue a perspective. The length requirement for this assignment varied from four pages to eight pages. Instructors described working with their students on narrowing down a research topic, gauging reliable information, integrating sources, working towards strong voice, and including proper citations (Dali, Bridgett, and Marge).

The course assignments objectives emphasized purposeful academic fairness, integrity, and ethics. This echoes the Christian faith integration efforts outlined above. Dali, when describing the persuasion paper assignment from his class, urges his students to construct “a persuasive paper in which they have to not only outline and argue their case, but they also have to interact with opposing views and demonstrate honest, fair and accurate representation of the opposing view, and good, reasonable refutation of perspectives, or acknowledging a good argument.” This demonstrates the goal of fairness and integrity that these instructors believe to be inseparable from their faith.

There were many other assignment types used by these instructors. One instructor included weekly reading responses, modeled after John Bean’s “thinking pieces,” which requires students to write one-page reflections on the course texts. Another instructor uses a different application of the personal narrative or literacy narrative, and asks students to write a “Food Memoir.” Students reflect on a favorite food and the memories that are centered around that taste or experience as they write their memoir. Another assignment, called a “Definition Essay” asks students to choose terms and use comparison or contrast, analysis, description, narration or

classification to define terms that have been discussed in the course. The literacy narrative was mentioned specifically at two different institutions, while memoir and annotated bibliographies were also mentioned. Finally, there were a few examples of assignments specifically used to benefit the post-academic experience through student occupational foci, but only one instructor mentioned resume, cover letter, and thank you note assignments.

### **Assessments**

Several different types of assessments were used across the institutions examined. Every institution used some kind of student evaluation of instruction. Some were required and some were voluntary. Most were standardized, online, and asked students about their perceptions of the course content, course structure, instructor teaching, instructor organization, critical thinking, and/or the integration of faith learning.

In Bridgett's institution, in addition to standardized student evaluations, there is a requirement for instructors to show that objectives are being met, using student work as evidence. To fulfill this request, Bridgett asks students to write an essay, in which they select some of the learning outcomes from the course, and demonstrate how they met those outcomes using examples from their own written work. She described that other faculty may use tests or exams to demonstrate student mastery over objectives; for example, if seventy percent of the class passed a certain exam, that was data that supported that the majority understand the exam content. However, she expressed her own preferences that students use their written work and produce a written text to defend their objective mastery, in conjunction with the goals of a writing course. In Cathy's classroom, students were given an evaluation at the beginning and end of the semester asking them to examine their perceptions of themselves as writers. In Dali's

course, students were asked to evaluate the online grammar modules used outside of classroom time.

Some institutions also used assessments specifically for course objectives. In Marge's institution, faculty were required to holistically examine their courses and evaluate students' performance in certain areas, using A, B, C or D for "excellent," "good," "meeting requirements," and "being inferior," respectively. This assessment was then examined at the administrative level for patterns to determine how the department could improve in terms of teaching or course structure. (Note that this was not how well the instructor felt they taught or engaged the material, but how well the students performed certain objectives.) Cathy's institution used an auditing evaluation (not performed routinely) that selected five volunteer students from each section and compared their essays throughout the semester, looking for improvement and accomplishment of course objectives for program assessment. In Dali's institution, faculty were asked to write a report on one course they taught each semester, including quantitative data support that demonstrated students meeting course objectives.

### **Teaching philosophy**

Many interviewees expressed elements of their teaching philosophy in their interview. Three instructors, Marge, Dali, and Lucy, discussed the importance of critical thinking and applying critical thinking in everyday activities. Dali discussed his focus on acknowledging different views fairly, evaluating views based on logic, evidence and experience, and then re-establishing your personal opinion on those views. Marge also states critical thinking is vital in ministry specifically: "if I can get them to understand what critical thinking skills are in a practical way, which means to be able to question or consider alternatives or consider what's missing in an argument, those types of skills, thinking skills, I think are actually more important

than learning where a comma goes.” Critical thinking was prioritized in these three instructors’ teaching philosophy: they desired for the composition course to be relevant and believed it should house general academic skills, like critical thinking.

Bridgett and Dali prioritized academic discourse development and maturing the student writer’s voice for the goal of promoting success in the college career. Both Bridgett and Dali believed the best approach to accomplish this is through writing in the disciplines. Dali stated how important it is that students learn how to write academically for courses outside of the English department. Bridgett also discussed the importance of explicitly leading students to learn the difference between high school writing and college writing, and how important it is for the rest of their college progress:

I think it’s an important concept for freshman to understand that their prior history of high school writing, either just spouting out whatever they think about anything, without any regard to what anybody with any knowledge and evidence have come up with, or only summarizing what experts have said. College is neither one of those. College writing is about listening to a conversation, becoming informed, and then contributing your perspective to that.

Bridgett discussed the importance of explicit classroom methods on backward transfer. She discussed her focused efforts in leading students to acknowledge the habits from their prior writing experiences so that they can understand how to develop as more mature writers.

Other individual values emerged which would be valuable in any composition classroom, such as the use of student writing as models to show students the potential in their own writing (Marge), the importance of “deep work” or efficiency in an ever-more-distracting web-based world (Bridgett), the value of scaffolding in course design and assignments to aid student learning and using the process model (Cathy), the importance of allowing instructors to teach to their strengths yet not compromise consistency across course outcomes (Dali), and acknowledging the judgment that occurs in the professional world when errors are perceived in

writing regarding intelligence and character (Lucy). All of these considerations and values were important to these instructors in their courses.

### **Technology components**

Marge, Dali, and Lucy mentioned specific integration of technology into their course structure. Marge described the problem of students feeling unprepared to choose a research topic when it came time to do so during the semester. To prepare students for this, she engages online discussion forums weekly, “So that by the time they get to [a] research essay, trying to find a topic isn’t going to take as long, because they’ve already been brainstorming.” Marge also incorporates a digital composition assignment, often taking the form of a video essay, asking students to engage in other modes of composing.

Dali uses technology to tackle the grammar portion of his course. Described as a “self-paced online learning environment,” Dali believes that it is a more efficient use of class time to delegate grammar instruction to outside of class. “So, in terms of grammar, mechanics, sentence level things, we’re trying to do that as self-paced as possible, because we recognize that maybe not everyone has problems with commas, if you spend a week dealing with commas, maybe only a few students actually need that, and is that really the most constructive way to use class time?” He has used “Inquisitive” and “MyWritingLab” as software options and acknowledges the common issues with transfer of grammar concepts from a computer program to a student’s writing. He also gives assessments to gather data from students on their opinions about the programs’ effectiveness. He openly admits that this is an “ongoing conversation” and acknowledges the pros and cons of this approach.

## **Community engagement**

Another common topic discussed by interviewees was community engagement in their courses. Marge uses a proposal assignment in her course to ask students to create a plan to better their campus. She described one group that proposed creating a campus community garden and their logistical plan to accomplish this goal. Reflecting on this group's experience, Marge stated, "It seems like the best proposal videos are the ones that are pushing the students to engage in the community." After this experience, she considered asking students to get involved with the literacy programs at local elementary schools, but also acknowledged the problems students may have with transportation and commuting funds. Instead, she now asks students to interview a veteran and to turn the interview into a video presentation of a story from the interview. Marge sees the value in service learning and the connections to her Christian faith: "I think that's the wave of the future in composition courses, especially in secular universities, so I really don't think that Christian universities should fall behind, because we should be the exemplars of service learning." Lucy also regularly asks her students to engage with the community by asking authors to visit her classroom and having her students write to editorials in an attempt to have something published. She described asking former students who had published poetry to come to her class to read their published work. Dali described the importance of engaging with the campus community and using the writing program to do so. It was very important to him that the writing program creates opportunities to serve other faculty members.

## **Skills and objectives**

Among all the topics discussed, some basic skills and objectives were important to these instructors. These topics included process writing, audience (and applying the appropriate conventions in the appropriate settings), style and clarity, research skills, responding to rhetorical

situations, biblical worldview, critical thinking, and argumentation. Instructors also voiced concerns such as ensuring the thesis is consistent with the rest of the paper, outlining skills, word choice, and repetition in student writing.

### **Interpretation of Research Data**

From the topical discussions, many different themes emerged from the data. From the discussions regarding curricular structure and design, a theme of academic versus professional genres emerged. The interviewees held that certain academic genres are usually productive/beneficial for students. There seemed to be a consensus that writing courses should require students to write in certain genres and that producing certain genres equates to demonstrating academic skill. Which genres are the most productive was debated among the interviewees, apart from the unanimously-used researched argument assignment. While the length or specific goals of certain assignments differed based on opinions of what constituted appropriate academic rigor, the researched argument with its elements of working with sources, entering an academic conversation, presenting a viewpoint, and learning academic audience and voice was seen as foundational to these institutions' first-year writing goals.

However, from there, there were many different views as to what constituted appropriate genre choices to prepare students for their future writing endeavors. Other genre choices that the interviewees discussed included the intentional use of Christian apologetic writing and using biblical examples to demonstrate genres. One of Dali's reasons for an apologetics focus was to teach students to consider multiple perspectives on an issue. He asks students to read secular and Christian arguments on a topic and then compare the strengths and weaknesses of both arguments. Lucy engages biblical scripture specifically as examples of literature, "addressing different modes of writing, finding the different areas in the Bible" that she can use to

demonstrate certain genres to her students. (For example, using books of the New Testament as examples of letter writing or memoirs) These instructors held that incorporating other fields (such as biblical studies and apologetics) was appropriate for a composition classroom. These observations raise the question, are instructors prepared for discussions from biblical passages specifically (versus biblical worldview efforts, like general principles, [discussed in Chapter Two]), if the instructor only holds an English degree? These efforts may be neglecting certain aspects of the expertise of the instructor. However, these efforts could be forging connections between different narratives of Christianity (and an understanding of discourse communities or communal voice) or overt transfer connections between the Bible and understanding genre.

There were also views presented that argued that the genre didn't necessarily have to be prescribed, as long as goals such as cultivating awareness of the rhetorical situation were met. Both Lucy and Marge discussed how important it is that assignments be relevant to student needs. Lucy stated that assignments should be targeting future student writing endeavors in relevant weekly writing assignments: "having a weekly writing assignment can take a course and...put it out there where they can see, 'this is something I might actually do.'" Marge stated that any assignment can be tweaked for relevance for ministry students, pointing out that the institution's mission should be incorporated into the assignments themselves. "I think knowing your school's mission is so important to tweaking all these assignments, but I feel like any assignment can be all about the rhetorical situation; it can always be tweaked to fit with ministry, you know? Like critical thinking skills are necessary in any walk of life. Especially ministry I would say." These instructors seemed to focus on common terms and concepts rather than the genre or assignment content as the focus of the course. Students making connections to their professional writing demands and the relevance of the course was more important to these



instructors. They valued student motivation (which would increase learning) over attempting to push a genre for its own sake.

Differing from this view, some instructors held that composition should target only college writing, without any overt professional or vocational writing genres. Bridgett's goal is to focus on a few writing concepts, rather than focus on post-collegiate or profession-specific writing. She stated that one of her main course goals is to teach rhetorical concepts, like audience, genre, and the "role" of the writer, so that her students can apply these concepts in the disciplines outside of composition. I acknowledge that in a traditional setting, professional writing genres (like emails, reports, resumes, letters, etc.) may not be appropriate to adequately prepare students for their academic writing futures. Conversely, if only academic genres were used, are students making connections between the skills and objectives of these genres and their future professional writing tasks? Connections that may be crucial for successful transfer? In the case of Highlands College, the researcher holds that what genres are appropriate for first-year writing should be reconsidered to reflect the differences in student goals and the mission of the institution, thereby applying a more thorough application of context.

A second theme that emerged was that of faculty autonomy versus departmental standards for instruction. While Marge's institution allowed for partial autonomy within a mandated framework, Bridgett's institution allowed complete faculty autonomy. There are positives to allowing faculty autonomy, but it begs the question whether all methods are going to be as effective as others and whether faculty ownership of their course supersedes these concerns. Marge's institution mandated that certain genres be taught, but there was not a standardized syllabus for all instructors. Marge said, "Basically, there are a few standards that we all have to abide by and that would be...assigning different genres...description, narration,

analysis, persuasion, and research, so we do require at least one researched project.” She explained that if one assignment of each type was assigned, the faculty member had met the requirements for the course, but faculty members had autonomy in selecting the assignment details within the genre. Maintaining consistent curricula with an entire department means resources can be pooled and colleagues become partners navigating course objectives and themes together. Consistent curricula also allow evaluations to be more instructor-focused since all students would be working towards the same course objectives and assignments. Program evaluations should also become easier since weaknesses would be more apparent if many instructors struggled with an aspect of an assignment, for example.

However, consistent curricula also mean that instructors will be asked to teach elements that they do not prefer; they could also misunderstand the objectives of an assignment or misunderstand program goals. They may feel as though they deserve more freedom in their course choices and that their voice is not being considered. The negatives of instructors being completely autonomous include navigating course assignments or course concepts without the same volume of resources. It also means that faculty with different backgrounds (literature and composition) will bring their assumptions about how best to teach writing, without direction from a chair or director of some kind. Bridgett said at her institution, faculty did not function with a curriculum at all:

...it is not a curriculum... all faculty have autonomy, but [here], we’ve taken that to the ‘nth’ degree. We have extreme faculty autonomy and faculty government, control, and a huge faculty involvement in terms of leadership and direction of the university. And that’s certainly true in English. So nobody is willing to tell anyone else how to teach the class or what to include... [the methods] are really all over the map.

Bridgett elaborated that some faculty use novels, essays, formal argumentation strategies, and writing studies approaches (writing as the sole field of study, without outside themes) in their courses. In Bridgett’s case of “extreme faculty autonomy,” where faculty used literature, writing

studies, and various themed approaches, the argument that the department seems to be embracing is that reading and writing in academic genres, without composition-oriented principles, yields the same results as following these principles, which the researcher finds problematic.

Composition as a field should not be neglected for the sake of faculty autonomy; although there should be a balance between what is mandated by the department and the choices of the individual instructor.

The third theme from the data was that of epistemological views: whether knowledge is gleaned from a “created order” or knowledge is constructed in learning. Dali explained his belief that the craft of writing leads us to the discovery of a “created order” of knowledge, rather than leading his courses in a wholly constructivist or subjectively-created knowledge view. Dali believes that his Christian worldview creates and demands a different view on knowledge, one that is partially objective and subjective:

We have a different set of assumptions going into what writing is...we view writing as discovery of knowledge... a mechanism towards critical thinking, where we recognize that there is a God of the universe that created all things for his glory and for the good of the people, and...that writing is one mechanism by which we come to understand this created order.

Dali stated that in a Christian view, knowledge can never be wholly “culturally-created” or “subjectively created” because this would compromise certain beliefs that Christians hold. Instead, partial subjectivity was expected from this instructor from students on the application of Christian beliefs and principles in the modern world. For example, Dali expected his students to acknowledge that there were multiple reasonable Christian viewpoints on issues like religious liberty, economic issues, international relations, relationships between church and state, and many other topics. But as a Christian, he did not maintain that all truth was relative to the individual. Dali held that although he used student writing as a tool for knowledge, the craft of writing leads to the discovery of knowledge that is already known by God.

This view of knowledge is complicated by the fact that it functions objectively and subjectively simultaneously. It allows the student to create and learn new knowledge while paradoxically saying that this knowledge has already been established somewhere else. This view seems to support pragmatism by saying that experience and thoughtful consideration of one's experiences can reveal deeper truths, even though one's experience is subjective, personal, and limited. James's view that knowledge is partial, and can only ever be partially known applies in this case. Culture cannot wholly create knowledge because God has created it; perhaps knowledge is so vast and so great that we have yet to tap into the order of knowledge that already exists. To apply a biblical view, "There is nothing new under the sun," (New International Version, Ecc. 1.9) or, humanity is both uniquely individual in the culmination of each's subjective experiences; yet we are also similar in the ways we react to aspects of life and the ways we can perceive the world. There is no thought that hasn't already been thought in some form, no emotion or action that hasn't already been experienced or taken.

The Christian view of knowledge could also be supported another way: basically that if we are made in God's image, and we believe God to be a creating God, would we not also have a certain creative function as well? Humanity's history of imagination and invention certainly points to a desire to create; the question is does knowledge fall in this domain? And if so, has the knowledge actually been created, or just given? Culture, in this view, may shape our relationship and view of knowledge, as well as how ideas are applied. Knowledge can shift largely within a created order that allows for free will, thinking, and decisions. Like Dali, we can acknowledge that there may be multiple reasonable positions of epistemology that can be supported with a Christian worldview.

A fourth theme that emerged from the data was how identity impacts educational instruction. Dali, Marge, and Bridgett held that their view of who God is determines certain actions and teaching philosophies. In Dali's view, teaching flows from identity, and identity determines the worldview that is projected. When he was asked about how he incorporates his faith in the classroom, Dali said:

I sometimes have a problem with the language that we often use integrating faith and learning. Well, isn't it already there?... It's like we use that word 'integrate'—and I haven't come up with a better word yet, but when we use that word, it immediately implies that somehow necessarily that faith and religion are separate from academics and you must proactively integrate, which I see as problematic. Like does the Marxist ever talk about integrating Marxist ideology? Does the feminist worry about integrating feminism? No, they do it anyway. It's kind of part of who they are and where they're coming from. Same with Christians. So a lot of it should come from how the professor carries him or herself in the classroom. What are the biblical assumptions, principles that they're coming from when they talk about writing, talk about mind, and language?

Dali believes that the purposeful integration of faith in the classroom initially comes from the instructor's own beliefs and positions as they engage material.

Two interviewees applied their belief that humanity is made in God's image to how they approached writing and the composition course in general. They stated that the foundation of the course changes when this view is applied. One instructor related God's communicative nature to writing and how writers, creating and writing, reflect that aspect of God. Marge said, "Ultimately the composition of the course is about writing and structuring and thinking, and those are things that showcase us as creatures in the image of God. You know He's literary-- He gave us that, being literary and communicative, and we can express our nature as being made in His image through the way that we write and communicate." Viewing God as a creator allows Marge to pursue and teach writing in conjunction with a Christian worldview, adding purpose to her work and encouraging her students to "express their nature" and understand academic work through a lens of faith.

These views bring up the question of the subjectivity of the Christian instructor, whether neutrality can actually be claimed in the classroom, and whether an educator should overtly explain their ideologies to students. Three of these interviewees seem to be saying that worldviews will inevitably seep into the way that instructors teach, read, respond to writing, and interact with ideas. Should a Christian professor in a Christian institution strive for neutrality in this context? Would student expression be stifled without this striving for neutrality? These instructors implied that since they were teaching in a Christian setting with Christian worldview development goals, that the natural impact that their personal faith had on their teaching practices should be embraced. The question remains for a secular institution: how should a Christian instructor approach a secular institution, whose goals are not situated towards developing a religious worldview? These decisions were viewed as ethical choices, relying on the ethos of the Christian instructor, and these codes of ethical actions impacted specific argumentation strategies and how the researched argument would be taught.

A focus on ethics for a Christian instructor means that certain behaviors, teaching philosophies, and views of students and colleagues will be different from one who does not necessarily hold or agree with those beliefs. Dali commented that integrity in argumentation was very important to Christian values, “Even down to issues of ethics in writing—avoiding logical fallacies, unfairly attacking your opponent, unfairly representing someone else’s argument to create a strawman...how that violates basic Christian principles.” Bridgett as well agreed in applying strong ethics to composition scenarios emphasizing respect for differing viewpoints:

What I look at is how our faith affects how we go about persuading others...they looked at the [Rogerian] model...where you really get inside the other person’s perspective, and you grant such great dignity and respect to the other person whom you disagree with...the first step is to express their view in terms where they would say, ‘yes that’s what I believe.’...all the steps that you take, there’s a Christian model of relationships and community. And of granting other people dignity.

Granting dignity to others goes beyond understanding a view, but pursues an understanding of the motive for that view, respecting and humanizing the person.

### **Discussions from Data Interpretation: Christian Ethics in Composition**

Among several interesting discussions that could be brought out of these conversations, one to draw out is that of Christian ethics and ethos in the composition classroom.<sup>13</sup> One interviewee, Bridgett, mentioned that the nature of argumentation and ethics in composition are different from a Christian worldview. She stated that her goal was to “grant other people dignity.” If a Christian lens is applied in a composition course to support the institution’s biblical worldview application, ethics and argumentation offer more room for investigation. In this section, I use interview data as a springboard on which to start discussions. I do not propose a new view of ethics, but rather a re-interpretation of well-known composition principles through a Christian lens and what conduct coincides with Christian ethical behaviors in the classroom. If John Duffy states that writing involves ethical choices, I would like to argue that teaching writing involves ethical choices.

If someone has chosen Christianity, then one would have a different application of ethics than one who does not follow that view. If Christians believe that faith should not be checked at the threshold of their academic lives, and if the goal of a Christian institution includes incorporating faith, rather than excluding it from certain areas of life, how can a different view of ethics be incorporated into teaching composition? How does a Christian view of ethics change

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<sup>13</sup> Ethics for the purposes of this discussion means simply right behavior in normative ethics, or ethics regarding conduct. I want to answer the question, how can Christian instructors apply their beliefs in a composition setting?

the way instructors teach argumentation? How does it change our teaching philosophy? How does it change our motives? How does it change our reactions to plagiarism?

Instructors certainly are already required to hold certain ethics, impressed upon them by their employer, the values of their respective discipline, and/or ethics according to their worldview. Instructors are expected to maintain certain behaviors of professionalism, general goodwill towards others, and robust scholarly inquiry (among others). There is an ethic of integrity to a certain degree, that scholars are honest in their research and citations. There is an ethic of the value of best teaching practices—we shouldn't teach grammar from workbooks outside of the context of student work if we know this method to be less effective (Weaver). These ethical standards supplied by employers and academic disciplines have motives of self-protection (goodwill), efficiency (time management), profit (payment received for academic services), and a commitment to scholarly standards of integrity. These motives are rational, logical. These values provide a foundation for a view of work.

In addition to these professional ethics, John Duffy also outlines an exercise in ethics: the relationship between the writer and reader. (31-32) Duffy states, “every time we write for another person, we propose a relationship with other human beings, our readers” ... “And that, in turn, initiates a relationship...that necessarily involves human values and virtues” (31). When a writer imagines their audience, Duffy explains the ethical considerations of the writer. In essence, a writer's ethical decisions paint meaning for the reader, and interpretations of style, voice, tone, scholarly endeavor, genre, purpose—these and all aspects of a “text” depend on these ethical choices. Duffy implies that any time our work involves negotiating a relationship with another human being, ethics are involved. Our behavior, our thoughts, our words, our presentation--impacts someone else and therefore should be considered carefully. The decisions



the writer makes speak to the “ethical considerations that follow when entering a relationship with another human being.” (32) Through Duffy’s presentation of ethical considerations in writing, the reader understands certain ethics are invoked because of certain *relationships*, and the parties within that relationship determine what kinds of ethics should be considered.

If these ethics pertain to writing, how does a Christian incorporate these ethics with Christian principles? A Christian view of work, as stated by Bridgett, comes from Colossians 3:23: Christians should give their best towards whatever they do, working “as unto the Lord.” This invokes a strange relationship to Christian ethics and work. It offers an alternative to the “critical ethics of postmodernism” (Duffy 231) and asks for a view that sustains belief rather than doubt. If Christians are to work as though their God was before them, there is another party, a fourth party, invoked, and it means that there is mediation from this fourth party.

There are already (at least) three mediating parties involved in a typical instructor-student relationship: the instructor, the student, and the university. Since the university dictates that if a student performs a certain action, then a certain action must be taken by the instructor, the university mediates instructor relationships with students. The university functions as mediator.

If Christians accept this view of work, as though they were providing a service to God, rather than to man, it changes the relationship dynamic and therefore changes the ethics involved in negotiating communication. When this mediator is invoked, Christians, at minimum, acknowledge an exchange of love for failure that they have received when they agreed to embrace Christianity. This mediating relationship offers a different exchange than that of a paycheck provided for services. If one chooses to accept Christian principles, one receives “payment” based on absolutely nothing. In this mediation, the paycheck is given even when, especially when, one fails to perform.

If a Christian is to work “as unto God,” an ethical behavior is to allow the preconceived notions of the person before them to fall away and to provide the level of work for that person with the same attitude and effort as one would provide for God. Therefore we can assume the person would receive better treatment at least than they would if this view were not applied.

This belief impacts the Christian view of work. Instead of seeing work as a means to an end, one option for viewing work is one that allows room for failure. It’s a view that states that value lies outside of our performance. This mindset, to work as unto one who will accept regardless of shortcomings, changes the motives of work. It’s not the fear of others, the fear of not performing, or the fear of failing that motivates. It is no longer about survival or saving face. These fears have been replaced with a different kind of fear. It’s a fear of understanding something like freedom and then withholding the same extension of freedom to others. This mediation changes the way we interpret the value of others, and therefore changes the way one works with people. The goals become about adding value, enhancing the quality of someone else’s life. This focus on someone else takes genuine humility.

Duffy, connecting the ethical decisions writers make when negotiating their reading audience, writes that certain qualities denote ethical writers— “respectfulness, open-mindedness, goodwill, *perhaps* humility (32, emphasis added).” For a Christian, it is not “perhaps” humility, but *unquestionably* humility. Humility forms the basis for a teaching and writing ethic that should be embraced in the academy at large, but especially Christians working to incorporate an ethic that embraces their religious beliefs. If Christian principles hold that work is unto their God, Christian ethics should involve incorporating actions that embrace a two-fold effort: interpreting the value of people outside of their performance and incorporating humility.

Scholars need humility in higher learning. Largely, the academy suffers from knowledge without humility. Without humility, the academy amounts to the stereotypes of the deeply learned: elitist, judgmental, isolated. Knowledge without humility leads to isolation. Humility is what keeps us out of the tower. Humility is what gives eyes for those around us, what equips us for service to others. Knowledge without humility inflates the mind without equipping the body in balance--without humility, we aim to serve our own ends, isolating knowledge from what gives it the most power: *use* and recognizing how and when it is best used. The university should be cultivating flexibility and openness, but without an effort towards humility, these things are lost in the crowdedness of the world of knowledge and accessibility. The knowledge we have is a privilege; it can be better used if we as writers and thinkers are able to maintain humility to serve others and maintain academic openness—the openness of considering that we could be wrong. There is always room for growth and learning, despite what we have already learned. This attitude, ethos, ethic, can be applied to many scholarly currents in composition studies, allowing for a merging of religious and academic discourse.

A fertile site for cultivating scholarly humility that is a deep undercurrent in composition studies is the concept of process writing. When instructors teach rewriting and revision, they are teaching a way (or mode) to learn (Emig), a way to communicate, a way to become flexible. Understood in the concept of process writing, “students examin[ing] their own evolving writing and that of their classmates,” (Murray 5) is the act of being open: open to what you’ve read, open to the response of peers, and open to the belief that “my writing can be improved by someone else.” This quality of open-mindedness asks the writer to consider other views as just as valuable as their own; by choosing this mindset, we get better writing. This practice holds that it isn’t “good” (or rather, “best”) for me to sit alone and write in isolation. “The writer, as he

writes, is making ethical decisions” (Murray 4). These ethical or “better” writing behaviors value the process of feedback, of other people, through peer review. Rewriting teaches that ideas in isolation may not consider audience as powerfully as possible. It allows for a community of voices to be active and credited in the craft. It asks that the implicit communities, or those that are no longer present but have already played a role in the development of our voice (Roozen), and the active communities, the peers we give our drafts to, are acknowledged. It eliminates the pride of isolated writing as untouchable. Murray’s call to acknowledge the unfinishedness—the draft state—of writing asks writers to see their work in humility: being willing to admit that a different choice, one contributed by another voice could be beneficial. This allowing of other voices echoes the Greek word *koinōnos*, which means a “partnership; comrade; companion” (“*Koinōnos*”) which benefits the parties involved. *Koinōnos* is the idea of brotherhood from the New Testament and the basis of the idea of meeting together for mutual edification. By rewriting, we have to admit that our initial words are flawed, less clear, less sophisticated, in need of someone else. It makes us consider our motives for writing: are we willing to learn from others? Are we willing to be pliable? Humility in writing cultivates flexibility in relationships. As we teach this to students, we should embrace the humility behind process writing. This makes us more ethical—better teachers and writers than if we believe we have passed the point of needing other people’s voices in our craft.

Ken Macrorie’s concept of freewriting (largely promulgated by Elbow) is another concept that benefits from practicing intentional humility. As we are taught to write in school, we are taught rules and structure, so that our writing may be clear and “correct.” Freewriting asks us to abandon our structure, our prior learning, our habits of thought. In Freewriting, we abandon structure so that we can yield to the flow of ideas that come from somewhere—

nowhere—it seems. This action, this yielding, is what Chris Anderson identifies as the same as “dying to self,” or the same call that Christ has to his followers to “deny yourself.” Anderson says, “It’s the principle of freewriting, this letting go and trusting” (87). The writer has to trust that the words will come, the ideas will flow, and they must relinquish control to achieve the goal. Anderson connects this to a Christian dynamic: “it’s a way of being in the world, not of writing, that students experience in the process of freewriting and revising” (88). Anderson states that in spite of the goals of the world, goals to get ahead, to win, to disregard others, freewriting and revising train students to let go of control and let the good coexist with the bad, mirroring our own complex states of being. Anderson paints a picture of humanity as paradoxical, deeply good and deeply evil, experiencing conflicting drives over things we want and things we need. (87-88) It functions as a representation of the saint and sinner, the person who is changing, trying to be different, better-- but will never be perfect. Colossians three work, in applying a Christian ethic, means that we acknowledge that our control is less knowledgeable, less beneficial, in light of this complexity. Colossians three asks for a relinquishing of our own opinions, seeing others through a different lens, acceptance of them in their complexity, refusing to judge based on the moment. It means we surrender to God’s view of the person in front of us. It means that as one who teaches writing, we teach methods in letting go. Letting go, dying to self, relinquishing control—these concepts exist by humility. If Linda Flower insists on a plan, or as Elbow calls it, “hyper-rationality,” and Elbow insists “that we can make a better plan if we plan for nonplanning” (17), then it seems that through intentionality, humility can increase the effectiveness of listening and relinquishing control. We invite an attitude that seeks to value others regardless of what appears currently. Teaching students who win, who fail, who struggle, who present problems and perfect answers, requires this attitude of humility and willingness to

not rely wholly on our own view. We trust that by relinquishing control and allowing someone else's view to mediate, we can project a greater value and purpose for others. In humility, we acknowledge the complexities in the human spirit and work towards a deeper understanding of the components in our relationships.

Our view of people impacts how we view the components in our relationships and in turn, our pedagogy. If we investigate our pedagogy through the lens of Christian ethics, Mina Shaughnessy's "Diving In" challenges our pedagogical attitudes and our unproductive pedagogical habits. Shaughnessy's model describes pride in action in the first three modes of teaching. In guarding the tower, converting the natives, and sounding the depths, teachers are unaccommodating, focusing on failure, unwilling to bend or to see students as people, as potential. Shaughnessy's piece focuses on the needs of "basic writers," but guarding the tower happens in many forms when we allow pride to go unchecked. In "guarding the tower," teachers are not willing to change anything about their pedagogy, even if students clearly require a different method as they are *different students*, with different needs. When teachers are unable to adjust based on need, they acquiesce to their own feelings of security above others' needs. They refuse to admit the slightest amount of uncertainty back into their daily planning. They are unwilling to feel uneasy. They have forgotten, as Anderson says, to live to die, or die to themselves, so that others may benefit. And of course, paradoxically, without this form of self-denial, they will never reach a mastery of teaching, but rather will become entrenched with less effective methods that only work when approaching a certain audience. Their pride keeps them from furthering themselves.

When composition teachers transition from "guarding the tower" all the way to "diving in," they are choosing deeper levels of kindness and humility. Humility in teaching means that

we dive in (Shaughnessy) regularly; diving in to *reach* the depths is the main mode of functioning. Humility is what allows a teacher to be willing to be vulnerable, uncertain, and unsure for the risk of someone else's success. Humility and kindness are about bending yourself to the needs of the situation you are faced with. This is the Christian notion of "kindness," (quoted from 1 Corinthians 13), *chrēsteuomai* in Greek, which means a willingness to change to adapt to the needs of others (Renner 672). Flexibility and kindness towards students are key components in successful pedagogy. A lack of these elements not only cheapens educative efforts but is apparent to students as well.

Heather Thomson-Bunn's research (referenced in Chapter Two) focuses on the unspoken perceptions instructors have of students, and what students feel when instructors doubt their potential or are unwilling to acknowledge their viewpoints. In "Student Perspectives of Faith in the Classroom," she asks Christian students to articulate what they believe their instructor thought about them. The main ideas these students related were "naïve, ignorant, or close-minded," "well-meaning but horribly misguided" or even "delusional" (380-381). Thomson-Bunn states, "Coming from this perspective, students may fear that instructors have judged Christians as a group before they can know individual Christian students well enough to determine their academic ability" (381). Judging based on preconceived notions is always the same: we've allowed the group to speak for the one, and therefore silenced the one before us. We are still guarding the tower. When instructors fail to adapt teaching methodology to student needs, present needs are not met. Humility, *Diving In*, seeks to understand because there is a present need. It adjusts pedagogically to the person who sits in the classroom *now*.<sup>14</sup> It implies a

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<sup>14</sup> In this way, teaching becomes more honest. C.S. Lewis said that in Christian prayer, one must state whatever is pressing, whatever is urgent (*Letters to Malcolm*). Isn't this true in any relationship? If we don't state whatever is happening now, our pressing concerns, in the

relationship that is willing to adapt to the needs of others: because “there *may* in fact be important connections between the changes teachers undergo and the progress of their students” (Shaughnessy 292, emphasis added). Humility looks at someone else more than self and remembers being in that position, unskilled, unlearned, unquestioned, and adjusts pedagogically not just to teach, but to enhance the quality of that person’s life.<sup>15</sup> If we are pursuing honest and humble relationships with students, we still recognize that “The essential human act at the heart of writing is the act of giving” (Elbow 35). As writers, we understand that sharing writing requires a giving of oneself, a vulnerability. Instructors can model a willingness to learn, even after a great deal of learning; instructors can encourage this learning through the believing game from Elbow.<sup>16</sup>

Elbow’s “Believing game” is the essence of humility: it asks us to abandon ourselves and choose someone else’s ideas above our own (even if only temporarily). According to Dewey’s observation, “The essence of critical thinking is suspended judgment” (74). The believing game does not suspend judgment but rather, removes it completely for as long as the game is played. Most critical thinking endeavors involve questioning, doubting, investigation with a goal towards disproving, I think, because it requires less emotional energy and protects one from the risks of emotional investment. James, in “The Will to Believe” acknowledges skepticism as an active

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conversation, how can that relationship go anywhere? The same is true in teaching. If we neglect the needs in front of us, how do we expect to get anywhere?

<sup>15</sup> But, this negotiation of humility as abandoning judgment, diving in, applying kindness in the consideration of human complexity-- requires reciprocity from students. If students are not willing to embrace humility, are not willing to be vulnerable and think through their faith or worldview in different ways, there will be no growth, there will be no new understanding. They will see the same fate as those who guard the tower, or those who become entrenched in ineffective methods that fail to lead others to new insights and perspectives. Humility should be modeled, but also embraced by students for better learning to occur.

<sup>16</sup> The “believing game” is defined on page 46 of this dissertation.



choice to embrace and avoid risk: instead of believing something and risking error, skepticism risks *loss of belief* simply to *avoid error*. Or, as James states, “Better risk loss of truth than chance of error” (Section X, para. 5). This choice of preventing error at the expense of believing anything at all is fallacious, a slippery slope. The problem of this, as pointed out by James, is the equivalent of a commanding officer telling his troops to avoid battle for the risk of a wound (Section VII). At the core of this is the fear of “being duped” in James’s words, or more simply, the fear of being wrong, even if in your wrong-ness you advanced one more incisive move towards truth. This is pride or cowardice or both—keeping us from humility that would seek a depth of concept (Peirce) that otherwise would be missed.

As Elbow points out, we rarely see a professional willing to critique an idea that they have accepted as true. They can easily critique ideas that they disagree with. “If you still think (naively) that it’s easy to practice systematic skepticism--to try to doubt what you want to believe--you need only notice that lots of very smart people still can’t do it. We see lots of our colleagues with PhDs who can only doubt ideas they *don’t* like (5).” Students are conditioned to the doubting game as they pursue education, which impacts the ways ideas are evaluated. If we have been trained to look for what is missing, where ideas are lacking, then we miss whatever positive traits and virtues an idea may hold. “If we try systematically to believe everything, we’re not trying to accept everything, we’re trying to find virtues we couldn’t see before and see which ideas look best after this scrutiny of believing” (Elbow 5). James states, “To preach scepticism [sic] to us as a duty until 'sufficient evidence' for religion be found, is tantamount therefore to telling us, when in presence of the religious hypothesis, that to yield to our fear of its being error is wiser and better than to yield to our hope that it may be true” (Section X, para. 6). If fear of being wrong causes academics to “preach” skepticism, why can’t we, by the same

appeal to emotions, urge the believing game for the hope it may bring and the positive emotional effects of aspects of certain beliefs? The believing game may be more taxing, emotionally and intellectually, because it asks us to take on different types of risks, and these risks endanger our image, our pride, and asks us to search for truth in the vein of Socrates: loss of self for risk of greater knowledge and truth. However, there is also potential for great reward.

Engaging in believing asks us to practice humility by laying down whatever we hold to be true (and our pride and fear of “being duped”) and believe for the moment that another idea could benefit us more than the one we’ve already chosen. It also asks us to embrace empathy, since trying the believing game requires understanding an idea in a new and different way, a way more closely related to the actual perspective of that view-holder. This exercise places more value on finding merit and virtue than finding faults. This is the opposite of typical critical thinking behaviors which focus on finding the flaw, in logic, in reasoning, or the limits or failure of an idea. “We haven’t learned to use belief as a tool--as we use doubt as a tool” (Elbow 4). We understand the believing game as a way to evaluate ideas, and this relates to how we teach argumentation. Using the believing game in argumentation means that the argument is grounded with a willingness to admit that there is a middle ground, and I have to be willing to move and meet you there. This is a mindset geared towards solutions, teamwork, rather than self and “winning.”

Another area that could be re-focused through the lens of humility and the believing game is the area of argument. Argumentation typically is antagonistic, with the mentality of win/lose, greater/lesser, or skilled/unskilled. Instead of focusing on this mode of argumentation, there are modes that incorporate humility, listening, and open-minded willingness to engage in compromise. Rogerian debate was cited by one interviewee as an example of argumentation that

engages with this application of humility, in her words, because “it grants such great dignity and respect to the person you disagree with” (Bridgett). She explains her use of Rogerian argumentation in conjunction with Christian ethics. In Rogerian argumentation, she states this is “where you really get inside the other person’s perspective...the first step is to express their view in terms where they would say, ‘yes that’s what I believe.’ Well, even just doing that is extremely difficult.” Describing someone else’s view so accurately that they would agree with your interpretation requires a difference in priorities. As Elbow states regarding the believing game,

They won’t change their position unless you can get them to see the issue the way you see it. For that, you need the believing game...the believing game is inherently collaborative, so you have no leverage for asking them to play it with your position unless you start by taking the risk yourself of trying to believe their position--and showing that you’ve really given this a good faith effort--even asking for their help. (7)

Viewing argumentation in this way prioritizes good-faith listening and collaborative solution-making. By prioritizing the person, rather than their views, the goals become about living at peace with one another, forgiving others, working towards enhancing their life rather than only correcting it. Rogerian style argumentation works towards solutions that would ideally benefit all parties involved. These methods embrace a balanced ethic of humility and assertiveness in balance. Balance means that we need the doubting game and the believing game, just as we need classical and Rogerian argumentation. But applying a Christian ethic, the focus is on valuing others and relationship as well as ideas, so we should consider the different emotional effects of these different argumentation methods. I see drastically different responses to two forms of argumentation in the composition course I currently teach.

In my current composition course, I teach both classical and Rogerian argumentation skills through in-class debates. But, I also teach the motive for argumentation as building relationships and placing value on others. Last week, we debated using both styles in class.

Despite all of my attempts, the classical debate got a bit heated by the end. We debriefed. I asked them what their emotions were during the debate. Here were some of the responses from my students: “Frustration,” “anger,” “rage,” “Kill, Kill Kill!...well, I wasn’t thinking that, but that’s what I was feeling in the moment!” We talked about the obstacles to the classical debate, and in both classes, my students said that they were not listened to. They stated that they knew the other side was only listening with the goal of arguing against them.

When we finished our Rogerian debate, I asked again for emotional responses to the debate. “Much less heated than before.” “I feel like they understood what I was saying.” And, my favorite, “Was that really a debate though?” The students discussed how important it is to place value on people and to be willing to listen. Rogerian argumentation is an opportunity to rethink ourselves, see ourselves in someone else’s mirror and then give them the opportunity to see themselves in ours. Acquiescing is not the goal, since we were given a voice to use. The goal is harmony and balance: listening to someone else’s voice and then using our own, for the goal of steps toward unity, highlighting our commonness rather than our different-ness. If classical argumentation trains us in antagonistic, critical, fault-finding thinking methods, then Rogerian argumentation offers a way to participate in the believing game. The believing game works towards emotional balance and harmony.

Playing the believing game, working towards emotional balance and placing the value on the person applies in at least one more area: our attitudes towards plagiarism. Marge’s statements regarding plagiarism implied a Christian view of integrity: “[it’s] more than just... ‘you could get in big trouble for this.’ But...this is your integrity before the Lord.” If a Christian ethic places more value on people and seeing people where they are, it requires a change in response to plagiarism. In Purdy’s “Calling off the Hounds: Technology and the Visibility of

Plagiarism,” Purdy defends students who plagiarize on the grounds that technology has made copying and pasting text relatively easy. “...the technology put into the hands of most high schoolers seem suited to the acts of copying and pasting” (291). Purdy states plagiarism is “a problem of technology”— yes, and to disagree with Purdy, it is not just technology but technology *and*. A Christian ethic, in this case, means viewing the situation as a result of the problems with technology and the problems with our humanness and the problems with systems that we as humans produce. Plagiarism is often overlooked in certain professional realms. Purdy says, “Concerns of plagiarism are often disproportionately focused on students, positing that they are the only group (or at least the group most) guilty of plagiarism” (Purdy 286); Purdy then highlights that plagiarism has been institutionalized at many levels (286-290). Disregarding this thought allows instructors to dismiss the ways they themselves may be excusing a behavior in one area but policing it in others. When instructors ignore plagiarism in the professional world but police their students, they are broadening the gap between professionals and students. They are seeing students as lesser—they guard the tower, once again. Instructors should be willing to see writing as writing and people as people. If the President uses speechwriters to plagiarize, and a student uses a paper mill to plagiarize, aren’t they both guilty of plagiarism? In pride, we believe that we one day “arrive” as professionals, and professionals are entitled to certain privileges. Humility says we never arrive. We only continue to learn. Applying humility to plagiarism cases “keeps us connected to our role as teachers” (291). If we focus on a student’s failures, we move towards seeing them as *violation, guilty, dishonest*. But if the focus is balanced, on this failure, on our failure, on our humanness, it allows an instructor to remain sensitive to a person’s needs. Students, teachers—we are all learning. This humility ethic, connected with grace, asks us to separate the act from the person.

Instead of viewing students who plagiarize as guilty, we can remember that we are all guilty, we all fail, we all continue to fail. This view alone (being humble enough to own mistakes) bridges the gap between “policing” and teaching. Instead of engaging the fox hunt, we can defend our students especially when they fail. Yes, they have plagiarized, and this requires certain actions, but we can also defend them by remembering their humanness—and the reasons that students plagiarize. Perfectionism, fear, time management, laziness, despair—acknowledging these reasons allows us to reconnect to pedagogy. Perfectionism and fear of failure: fearing that their own thoughts, should they be written, would fail. Lack of time management and discipline: the struggle of full freedom for the first time in life and to appropriately manage the time given to us. Often students are so daunted by the vocabulary and argument in professional publications that they despair of ever reaching that caliber of writing. These conditions can inspire a Christian ethical response for the main reason that one cannot give grace until someone needs grace, and these other considered conditions offer room for more teaching and a different pedagogical moment. If forgiveness is brought into the equation, how we approach and handle plagiarism cases can be very different if we acknowledge the role technology plays as well as refusing to alter the value of the person in the midst of a failure. We should not change the penalties for plagiarism, but remembering humility in these instances doesn’t distance ourselves from our students in failure.

“Granting other people dignity,” as Bridgett said, is the main goal of this Christian ethic in composition. Granting another person dignity is valuable when handling a plagiarism case, engaging in debate, or understanding the writing process or the believing game through a Christian ethical lens. Granting others dignity requires listening, understanding, flexibility, and humility. Without humility or the willingness to consider others above self, dying to self, this

Christian ethical lens would not function, and without an intentional focus on using humility as an ethical tool, the greatest gains would be missed. If one chooses a Christian ethic, one must write as a Christian, and that also implies a certain *ethos*. Ethos, as echoed by these interviewees, is intertwined with identity and demands something different from someone who has chosen a Christian worldview.

### **Using These Discussions to Move Forward**

All of the discussions outlined above contribute to the successful implementation of a new curriculum and offer models of current composition efforts in which faith is integrated. By examining the information supplied by these instructors, I hope to design a course which collects the most applicable components into Highlands College's culture and purpose.

All of the courses described above vary in approaches, opinions, philosophies, and choices. There were many different faith-based integration examples which will be very beneficial to the purpose of this project. This information will serve as a preliminary framework for a faith-based composition course and the relevant components therein. These instructors did not offer their insights as perfect models but rather examples which are subject to problems and issues. Considering their perspectives should assuage the possibility of curricular decisions that have to be largely re-worked because of a lack of trial or practice.

In the next chapter, I will integrate the perspectives of ministry professionals and their use of writing in the workplace. By combining the perspectives of academics and ministry workers, I hope to create the most relevant and beneficial curricula possible.

## **CHAPTER 4: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS WITH MINISTRY PROFESSIONALS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of Chapter Four is to consider writing expectations in three different ministry scenarios: first, to examine the writing expectations of faculty members teaching in ministry or religious studies fields; second, to examine the writing expectations for ministry students (in the classroom and in professional activities), and third to examine the realistic writing demands of professionals currently employed in ministerial or church positions. Specifically, I focused on the writing demands of ministry professionals that are employed by the church that houses Highlands College, Church of the Highlands. This select group of ministry professionals was chosen because of the continuity of goals, purpose, and vision held by the church, the college, and the staff. This group of interviewees holds the same occupational positions that Highlands College students aspire to. For that reason, I argue that their perspective is valuable pertaining to writing in the workplace and which genres and skills they would expect a fellow professional to know.

Chapter Four begins with the data collection methods and interviewee and site data. It then presents the summaries of the data in the following categories: appreciation for other viewpoints, email communication, administrative writing, writing for teaching purposes, academic writing for students, opinions on teaching writing, common complaints about writing, ministry writing genres, and skills.

I then present a thematic interpretation regarding the data presented by the interviewees. The first theme is that writing well communicates a set of principles. These interviewees viewed



writing as a discipline that could reveal other areas of knowledge and personal discipline. The second theme is that reading and writing has the potential to impact our souls, applying a spiritual view to writing. The third theme is the evidence of internalized composition principles from scholars outside the field of composition. These interviewees valued these principles and taught them even though they had not studied composition themselves. Finally, the theme emerged that professional writing is often social: the data shows that workplace culture, conflicts with co-workers, representations of the organization, and persuasion are all impacted by the nature and art of writing.

Chapter Four then overtly argues an implied connection that transfer should be pursued to bridge the gap between vocational or professional writing genres and goals and what is covered in the academic classroom. I argue that we should see professional and academic writing goals as mutually beneficial instead of separating the terms; I argue that transfer efforts can and should take place so that skills developed in academic writing tasks can be transferred to ministry writing efforts, and vice versa. I then articulate several methods used to increase transfer of knowledge to other contexts, including critical thinking, low transfer, high transfer, and transfer techniques of hugging, bridging, assemblage, remix, and critical incident. I argue that these methods will be more effective with repetition and use of overt key concepts. I also argue that the “Intro to Writing Studies” model holds both potential and weaknesses for the Highlands College site. I then argue for critical thinking as a tool to bridge pragmatic efforts and transfer. A critical thinking heuristic also may create a safe space for Christian students to engage critically. I acknowledge the issues traditionally associated with Christians and critical thinking, and offer a critical thinking model to assuage these concerns.

By considering professional/vocational writing demands and expectations, the researcher gains perspective on how workplace professionals use writing in the professional ministerial sphere and how to meet those demands when training students in the classroom for their future career goals. Although the curricula will largely focus on academic writing genres, there will be at least one assignment devoted to professional development.

In a setting where students are pursuing the same major, considering the vocational writing demands of those employed in ministry occupations opens up new possibilities for writing assignments. The goals of the interviews in Chapter Four include to better understand the academic writing expectations and ministry writing expectations held by faculty and other ministry professionals so that the first-year writing curriculum balances relevance and practicality with the academic goals and perspectives discussed in Chapters 1-3.

## **Research Methods**

The data presented in this chapter represents interviews that were conducted in the spring, summer, and fall of 2017. There are six interviewees represented in Chapter Four who are employed as staff members of Church of the Highlands in various capacities. The interviews focused on the job positions and duties of the interviewees, the writing they are asked to produce and/or interact with on a regular and infrequent basis, their own writing expectations for other ministry professionals, the consequences of not writing or communicating well in their positions, and the writing skills that students would need to perform their positions well. This study was exempted by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Alabama.

## **Research Site and Participants**

The Church of the Highlands is located around the Birmingham, Alabama metro area in several different church campus sites. The interviewees represent four different campuses of the

Church of the Highlands, including the Grants Mill, Alabaster, Grandview, and Greystone locations. All of these locations would still be considered within the greater Birmingham-metro area by a radius of 22 miles, or a maximum driving distance of 27.6 miles, which is the farthest distance between two campuses represented in this study (Grants Mill and Alabaster). The Church of the Highlands is classified as a non-denominational Christian church, with 15 different locations as of Fall of 2017. According to their annual report, approximately 43,000 people attend services on a weekend. Other campus locations include Riverchase, Tuscaloosa, Auburn, Opelika, Montgomery, Huntsville, Muscle Shoals, Fultondale, Gadsden, McCalla and Woodlawn, Alabama. (highlandslegacy.com) The size of the church is not typical, which I acknowledge may change interview data from a typical ministry professional in a smaller church. The church was selected based on the continuity of mission, values, and goals between the church and the college, which is more important in this case.

The ministry professionals interviewed were selectively chosen based on their willingness to participate in the study, their experience in a ministry position, and/or their experience in academics. The six interviewees include Bentley, Travis, Sherry, Curtis, Jennifer, and Eliza.<sup>17</sup> Of the six interviewees, their ministry experience encapsulates the roles of teaching faculty, college administration, Christian author/writer, curriculum developer, children's ministry director, administrative assistant, associate pastor, and youth pastor.

## **Procedure**

The researcher non-randomly emailed church staff using their staff email address or asked them in person if they would be willing to participate in the study. The interviews were scheduled over email and then conducted over the phone. I contacted the interviewees with the

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<sup>17</sup> All names used are pseudonyms.

phone number they supplied, either office or personal. Each interview lasted between 25 and 45 minutes, depending on the interviewee's schedules. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, coded, and analyzed for presentation in this chapter. The questions asked by the interviewer included academic writing expectation questions if relevant, in addition to frequent and non-frequent examples of writing demands in their professional sphere, the consequences of not producing that writing well, and which writing skills they felt it would be important for students to learn before going into ministry.

### **Data Analysis**

The transcripts from the interviews were coded according to topic, allowing the observations to speak for themselves and allowing codes to be grouped into topical categories for consideration. The coded material was sorted to determine which topics were most frequently discussed or to see if there were similarities between the techniques used. Codes were chosen based on the frequency that topics were discussed by the interviewees and were content-based to best answer the question, "What writing skills do ministerial professionals expect graduates from Highlands College to have?" This organization then allows the researcher to examine the components of the data, outside of thematic considerations, and then apply her own thematic interpretation. The categories that emerged were cultivating an appreciation for other viewpoints, email communication, administrative writing tasks, writing for teaching purposes, academic writing, writing opinions, common complaints, ministry writing genres, and skills.

#### **Cultivating an appreciation for other viewpoints**

A common view expressed by interviewees was the importance that students cultivate an understanding of the Bible and are exposed to and understand alternate points of view from their

own. Curtis connected the experience of learning about different worldviews as vital and important to his Christian worldview and the relationships he wants to make with other people:

I think that if one of the goals of college is the growth of critical thinking in the way we view the world, then I think it's important to be able to understand and think about how other people view the world and other religions so that you appreciate yours better or so that you can better communicate with others...And Christians are trying to reach other people. It's important for them to know their audience and transfer information in a kind, intelligible, and compelling and winsome way. If you don't know the other person, where they're coming from, it's going to be hard to communicate with them, in a practical way or in a natural way.

Curtis's application of critical thinking in college encourages Christians to be more prepared and more relevant to those with different viewpoints. Travis also stated, "Because living outside of your contexts are going to be people with various upbringing and backgrounds and experiences...that helps them if they're able to maybe read something that might be different from what they think or believe." He states that this helps to prepare students to handle realistic situations. Sherry, like Curtis, experienced an assignment in a graduate course that opened her eyes to the possibility of learning through worldviews different than her own: "The whole assignment was to go and listen to [someone else] and not testify, not talk about Christianity, but just get to know them and their beliefs. It was phenomenal. It was phenomenal... Because it's hands-on training of going and hearing a person's heart." Sherry also expressed the importance of listening to students in their struggles and encouraging them to speak, even if their worldviews are different. She says,

So you know, it's very important to have a freedom... a right to conversation. We're not seeing that in the world, but we should be able to hear each other. And the students who are struggling...we just really need to hear them through their hearts and not become judgmental, but hear their heart and allow them the freedom to express their concerns without getting all crazy and condemning.

Sherry, Travis, and Curtis all voiced the importance of training students to engage listening skills when interacting with people with different belief systems.

## **Email communication**

When asked about the writing products that they were asked to produce regularly, the interviewees responded with many varied types and examples depending on their job titles and duties. One of the major commonalities across all positions was the use of email for administrative correspondence in their daily writing routines. Email was the primary mode of communication regardless of position, and every interviewee described its importance in some way. Emails were used by Travis, Sherry, Curtis, Eliza, Jennifer, and Bentley regularly for basic information exchanges. For Travis, emails were used as a basic connection point to others from whom he needed logistical information or contact information. Sherry as well stated that emails were just part of her “basic administrative work” which involved communicating with faculty members, students, and other college staff. Basic informational exchanges aside, there were some very specific observations relating to the use of email in the workplace.

While email was cited by all interviewees, two related to it as one of the most important aspects of their job performance. Jennifer and Eliza both described the high volume of emails they write on a regular basis. Eliza, as a children’s director, described that her frequent writing demands include weekly emails to other staff, her children’s ministry team, other churches, and parents. She states, “As far as writing goes, it’s part of my daily life, all day long.”

A major commonality between several interviewees was the opinion that emails should be written as clearly as possible in order to be efficient and productive. Sherry described an email as one of the more difficult things she is asked to write, based on the fact that emails require brevity but also extreme clarity to be effective. Curtis also mentioned the importance of being able to write a clear email with a clear message: “It needs to be obvious what’s most important, what the big idea is, and then what are the things that people need to know and what are the things that people need to do.” He also stated the importance of the subject line in an

email, because a clear subject line will ultimately save time if it clearly explains the purpose of the email.

Another common view in email writing was the need for careful proofreading. Curtis described that, to him, there is a relationship between the number of email recipients and the level of intentionality and proofreading when drafting an email. He stated, “Students need to learn that depending on how many people you are emailing, or how many people you’re disseminating to, needs to correspond by how many times you and other people proofread...whatever you're about to send or produce.” He acknowledged the importance of proofreading and that sending out mass emails with errors would be humiliating to the writer. Eliza also stressed the importance of email and the use of a professional tone when responding to certain situations; she described her expectations of a staff member working for her and her desire for them to carefully draft their emails to others: “I want you to sit down and look at your emails and think about how you say things, the way you write things. Think about if you’re using current terminology like slang, or are you using good verbiage. Like, do you know how to put sentences together in a way that sounds professional? Because it matters.”

Jennifer also acknowledged the problems with email as an inefficient use of time when information is not transferred properly, quickly, or clearly. “We go back and forth fifteen or twenty times in an email and at the end of the day, I still don’t know all of the information or the person doesn’t know it from me. And it’s all for the sake of time, but in the end of the day we’ve wasted time.” She comments on waiting for others to respond and the exchange of unclear information as some of the largest time-wasters in her experience in the workplace.

These perspectives on the importance of email communication, the various messages that can be interpreted based on when the email is sent, its tone, and word choices were very

important to Jennifer, Eliza, Curtis, and Sherry. They view strong email communication as a basic requirement to perform well in their professions. They hold that knowing your audience, thoughtfully editing, choosing words and punctuation, and using email artfully can establish positive relationships and excellently represent the corporation that you work for. All of these concerns are composition skills that can be focused on in a writing course; these concerns can supply the foci for transfer efforts and provide testimonials for students to increase motivation for writing skill development.

### **Administrative writing tasks: reports, procedures, and organization**

Common opinions in ministry writing emerged along the lines of writing requirements for administrative purposes, including writing for computing, organizing, planning, scheduling, or staffing. Jennifer, Sherry, Travis, Bentley, and Eliza described the writing they complete in order to meet administrative demands. Other than email, administrative writing was one of the primary tasks required of these ministry professionals.

Eliza outlined several administrative writing expectations that she was asked to complete weekly that were unique to children's ministry, including weekly reports, in-house HR documentation, or any legal or DHR instances that occurred that week. Her report clarity ensured that budgets and expectations were understood by those in the department. She also stated the importance of the team or staff reporting, as her documentation each week provides an artifact outlining issues with personnel or volunteers. Her weekly reports also include praise and gratitude for team members who are serving exceptionally well, which provides a "trail" for others to use if they need to promote someone in leadership or transfer a leader to another area.

Jennifer described several different types of administrative writing that she performs as an administrative assistant. Jennifer specifically described one type of writing, what she referred



to as creating “processes.” Jennifer is occasionally asked to produce a step-by-step procedure that describes how her department should undertake a process that requires a series of steps, like an accounting function, a checking or purchase request, or “the official ‘how we do business as a team’” protocol as it relates to the accounting department or other departments. Jennifer had already expounded on the importance of time management and the goal of efficiency in the office (see the section on email above), so her goals in providing these procedural “processes” include writing clarity and logical, coherent writing so that time is not lost in their day-to-day operations.

Also included in administrative writing are the genres of meeting notes, summaries, and texts sent to other office staff or personnel. Curtis specifically stated the importance of clear, concise meeting minutes that state the “big items,” “decisions made,” and the action steps that should be taken. Another administrative task mentioned by Curtis was the creation of evaluation reports on young speakers delivering sermons so that they could receive feedback and improve their speaking and preaching skills. Curtis also was asked to create research briefs for pastors on biblical topics, similar to a research assistant’s role.

### **Writing for teaching purposes**

In the ministry professional interviews, much professional writing was for teaching purposes. Since three of the interviewees were also teachers, they listed any writing they did to prepare to teach as part of their regular writing demands. Sherry, Travis, Bentley, and Curtis mentioned writing in order to present information, teach, or otherwise transfer information. Sherry, Travis, Curtis, and Bentley listed organized group discussions and class lectures as part of their routine job functions as well as teaching and leading people in their leadership development and equipping them for ministry.

The development of curriculum writing was a common exercise among the interviewees since teachers regularly engage with curriculum concerns and one interviewee works in Children's ministry, where curriculum is needed regularly for small groups or children's church services. Curtis provides weekly outlines for these curriculums. Curtis is also regularly asked to create syllabi, course designs, and class plans for Highlands College courses, creating course goals and ensuring that students will be asked to meet certain objectives in certain courses. He defines his role as, "Definition, design, and development...so I would say helping to find what's important as far as learning objectives and helping to design a road map of what classes are going to deliver those objectives and then help them to fulfill those for each of those classes." Curtis also mentioned giving feedback to instructors on how well curriculum was being executed in their classes, and his role of providing resource development (like textbook selections) and support to instructors and other staff.

In addition to the weekly curriculums produced in children's ministry, Eliza creates small group curriculums to develop the volunteers and staff who serve in the children's ministry areas. All of these curricula writing forms focus on producing a lesson plan with goals to educate others in some capacity.

Travis uses writing for teaching in a slightly different way, using writing to prepare himself for teaching demands but also as a part of his process of thinking and creating material. Travis regularly writes in preparation for teaching courses, but he is also a book author, and so teaches through biblical topic writing and devotionals. He also speaks as a pastor frequently and uses writing before he gives a message as part of his "process of preparing."

Curriculum writing, writing for teaching preparation, writing books and devotionals, and preparation writing before public speaking were common forms of writing for the ministry

professionals interviewed. Since many ministerial occupations involve teaching others in some capacity, these are worthwhile genres to investigate for developing ministry writing skills.

### **Academic writing for students: examples and suggestions**

Since three of the ministry professionals were college-level instructors, they also included thoughts on the writing assignments given in each of their courses. Sherry, Travis, and Curtis described the use of chapter summaries, research papers, outlines, thesis statements, and exegesis papers in their courses. Sherry stated that, ideally, she would like to scaffold the writing demands of her course. She stated that the students needed basic writing at the beginning and then a gradual building up to more complex assignments like the final paper.

Travis and Curtis articulated concerns about more general academic writing skills, such as identifying a clear thesis, making clear points, asking questions, and being coherent in writing. Curtis desires students to be able to create an outline and understand how to develop that outline into a formal academic paper. Travis expressed a desire to have clarity from the very beginning of student writing, and for students to “understand the framework” of a five-paragraph essay. He believes that if students understand the framework, they should have more success when they are asked to write or produce different content. He desires for students to write wholly coherent papers and to engage with research in a productive way, hoping that their writing contains “weighty” content, or that they produce mature writing that matches their college level. Curtis also echoed these goals, desiring his students to produce mature writing with clear thought expression. He hopes that when they leave his class, they will have improved their clarity, critical thinking, and the organization of their own thoughts.

Two instructors voiced opinions on the importance of engaging with scholarly or outside sources successfully in writing. Travis and Curtis both described expectations for students to

research and apply research effectively as part of a routine scholarly practice. Curtis voiced the importance of engaging with scholars and turning in work that challenges your own writing to mature. He implied that engaging with scholarly sources could challenge students to cultivate a “maturity of written expression.” Curtis hopes that students will support their academic work with sources and grow through the engagement with the mature voices found in scholarship.

Another common desire in academic writing settings was for students to follow instructions regarding formatting styles and mechanics. Travis specifically mentioned his desire for students to follow formatting guidelines, specifically a correctly formatted works cited page and page numbers. Curtis expects students to use electronic forms of grammar or spelling checkers so that the work they turn in does not have errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, or sentence structure.

Some writing forms used in the academic classroom included genres or the use of discussion forums more specific to church ministry and biblical studies. These included manuscripts of sermons (used in Curtis’s course on Preaching), evaluations of sermons, personal testimonies, and discussion forums. Curtis also described the intentional use of evaluations in his Preaching course, asking students to produce a manuscript of a message that they would present to the class, which is typically eight to ten pages for a twenty-minute message. He then asks students to outline their messages and then create written evaluations of their classmates’ messages and presentations.

Both Travis and Curtis described the use of certain assignments as an intentional connection of biblical topics to student life experience. Curtis states his goals for students are “to clarify the concept that we’re talking about, define it in their own words, and then relate it to their life in some way.” Travis described that in his exegesis class, one goal for the students’

final paper is for them to answer questions regarding themes, culture, or history and then purposefully apply it to the present.

### **Opinions on teaching writing**

Ministry professionals have typically not been trained in composition or writing and for that reason the researcher was intentionally interested in their opinions on writing and the connections to academic and ministry success. Bentley, Travis, Curtis, and Sherry expressed opinions on writing and the need for writing to be taught or engaged in certain ways.

Another common opinion shared by interviewees was that the foundations of writing learned in English composition are vital for successful writing and habits later on. Sherry stated that she sees English as vital to give students the tools they need to succeed later on in college and ministry work. She desired that students see the importance of learning the “basics” in their English course and how that affects their communication skills later in their careers.

Another opinion expressed by both Travis and Sherry was the goal of students loving writing and developing their appreciation of writing. Travis wishes to encourage students to appreciate writing in and of itself. When asked about his classroom goals, he replied that they included “An appreciation for literature and appreciation for writing. Because I think so many times a generation may try to run away from the idea of literature and reading and writing appreciation.” Appreciating writing also partnered with the view that writing should not be burdensome or dreaded. Sherry had recently taught courses that required students to turn in three or possibly four writing assignments per week, which she felt encouraged poor quality and rushed writing. Instead, she argues for one major assignment per week, because she believes that

excessive work only burdens students.<sup>18</sup> She cites that in her own classroom, when students were given choices in their writing, they enjoyed the work more. She also described that when she gave them writing opportunities that required less “rules” (she referred to MLA formatting), that students were “freed up” to write how they wanted. She stated one of her goals for students was “freedom of expression” and to encourage students in their writing.

Sherry believes that an imperative in the process of learning to write is encouragement and affirmation. She cites an example of her own graduate work when a professor encouraged her: “For example, when that professor told me the other night that I was a good writer, I can’t tell you what it did to me; it was like I had a shot of adrenaline.” For that reason, she regularly tries to encourage her students in their writing and feels this to be important in developing their love of writing.

Both Travis and Sherry recognized the connection between students valuing writing and writing success. Travis and Curtis also described their goals for each assignment to be worthwhile for students. Curtis stated that he saw value in assignments “stretching” students while giving them an opportunity to attempt writing tasks that they have never been asked to do. Curtis also preferred that the assignments were also directly relevant to something they will undertake in ministry (citing the sermon assignment from his preaching class).

Another commonality for two interviewees was the need for instructors to be intentional about repeating writing expectations and goals to increase the odds of successful writing. Both Sherry and Travis also discussed the need to be vigilant in reminding students about writing expectations and assignments in their classrooms. Travis detailed his method of using online and

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<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that in Sherry’s situation, “excessive” amount of assignments were around 3 different written assignments per week that were counted for a grade. This added up to more than 45 graded assignments by the end of term.

in-class visual and verbal instructions so that students would be thinking about long-term writing projects from week to week. He also believes that skills involving writing a thesis need to be “continuously drilled” so that students not only retain but practice important skills. Sherry also described the need to “continuously remind” students of material. She hopes that the reminding will “plant” things that the students will remember and access in their long-term writing pursuits.

### **Common complaints about writing**

Since three of the interviewees were college-level instructors, there were several complaints pertaining to college writing. These complaints, shared by Sherry, Travis, and Curtis, included incorrect formatting on a paper (or “not following instructions regarding formatting guidelines”), not engaging with scholarly sources, not citing sources, capitalization, spelling and homonym errors, fragments and creating complete sentences, and subject/verb agreement. Specifically, Travis and Sherry described the need for students to create a clear structure in their writing, with balanced paragraphs throughout the assignment. Travis desires for students to produce thoughtful content that has the adequate depth expected of a college writing assignment, increasing the quality of information, paragraph development, or clarity on the points they were making. Travis also commented specifically on the problem of using citations to fill space or a lack of purpose when using citations, and a lack of direction or “rambling” in student writing. Sherry specifically expressed a desire for students to make changes based on feedback, rather than making the same mistakes over and over. She also noted a lack of perseverance in students or a lack of initiative in turning work in at all. Sherry and Travis also agreed that there seemed to be a lack of writing training in some students depending on their educational background.

Jennifer and Eliza, however, also had complaints about colleagues and students they have worked with in professional ministry. Jennifer specifically identified the problem that often

young professionals “communicate in all forms the same way,” referencing the “text speak” that she sees in emails, resumes, cover letters, and thank you notes. She and Eliza agree that they receive many emails that appear “rushed” and that “lack forethought.” Jennifer stated that these errors in communication impede goals being met and increase the chances of time being lost. Eliza also stated the need for interns and students to communicate professionally, adhering to the verbiage expected and cultivated by the environment in which she works.

### **Ministry writing genres**

There were also several genres mentioned specifically that interviewees felt were important to ministry tasks. Curtis specifically described genres that he feels that students require training on before going into ministry. He suggested project proposals, commercials, service “huddles” (a quick devotional or word of encouragement for the serve team before the church service starts), directions for an activity, church announcements, mission statements, worship guides, and church news segments. He described the importance of “being able to write a great sentence” because he believes this is basically what a great mission statement is. Bentley mentioned the need for students considering a pastoral role to know how to write and prepare a message, and how to engage in exegetical writing as well as biblical topical writing. Sherry described the importance of summaries in her ministerial work. Travis also described his own experiences with book writing, preaching, teaching, theological writing, and speaking engagements. As a pastor, teacher, and author, these activities were vital to his successful job performance.

### **Skills**

Each of the interviewees expressed skills in writing that they believed would be pertinent in ministry work. One of the main concerns was time management/efficiency and the need for



writing to be written clearly so that it would be understood. Eliza, Curtis, Sherry, and Jennifer spoke about the need for clear written communication so that time would be saved. Curtis expressed the need for clarity, brevity, and simplicity as the “relationship between writing and delegating.” He describes the skills of being able to “boil something down” or prioritize what is most important, state what is “actionable” or what needs to be done, state what the big ideas are, and what people need to know in ministry communication. He stated that clarifying the “action steps” is very important. He said that eliminating wordiness in ministry communication or exchanges for these reasons is very important for time management and ensuring that you are providing clear directions or exchanges in the workplace. Eliza also described the skill of being able to produce informal writing quickly in the forms of email exchanges or messages to team members. She says, “So my writing level has to be on point, and I have to be able to shoot out [emails] you know really super-fast... I need to understand brevity and all of those things, and how to communicate information and policies and procedures.” Eliza often has many emails to respond to daily, so brevity in her work is very important. Sherry as well expressed the skills of organization and readability to aid in time management in communication in general.

Finally, Curtis described several skills that he felt were relevant in everyday ministry work. He described the importance of being able to paraphrase, outline, and understand the thesis of books, articles, or sermons. He explained that this skill was vital in passing on information, whether it was the contents of a sermon or the outline of a book. He stated that understanding paraphrasing and the “big ideas” of certain works allows staff members to pass on that information quickly, clearly, and easily. He stated that this would allow a ministry professional to apply information they have learned in a counseling or pastoring situation. He also stated that bullet-point form, rather than paragraph form, is much more widely used in

exchanging information in ministry settings, which is why the skills of paraphrasing and understanding the main ideas were so important. Curtis also described skills that would be useful in preparing messages or sermons, such as making points memorable and simple but also helpful for personal growth. He said this often means creating maxims or proverb-style rhetorical points. Another skill he mentioned was being able to acknowledge a very wide audience, made up of different generations, political views, and views related to Christianity.

### **Interpretation of Interview Data**

In this set of interviews, several themes emerged. The first theme that the data expresses is that writing well communicates a set of principles. There was a common view that if one wrote well (in academic or professional writing scenarios) that they were modeling excellence, which is inextricably tied to personal faith. Travis, Curtis, Sherry, Jennifer, Bentley, and Eliza voiced opinions that belief and faith overtly connect to the way they see writing and their professional writing efforts. There were specific biblical beliefs that the interviewees applied to their writing values that impacted their views on the importance of writing and the desire to be excellent in their writing skills.

Several interviewees voiced a spiritual basis for striving for excellence in writing. Jennifer described her writing and organizational skills as a reflection of her and the church's integrity in the area of finances. As she processes payments, orders, and other financial records, she believes that integrity is part of leaving an accurate and clear paper trail and establishing a positive financial legacy. Jennifer feels that her job is to communicate financial principles that will establish a healthy budget and healthy spending principles that can be seen through her writing, organization, and communication of how and why purchases were made.

Eliza also bases the drive for excellent communication on a biblical principle: that we should be training leaders continually so that they can be sent out and used effectively when the need arises (the Great Commission). She stated that through training workshops, the passing on of knowledge, and the intentional calling out of leadership in people, leaders can be developed. When leaders are developed, they can be sent out to fulfill the mission they have been trained for (in this case, children's ministry).

Bentley stated his purpose as a pastor is biblical work, yet he depends on writing and communicating and pursues the highest standard to accomplish his job functions. He described that his job is "to develop leaders, build teams, communicate vision, and equip people for ministry." Bentley is asked to communicate and lead teams at his church regularly, so he recognized the connection between communicating and motivating others to achieve their potential and attempt things they otherwise would not have attempted. Excellence in communication enables Bentley to teach and lead others in their spiritual lives.

Curtis stated that his beliefs mandate excellence in writing. He said that when he is communicating information, the *act* of communicating is important because of the nature of the content itself. He states that when ministry professionals communicate, they are communicating information about God, following Jesus, or how to help people with their hopes and fears. For this reason, Curtis stated that ministry professionals should strive for excellence and clarity in their communication skills because the representation of that information directly impacts people's lives and how they perceive Christ and Christianity. Curtis also mentioned the importance of excellence in organizational design, or communicating a ministry's values, goals, vision, and mission well. He described the idea of clear organizational goals and purpose with the idea of writing a paper with a clear thesis. Just as a paper needs clarity in its thesis and

supporting points, a ministry design needs relevant activities that support the ministry's purpose, mission, and goals. He stated that a student's understanding of paper writing with a thesis, claim, and support can be applied in ministry design:

So in the same way that we're writing a paper and you have a clear thesis, in what ways does the body of my paper or my paragraph support progress or advance that thesis? So...the clarity that somebody learns when they think about what they add or take away or build a clear paper is hugely applicable to having and working in a ministry setting that has that same kind of organizational clarity and purpose.

His statements imply that academic writing concepts, when applied to different contexts, can model a structure that a student can apply elsewhere. The implied belief is that writing concepts such as a thesis can be largely transferable as concepts; he sees connections between the application of these concepts in ministry settings.

Sherry also values writing excellence based on a biblical principle. She believes that when students practice the discipline of mastering "basic" skills such as formatting, spelling or other tools for clear communication, that they are connecting with the biblical scripture that states when people are faithful in small things, they will be given greater things to do. (This is based on Luke 16:10). Sherry believes that small disciplines are important (as described above) for laying the foundation of other disciplines in life and in writing.

The data also suggest that if one didn't write or communicate well, this was demonstrative of a lack of discipline, care, knowledge, or training. Several interviewees felt that it was their job to provide the learning of these skills so that others could succeed. Bentley recognized the direct correlation between writing and being able to perform these primary functions excellently: "Poor writing leads to poor communication. Without good communication, it is difficult to motivate people to grow and pursue their own individual calling." Jennifer stated that certain errors in emails impact her perception of the writer's professionalism, specifically when she receives emails from others that use "text speak:" "So you

see these... you know, 'see you later,' [with] the letter 'c' and the letter 'u.' Well, you don't put that in an email. But then we also see it coming across on resumes and cover letters and thank you notes. And it's like...no one has taught them the correct way to communicate on paper." She connects these errors as a lack of education or a lack of effort from the writer. Travis, Eliza, and Jennifer made connections between a writer's thoughtfulness in emails and their ability to complete ministerial job tasks successfully.

These beliefs imply that writing is an expression of faith for these Christians. These perspectives on writing push writing beyond learning and discovery or creation of knowledge: writing becomes an outlet to express Christian devotion or discipline. Curtis's observations point to a different function of writing as well: using concepts studied in paper writing to create a logical format that students should emulate in organizations. This statement has implications for transfer and the possibility of applying writing concepts to other contexts in ministry settings. If students make connections between their paper writing and organizational ministerial structure, this should increase the relevance of paper writing in college first-year writing courses, and therefore strengthen the motivation, retention, and successful transfer efforts.

Excellence in communication for a believing Christian means that they represent their ambassador role well (2 Cor. 5.20).<sup>19</sup> Being an ambassador, the role itself is incorporated with the writing and speaking that Christians conduct because of the public, relational nature of these acts. Seeing a connection to faith in professional and everyday activities is demonstrative of a worldview based on another scripture, (1 Cor. 10.31) "Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." This scripture points to an over-arching worldview choice, that everyday tasks should be seen through a lens of faith and done with a certain intentionality. For a person who subscribes

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<sup>19</sup> "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us."

to this belief, the application of this text means that all aspects of life are interwoven with faith. This aligns with Patricia Bizzell's argument that the religious mind is like a web, where faith impacts the entire person. Seen through this lens, a Christian worldview application to writing means that the writing task is an opportunity to showcase one's discipline, faith, and excellence.

The second theme from the data was the view that what we read and write has the potential to impact our soul,<sup>20</sup> and not just our mind and emotions. The data suggests that reading and writing are powerful tools that have the potential to impact the whole person. Travis voiced the belief that understanding the "why" or the purpose behind a writing assignment allows writers to grow in spiritual maturity, implying that a spiritual component can be incorporated into assignments. Other religious convictions included beliefs of how students should engage with assignments in the academic classroom. Travis voiced his desire that assignments are beneficial to students intellectually but also that assignments are beneficial to students spiritually:

That's important to me in that they understand *why* they're writing the paper and that it's not only an assignment for them, but that their hearts will be changed in the process of writing... that they will grow in their relationship with the Lord; they will learn something they haven't learned before about scripture...Not that they just complete the paper but that God speaks to them through that process... It is an assignment but not an assignment just academically... there's also a spiritual component.

Travis hopes that students will be changed through the close-reading and deep thinking of biblical topics and biblical scripture. He reflects this process of being changed spiritually through writing in his own work. Since he writes, publishes, speaks, teaches, and preaches, he intentionally incorporates prayer into his writing process. He describes his process as circular,

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<sup>20</sup> Understandably, not everyone agrees that human beings possess a soul. The belief of the existence of a soul, or spirit, is understood in this claim drawn from these interviewees who believe in the existence of the human soul.

but also as dependent on prayer: “But I'm always writing and taking notes and reading and I'm going back to it and changing things and praying and changing and writing and typing... and kind of going back to it and praying and saying, you know, Lord is this what you want me to say?”

Travis hopes that his writing accurately reflects a thoughtful and spiritual process.

This is interesting considering the current conversations regarding religious discourse and academic discourse, and in what ways the two are compatible. Jeffrey Ringer has outlined the emotional effects of academic deconversion efforts on religious students which underscore this belief that what we read, write, and otherwise experience affects our souls. This begs the question of whether a topic must possess a spiritual aspect for it to be “spiritually charged” so to speak, or rather, do non-religious topics still impact faith? This opens up more room for discussions for the spiritual nature of assignments and how a Christian institution should acknowledge or plan assignments with these considerations in mind.

The third theme that emerged was that some composition principles such as process-based writing, collaborative writing, and using class time for writing were apparently beneficial and valuable to scholars who had not studied composition. This observation validates that outside of the field, professional readers and writers who had not studied these principles value them in their professional and teaching practices. These ministry instructors often referred to writing as a process and that processes develop writing more fully. Sherry acknowledged that writing is a developing skill and wants her students to practice writing in order to develop their craft. “I know that writing is a skill; I’m learning this myself. It’s a skill that you develop. Most of us don’t have the ability to write well, but it’s a skill that you learn so that you ...so we all can become good writers with practice.” Travis also described his own writing as a process and the need for students to see writing development the same way. He states, “It's something the

student has to work at. It doesn't happen overnight. You and I know. Writing takes time, drafts, and reading. I think reading plays a huge part in how you write. I think... just knowing it's a process... The students should realize that it's a process. You got to work at it, but you got to work to get better at it.” Travis acknowledges that not everybody sees themselves as great writers, but another goal he has for students is that when they are called upon to write, they can complete tasks successfully when they put forth the proper effort. Travis gave a cogent example of his own professional revision efforts. When he described his revision process, he stated, “So it gets to be revolving kind of thing, like a revolving door...kind of circular...” Travis explained his writing as a metaphor of a revolving door; using this image shows Travis’s understanding of not only process, but specifically a non-linear writing process.

These interviewees valued the process of writing as intricately involved in the process of learning. Curtis connected writing to the overall learning process and stated that students can use writing to bring clarity to their thoughts, or as he put it, “write themselves clear in their thinking.” Applying pragmatism to this observation, the implications are that if one is unsure of their meaning, and they haven’t yet reached the “depth” of a thought (Peirce), then writing becomes a useful way to investigate thought and reach a new level of clarity and/or knowledge. Writing allows students to see their thoughts and revise them in order to present information to themselves and others with more intentionality. Curtis stated that critical thinking skills are vital in paper writing. “But I think that's a mindset...that those are critical thinking skills that are necessary and essential to English or paper writing.” Curtis also described a very common trend in process writing: the use of class time to develop written work and give feedback to peers. “I really like giving them class time to do it because it makes it a priority and they can speak to their peers...they're also modeling good or bad things for their peers and we can talk about that in



class, you know what things they could have done better or things they did really well.” Curtis believes that skills grow by practice, which he demonstrates by allowing his students time in class to write, speak, and evaluate material collaboratively.

These composition principles of valuing writing as a process (Murray), writing as a mode of learning (Emig), and the belief that writing is not a talent but a learned skill were beneficial views of writing for these academics. Travis, for example, had learned through experience that his writing improved when he made room for a recursive writing process. These religious studies scholars seem to have a healthy perspective of student writing and personal writing, acknowledging that the best writing occurs when it is collaborative, completed over time and in multiple steps, and when it is used to uncover clarity and depth in thought. In situations where non-English faculty share these views, hopefully, an “inoculation theory” mindset may be more easily avoided, especially when other departments embrace these principles. If the faculty understand the demands of writing well, they should be more amenable to developing student writing even if it is not a main objective of their course.

The final theme that emerged from the data was that professional writing requires responsibilities that are often social. The data suggest that writing composed in the workplace requires meticulous attention to audience; these texts establish a writer’s ethos (which is relational); and these texts represent the organization as well as the individual. The data suggest that how well a genre is understood and executed has serious repercussions for the writer and the other parties involved. Efficiency as well as precision is required, which is difficult to achieve without a thorough understanding of the genre and how it functions within the rhetorical situation (especially audience).

The social nature of writing was discussed when handling conflict resolution. Eliza and Jennifer described the skills of conflict management specifically in their regular work activities. Eliza stated the importance of relating to others and working together to find solutions when presented with a problem. Eliza described the need for ministry workers to use verbiage appropriate to the situation, and that verbiage, successful or not, represents your institution. She stressed the need for children's ministry workers to use appropriate terms so that policies could be upheld yet explained in a way that builds positive "life-giving" relationships. Using correct verbiage aids in avoiding liability, producing accurate details of accounts, praising people through specific examples, and building and promoting culture. Eliza and Jennifer described how word choice impacts how a conflict will be addressed and handled.

Jennifer and Eliza's jobs regularly require them to diffuse situations, so developing a professional, approachable, clear, and successful email often can ease demands on their time and emotions. Eliza regularly responds to emails she receives from parents, which could involve simply transferring information from parent to child-care volunteer or vice versa, a parent asking for information regarding their children's activities, or answering parent concerns. Eliza emphasized the importance of these exchanges, since a haphazard or careless email could result in the church being held liable for something that they were not responsible for or damaging the relationship between church attendees and the children's ministry. Eliza stated that email in this situation could be too impersonal, but when she crafts a carefully worded email, she wants to make sure certain steps are followed: "So what we want to do is always provide the solution and we want to give any next steps that are available at that moment... let them know [solutions] [are] happening. And then encourage the open communication...we want to show that we're open to whatever needs to be done to give them a successful experience." Eliza's weekly reports

also are very important from a legal standpoint; her writing in these reports may be the first recorded observance of abuse happening in a child's home. When a child discloses a possible abuse situation to a church volunteer, they must act according to the policy in place to ensure that the child receives the protection they need, and for Eliza, that means mandatory reporting. She states, "from a legality standpoint, your writing as a kid's director is ridiculously important because now, we're caught in all kinds of legal situations and counsel." Eliza understands the importance of clarity and communication in these legal instances as one of the most important writing aspects of her job. In these instances, she also notes the importance of communicating the policies and procedures in very serious situations like these, but also the day to day policies that work to secure the safety of the children in the kid's services week to week. Eliza stressed the importance of purposeful email communication in handling delicate situations involving children and safety.

Jennifer's email correspondence was important because it could make the difference between soothing a tense situation or exacerbating it. Jennifer describes that in full-time ministry, just as in any other profession, there are going to be moments when email exchanges get heated, and how vital it is in that moment, she sends an email that de-escalates the situation, rather than perpetuating the problem. She says:

And when you work in full-time ministry there's this perception that it's going to be kumbaya and fuzzy bunnies all the time and it's not. It's dealing with people. So, it's going to be stressful and difficult at times and you're going to have difficult people...Sometimes those conversations can quickly heat up, so you've got to have the ability to settle that, and say, 'Hey guys, let's look at this from a different perspective. Let's consider this point of view.' So, it really is the art of writing.

Jennifer describes the importance of using appropriate punctuation and word choice when handling these situations. She described an example of using an exclamation mark in emails and how it can send a more aggressive message than intended depending on the audience. All of

these aspects of conflict management relate to the fact that writing is social, and neglecting this fact can have serious repercussions involving the safety of others, creating a healthy workplace culture, maintaining healthy relationships with co-workers, and establishing a balanced and fair tone toward teammates at work.

Organizational and team culture is very intricately tied to the social nature of writing. Jennifer views her emails as a direct representation of the pastor that she works for and sees her communication as an extension of his own. She says, “One of my other primary responsibilities is to communicate his heart when it’s appropriate to the team or to other teams or to someone in particular. In many situations, I can speak for him. And then to have his back. My job is to protect him.” Jennifer views her role very seriously because she understands the reputation that the pastor wants to uphold, and she understands that since emails are her routine form of communication, that her tone and professionalism in those emails will create and maintain an image of the people she works with.

When working with others, it is imperative that an employee considers audience and chooses the most appealing and persuasive tactics possible. Jennifer articulated the need to know how to appeal to an audience in email communication. She discussed the potential an email has to be purposeful and artful, and how certain situations would benefit from this kind of effort in email correspondence. “I get a lot of emails, not from students but just from people, in general, that lack heart. It lacks forethought. It’s just static information, but there is a beauty to writing and it can even be in an email.” She describes the importance of persuasion, which involves knowing your audience, using emotion effectively, and establishing a connection with the recipient. “I think that’s an art that could be really cultivated in people because it *does* help

you to be persuasive. And most of us are trying to get something done, and we need other people to do it with us, and we need their help.”

Another aspect of the writing is social theme appeared in the collaborative nature of text production in the church. Eliza described the collaborative nature of writing that goes into the children’s ministry curriculum. She described that the church staff brainstorms, designs, and implements the curriculum through teamwork. She explained that the “Kid’s Creative Department” is comprised of curriculum writers, who pull biblical passages and topics from the Senior Pastor’s series, a video team, animators, editors, and actors who produce the video shorts or message “movies” used in children’s ministry. Eliza explains, “It requires writing and videography and editing and all of the creative aspects that you would see in our normal creative department.” The curriculum creation for children’s ministry is very collaborative and requires all of these team members’ approval and process to accomplish the feat.

Eliza’s department could only produce a multi-modal “text” by working as a team every week. Curriculum writing was geared toward bringing people together by providing knowledge and discussions of that knowledge. Books were written to aid others in spiritual growth. Sermons or meetings were developed with others in mind and were written to further other people’s maturation and growth. These writing tasks force the writer to address the social nature of writing and the implications of writing for and to an audience.

These conversations point to the belief that text, or the written word, is representative: representative of self, of groups of people, of organizations, and of institutions. The people that these employees encountered would make judgments regarding an entire church or an entire religion based on an email response: a poorly worded email to a parent, for example, could severely change the feelings and relationship of that parent to the church, which could impact

whether or not they returned to another church service. This leads to the observation that the written word is powerful and has the potential to form powerful bonds or destroy the future possibility of them.

It also seems that ministry professionals expect students to possess a strong knowledge of genre and how and when a genre should be used. There were situations where certain genres were seen as “too impersonal” (Eliza). These professionals expected employees to know when an email was appropriate or not. The data also suggest that certain skills can be cultivated in certain genres if there is a certain focus. For example, Jennifer believed that emails can be “artful,” that with effort, they can accomplish several purposes. These interviewees hold that genres require a thorough understanding of the rhetorical situation to be executed well and were more complex than originally assumed. Skills such as understanding the context, knowing, and writing for an audience and crafting effective persuasion was cited by interviewees as skills in professional writing. The implications of these observations are that if certain genres, such as email, are more complex than originally assumed, perhaps they also can be used to foster academic writing concepts, skills, and be tools for effective transfer in composition.

### **Discussions from Research Data: Transfer, Course Theme, and Critical Thinking**

The Comp I and II sequence at Highlands College intentionally prepares students to write for their future occupations as ministry professionals. While this may be counter to a mainstream view of post-secondary education, a Pew Research Center poll states that 47% of Americans hold that college should be used to prepare students for their future occupations, while 39% say that college should provide a general education, designed for personal and intellectual growth (Pew). 12% say that it should do a combination of both. (Pew) This writing curriculum best serves students’ needs by siding with the 12% who say college education should

do both. It should be pragmatic by meeting students' needs for vocational writing, and there should also be a concerted effort to focus on writing as a field of study.

The interviews cited above highlight the potential of working with professional writing genres, but instead of separating writing objectives or assignments as either vocational or academic, I suggest a merging of these terms for the objectives of these curricula in this context. Commonly, there are separate courses and programs designed with "academic" or "vocational" goals in mind. A vocational course usually has more of a focus on practical, hands-on learning and practice with tangible skills. An academic course may focus on different "products" such as essays or projects, but seeks to deliver "intangibles" such as comprehension of threshold concepts and modes of critical inquiry and engagement. However, my question is, isn't writing tangible? In a straightforward sense, of course it is. It is a product that can be printed, held, examined. But, the process and effort and degree of thought that writing requires is never tangible. Writing requires levels of cognition, critical inquiry, and problem solving. But, in teaching that writing is a process, using collaborative peer-review workshops, and producing tangible results, aren't we already embracing a somewhat vocational mode? Writing, or a professional writer, is a vocation. (People will be handed a paycheck to produce written words [of a certain quality]). Does the term "vocational" lower the academic standard of writing, even if academic genres are being produced? What makes a course vocational or academic? If a writing course requires persuasive essays and researched papers, and instructors work to prepare students to enter into the academic discourse community, does the term "vocational" lower the quality of these academic practices? Isn't this the goal of introducing students to concepts such as "discourse community" and "academic audience," so that they may learn a set of skills to produce a tangible product? The merging of these two concepts in this project is a paradoxical

necessity: Highlands College believes in vocational training: hands-on experience with skills they will practice on their first day on the job. Highlands College also believes in academic training: shaping the intellect in ways conducive to any standards of higher education. This merger means that we acknowledge the productive ways that writing meets tangible needs and produces tangible products, but we also appreciate the intangible levels of cognition involved in the writing process. Cognition, metacognition, reflection—all of these efforts elevate the act of writing to a challenging academic mode. And, the merging of these terms allows another concept to be examined for its potential: the possibility of transfer of academic concepts to vocational settings.

If many of these skills can be transferred, transfer activities that ask students to state where and how academic writing tasks may transfer to ministry scenarios would be highly beneficial in this case. After studying transfer, there are many variables to consider. Is it possible to create an intentional method of transfer teaching that is effective in ministry training institutions? I would like to argue yes, that with intentional methodology, transfer is possible. Downs and Wardle's view on transfer aligns with Yancey, Robertson and Taczak's view, that a course specifically designed with transfer in mind will be much more successful than courses that purport to accomplish the same thing but are without a plan to accomplish this purpose. But the proper plans and actions must be pursued, or transfer may be less successful.

To increase the possibility of transfer, material that is useful in several contexts should be prioritized. Because Highlands College students all have the same major, there is a unique opportunity to concentrate on certain genres that will be applicable in their professions and college pursuits. If students view their writing tasks as "unusable" elsewhere, the experience will only be beneficial to them for the short time they are in college. As Robert Ennis states, "we



learn what we use” (25), and if we want to foster longitudinal learning, we should focus on material that is usable for students in the long-run, or strategically present genres or writing tasks in such a way that students make connections for later learning. Our goals are that students should be prepared “...with the analytic skills and rhetorical skills to write clear, convincing arguments, as well as...the fundamental concepts necessary to be able to adapt, change, and add writing skills in new contexts for writing” (Beaufort 2). If this can be accomplished, the ministry writing goals and academic writing goals are mutually beneficial.

Transfer as a concept has been highly debated since the 1980s. Perkins and Salomon define “transfer” in their 1988 *Educational Leadership* article; they state, “Transfer goes beyond ordinary learning in that the skill or knowledge in question has to travel to a new context” (22). They state the vital point that Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak and Downs and Wardle agree with: “transfer does not take care of itself” (Perkins and Salomon 22). Many teachers and instructors may believe that students will automatically understand the connections between their composition goals and other goals, but this is simply not the case.

There are many different types of transfer outlined by transfer scholars. Perkins and Salomon discuss their own model of “low” and “high” transfer. Low transfer is basically when the surrounding context is so familiar or like another context that transfer can occur almost immediately. (Perkins and Salomon 25) It is described as “reflexive and automatic,” and “at the level of superficial stimulus” (25), while high transfer requires the student to purposefully abstract a concept or skill in order for it to be applied elsewhere (Perkins and Salomon 26). Whether high transfer is “forward-reaching” or “backward-reaching,” the student still processes concepts “seeking connections with others” (26). Perkins and Salomon assert that most transfer that happens in general education is low transfer, if it happens at all (27-28). Usually, students

are taught context-specific facts or skills, rather than taught to look for connections in other areas where the surface features may look completely different. Instead of focusing on context-specific knowledge, teachers can systematically use the techniques of “hugging” and “bridging” to encourage their students to abstract the concepts and connect them to other areas. “Hugging,” the low transfer technique, is described as teaching in such a way that students are more able to recognize other contexts where the knowledge will be applicable (Perkins and Salomon 28). Teachers could simply introduce literature, history, or biology as applicable in lived experience, or to current events (28). “Bridging,” or the high transfer technique, is described as “mediat[ing] the needed processes of abstraction and connection making” (Perkins and Salomon 28), or intentionally designing critical thinking questions and activities that ask students to make these abstractions and connections.

If teachers would focus on developing possible sites for transfer, Perkins and Salomon and I agree that there are opportunities for successful transfer. While teachers do ask students to make these kinds of connections, they often do not focus on these concepts systematically enough to for students to develop transfer skills (Perkins and Salomon). Perkins and Salomon state solutions exist in understanding connections between seemingly disparate fields and making those connections in the classroom. Going back and forth between literature and real-life application (30), for example, strengthens the inter-relational and connected nature of certain fields that already exist but may not be apparent to students. Perkins and Salomon focus on transfer in many academic areas, but transfer efforts in composition involve different foci.

In composition, transfer teaching involves high efforts with reflection, which usually covers the student’s own processes, learning, and connections to prior and future learning. Beaufort states that “Tasks must be framed appropriately and *repeatedly*” in order for students to

experience the success with transfer that is desired in any writing course that seeks to expand writing processes and skills to farther-reaching contexts (6, emphasis added). This aligns with Perkins and Salomon that intentionality with transfer efforts is more important than the subject matter itself. In this way, the instructor should function as an expert, as the process and reflection approaches are mainstream views and gives instructors an opportunity to ask students to analyze and synthesize the skills they practiced in their writing tasks.

As instructors, we should recognize that transfer can be both positive and negative, impacting students' ability to re-organize prior knowledge. In a later look at the transfer habits of students, Perkins and Salomon determine that prior knowledge that students have stored from their academic pasts are either "positive transfer (performance improvement) [or] negative transfer (performance interference)" (Perkins and Salomon, qtd. in Robertson et al. 2). Sometimes, when new information is presented, prior knowledge disrupts a student's interpretation or understanding. Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey address this issue of negative interference by outlining three major learning processes that use both positive and negative transfer: "assemblage," "remix," and "critical incident" (Robertson et al. 7-15). Each of these strategies works to turn negative transfer into positive transfer. Assemblage is a knowledge-grafting method that only allows bits, like key terms or new strategies, to be transposed onto existing knowledge that isn't questioned or relinquished (Robertson et al. 7). The Remix method is when a student revises their existing knowledge and incorporates new concepts and applications for future writing endeavors (Robertson et al. 10). Finally, a Critical Incident occurs when a student's efforts fail or largely fail, and the student must completely re-conceptualize their prior knowledge to accept new knowledge, concepts, and changes (Robertson et al. 13).

Considering strategies for high transfer, low transfer, assemblage, remix, critical incidents, problem-exploring dispositions, and positive and negative aspects of transfer, it is clear that even with the most meticulous plan, transfer may still not be successful for every student. Students who do not reflect their process accurately or do not understand the skills involved may not transfer writing concepts. Students may not work to make their learning longitudinal. However, the research that shows the benefits of transfer beyond the classroom is very persuasive. For these reasons, I would like to argue that with intentional methodology in the classroom, transfer should be pursued, even if not wholly successful for every student. Viewing transfer efforts as positive will help instructors to see even small bits of transfer in an assemblage form, or complete remixing of prior knowledge as successful. Examining these modes of transfer will help an instructor to recognize sites of learning in their students and better customize the classroom atmosphere to foster the remixing and transferable integration of knowledge. It also would align with compositional efforts of remixing modes and forms and expanding the view of “text” and form.

Each of these methods outlined by Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey could be facilitated under controlled situations in the classroom. Assemblage activities could be created so that students are asked to apply new terms and strategies to known strategies. Students may be asked to Remix their existing knowledge for a very different situation. Both of these activities should be well within the student’s abilities, but specifically designed to accomplish the Assemblage or Remix methods. The Critical Incident method may actually be more successful in a controlled exercise, as it gives students the chance to fail without the negative repercussions that would typically take place after such an incident. Students that fail a task may not view their failings as positively as Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey do. They may not be able to see the value in their

failure or recuperate from the failure. It may impact their view of the discipline or instructor or damage their motivation to learn. A Critical Incident is only useful if students are successful in re-conceptualizing past knowledge. Exercises in failing that are presented as low-stakes free the students to fail in a safer (admittedly not totally safe) environment. Those students who succeed at the difficult task of re-conceptualizing knowledge should retain long-term gains, as well as an exercise in flexibility in learning. These schemas display some options for teaching transfer, learning to recognize transfer, and how to manipulate learning objectives to ensure that both high and low transfer is successful, in addition to recognizing the impacts of positive and negative transfer.

I agree that as evinced by the above objectives, “understand[ing] [that] each writer (and each writing task) develops uniquely” is a core principle that students of all majors will use for the rest of their writing lives. Transfer happens when course goals are understood, communicated, and repeated extensively. As an instructor, I have learned that printing objectives in a course syllabus, displaying them on course assignments, and even stating them at the beginning of every class does not guarantee that students will understand the core objectives driving the course and how to apply them. Clearly articulating objectives and curricular goals is not enough—although it should be done extensively. Instructors should encourage students to make their own connections of classroom efforts to curricular emphases using active discussion, writing assignments, and personal reflections on the application of curricular goals to class activities and connections to other writing endeavors. Without this intentionality, explicitly stating curricular goals is only one step in the right direction. Student understanding of big-picture concepts will aid the positive transfer results that should be pursued in the writing classroom. This will take intentional pedagogy that keeps transfer in mind.

One of the most poignant pedagogical models that hold implications for transfer comes from Downs and Wardle's "Intro to Writing Studies." They argue that first-year writing efforts often are less effective in teaching students the writing skills they need, but also undermine the field of composition and demean the qualification of composition instructors (Downs & Wardle 553). They claim this is caused by attempting to cover all university writing skills in two semesters (or less in some cases), and by allowing composition instructors to teach outside their field of expertise by incorporating varied course themes into the curriculum (Downs and Wardle 553). Downs and Wardle argue that intentionally designing first-year writing pedagogy to reflect writing studies rather than other forms of literature has many benefits: they claim it purposefully develops concepts that will "far transfer": self-reflection on writing, explicit abstraction of principles, and alertness to one's context (Downs and Wardle 576). The course proposed by Downs and Wardle develops student awareness of the writing discipline, writing strategies, and independent critical thinking. Downs and Wardle's pedagogy argues for the instructor's mastery of course content and readership of the paper topics assigned in that course. They agree with James Reither's assertion "that writing cannot be taught independent of content" (559). Assigning an open topic, so that the student can write about "intelligent design," "capital punishment" or other topics, creates a nearly impossible scenario for the instructor to be appropriately knowledgeable on every topic for his or her students (Downs and Wardle 559). This eliminates an asset in the course for the students, as they rely on their instructor to provide aid when they require an expert or are seeking research help. Personal experience with the plethora of student-chosen topics in my own writing courses only strengthens Downs and Wardle's argument that "writing instructors should be expert readers" (559); without this

expertise, the instructor cannot offer the assistance most students need to develop their research or writing further.

In response to Downs and Wardle, I would like to point out some benefits and necessities to recognizing a knowledge base outside of only writing and writing studies. In the case of a religious institution, only the religious studies professors may hold terminal or graduate-level degrees in religious fields. However, when an instructor is employed in such a space, in seeking to understand students' beliefs and worldviews, one should be expected to develop a basic reading knowledge that will aid students in writing on religious topics. As previously stated (Ch. 2), religious discussions in a religious space are expected. Instead of opening up the course theme to "any" paper topic, or a wide assortment of possibilities, a composition course in a Christian institution should focus first on writing but should also include a critical engagement of Christian worldview. However, the instructor should create boundaries for research. If students wish to engage in writing about their Christian worldview, the topics should also be restricted to some extent to subjects the instructor is knowledgeable in. They should be consistent with the course theme, which does have benefits.

In disagreement to Downs and Wardle, there are transfer and knowledge benefits to a unified course theme *as long as it is actually unified*. The goal of cultivating critical consciousness and teaching students to become active thinkers is most relevant when partnered with a unified course theme. Beaufort also states that the course theme does not limit the success of high transfer. "Teaching for transfer can be accomplished if appropriate strategies are used, no matter what the course's subject matter" (Beaufort 4). I agree with Beaufort that when there is more than one major theme in a course, students are not exposed to a significant amount of subject matter knowledge, which leads to uninformed and unimportant writing (Beaufort 4).

Downs and Wardle call for an emphasis on subject matter that is relevant to the instructor's expertise. Beaufort does not seem to share this view, but states that "writing skills can be developed through multiple possible course themes as long as the course is structured around sustained inquiry into a subject that has both breadth and relevance to the age range of students in the course" (Beaufort 5). I agree that if the readings of the course are unified and are structured to give students the necessary background knowledge, then the instructor has the opportunity to increase their own knowledge on a limited set of topics and therefore maintain their "expert" role. If students are not well-informed on the topic by the end of the course, then this will be an indication to change the reading selections to more successfully equip the readers. In the Highlands College setting, an intentional course theme can equip students to write and engage in critical thinking in matters directly pertinent to their futures, which increases longitudinal learning. Again, if the instructor limits the topics and discussion to those that he/she is knowledgeable on, the instructor can balance the needs of cultivating worldview and can also function as an expert.

### **Critical Thinking: Risks and Perception and Ennis's Model**

Another tool that is instrumental for transfer success is critical thinking. If students are going to critically engage at the level described in Chapter Two, grounding transfer efforts in critical thinking may also increase success. John Dewey (cited by Robert Ennis), states this definition of critical thinking: "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (1933, p. 9 (first edition, 1910)). When students apply concepts to new situations and engage in reflection, they are using critical thinking skills. Pragmatic exercises asking students to apply certain beliefs to different scenarios and asking them to write a



reflection considering the implications those beliefs hold for actions fit in with Dewey's schema, which is why pragmatism as a teaching framework is beneficial in this context. Again, intentionally chosen pragmatically-focused in-class questions, prompts, and assignments will foster both transfer and critical thinking development.

Before discussing critical thinking as a crucial aspect of the composition course, I should address the context of this institution specifically. There are different attitudes and perceptions of the intellectual exercise of "critical thinking" to a religious person, and we should acknowledge the risks involved. Asking the Christian person to engage in critical thinking is asking them to take a risk for which the consequences are completely unknown. When a Christian uses a critical lens of inquiry, they are putting their faith, experiences, and knowledge to the test of truth: do these things reconcile? Can they be reconciled?

Either the truth that they seek is amenable to their faith, and by questioning they receive fuller answers that supplement and strengthen their faith, or, the person interprets knowledge as incompatible with their current understandings of their faith. This is where their personal risk is involved, and this also begins one of several options. The first option involves a process of denial of that knowledge, (faith has overruled it, essentially) and this action, therefore, neglects any truths which the critical engagement could have revealed. The second involves an adjustment of faith, or a re-interpretation of faith which allows room for the interpretation of the knowledge acquired. This means that the person's faith is changed, that they no longer believe the same things in the same way. This is a healthy, though difficult, level of dialogue between religious belief and experiential observance, a pragmatic view of deepening belief. This healthy level requires immense flexibility and courage. The person must be flexible enough to acknowledge the subtleties of faith and reality and also be courageous enough to pursue the fine-

tuned existence of deep belief. Another option, a high-risk option, is that the person rejects their faith as a source of knowledge at all and accepts the new knowledge as the only source of their truth. This truth is limited, excluding any beneficial aspects that faith may have offered. It also opens a person of faith to the emotional consequences of leaving their faith and their faith community. Critical engagement offers specific challenges that others may not experience, at least in the same ways.

If a Christian person limits their faith only to the level of critical thinking that is “safe,” or the level at which they are sure will not change their beliefs or the scope of those beliefs, or to the level that they are sure their uncomfortableness with that knowledge will be resolved, they are attempting to avoid these risks to their identity, belief, self-hood, and community membership. It seems understandable as to why Christian people may act aversely to engaging with critical inquiry. Reconciling these forces, for a person of faith, means an understanding of one’s definition of epistemology: personal experience and individual perspective of the limits of knowledge and the limits of faith have to work together in flexible ways or the person will either have to abide by one or the other, severely limiting that person’s access to truth. This is a difficult endeavor, especially considering the education typically required to understand these concepts.

Embracing a healthy mode of critical thinking requires a Christian person to reach new depths in their interpretations of beliefs and experience, searching for answers perhaps for a lifetime. A believing or non-believing person has questions that have not and perhaps never can be answered: both of these groups must learn to be comfortable with a certain level of uncertainty based on their choice of worldview. Believing or non-believing, this is common to both groups, that there are answers that are not available to us, and with the discovery of new

knowledge often comes the un-answerability of new questions. With these considerations in mind, it is logical and plausible as to why a Christian may feel averse to engaging with certain modes of scholarly critical exercise.

Robert Ennis's model is one to consider for these curricula since it includes a non-threatening process of critical thinking that encourages Christian students to embrace a healthy view of critical inquiry and aid them in taking on these risks. Ennis's model also uses pragmatic methods of investigation and focuses on incorporating critical thinking as a focus of transfer. Ennis creates a curriculum in which critical thinking development is the core of the student's educational experience. The goal of critical thinking as articulated by Ennis's Wisdom CTAC program is to apply critical thinking to everyday life (33). Applying critical thinking to everyday life, or to explore life experience more fully, fits well with a pragmatic approach to teaching critical thinking, and may give Christians a familiar base on which to build their critical thinking skills. Ennis's model echoes similar values and should be beneficial in this context.

Ennis says that there are four underlying principles of teaching methods that include "engaging in interaction/involvement, using multiple varied examples, teaching for transfer, and making critical thinking principles and criteria explicit" (28). Ennis adds his own definition of critical thinking as "reasonable reflecting thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do" (31). Ennis echoes the theory of pragmatism in his addition of action—"doing"—based on the understanding that actions are based on beliefs. He follows the lines of Dewey, Gerald Nosich, and Harvey Siegel who state that decisions on actions are based on reason and lines of thought (31). This is one of the main goals of incorporating critical thinking into a ministry student's curricula: without critically examining one's beliefs and the actions that should follow, one could be following faulty reasoning or misinterpretations of beliefs that could lead to actions that

poorly reflect or completely misdirect the truth the student believes in. It should be the responsibility of instructors who take on the challenge of teaching worldview to teach students the critical thinking skills they will need to examine their actions to see if they coincide with the beliefs that they hold.

Ennis offers several “fundamental strategies” for consideration in implementing a critical thinking model into the classroom. Several of these aspects could be incorporated into the Highlands College curricula as they agree with the transfer principles outlined above and also support the students’ interrogations of their own beliefs and serious consideration of the worldview of others. Ennis encourages instructors to develop a definition of critical thinking and any other terms that would be used. I also think that developing and using these terms consistently throughout the course will aid student understanding of the terms and their application (as this is echoed in Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey). Ennis encourages application of critical thinking strategies to realistic examples, asking “why” or asking questions for which there is no answer (or for which you do not have an answer), and an emphasis on being open-minded as a few of the critical components. He also encourages explicit instruction of transfer and critical thinking endeavors (or what he terms “infusion” rather than “immersion”) to ensure higher rates of transfer and critical thinking retention. (Ennis 44) He acknowledges that critical thinking skills will replace time spent on mastering subject matter but encourages the instructor to think of critical thinking as a deepening strategy for remembrance and mastery of subject matter. Ennis urges that subject matter and critical thinking skills can grow together simultaneously, rather than as separate skill sets (44). Finally, Ennis encourages using writing, peer-editing, and revising as critical thinking strategies. He maintains that critical thinkers are able to articulate their positions clearly and can understand the weaknesses in their own positions

(44). Using peer feedback on written position statements, for example, gives students the opportunity to test the clarity in their own position statements but also evaluate the statements of others and provide feedback. Ennis's suggestions pertain to a composition-based critical thinking course and would add to the Highlands College curriculum. The curriculum will benefit from these critical thinking connections to relevant areas and aid in the efforts for far transfer.

These principles will aid in the most successful high, far-reaching, transfer possible. Highlands College students will benefit from the critical thinking tasks that transfer efforts require. Although there are endless discussions one could draw from the interviews included in this chapter, transfer is one of the most pertinent considering the uniformity of majors present at this institution and the worldview development required by the ABHE. Finally, by intentional planning, an instructor can learn to use these methods and grow in their ability to recognize sites of positive, negative, and potential transfer. If transfer can be tapped, the knowledge retained by students could drastically increase, as well as the partnership of vocational and scholarly writing development.

### **Using These Discussions to Move Forward**

Ministerial perspectives on writing will benefit and enhance the curriculum for Highlands College. Many writing opinions certainly were expected, like the desire for students to achieve correct spelling, grammar, and formatting, but many insights were unexpected, like the belief that writing is a process that can be cultivated through practice, and the belief that certain "everyday" genres have the potential to be an art form. One of the most prevalent writing genres was email and the interviewees overwhelmingly communicated the importance of clear email writing. For that reason, email deserves a closer look in a ministry-writing curriculum. The skills discussed and the expectations were also very clear and applicable to composition goals.

There were also a number of genres mentioned that might be considered for academic purposes that could also be relevant for ministry students. After holding these interviews, it seems that both academic and ministry concerns should be addressed in the Highlands College curricula and that professional genres may be productive in meeting academic goals of transfer.

Many examples of ministry writing included very transferable communication skills: heavy collaboration (as discussed above in curriculum development), multi-modal engagement (working on creative teams designing videos or movies), and the importance of examination of different worldviews. The curricula proposed in this project have incorporated these in the Ministry Writing course Assignment #2 and the Writing Worldviews Course (see Chapter Five). Professional genres, such as email practice, have been included as well due to the ubiquity described by the ministry professionals in this chapter.

In Chapter Five, I will be applying what I believe to be the most beneficial recommendations from Chapters Three and Four and integrating all standards required by the ABHE and Highlands College. Considering the theoretical views of Christianity in the composition classroom, the views of academics from other Christian colleges, and the views of ministry professionals on writing, the curricula for the first-year writing program at Highlands College can incorporate balance in all of these areas to equip students in the most beneficial ways possible.

## **CHAPTER 5: A PEDAGOGICAL OVERVIEW AND FIRST-YEAR WRITING CURRICULA FOR HIGHLANDS COLLEGE**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will focus on curricular decisions including texts, assignments, and pedagogical goals that include the perspectives and information incorporated in Chapters 1-4. As Erika Lindemann states, “Before we can design a writing course...we must determine, at least provincially, who our students are and what our goals will be” (Lindemann 261). Chapters One and Two specifically discuss who Highlands College students are, the standards of Highlands College and the ABHE, and the argument for integrating a spiritual component/Christian faith into a composition classroom. Chapter Three offers insight into other faith-based institutions’ composition programs and an overview of Christian ethics in composition. Chapter Four describes writing expectations from ministry professionals as well as how we can work to transfer writings skills across contexts. These chapters provide information to determine the most suitable first-year writing curricula for Highlands College. Chapter Five will outline the pedagogical goals and final curricular decisions for this project. Hopefully, with these considerations in mind, the curricula will be productive and fruitful for the first-year writing program at Highlands College.

Chapter Five states the pedagogy goals for the Highlands College site as well as a proposal for the first-year writing sequence. It includes a brief discussion on pedagogical choices and states how these pedagogical goals would be applied at this specific site. I then

describe the course philosophy and the beliefs implied by these pedagogical and curricular choices.

Chapter Five then presents four courses, two 101 course options and two 102 course options for the first-year writing sequence. The 101 courses are titled “Writing about Writing” and “Writing and Ministry;” the 102 courses are titled, “Writing Worldviews” and “Christianity and Culture.” The different options give instructors a choice on which assignments and objectives they feel the most comfortable pursuing within their knowledge base.

I then present the objectives for each of these courses and describe a common assignment to all four courses: journal entries targeting transfer efforts and key concepts. I then go into a synopsis of each course, how the instructor might choose a theme, how the course is scaffolded, and the assignments for each course. I include student instructions and then a rationale for each assignment. (The instructions are intended a guide more than strict law.) Some assignments are repeated in the 101 or 102 options, since students would not be taking both versions of the 101 or 102 courses.

I end the chapter with other curricular decisions, including discussions regarding how I would recommend teaching grammar, what readings might be appropriate per the course themes, and what kind of placement and evaluations I would recommend for Highlands College.

### **Pedagogy Goals for Highlands College**

Among many pedagogical models, there are several that would be beneficial for students of Highlands College and would work to incorporate the goals outlined in Chapters One and Two. Constructivist, transformative, and critical spiritual pedagogies may be productive pedagogical models to engage. By incorporating pieces of each of these pedagogies and by partnering these with the cultural values articulated by Highlands College, composition



instructors at Highlands College can successfully impart knowledge through informed and thoughtful pedagogical efforts. The best pedagogical practices for this context are those that align with the culture that Highlands College promotes.

**Pedagogy Goal #1: Instructors should work to embrace student spirituality alongside physical, mental, and emotional elements as facets of learning identity.**

Since the culture at Highlands College is spiritually driven, the application of Critical Spiritual pedagogy is especially relevant for building the pedagogical model at Highlands College. Ryoo, Crawford, Moreno, and McLaren's article, "Critical Spiritual Pedagogy: reclaiming humanity through a pedagogy of integrity, community, and love" coined the term "critical spiritual pedagogy" in 2009. Through this article, Ryoo et al. argue for the importance of critical awareness partnered with the humanization of students. Their premise is that students are more fully known and developed, or humanized, when educators can address them as individuals complete with physical, mental, educational, and spiritual elements (Ryoo et al.). Although Ryoo et al. argue for the critical use of this pedagogy as a means for Othered, non-dominant, or otherwise marginalized students to achieve validity, I would like to argue for the wider significance of the term to any student, regardless of their non-dominant, Othered, or marginalized status, at Highlands College.

In using the term "critical spiritual pedagogy," I echo Elizabeth Ellsworth's avoidance of "colluding with many academic writers in the widespread use of code words such as 'critical'" (300), but I do this for a very different reason than Ellsworth. My own application of the term "critical" in this context requires certain parameters. If instructors are posing themselves as "anti" groups of people in an attempt to spark social change, we should acknowledge that there are repercussions for these rhetorical choices, beginning with the polarizing effect of this word

“anti.”<sup>21</sup> To embrace the anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-elitist, anti-heterosexual, anti-classist, etc., mindset typically implied by the term “critical” would work against the humanization goals of humility described earlier in this project (Ch.3). While critical pedagogy may have noble goals, and obviously there are systems and actions in our society that need to be changed, in a classroom in which I hold the most authority, my promotion of a certain political agenda that seeks to create such a stance against so many groups of people actively works against my personal and ethical beliefs. Incorporating humility in pedagogy means separating actions from the people who commit them, at least to the point of “granting others dignity” (Bridgett): people deserve respect no matter their shortcomings or beliefs. I believe that posing myself as “anti” can be perceived by students as an attack when I hold the authority in the room and understand that students may not grasp the implications of critical pedagogy. I also understand that one of the main goals of critical pedagogy is to allow voices oppressed by the dominant discourses in society (and Christianity has been a “dominant discourse”) to have an equal place. And this is where I would argue that a thoughtful and informed Christian instructor understands the perversion of certain Christian efforts to silence others. I would argue that rather, this is not the goal of the New Testament, seeking to silence and destroy those who oppose the message, but rather an insecure and harmful interpretation of how to treat others. If I have a \_\_\_\_\_ student (a member of a dominant group, for instance) in my class, if I pose myself directly against him/her, how effective will I be in influencing their worldview? Have my actions supported a dialogic model or dialogic pedagogy? Perhaps I disagree strongly with their beliefs; but this desire is different from openly working against the foundations of his worldview while

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<sup>21</sup> I believe rhetorical choices like these are partly to blame for the current hostile and divided attitudes in the United States presently regarding this educational agenda.

he is in my classroom. That pedagogical choice is combative: my goal is to educate, and not combat my students. When we choose such strong language and methods to be “anti,” we lose our influence. These choices pit the instructor against certain students and also pits certain students against other students. Unity is a better goal and should be approached differently. Again, to go to a Christian principle, for the simple fact that Christianity asks me to love my enemy, which in essence means that overtly being “anti” any group, regardless of their dominant status in society or my own personal disagreement with that group, goes against that belief. As Kennedy and Grinter state, “Loving the ‘other’ is the ethic that Jesus teaches.” (47) We should not dissolve “the other” for the sake of creating a different “other” because our combative methods leave no space for a better alternative. My use of the term “critical spiritual pedagogy” is more about using love as a vehicle to respect and understand, which encourages listening to a view we completely disagree with (such as elitist or racist views) since this is the method I am recommending for pedagogical transformation for Christian students. Everyone, in their personhood, deserves this basic level of respect. Elizabeth Ellsworth points out the fact that instructors often use public classrooms for a cause they believe is for the public good: “...they are in fact seeking to appropriate public resources (classrooms, school supplies, teacher/professor salaries, academic requirements and degrees) to further various “progressive” political agendas that they believe to be for the public good — and therefore deserving of public resources” (301). The issue with the perspective that Ellsworth points out is that I do not feel it is my call to determine what is for the “public good:” such a claim thrusts me into a realm of authority that I am not equipped to function in productively. In a Christian space, a private institution as is Highlands College, the overt promotion of a Christian worldview is what I am being asked and paid to do: those attending the college actively support these efforts. But to choose a political

stance would alienate one group or another from their educational resources; this crosses a line of appropriateness that hinders the educational atmosphere.

Students of Highlands College have chosen an education that recognizes the spiritual aspect of their identity. Although Ryoo et al. do not connect their pedagogy to a specific religion, I would like to apply the term to Christianity specifically and extend the applications to the cultural components outlined by Highlands College. Critical spiritual pedagogy encourages students to question their existing view of the world and the hegemonies that make up their experience while connecting to the spiritual elements of their identity. As Ryoo et al. state, “Although there is a great deal of debate around the founders, terminology, and implementation of critical pedagogy, critical pedagogues are united by their commitment to social transformation for the collective good” (134). This basic definition of critical pedagogy aligns with the goals outlined in Chapter Two: for students to examine their experiences and beliefs to better understand how to interpret the world around them and interact with views different than their own. As part of the pedagogical goal of this project, Highlands college students are expected to leave the institution with a different interpretation of their beliefs (this is what I mean by “critical”) and a relevant and committed goal to work for the good of those around them. The move towards action and social change in this context would be concentrated around the effort to re-define church culture to admit the church’s weaknesses, acknowledge the view of the church that those outside of the church hold, and listen to why these views were formed. If Christian students are working towards initiating a dialogue with others with the intent to rebuild church culture, it aligns with the literal definition of critical pedagogy as one of using education to ignite social change; in this instance, the social change is not political in nature, but rather one of religious culture within the Christian church.

**Pedagogy Goal #2: Instructors should work to sharpen students’ critical capabilities and increase relevance and authenticity in the student learning experience.**

Pedagogy should incorporate educational components that strive to be authentic. For my purposes, “authentic” simply means engaging with more truthful education.<sup>22</sup> It means that we have realistic views and goals for ourselves as instructors and we have realistic views and goals for our students. Choosing to be authentic is another ethical choice: a distinct pedagogical decision. It means we pursue the best methods we know of honestly and genuinely, accepting our failings as human and normal while still striving to meet the best possible informed pedagogical choices. This application of authenticity implies an opportunity to be genuinely present in academic ways. When pedagogy and curricula strive to be authentic, students can forge connections between their efforts in the classroom and the impact it has on their lives as learners, thinkers, students, people of faith, and citizens. Authenticity allows instructors to embrace a genuineness with their students, which frees them to humanize and be humanized themselves. A lack of authenticity lends itself to a banking model of education, pretense, and a lack of dialogue and understanding of student experience. Instructors should strive to teach, learn, and be authentic in their learning while encouraging their students to be as active in their own education. Authentic expectations meet students where they are and do not expect concept mastery but rather a step towards concept mastery.

Often, we forget as instructors that the conceptual understandings we have of certain genres took many different exposures and workings to develop fully. Expecting our students to grapple with their writing and genres is a reasonable expectation; to expect them to master them is not. Rather than expecting a first-year student to become an expert writer, I agree with

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<sup>22</sup> I am not intending to engage a metaphysical or epistemological discussion of authenticity, but rather use the term simply as an expression of “real-ness,” or “being real” with students and ourselves.

Sommers and Saltz and Downs and Wardle's assertions that it is important to allow students the time and space to be novices, as this results in richer, more mature writing growth. This enables the students an authentic space in which to learn. Downs and Wardle's "Intro to Writing Studies" model does not purport to "teach students to write" in two short courses, but rather expose them to the science and study of writing. I agree with Downs and Wardle that this goal (rather than attempting to master several academic genres) is much more attainable in the scope of a first-year writing sequence. The "Intro" course philosophy allows students to be what they are, novice writers, and embraces the authenticity values encouraged by the college.

Relevance, or components that are personalized, specific to a student's academic or professional goals, is an important pedagogical goal for Highlands College. A relevant pedagogy allows students to work with real-world tasks. These tasks should be rich, providing complex questions and answers to be investigated. These tasks might include experiential components, allowing students to use their experience, current questions or plans in their academic pursuits. Agreeing with Yancey et al., just as imperative as student interest is "relevance to their own lives." Yancey et al. discusses using texts to teach the rhetorical situation and audience, but also direct connections to issues occurring today (144). This pedagogical goal works in several areas to increase student interest, transfer, and retention; it also satisfies the expectations of Christian institutions to incorporate worldview discussions.

**Pedagogy Goal #3: Active student involvement increases the enjoyment of student learning and promotes better long-term retention and transfer.**

Enjoyment for students is not only connected to the relevance and authenticity students perceive in their academic efforts, but also the role they play in their learning.<sup>23</sup> Active learning

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<sup>23</sup> I am not arguing that these qualities will guarantee student enjoyment of the course. But I am arguing that purposeful authenticity and relevance in assignments will increase the likelihood of

should be employed in every situation possible. Collaboration, dialogue, the integration of technology, experiments, question-driven, and reflective exercises should increase student participation and also the enjoyment of learning. When students are more actively involved in their learning, in dialogic, group work models, or inquiry-based methods, students can engage their own process of learning. Active classrooms where students engage as teachers and peers cultivate the necessity of each student's voice; when students feel necessary or vital to an atmosphere, it increases their willingness to invest in that atmosphere. These active engagements increase the possibility of transfer. Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak call for more intentional reflective efforts, or focusing on "big picture thinking," as discussed in Chapter One (Yancey et al. 4). Contrast this with the banking model of knowledge transfer, and there is a significant difference between sitting idly at a desk taking in information and being an active participant in the discussion of and creation of knowledge.

Part of enjoyment in the classroom is the regular practice of acceptance. For Highlands College, instructors should embrace acceptance toward radically different views and encourage their students to practice acceptance of classmates during collaborative work, discussions, or dialogues. Acceptance should also take place in the relationship between instructor and student. When the instructor respects the student, the student is then free to ask questions, explore material, and exchange dialogue with the security of knowing that the instructor is not going to "attack" or otherwise act antagonistically. Acceptance in pedagogy is one that seeks to empower, rather than tear down, and encourage and equip rather than criticize. The instructor revitalizes students, learning, and their classrooms by offering their energy, passion, intellection,

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enjoyment versus if students do not see connections in their current work and benefits to themselves as people and professionals.

and emotion to support the students' intellectual growth. Ultimately, this classroom equips students to succeed in areas where they previously were not equipped to do so: it transforms students by preparing them in more holistic ways and by challenging them in ways they have not yet been challenged. It meets the student where they are and encourages them to take steps forward, without judgment.

**Pedagogy Goal #4: Transformative pedagogy offers the result that Highlands College students seek: to create agency and motion towards Christian church culture**

Transformative pedagogy, applied in this case, is not a political agenda, but a personal re-working towards a fuller comprehension of self and belief and the transformation of how the world views the Church and how the Church interacts with the world. Transformative pedagogy is intertwined with the pragmatic approach outlined in Chapter Two of this project, which encourages students to re-think beliefs for their “cash value” (James) and develop a new sense of self through these efforts. Transformative pedagogy embraces the challenges that create transformation. When we appreciate other perspectives, we open our minds to others and can then learn new habits of mind. These new habits of mind allow us to change our beliefs, and in accordance with James's philosophy, ultimately act in new ways. Instead of the banking model of education, there are ultimate goals of community/outside engagement and personal change through the use of the critical and transformative pedagogy models.

One of the main goals of transformative pedagogy is exploring our own and other points of view so that by building a knowledge base and critical consciousness, students develop agency. This agency includes the fine-tuning of one's viewpoints (through the pragmatic method), understanding one's beliefs in relation to others, and then working to revolutionize Christian church culture. Ryoo et al. argue that by incorporating the spiritual element into



pedagogy, students can achieve a greater critical consciousness and achieve greater agency, thereby accomplishing transformation:

Spirituality in transformative education can counteract Othering by being the driving force to build community. Spirituality helps give students a greater consciousness of the world beyond themselves and creates that connection between self and community such that one can ‘destroy the self/other dichotomy, rendering the self as not autonomous but connecting to a larger collective. (Ryoo et al. 139)

The reflection fostered by both pragmatism and transformative pedagogy provides the insight necessary to understand the world in new ways and the potential to work within it for change. Since Highlands College seeks to transform students into leaders that mold the landscape of church culture, a transformation is mandatory. Students themselves should be asked to undergo change as well as develop action plans that make them better students, employees, and citizens regardless of their vocational positions. Transformational pedagogy encourages students to pursue action steps after building their reflective base knowledge; this is the heart of authentic learning that is also relevant to future endeavors.

**Pedagogy Goal #5: Instructors should strive for teaching excellence and regular curricular revision**

Highlands College encourages striving for excellence as a core value. Executing pedagogy with excellence challenges the instructor to embrace a high standard in all teaching endeavors. Excellence means that one pushes oneself beyond previously known limits and seeks to excel beyond prior efforts. Instructors understand that excellence does not mean perfection, on the contrary, part of excellence is knowing to expect mistakes. Mistakes often can open doors to excellence in learning; instructors should capitalize on these “teaching moments” to ensure that students do not define excellence as a specific grade, but rather as a work ethic and attitude toward challenges presented to them, academic or otherwise.

Lastly, a strong pedagogy is revisable. While pedagogy should be planned and practiced, it should also readily be reflected upon, evaluated, and ultimately improved. Pedagogy should adapt to the needs of the student and should allow for enough flexibility to meet the most current need. Purposeful pedagogy meticulously considers the hurdles students may encounter as well as possible solutions to those hurdles beforehand. A strong pedagogy evaluates topics, assignments, activities, and other educational endeavors for shortcomings and effectiveness with desired outcomes. Reflection is a pivotal part of purposeful pedagogy, which allows pedagogy to shift to accommodate students in more effective ways.

### **Course Philosophy/ Curriculum Rationale: What can We Learn About Teaching Writing by Using This Curriculum Design?**

The writing courses proposed below ultimately seek to develop an understanding in each student of composition and writing principles, a transferable writing and research process, transferable critical thinking skills, active engagement with the modern world through peers, media, and historical accounts, and a deeper understanding of self and identity. Each course has similar goals related to the field of composition: learning research skills, developing critical thinking and rhetorical skills, cultivating personal writing processes, growing in the knowledge of conventions, applying correct grammar in context, and pursuit of useful metacognition to produce a more aware writer in terms of writing and self. The courses also seek to equip students to understand their writing better, the writing process, the research process, conventions and rhetorical awareness of context, purpose, and audience.

A focus on audience is also a major point of focus for many of the assignments. Appeal to an audience is more important than ever in a heated political and religious environment; students training for vocational ministry must learn to be aware and sensitive of their audiences

of both Christians and non-Christians. Even when addressing those who profess Christianity as their own, there is still a wide span of perspectives and opinions, not to mention generational tastes. (What an elderly person might expect from communication versus a teenager, for example.) The writing goals of this course seek to push students into deeper intellection of their own beliefs and the practical implications of their beliefs, the beliefs of others, an awareness of the cultural and social contexts in which they live, and the larger narrative involving them as members of a community and locating themselves in that narrative. Some writing pieces incorporate community engagement by asking students to interview professionals in the religious Christian community, other working ministry professionals, and those with different worldviews.

Since the ABHE and Highlands College both require integration of a biblical worldview and integration of the Bible in their course goals, this philosophy reflects this requirement in the assignment topics and research options. Although the Bible may be used as a secondary text, the goal is to keep writing as the focus of the course while still allowing students to engage in biblical worldview discussions.

This course model argues that certain vocational genres offer fruitful learning opportunities that should not be neglected in a ministry-training composition course. Communication through writing is more prevalent in the workplace than ever before due to technology, and students should be prepared to compose in these written forms in more clear and precise ways. For example, emails, although not traditionally seen as academic, offer students the opportunity to focus on brevity, clarity, tone, audience awareness, and persuasion as compositional goals. The other genres chosen include interviews, essays, a multi-modal assignment, evaluations, journal writing, and others.

The courses seek to equip students for far-reaching transfer of their writing skills in different situations through the use of targeted shorter assignments. These assignments will ask the student to engage in metacognition to identify their writing and research process and think creatively about how to transfer these processes successfully in other writing scenarios.

Each course also focuses on a slightly different theme, emphasized with reading selections, class discussions, and activities (which are left to the discretion of the instructor). I believe these themes will produce writers who consider audiences more carefully and thoroughly, research skills that are grounded in relevancy for their future careers, and an understanding of personal beliefs and how those beliefs impact other people. I also believe these themes are well within the reach of a composition professional, not requiring a Bible or religious studies degree. This curriculum design argues for the integration of religion in writing because it allows students to use personal beliefs as fuel to further intellectual discovery. These courses include academic, occupational, and faith-based writing tasks in an effort to cultivate transferable critical thinking, writing, and research skills. These courses acknowledge that personal investigation yields well-adjusted and more open-minded individuals, willing to consider different worldviews and interact productively with individuals who believe differently from them. I believe this training will prepare students for future ministry writing in which believing and unbelieving audiences will be addressed in many different writing scenarios. The partnership of writing and religion in these courses seeks to grow academic and vocational writing ability.

### **Course Format and Objectives**

The basic layout of the courses includes four major written assignments per sixteen-week semester. There are two 101 course options and two 102 course options. All four courses should

include six to eight smaller written assignments that can be completed in class, electronically, or in journal form, which has been left up to the discretion of the instructor. The purpose of these assignments is to create “far-reaching” transfer, enhance retention, and articulate overt process steps. These short assignments should “bridge the gap” between the assignment and applying skills in other contexts.

### Course Objectives

Below are the course titles and objectives for the 101 and 102 course options.

Table 2

Composition 101 and 102 Course Objectives

<b>Writing About Writing (101)</b>	<b>Writing and Ministry (101)</b>	<b>Writing Worldviews (102)</b>	<b>Christianity and Culture (102)</b>
<b>Objectives:</b> To identify personal writing assumptions, approaches, and techniques when approaching a writing task	<b>Objectives:</b> To develop vocational and academic writing skills	<b>Objectives:</b> To cultivate an awareness of personal worldview and a sensitivity to other worldviews	<b>Objectives:</b> To cultivate an awareness of personal worldview and a sensitivity to other worldviews
To create a transferable writing and research process that can be applied in multiple writing scenarios	To identify personal writing assumptions, approaches, and techniques when approaching a writing task	To engage with the local community	To engage with the local community
To cultivate awareness of effective rhetorical methods including audience, context, and purpose	To cultivate awareness of effective rhetorical methods including audience, context, and purpose	To cultivate awareness of effective rhetorical methods including audience, context, and purpose	To engage the cultural narratives surrounding Christianity and locate self within that narrative
To apply formatting principles of MLA and use library research tools to locate, evaluate, and integrate	To create transferable writing and research processes that can be applied in multiple writing scenarios	To use various rhetorical strategies including critical and creative thinking to understand and evaluate multiple	To cultivate awareness of effective rhetorical methods including audience, context, and purpose

<b>Writing About Writing (101)</b>	<b>Writing and Ministry (101)</b>	<b>Writing Worldviews (102)</b>	<b>Christianity and Culture (102)</b>
authoritative sources into writing		perspectives on complex issues and articulate a position in relation to these views	
To use various rhetorical strategies including critical and creative thinking to understand and evaluate multiple perspectives on complex issues	To formulate and defend a position/argument using a clear, concise thesis that focuses the document, a logical organizational structure, unified and coherent paragraphs, and grammatically correct prose	To further understand your own writing and research processes	To use various rhetorical strategies including critical and creative thinking to understand and evaluate multiple perspectives on complex issues and articulate a position in relation to these views
To formulate and defend a position/argument using a clear, concise thesis that focuses the document, a logical organizational structure, unified and coherent paragraphs, and grammatically correct prose	To apply formatting principles of MLA and use library research tools to locate, evaluate, and integrate authoritative sources into writing	To apply formatting principles of MLA and use library research tools to locate, evaluate, and integrate authoritative sources into writing	To further understand your own writing and research processes
To access, critically examine and understand belief/faith in an academic setting	To access, critically examine and understand belief/faith in an academic setting	To access, critically examine and understand belief/faith in an academic setting	To apply formatting principles of MLA and use library research tools to locate, evaluate, and integrate authoritative sources into writing

<b>Writing About Writing (101)</b>	<b>Writing and Ministry (101)</b>	<b>Writing Worldviews (102)</b>	<b>Christianity and Culture (102)</b>
		To formulate and defend a position/argument using a clear, concise thesis that focuses the document, a logical organizational structure, unified and coherent paragraphs, and grammatically correct prose	To access, critically examine and understand belief/faith in an academic setting
			To formulate and defend a position/argument using a clear, concise thesis that focuses the document, a logical organizational structure, unified and coherent paragraphs, and grammatically correct prose
<b>Assignments:</b> 1) Interview with a Ministry Professional 2) Professional Portfolio 3) Group Academic Journal 4) Writing Processes Essay	<b>Assignments:</b> 1) Interview with a Ministry Professional 2) Professional Portfolio 3) Multi-modal Evaluation 4) Writing Processes Essay	<b>Assignments:</b> 1) Worldview Essay 2) Pragmatic Beliefs 3) Historical Argument 4) Academic Book Review (or Media Myths)	<b>Assignments:</b> 1) Worldview Essay 2) Media Myths 3) Religious Liberty in the Modern World 4) Historical Argument (or Academic Book Review)

### **Bridge Assignments/Journal Entries**

Each course seeks to foster reflection and meta-cognition through the use of regular exercises that cultivate awareness of the students' writing beliefs and practices. These exercises may take the form of a writing journal that focuses on process, reflection, or transfer (depending on the

instructor's preference or requirements of the institution or department). They could be online discussion forums, in-class writing prompts, used as reading "quizzes," or as the basis of class discussions. However they are used, each shorter assignment should encourage students to articulate their writing and research processes, their writing experiences in the course, their current writing assumptions, reflections on writing skills, or how to transfer the skills they are learning to other contexts. Some sample questions are listed below.

***Personal writing assumptions:***

What did you think about writing before this course? How do great writers become great writers? Is writing a talent or a skill? Have your beliefs on writing changed or remained the same?

***Process Entries: metacognition on the writing and research processes***

Reflect on your writing process for assignment #\_\_. At what time of day did you write? How much time did it take? What strategies did you use? Which ones were the most effective for you? (Did you use a peer-review? Editing software? Writing Center? Tutoring help?) How did you conduct your research? What yielded you the best results? How did you decide which sources to use? Which sources were the most credible and why? What will you change about your writing process from this assignment to the next?

***Reflection Entries: on reading and writing assignments***

Reflect on the reading assignment. Describe your reactions to the piece: did you enjoy it? Why or why not? Did you find any of the writing issues relevant? Interesting? Where can you apply the material you read about? What about the piece did you agree with? What was the author's point of view? What did you disagree with? Why?



How does the author use evidence? Did you find the evidence persuasive? Who is the main audience? Who is the secondary audience?

***Transfer Entries: on applying skills learned in wider contexts***

Key terms for definition: critical analysis, knowledge, audience, genre, discourse community, reflection, rhetorical situation, evidence, exigence, context, composing

What skills did you use in drafting and writing assignment #\_\_? In what other contexts can these skills be used? How do these skills translate to workplace writing? How do these skills translate to ministry environments? Where have you used these skills before? How do you plan on refining these skills for future writing tasks? Did this skill radically change for you? Why or why not?

What are your goals for your writing? Did you accomplish those goals in the\_\_\_\_\_ assignment? Which genres are appropriate for \_\_\_\_\_ audience? How would you apply what you've learned to a general theory of writing? What framework do you have to complete writing tasks in college? In your future job?

The shorter assignments included in each course serve as a foundation the students can expect and retain as they build awareness practices.

**Course and Assignment Synopses**

**101 Course Options**

**Writing About Writing: 101 Course option #1 of 2**

The Writing About Writing course uses Downs and Wardle's model, ("Intro to Writing Studies") as a major guiding force. The instructor is free to select a course theme within the parameters of "writing about writing"; however, the foci of the reading selections, class discussions, and writing topics should center on rhetorical concepts. The instructor may focus on

many different key terms and concepts, but the researcher recommends a selection from the following concepts: audience, context, purpose, exigence, genre, medium, stance, design, strategy(ies), process, narration, persuasion, research, analysis, argument, evaluation, reflection, discourse community, multi-modal, transfer, qualitative research, etc. “Writing About Writing” is a viable course theme itself, but the researcher acknowledges other course theme options available within these parameters.

This course option will serve the degree-seeking students of Highlands College with preparation in academic writing genres and ministry writing genres. The course goals are for students to thoroughly understand their writing processes, to create transferable writing and research processes for different situations, and the academic skills of argumentation, evaluation, and synthesis writing. The assignments provide students practice with different audiences and exigencies in the areas of academic and ministry writing genres that will give them a foundation for their college writing and professional writing.

In the WAW course, students will cultivate academic writing skills by using critical thinking through problem-solving, evaluation, and research methods. They will be asked to argue for certain perspectives, organize thoughts in the most logical, clear, and persuasive way, and consider various strategies and techniques for writing in different situations. Each of the assignments chosen for this course, an interview with a ministry professional, a professional portfolio, an academic journal article, and the writing processes essay are designed to scaffold writing skills throughout the course.

The WAW course is scaffolded in different ways so that students build their writing skills throughout the course. The first assignment, interview with a ministry professional, allows students to explore writing scenarios and see writing in action in the practicum (or field) they

have chosen.<sup>24</sup> The first assignment asks students to argue for a solution to a writing problem which focuses each student on writing discussions when engaging in research reading, writing, peer workshops, or peer review. It also introduces the students to qualitative research through an interview process and gleaning relevant information from an interview. It asks the students to use argumentation, critical thinking, research skills, and writing processes. Their first research opportunity provides a limited pool of research options as students will be asked to use the course reading (composition texts) they have already read (or selected recommendations from the instructor) for their arguments.

***Assignment #1: Interview with a Ministry Professional***

1 Interview, Research, 1 Analysis/Synthesis Essay (750-1000 words)

Assignment Instructions for Students: Interview a ministry professional to investigate the types of writing used in a ministry career. Ask your interviewee what benefits come with good writing in the workplace, as well as what issues or problems are created when writing is not clear. After gathering interview data, you will consider composition principles that address the issues discussed in your interview. (Is it lack of process writing? Consideration of audience? Word choice? etc.) You will then research writing solutions using texts assigned from your syllabus and argue for a strategy to improve those writing issues in the workplace. What kinds of changes would you propose to a writer's process that would improve workplace communication? Your paper should briefly summarize the writing issues described and their effects in the workplace. It should then propose a solution through cultivated writing habits

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<sup>24</sup> Highlands College students choose a "practicum" or career path upon entry to the college. These include pastoral, missions, technology, kids/youth ministry, and other ministry areas. These will determine what type of ministry professional they interview as well as the types of writing they will encounter.

based on evidence from composition texts. You should consider audience as you address your solutions paper to a group of professionals from your ministry field.

You should use three articles for the strategy paper. You should engage with composition scholars (such as Elbow, Murray, Flower, Sommers, Yancey, etc.) to determine what similarities and differences lie in professional opinions and compositionists' opinions in problems and solutions.

Assignment Rationale: This assignment asks students to find, meet and interact with a ministry professional in their field of interest. (Since Highlands College places students into "practicums" taught by ministry professionals within the first days of every semester, this request should be attainable.) A practical benefit of the assignment is that students build connections with a professional but also glimpse real-life writing scenarios. I hope this assignment, purposefully placed at the beginning of the semester, will increase motivation in students to consider their writing skills and the value of strong communication in the workplace and fuel their learning from the start.

Since this assignment also asks students to conduct research, students will begin their research process with a topic connected with writing (rather than global warming, gun control or other topics unrelated to writing) and a topic that pertains to their future vocational goals. This research focus on composition texts "keeps the expert in the room," as Downs and Wardle suggest, but is also limited to composition scholars introduced by the instructor. Students will work on argumentation, thesis development, analysis of interview data, synthesis, and critical thinking skills through this assignment as they argue for solutions. Finally, students are asked to write for a specific ministry audience, which will begin their considerations of how to approach writing differently as professionals. Asking students to direct their writing to a ministry

audience is attainable early in the course since, at a minimum, students can conceptualize responding to their interviewee in a professional setting.

This assignment satisfies Highlands College course requirements of creative problem solving, cultivation of devotion to a personal calling and development of vocational skills. It also satisfies the WPA's requirements for rhetorical development of audience, context, and purpose; critical thinking, writing, and composing; and a knowledge of conventions.

Assignment #1 serves as a starting point for further refining of different aspects of writing focused on in Assignments 2-4.

### ***Assignment #2: The Professional Portfolio***

3 Emails (200-325 words each)

1 Cover Letter (400-600 words)

1 Thank you Letter (200-300 words)

Reflection Piece (450-500 words)

Assignment Instructions for Students: In your professional portfolio, you will create three different genres of work: emails, letters, and a reflection essay. When you have completed these exercises, you will then write a reflection piece answering the questions below.

- Email #1: An email to a professor asking for a recommendation letter for a job position or graduate school
- Email #2: An email to your ministry team announcing a budget decision that previously divided the team
- Email #3: An email to a non-church member hoping to soothe some angry feelings from a negative encounter during a Sunday service
- A cover letter explaining your fitness for a job you are applying for (500-600 words)
- A thank you letter to a hopeful future employer after an interview (200-300 words)

Reflection Piece: What were the differences in the audiences you were asked to address? How did you reflect these differences in your writing? How did your tone change based on the situation you were being asked to address? Which of the pieces did you find the most difficult?

Why? What research was required in this portfolio assignment? What was your writing process for two of the five of these exercises? When will you use these genres again? What skills did you learn? In what other areas can you apply these skills?

Assignment Rationale: This assignment serves as a foundational exercise for workplace writing. It asks students to develop an awareness of audience and rhetorical purpose in email writing, which was the most-used written genre by ministry professionals as cited in Chapter Four. Emails ask students to use concision and clarity while still being persuasive and attentive to an audience. Due to the ubiquity of the email genre, this is a vital genre to explore to prepare students for success in the professional world.

The professional portfolio asks students to consider different audiences in their argumentation in conjunction with critical thinking and writing process skills. Assignment #2 scaffolds Assignment #1 because students consider multiple audiences instead of one. This assignment asks students to use the academic skills of persuasion and consideration of audience in conjunction with concision; emails and letters require precision, thoughtful word choice, and deliberate use of limited space.

While students may not be researching articles or texts on composition, a strong cover letter or email writer should learn to apply business research while addressing their audience. If students want to write effectively for their audience, this assignment requires students to research the philosophies, culture, or other pertinent aspects of the organizations that they address. Again, this research is scaffolded since research efforts will be limited to organizational websites or reviews of the organization. In this, I hope students make the connection that research is required in their job-seeking processes as well as academia; it benefits their professional knowledge and makes them a more competitive job applicant. In adding this consideration of

audience and purpose, students are building on the rhetorical skills they used in assignment #1 and working toward productive sites for transfer.

Emails, cover letters, and thank you letters in professional settings also require certain formatting (appropriate subject lines, openings and closings), as well as understanding the main idea or thesis of an email and how to indicate that succinctly (in the subject line). This assignment cultivates the skills of persuasive writing, writing processes, knowledge of conventions, and responsibility. It also gives students a chance to exercise some creative problem solving as required by Highlands College, the ABHE, and the WPA. This assignment also asks students to evaluate their current skills in light of a job position and determine their strengths in the job market. It also teaches students very practically that politeness and professionalism go a long way. Hopefully, the students will also see the high relevancy of this assignment since each of them will be confronted with email writing, cover letter writing and thank you letter writing after their collegiate work and will be asked to negotiate the differences between audiences. The reflection aspect of this assignment engages the student in metacognition of their writing process, knowledge of conventions of letter writing, rhetorical knowledge (purpose, audience, context), and sensitivity to cultural contexts in addressing someone with different beliefs, a future employer or another professor, and a ministry team.

***Assignment #3: Academic Journal Article (taken from Hogsette)***

1 Academic Essay (1250-1500 words)

1 Summary

1 Group Journal

Assignment Instructions for Students: Students will be placed into editorial groups of four. Each group will then choose a complex issue or problem as the focusing topic for the

group's journal that is relevant to your ministry field *or* writing in your ministry field. Each student will write his/her own separate article (your synthesis essay) to be included in the journal's special issue. Write your article from the perspective of an academic in that field, using the academic writing conventions of your discipline. The purpose of your article is to evaluate various ways of solving the larger problem, using specific criteria. Then, you will formulate your own recommendation on how to solve that problem.

Find at least four articles from the library online databases and two books (print or e-book) that provide various views and perspectives on your topic. Your thesis should establish the problem, summarize major ways of solving the problem, and indicate your recommendation. Then, you will outline in more detail the problem or issue and explain why it is such a problem and why it needs to be resolved. Outline and describe specific criteria that you will use to evaluate various possible solutions. Describe and evaluate 2-3 possible solutions, using the criteria you describe. Outline and describe your recommendation and defend it using the same criteria. Conclude by explaining the significance of solving this problem and why your recommendation is valid. Format your article according to the conventions of your discipline and provide in-text citation and a bibliography page for your sources as per the style sheet for your discipline (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.). For the essay you submit for grading, use double spacing and one-inch margins; use the documentation system of your discipline.

After you have written your personal article, assemble the articles from each group member into a special issue journal. Choose a name for your journal, and the special issue will be your chosen topic. Create a cover for your journal, modeled after academic and/or professional journals. Include a table of contents for the journal. Include a jointly written introduction for the special issue that provides an overview of the topic, a brief explanation of



why this topic is important, and then a brief summary of each article (the overview and significance should be about 200-300 words, and each article summary should be 200 words). Each student should write the summary for his/her article contribution. Your articles should be professionally formatted as per the expectations of academic journals in your discipline (single-spaced or 1.5 spacing, columns, abstract, section headings, etc.). Your articles can/should use graphics, images, and charts as appropriate. Assemble all the materials into a single document journal. Use document formatting as per journals in your discipline. For example, you can use single spacing or 1.5 spacing. Also, you may wish to use double columns, as some professional journals do. We will have the journals printed out for the class, and copies will be kept in the Writing Center. Each student will submit his/her individual article for grading. Post the final assembled journal in your group area.

**Interdisciplinary Journal Group Work:** Students will work collaboratively in an editorial group to create an interdisciplinary journal, publishing your synthesis essays in an attractive academic or professional journal format (see above for more details). In addition to your individual essay grade, you will also receive a group grade based upon your collaboration, journal introduction, overall editing, journal design, and brief (5 min) group oral presentation of the journal.

**Assignment Rationale:** Assignment #3, the academic article and journal project, will ask students to combine the critical thinking, argumentation, and research skills they have practiced in assignments 1 and 2 in addition to constructing a more formal academic genre. In this assignment, students are challenged to maintain concision, meticulous critical engagement, and a logical structure in a longer assignment. They will undertake a larger-scale research process and use the readings from journal articles they have pursued thus far in the course. They will be

asked to work collaboratively to understand each of their peer's writings and how they might fit together cohesively as well as address an academic audience. Students will become familiar with the scholarly work of assembling a journal, working together as a group, defining issues, describing and summarizing ideas, analyzing source material, synthesizing source material, argumentation, persuading their audience, and developing a thesis statement. Students will also abide by documentation styles and will be asked to display their knowledge of conventions. This group project asks students to think thematically about their problem, devoting an entire journal issue to it, while also addressing the issue individually through their personal essays. They must think about how their essays relate to one another and to the problem as a whole. They will work with rhetorical conventions, audience, purpose, and context, as well as critical thinking, writing, and composing. These skills are all recommended and/or required from the WPA, ABHE and Highlands College.

Since the writing topic is a problem within their ministry field pertaining to writing or not, this opens up their research pool significantly. Research has been limited up to this point, but this assignment will open up the library and electronic sources en masse. They have been asked to produce several documents that will require proper formatting (as required by the WPA) and attention to document design. This assignment also should increase responsibility and devotion to personal calling (Highlands College requirement) since they will be identifying an issue in their chosen field. This assignment cultivates "creative problem solving" as required by Highlands College and the ABHE. It also cultivates rhetorical skills, critical thinking and writing processes, knowledge of conventions, and flexibility as required by the WPA.

***Assignment #4: Writing Processes Essay***

1 Process Essay (3 writing scenarios, 750-1000 words each, 1500-2000 words total)

Assignment Instructions for Students: Using composition scholars/texts to back up your assertions, describe your writing process for three different ministry writing scenarios pertinent to the practicum or field you are pursuing. In each scenario, describe the audience you are addressing and considerations of that audience, the purpose for which you are writing, the context in which you are writing, what a successful writing piece looks like (what it will accomplish), and how you will use your personal writing process to produce a successful writing piece. Describe the research process for each scenario and the steps you take in your personal research process. Write a thesis statement arguing for why your processes will be successful. Reference the other writing assignments you have completed for this course as evidence for why some writing processes are more successful for you than others.

Assignment Rationale: The fourth assignment in the Writing About Writing course asks students to think metacognitively about their own writing experiences and processes over the duration of the course, asking them to overtly state and tweak their writing processes for three different scenarios and argue for why their process will be successful in that scenario. This exercise requires students to reflect on their writing for the course and articulate their understanding of audience, purpose, and context and other rhetorical elements that allow a piece to be “successful.” This assignment focuses on the transferable processes students may need in further academic courses as well as vocational scenarios. This assignment serves as a reflective piece on the entire course, an exercise in transfer methods, and is scaffolded so that students reap the most benefits from the exercise. The goal is for students to articulate a transferable process that they have built from their first three assignments that will equip them with tools for successful academic and ministry writing.

This assignment combines composition and ministry directly. Students are asked to create an argument using composition texts, which involves the research process, critical thinking, writing, and composing, and an awareness of audience (all WPA standards) since the prompt asks students to address a specific audience and identify that audience. This assignment asks students to revisit data from Assignment #1 and further look into writing in their field. Focusing again on composition texts as a review of course material, students must evaluate the different perspectives in composition texts and argue for the ones they choose to use, using argumentation to back up their thesis. This assignment can be used as a final exam since it asks students to compile what they have learned through their composition texts, argue for certain perspectives in composition and apply them to relevant ministry writing scenarios. (This assignment provides flexibility for the instructor to provide writing scenarios if the instructor feels the structure would be helpful for their students.) Finally, this assignment asks students to identify their personal writing process overtly in three different scenarios, which involves metacognition and should increase the likelihood of high or “far-reaching” transfer. This assignment asks the student to revisit their prior writing assignments which should increase retention as well as aid them in building a successful, transferable process. These questions seek to produce overt transfer and process answers and hopefully help students in linking good writing with success in their future careers.

### **Ministry Writing Course: 101 Course option #2 of 2**

The Ministry Writing course option is designed with certificate-seeking students in mind.<sup>25</sup> Highlands College offers a ministry certificate option (which means typically these

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<sup>25</sup> Certificate students are not seeking a bachelor’s degree. Rather, they are seeking a certificate of ministry offered by Highlands College. Due to this change of academic trajectory, the course has been modified to better meet these students’ needs.

students will not be seeking an Associate or bachelor's degree). With these students in mind, this course seeks to increase direct connections and references to writing demands in professional ministry. The course theme is up to the discretion of the instructor, but again the researcher urges using the concept terms listed above (audience, context, purpose, exigence, genre, medium, stance, design, strategy(ies), process, narration, persuasion, research, analysis, argument, evaluation, reflection, discourse community, multi-modal, transfer, qualitative research, etc.) as the reading topics, writing topics, and learning activities' foci. This course is designed with overt transfer connections in mind so that these key concepts build students' processes towards their professional writing tasks. The course develops vocational writing genres while still developing academic writing and transferable writing skills, should students decide to continue their education at a later date.

On the whole, the course is very similar to the Writing About Writing course with one major change: the shift from the academic journal assignment to an evaluation assignment. (Assignments 1, 2, and 4 remain the same.) The evaluation assignment asks students to engage with a multi-modal form that is relevant to their field, (audio, video, web development, etc.) and evaluate its effectiveness based on audience, purpose, clarity, and other elements. The evaluation is an academic genre (given in many composition courses) but allows students to engage with multimodality which will be a regular piece of their vocational lives. It asks students to develop their critical lens on an element they may have been surrounded by (sermons or websites, for example) but never considered rhetorically.

***Assignment #3, (Ministry Writing Course) Practicum-Specific Writing Piece: Critical Evaluation***

1 Critical Evaluation Essay (750-1250 words)

1 Researched “Element”: a sermon, website, service experience, music CD, a children’s curriculum, etc.

Assignment Instructions for Students: Select a writing option based on the practicum in which you are currently enrolled. Pick four categories to evaluate from the following or create your own criteria: How well does the element meet its goal? Is the goal clear? Why or why not? What were the strengths of the element? What were the weaknesses? How would you rate its quality, effectiveness, or other elements of the event? What messages did the element send through its presentation, style, cohesiveness, appeal, and biblical foundations? How well did the element present its worldview and how clear were those ideas? If you choose different areas of evaluation, clear them with your instructor before pursuing your drafts.

- Pastoral Leadership: sermon evaluation based on rhetorical style, content depth, clarity of communication, cohesiveness, appeal to audience and biblical foundations/knowledge; small group curriculum: readability, clarity, goals, lessons, etc.
- Kids/Youth: service evaluation based on worship, message, audience, or Children’s curriculum evaluation: clarity, goals, lessons, creativity, etc.
- Production/Audio Engineering: service evaluation based on intro videos, music, transitions, lighting or other effects or service components
- Creative/Digital: website evaluation/video evaluation based on layout, clarity of information, overall attractiveness of the site, user-friendliness, and appropriateness to audience
- Worship Leadership: Christian band/singer evaluation or worship experience at another church based on musicianship (quality of singers/instrumentalists), presentation (lights, stage, dress, backdrop), overall experience (distractions, good ideas)

- Missions: websites for mission organizations based on mission statements, video testimonials, budget availability, presentation, worldview

Assignment Rationale: This assignment engages students in relevant ministry experience but also cultivates a critical lens for a multi-modal “text.” Students will be asked to evaluate the effectiveness of a sermon, event, service, website, or another element towards its goal, giving them an opportunity to evaluate what “success” is in different modes and how it is achieved.

This assignment asks students to think critically about something they may have heard or seen many times, (websites, sermons, music, etc.) but have never investigated critically. It satisfies the WPA’s requirements for critical thinking, writing, and composing, and the Highlands College goals for knowledge, integration, and cultivation of a biblical worldview, devotion to personal calling, and vocational skills. Students will be asked specifically what kind of worldview their multimodal text presents and how it reconciles with a biblical worldview. This assignment also is highly relevant since it cultivates the critical lens that students will use as students, citizens, and advanced “readers” of their culture and belief systems and how those belief systems are manifested in ministerial forms.

### **102 Course Options**

The next two courses, Writing Worldviews and Christianity and Culture, are different from the 101 courses in that the topics engage critical thinking skills in regard to personal worldview, Christian historical events, and the larger narrative of Christianity. The 102 courses are designed to be taken after one of the 101 courses and allow the instructor options based on their professional knowledge of Christianity in history, the media, Christian academic books, or Christian worldview. The instructor may choose the course they feel best supports their current expertise on the topics covered.

## **Writing Worldviews: 102 Course option #1 of 2**

The Writing Worldviews course is developed as a 102 or second-semester addition to the WAW or MW courses. The course theme, “worldviews” underlies the main reading, teaching, and thinking concepts of the course: to introduce students to the concept of a worldview, to develop a student’s awareness of the implicit beliefs they hold and the implications of those beliefs, and to understand how to tie the concept of a worldview back to the writing concepts covered in the 101 courses. Writing Worldviews also seeks to develop a student’s listening skills and respect for others with different beliefs, which they will encounter while practicing ministry in addition to the composition skills listed above. Key concepts/terms include discourse community, community narrative (politically or culturally-constructed voice), listening, Rogerian argument, stance, persuasion, argumentation, qualitative research, process, synthesizing, dialogue, cause and effect, history, etc. These key concepts would ideally be connected to the researched argument and the other assignments in this course. Like the 101 courses, assignments are scaffolded and seek to cultivate reflection and overt transfer skills.

The first assignment in the Writing Worldviews course asks students to articulate implicit beliefs they may hold and state them explicitly. It allows the student to explore their own worldview and a worldview different from their own. It allows the student to practice the research skills of interviewing and compiling yet limits the research pool for the student.

### ***Assignment #1: Worldviews Essay***

1 Personal Essay (750-1000 words)

1 Interview

1 Response Essay (750-1000 words)



Assignment Instructions for Students: Articulate your own worldview using the model below. Choose one of the five categories and selectively answer some questions from your selected section according to your own opinion. After articulating your own worldview, hold an interview with someone with a different worldview. (Visiting a local college campus, another religious site, or simply asking someone you already know will be required for this step.) After the interview, articulate your interviewees' worldview in a thoughtful and respectful manner and defend a rationale for their worldview.

Elements of worldview for consideration: (taken from Anderson)

- Theology: Do you believe there is a God? If so, what is God like? Is God a perfect being? Is God a personal being? How does God relate to the world? (According to some worldviews, God is transcendent and distinct from the world; according to others, God is identical to the world; still others take a position somewhere in-between.) How does God relate to human beings in general? How does God relate to me?
- Anthropology: What are we? What kind of being is mankind? (Are we creatures made in the image of God? Are we gods-in-embryo? Are we the unintended products of naturalistic evolution? Something else altogether?) Where did we come from? (Note how this is closely related to the first question!) Are we purely physical beings or embodied souls? Are we special or unique in any way? Do we exist for any particular reason or purpose? Are we basically good, or basically bad, or something in-between?
- Knowledge: Can we know anything? Which knowledge is the best kind? What can we know about God? What can we know about the universe? What can we know about ourselves? What is the best kind of knowledge to have? How do we know what we

know? (Or to put the question another way: What are the sources of knowledge? Divine revelation? Reason? Intuition? Science? Sensory experiences? Mystical experiences?) Are there any limits to our knowledge? What are the best ways to improve and expand our knowledge?

- Ethics: Is there a point to being good? Are we held accountable to anyone/anything for our actions? What is the highest or ultimate good? (God? Love? Knowledge? Pleasure? Power?) Is morality real or merely illusory? Are some things really right or wrong? Is morality objective or subjective? Are there any moral absolutes? If morality is always relative, what is it relative to? (The individual? The community? The species?) How do we know what is right or wrong? (Note the connection here between ethics and knowledge.) Why should we try to be good anyway? Are we ultimately accountable to anything or anyone for the way we live?
- Solution: What is the solution to the problem of mankind? What is humanity's most basic problem? What (if anything) is the solution to that problem? Are there multiple solutions? What part (if any) do we play in solving the problem? What part (if any) does God play in solving the problem? What are the prospects for the problem being solved?

Assignment Rationale: This assignment asks students to examine the idea of a worldview and understand it more fully. The assignment gives students an opportunity to think deeply about their views regarding God, man, knowledge, ethics, and the problems surrounding humanity, as well as a starting place from which they can build a critical lens on worldviews. Although these questions deserve fields and years of study, the main purpose of this assignment is for students to articulate a "baseline" or a general understanding of their own worldview in

relationship to other worldviews. It asks students to articulate beliefs that may be running silently under the surface that they have never before acknowledged or articulated.

This assignment also encourages students to develop respectful listening skills as they engage with worldviews different than their own. Students will be asked to evaluate their personal priorities and responses to religious doctrine but also personal experience. It asks them to define terms, summarize ideas, analyze another person's worldview, and respectfully argue for the legitimacy of another worldview. This assignment seeks to equip students with knowledge and understanding of others who hold different beliefs from them. The design of this assignment is based on the biblical principles of respect for others as rational beings made in the image of God and loving your neighbor (based on strategies from Chapter Two and interviewee input from Chapter Three). If students are expected to interact with culture productively, it is a necessity that they not only deal respectfully with differences of beliefs or opinions but seek to understand the reasons behind a different worldview.

This assignment fulfills requirements from the WPA because it cultivates critical thinking skills, writing processes, and rhetorical knowledge of audience and context. It also cultivates openness, responsibility, metacognition, curiosity, engagement and flexibility, all standards of the WPA framework. Students should have completed an interview with a ministry professional in a 101 course, so they should have familiarity with interviewing and qualitative research.

Students will be asked to engage with James's pragmatic model, since by assessing the strengths and weaknesses of their own and another's worldview they are analyzing the practical value of certain ideas and their implications. In this assignment, students should develop a "sensitivity to cultural contexts" which is a requirement from the ABHE. This assignment serves as a scaffold for the Pragmatic Beliefs essay, assignment #2 in the Writing Worldviews course,

since students will be considering their own worldview in assignment 1 and then further investigate their individual beliefs in the second assignment, “Pragmatic Beliefs.”

***Assignment #2: Pragmatic Beliefs, Exploring the practical implications of Christianity***

1 Analysis/Synthesis Essay (1500-2500 words)

Library research

Assignment Instructions for Students: “[James] showed that the meaning of any idea whatsoever, scientific, religious, philosophical, political, social personal—can be found ultimately in nothing save in the succession of experiential consequences that it leads through and to; that truth and errors, if they are in reach at all, are identical with these consequences.”

(Kallen)

The purpose of this writing piece is to explore how a particular belief co-exists alongside your life experiences. Choose a core belief that you hold. (What do you believe about who God is? What he does? Marriage? Family? Health? Relationships? Sexuality? Finances? Etc. Use your worldview essay framework [Anderson] if needed.)

Examine this belief for the implications that it holds for your life: How do you live differently because of this belief? How are your relationships impacted? What choices have you made because of this belief? Then, choose 2-3 experiences from your own life that correspond with this belief in some way—either negatively or positively. (Experiences may solidify or detract from certain beliefs.) Conduct research on the topic, using Academic Search Premier or Lexis Nexis Academic, to see how others view that belief as it plays out in society today.

Write an essay describing how one specific personal experience impacted or changed the way you view Christianity, your faith, God, or another factor of your religion and argue for your current perspective on your experiences after applying a critical lens and research to the issue.

Answer the question: How did your experience impact the way in which you view God, your faith, or your religion? Can your experience and faith be reconciled? Argue for the meaning of your core belief based on the experiential consequences it leads you to. (i.e., What are the consequences of your thought? What experiences do not reflect the beliefs you claim? Why?)

Use your experience as a tool to search for further, more precise truth. Some examples:

Relationships: how you view others, how you treat others, Mother/child, Father/child, sibling/sibling, friend/friend, significant other, etc.; love one another/love your enemy; engaging with culture; engaging with someone who disagrees with you; the loss of a loved one, etc.

Assignment Rationale: This assignment asks students to engage with William James's notion of pragmatism in assignment form. It asks students to use metacognition and to think critically about their beliefs and experiences. They must use the research process, knowledge of conventions, and rhetorical knowledge of purpose, audience, and context (WPA standards). They must also cultivate their worldview, their argumentation, evaluation, and their biblical knowledge in understanding what their beliefs say and how they do and do not always live according to their beliefs (Highlands College and ABHE requirements). An understanding of failure and grace hopefully resonates with the student since we all profess things and then fail to abide by them (incorporating a humility ethic from Chapter Three). This encourages flexibility in the student, as well as a sensitivity to cultural contexts depending on the situation/experience they choose to write on (ABHE and Highlands College goals). It also asks the student to search for deeper truth in their experiences and how those experiences may be interpreted in many different ways (Highlands College goals). Often, perspective allows us to re-see the past, and I hope this assignment gives students the opportunity to "re-see" something that may have challenged their faith at the time. Life often presents complex issues that do not have a straight-

forward answer. Students will be asked to critically examine a complex issue and recognize that solutions are often amorphous. Assignment #2 seeks to invite students to imagine the implications of their beliefs on others and paves the foundation for Assignment #3.

***Assignment #3: Historical Essay***

1 Analysis/Synthesis Essay (1000-1500 words)

Library Research

Assignment Instructions for Students: Part 1: Research Summaries: Choose a controversial event specifically from Christian history, either positive or negative in your own opinion. Find history and media/press articles regarding the topic. Write a summary describing what happened, and at least two different reactions to the event.

Part 2: Essay: Develop a thesis statement and argue for your perspective on how the event impacted Christians, the public view of Christianity, or your personal beliefs. Examine the conversations surrounding the event and state your own opinions regarding the events.

313: The Edict of Milan

323: The Council of Nicaea

367: The New Testament Canon

1054: The East/West Schism

1456: Gutenberg produces the first bible

1517: Martin Luther posts his 95 theses

1545: The Council of Trent

1962: Vatican II Council

1989: Jim Bakker incident

2006: The Ted Haggard incident

2010: Eddie Long incident

Assignment Rationale: Assignment #3 for the Writing Worldviews course is a historically-researched essay, asking students to investigate the complex narrative that makes up their religion. This assignment asks students to engage with the ongoing, historical narrative of Christianity, allowing students to consider the complicated and varied reactions to Christian faith regarding a historical event. The historical essay broadens the students' perspective from their own worldview (Assignment #1) to the implications of their beliefs on their lives (Assignment #2) to the narrative of Christianity throughout history (Assignment #3) and asks the student to determine where they stand in response to the narrative surrounding one isolated event in Christian history.

This assignment asks students to research an event they may not be familiar with, examine different perspectives on that event, argue for a perspective, and apply their own opinions. Inherent in the assignment is the acknowledgment of the messiness of people and religion, and the effect of one person's actions on many others. They are asked to creatively problem solve, develop a sensitivity to cultural contexts, be flexible in how they view events, use research skills, use knowledge of conventions through research citations and MLA formatting, and evaluate sources (WPA, Highlands College, and ABHE requirements). They are also asked to reconcile their faith with certain controversial events and see their beliefs through different perspectives, cultivating a complex rather than simplistic view of their faith. This assignment seeks to increase responsibility and flexibility in the student, as well as their curiosity on how Christianity was viewed during different times by different peoples (as required by HC, the ABHE, and the WPA). The third assignment scaffolds the last assignment which asks students to delve further into the many voices surrounding their faith.

***Assignment #4 (Option 1): Academic Book Review: (taken from Hogsette)***

1 Outline

1 Book Review (1000-1250 words)

Assignment Instructions for Students: Write an academic review essay on a book of your choice. Early in the semester, you will choose one of the books from an approved list and read it carefully during the semester. You will outline your academic review of this book before writing your review essay. You will write a review, using your outline, and then submit it online.

NOTE: No more than two students can choose the same book.

Assignment Rationale: The fourth assignment in the Writing Worldviews course offers the instructor flexibility based on their own knowledge. The instructor can either choose the Media Myths (covered later in this chapter) or Book Review assignment (discussed below). Both of these assignments ask students to understand narratives (in the form of the media or Christian scholars) connected to current events. By nature, the media myths assignment and the academic book review will open more narratives to the student for investigation.

This assignment works with the instructor's range of knowledge since they control the reading list. Ideally, the instructor would choose a list of texts that fits the theme of the course and includes Christian scholars presenting ideas on current events or other Christian scholarly work. If he or she does not possess a knowledge of Christian scholarly work, the instructor may limit the list to their knowledge base. The list may also include books on topics relevant to the religious question, current events, or even tied to other assignments, like worldviews, media myths, or composition theories. This assignment asks students to examine their book critically, argue for their review of the text, and evaluate the text. This assignment is very flexible for the instructor since again, it "keeps the expert in the room" by limiting text options to students. It



also is very flexible as it can be strictly related to academic subjects like composition or religious subjects related to current events (like religious liberty in the modern world). It also can be used as an in-class final exam, take-home final, or a drafted, peer-reviewed written assignment. It can be tied back to another assignment by offering students more in-depth reading on a topic they have already researched. If the instructor chooses to include Christian scholars on the reading list, this assignment opens up the range of perspectives from Christians on issues, providing another opportunity for students to understand the complex views of religious schools of thought.

### **Christianity and Culture: 102 Course option #2 of 2**

Lastly, the final 102 course option I will propose for Highlands College follows the theme “Christianity and Culture.” This course, like Writing Worldviews, seeks to cultivate an awareness of the larger narrative of Christianity through the eyes of the media, non-Christians, and history, and allow students to locate themselves within that narrative. Key concepts/terms include discourse community, community narrative (politically or culturally-constructed voice), listening, Rogerian argument, stance, persuasion, argumentation, qualitative research, process, synthesizing, dialogue, cause and effect, history, etc. Students will engage with cultural stereotypes of beliefs and think critically about their place in these narratives, rather than accepting the “givens” they may have not yet examined regarding their religious identity. There are a lot of commonalities between Christianity and Culture and Writing Worldviews since students will take only one of these courses; the main function of the additional course is to give the instructor another course option based on their teaching knowledge and comfort levels with the topics. One of the main changes in the two courses is a different second and third assignment. This assignment originally appears in an article by Miller and Santos entitled, “Recomposing Religious Plotlines.” The name of the assignment is “Media Myths.”

***Assignment #2: “Media Myths” (From Miller and Santos, “Recomposing Religious Plotlines,” based on the model provided by Mark Silk.)***

1 analysis/synthesis essay (1250-1500 words)

Media and library research

Assignment Instructions for Students: Choose a piece of religious journalism about some religion other than your own that conforms, or fails to conform, to Silk’s plotlines. Analyze its conformity or nonconformity to the plotlines and the usefulness and problematics of the plotlines for whatever is being reported. Find an article from a secular source and a religious source on your topic. Write a 3-4 page paper discussing the similarities and differences you find within this article’s view of religion and your own beliefs, the strengths and weaknesses of the article, and argue for its effectiveness in the way it presents information to an audience.

From Mark Silk’s *Unsecular Media: Making News of Religion in America* (1995):

1. Worthy religious people and institutions perform “good works,” especially aiding the needy. Religious groups who help the poor deserve public recognition and praise for behaving properly. Those who fail to do so deserve public disapprobation. For example, the press consistently uplifts former president Jimmy Carter as a “good Christian” who works to ameliorate poverty.
2. Everyone should practice religious tolerance. For example, in 1960 the press generally criticized explicitly anti-Catholic arguments against the election of John Kennedy, a Roman Catholic, to the White House. In 1992, the news media labeled the Republican alliance with the Christian Right as an embrace of religious tolerance.
3. Hypocritical religious leaders deserve unmitigated condemnation. For example, during the late 1980s, reporters repeatedly skewered Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggert, two leading Protestant fundamentalists and television evangelists, for their adulterous

escapades. More recently, journalists have excoriated Roman Catholic priests who practiced pedophilia and the bishops who protected them from legal consequences.

4. False religious prophecy warrants unalloyed scorn. Reflecting the Protestant bias of the entire nation, early American newspapers sometimes identified and blasted Catholicism as false prophecy. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, much of the press proudly and repeatedly denounced Mormonism as another false prophecy until the Mormon Church outlawed polygamy. In 1993 journalists unanimously branded David Koresh of Waco, Texas, as an extremely dangerous false prophet. Reporters sometimes label small, unpopular religions as “cults.”

5. Various religions deserve acceptance as “normal” American faiths. After World War II reporters largely succeeded in prompting many readers, first to accept Mormons as “normal,” meritorious citizens and, second, to accept Jews as meritorious and worthy constituents of “Judeo-Christianity,” a phrase that reporters popularized after 1945.

6. Claimed indications of the supernatural deserve press coverage. These include the reported discovery of Jesus’ shroud and statements about visitations by the Virgin Mary.

7. Old-line “mainstream” Protestant churches are declining. In Silk’s words, “Since the days of the Puritans, American religious leaders have rarely let slip the opportunity to lament the decline of religious devotion,” especially dedication of the sort fostered by conventional Protestant denominations (1995, 135). Evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants, however, are gaining adherents, partly through commercial, media-savvy appeals and partly through enthusiasm and imagination that is lacking in “stodgy” churches.

8. Santos and Miller also hold that there is another plotline maintained by the media: “science conflicts with religion...More often than not, the headlines of such topics telegraph an alleged conflict between theology and the advancement of science” (66).

Assignment Rationale: “This assignment encourages students to confront the problematics of the plotlines, as one or more of them pertain to a specific instance” (Miller and Santos 66). Miller and Santos state that students should demonstrate an understanding of one of Silk’s plotlines while discussing the implications of these plotlines in a given scenario (66).

“Media Myths” asks students to engage with the already-present national conversation regarding Christianity and other religions and enter in to the narrative. This assignment gives students a framework that scaffolds their work with media stories in a less overwhelming way (than if they were to analyze media stories without the framework) and asks them to critically question how the media depicts a story, person, or event. It allows them to grapple with current events and identify the bias of their media source or the bias within themselves. This assignment asks students to understand the larger narrative of Christianity and culture and engage with it in a relevant way. It asks students to study and comprehend a different perspective on their beliefs and how to read that perspective critically. This assignment cultivates rhetorical knowledge, biblical worldview, creative problem solving, intentional pursuit of truth, and sensitivity to cultural contexts as required by the Highlands College, WPA, and ABHE.

The last major change in the Christianity and Culture course is a new third assignment, entitled “Religious Liberty in the Modern World.” The religious liberty assignment asks students to engage in a current issue facing Christians and the world today.

***Assignment #3: “Religious Liberty in the Modern World” (Hogsette)***

1 Persuasive Paper (1500-2000 words)

Assignment Instructions for students: Write an essay in which you argue for a specific position or perspective related to religious liberty in the modern world. Some topic ideas:

- Should professors with religious convictions and knowledge who work in secular and/or state colleges and universities be forced to avoid grounding their teaching and scholarship in religious ideas? Do “diversity” and “academic freedom” apply to religious ideas in the academic marketplace of ideas?
- Should private businesses be forced to violate religious conscience and conviction to conduct business which condones or celebrates lifestyles that violate the owner’s religious principles?
- Should the international community intervene with a country’s domestic affairs to protect those being persecuted for religious belief?
- Should a secular nation (China, N. Korea, Cuba) allow religious liberties for its people?
- Should US legislation be rooted in biblical moral law?
- Should religious discourse inform political discourse?

Choose a topic in which there are multiple reasonable positions. Find at least five articles from the library online database that provide pro and con information. Use Rogerian argumentation to defend two different perspectives on the issues you have chosen. State both sides’ perspectives, as well as pertinent evidence and situations where the view is valid. State your opinion in a clear argumentative thesis statement and then defend your opinion using clear logic and compelling evidence from your sources and personal experience. Write as though your opposing audience will read your paper. Maintain respect while you address/refute their counterarguments. Use MLA format for in-text citation and Works Cited page.

Assignment Rationale: This assignment asks students to engage with controversial religious topics, some they will be faced with as they pursue their ministry professions, and undertake a research process. It asks students to analyze sources, think critically about the sources with which they engage, persuade and argue for their perspective, and creatively engage with current events. Since this essay will be done in Rogerian form, they must write with an awareness, respect, and sensitivity to others and cultural contexts while addressing their worldview. They must apply knowledge of conventions with their research process. They are asked to synthesize their argument into a succinct thesis statement and seriously consider their audience. Cultural sensitivity will be needed as they grapple with different worldviews (scaffolded skills from the worldview essay assignment) and discern how different solutions are interpreted in different contexts. This assignment cultivates a biblical worldview, creative problem solving, leadership skills, rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking, analysis, evaluation, argumentation, curiosity, openness, engagement, responsibility, and flexibility as required by the Highlands College, the WPA and the ABHE respectively.

As a last note on assignments, there are a few that may be exchanged for others. If the instructor chooses, in the Writing Worldviews and Christianity and Culture courses, the last assignment may be changed for another, depending on instructor preference or the experience of the students. These options are listed in the table above.

## **Other Course Considerations**

### **Grammar**

My grammar philosophy will be the same for all of the courses. Grammar will be taught using an online module. One of the interviewees from Chapter Three (Dali) states that in-class time is not used effectively teaching grammar material when only some students may or may not

need instruction on that concept; therefore it makes the most sense for students to work outside of class on grammar concepts and for class time to be used developing other writing skills. I agree and would like to attempt the model Dali proposes. Individual grammar concerns in student writing will be targeted holistically (Larsen-Freeman, Lee, Ellis, Weaver), selectively choosing only the most prevalent and recurring errors to mark in student writing drafts. When students are taught individually on the grammar concepts that they need to learn, rather than group-taught concepts they may already know, it maximizes the efficiency of class time as well as the energies of the student since they are not focusing on needless grammar exercises. Defending a specific grammar software will involve much more research and is outside of the scope of this project.

### **Readings**

The 101 courses will begin with readings that discuss composition, as many assignments will ask students to discuss strategies for successful writing. Authors such as Murray, Elbow, Sommers, Delpit, Hartwell, Weaver, Emig, Perl, Ong, Rose or Bizzell (among many others) would be excellent choices. The remaining course readings may be on relevant writing topics for assignments or around the theme for the course.

As for 102 course texts, for this particular institution's goals, I would recommend a text by David Hogsette, *Writing that Makes Sense: Critical Thinking in College Composition*. My reasons for selecting this text are many. Hogsette shares the same concerns I hold to integrate transferable skills, like critical thinking, into the composition course as well as developing a Christian worldview. The text is divided into three sections: Critical thinking, composition and writing, and readings. The critical thinking section addresses ethics in writing, ethics in defending an argument, and listening to others' viewpoints. The composition section then builds

on these critical thinking chapters in hopes that students will apply advanced critical thinking techniques to the assignments and goals in their composition course. Finally, Hogsette has selected readings on the topics of science and faith, America in modern times, analyzing media (directly relevant to one of my assignment choices), sex and sexuality, abortion, scientific ethics, and education. Hogsette has balanced the transferable critical thinking skills that are so mandatory in the Highlands College institutional setting with the goals of composition and cultivating a Christian worldview. I feel this text best accomplishes the goals and objectives of my course options. Course texts would also include a handbook, such as the *Hacker Handbook*, the *Little Seagull Handbook* (with exercises), the *Quick Access Reference Guide*, or the *Writer's Harbrace Handbook*. The handbook should include the newly updated 8th edition MLA changes as well as online/electronic source citation guides for students. Any additional texts, including critical thinking guides, collaboration or peer editing guides, MLA handbooks, etc., are up to the discretion of the instructor.

### **Course placement and evaluations**

Currently, Highlands College does not require students to take a writing placement or end-of-semester writing assessment. I would like to propose a model based on Irvin Peckham's that was used at Louisiana State University, with a few changes based on local needs at Highlands College. (White, Elliot and Peckham 38-48)

In my proposed model, upon entering Highlands College, all students will be required to take a writing placement exam. I suggest a hybrid model which considers both the SAT/ACT English and Writing scores in conjunction with three student writing pieces written by the student before they take a writing course. Highlands College already has the technological capabilities to support the electronic submission of essays on Populi, the current web-based



college management software used by the college. (The college uses Populi for assignment submission as well as student communication.) Ideally, instructors would present the assessment for the students during their orientation before the start of the fall or spring semester. During college registration, students would be asked to access Populi and read the directions, required articles, and writing prompts for their pre-course writing assessment. Accessing Populi provides an electronic submission venue at no additional cost to the college and would allow students a chance to familiarize themselves with the platform.

As discussed by White, Elliott and Peckham, assessments should mirror the types of writing students will be asked to produce in writing courses (40). For that reason, a timed essay is not a good indicator of the writing tasks they will complete in the 101 or 102 courses, since each writing assignment is given over the course of weeks, is drafted, resourced, and edited by peers in workshops, and is open to textual aid, instructor aid, and other resources. In contrast, Peckham's model allowed students four days to complete an essay response to several academic articles. I would like to follow the same model, allowing students several days (seven to ten) to complete their written assessment.

Since the model institution from White, Elliott and Peckham (Louisiana State University) had thousands of incoming writing students, and Highlands College may have between 150-300, assessing more than one writing piece is more plausible. Several essays in several genres are more ideal to demonstrate the ability of one's writing (Cooper and Odell 1977; Elbow and Belanoff 1986). This model would ask students to produce three pieces of writing in different genres: one researched argument essay, one professional email, and one critique or evaluation. Each one will supply students with a rhetorical situation and part of the assessment will be the student's demonstration of understanding that exigence.

One of the main goals of the assessment is an organic rubric, created relevantly for the assignments themselves. As evinced in Peckham's model, initially instructors will be asked to complete the three writing pieces and articulate what each piece should contain to demonstrate mastery over that writing task. Then, student work will be read, and model pieces will be chosen to represent each scoring level. Instructors will discuss what each model does successfully and write descriptions for each scoring level based on those successes. All student work will then be read and placed into the levels described. I believe this organic rubric will more accurately demonstrate the writing skills of the students. (White, Elliott and Peckham 38-48) In conjunction with these organic rubrics will be the consideration of outcomes stressed by the WPA: understanding of a variety of rhetorical situations; to undertake a critical reading of secondary research; to integrate sources into a students' writing; to write clearly; and demonstrate control of conventions. Students may be allowed to skip the first course in the sequence if they demonstrate superior writing skills.

At the end of each semester, students may take an end-of-course writing challenge. The writing challenge will ask students to produce three short writing pieces: a researched academic essay, an email with a different rhetorical situation, and a critique or evaluation. The writing pieces will be grouped and scored in the same way as the placement essays, with a rubric developed specifically for these assignments. The scores will then be compared with the scores at the beginning of the semester for improvement. Students will be assigned numbers so that students are guaranteed anonymity during both of these assessment processes. Great care will be taken to ensure that writing prompts are as apolitical as possible, since in Peckham's case, students performed at higher levels when the topics they wrote on were apolitical. (White, Elliott and Peckham 38-48) Students will be given incentives, such as course bonus credit, or the

possibility of bypassing their next writing course if they demonstrate certain skills. These writing challenges will be necessary as Highlands College seeks accreditation in the upcoming years.

After the completion of the pre and post-course writing assessments, instructor surveys will be taken on the assessment itself to evaluate what instructors saw as common weaknesses and successes in student writing.

### **Student evaluations**

Near the completion of their composition courses, students are currently given evaluations for the quality of their courses. These are usually given online and are required before students can access their final exam or submit final papers on online learning platforms. I do not believe student evaluations should only be voluntary since representation can more easily be inaccurate. Every student should provide feedback and understand the importance of their feedback for the course, instructor, and their peers. The online submission includes both a multiple choice (scored) answer and short answer options for each section/area. The specific areas of feedback include course objectives, writing assignments, reading selections, course structure, instructor teaching methods, faith learning, online components, and assessments. Some questions in light of this curricula have been added for consideration below.

- Were the course objectives clear? Were they accomplished?
- Did course writing assignments challenge me as a writer? Did they have clear objectives? Did they match the objectives for the course? Did the writing assignments provide practice on transferring writing skills to many different scenarios? Did the writing assignments help me to understand my beliefs better? Were the assignments relevant and interesting?

- Did the reading selections challenge me? Did they present new viewpoints? Did they add to my knowledge? Did they demonstrate academic argumentation, style, and worldview? Were they interesting?
- Did the organization of the course make sense to you? How would you rate the online components in terms of effectiveness? Ease of use? Accessibility? Did you feel the online grammar module was helpful to you? Please rate the quality of in-class and online discussion boards.
- Please rate how well you feel your instructor communicated. How accessible was your instructor to you outside of class? Was your instructor invested in your personal and academic growth? Did your instructor's expectations challenge you?
- Did this course challenge your faith? Did you grow in your personal faith? Did you grow in respect for beliefs different than your own?
- Did you feel the assessments were clear? Did you feel the placement accurately reflected your writing?

All students will be asked to rate their responses on scales of 1-5 and have the opportunity to provide commentary on each section. Instructors will receive student evaluations after final grades have been submitted.

### **Instructor evaluations**

At the conclusion of each course, instructors will be asked to participate in a holistic course examination to be reviewed by the department head and others. The following is a sample of the questions that will be asked:

- How well did you feel you accomplished course objectives? Which were your strongest? Which were your weakest? Which need to be changed, deleted, or adjusted for next semester?
- Did you feel the readings supported course objectives? Were there any excellent examples that especially engaged the students or any that need to be altered or deleted?
- How did you feel the students performed in each of the following: assignments, readings, class presence/discussions, online presence, initiative, interest in the course, and retention of course objectives?

These questions will be discussed in a roundtable with the English department faculty at the conclusion of each semester.

### **Auditing evaluations**

In addition to these bi-annual student and instructor evaluations, there will be auditing evaluations scheduled at least once every three to four years. Five students will be randomly selected and asked to anonymously submit their writing assignments over the course of the semester. Faculty will evaluate these submissions for writing growth and accomplishment of course objectives by the end of the composition courses. These will be used alongside the writing challenge pieces at the end of each semester to demonstrate that objectives are being taught and retained in Highlands College composition courses.

Finally, there will be bi-annual faculty meetings before the beginning of each semester. These will be informal faculty meetings to aid faculty in improving their weak teaching/instruction areas as well as brainstorm new methods or ideas for the courses. I hope with these evaluations, student, instructor, placement, end-of-course assessment, and auditing,

that a culture of growth and revision will be part of the infrastructure at Highlands College. This culture allows the program to assess, evaluate and improve on a regular basis.

### **Suggested teaching methods**

Classroom time will not be dictated to each instructor; each instructor should use class time as he or she sees fit. However, all teaching methods used should be targeted towards the pedagogical goals outlined at the beginning of this chapter. For this reason, lecture should be used only in smaller sessions (no more than 15-20 minutes at one time). Instructors should video record any longer lectures for students to view outside of class time, following a “flipped” classroom model. Instructors should ask questions to promote class discussions. Peer writing workshops should be used as well as in-class drafting time. Since grammar will be taught on the online module as well within the context of student writing, no class time will be used for isolated grammar exercises. (Weaver) Writing activities, group discussion, and presentation work would be highly encouraged as a constructive use of class time. If the instructor chooses to use a portfolio-style turn in method, that is their decision, but should include adequate writing workshop opportunities in class that adequately support portfolio methodology.

### **Conclusion**

Through these assessments, course texts, course assignments, readings, and teaching methods, I hope for successful curricula at Highlands College. In this chapter, I have provided my practical recommendations after studying the interview data from professionals teaching composition in Christian institutions and from Christian ministry professionals. This chapter discusses the rationales behind the assignments chosen as well as the construct of the assignments themselves; the teaching philosophy of Christian classrooms; the course objectives; and the benefits of teaching writing in this way. This course model ultimately argues for the

transferability of writing skills, critical thinking skills, and research skills; learning through active engagement with one's belief system; use of professional genres; and the integration of biblical worldview cultivation. Each 101 and 102 course provides a slightly different arrangement of assignments to target the goals for those courses.

There are limitations and drawbacks to this research and approaches. For example, only eight institutional perspectives were represented in the interviews that provided models for this project. Obviously, there are many, many more institutions that could provide models that would be beneficial to curricula development. The information obtained in the interviews is also limited to what interviewees were willing to disclose, how it was described, and how well the interviewer comprehended their descriptions.

And, of course, there are no perfect curricula. These curricula have weaknesses and drawbacks. Students may struggle to include their religion in their writing because of its highly emotional content. They may struggle to articulate other worldviews fairly and neutrally. While these assignments should increase buy-in from students, it may also hamper their ability to write clearly and effectively. These curricula also ask students to attempt some difficult tasks, listening to someone's else's worldview being one of them. Some students may feel intimidated, nervous, or fearful of participating in an interview that may undermine their own beliefs. Instructors as well may feel at times that they are under-prepared for these religious writing challenges. These assignments also are very complex, asking students to conduct many levels of writing, critical thinking, drafting, and research, also seeking to increase transferability and retention. If a student misses one assignment, it is possible they may struggle as the skills compound, or they may feel behind or overwhelmed while completing the rest of the coursework. The instructor also must cover a lot of ground in a relatively short amount of time.

Some assignments ask the instructor to develop a concept of the Christian worldview, Christian history, or Christianity as represented in the media, which the instructor may not have previously developed. Lastly, there are also drawbacks to electronic grammar modules. There is a disparity between the demonstration of grammar concepts outside of writing and applying those concepts within writing (Weaver).

My recommendations have been chosen despite these drawbacks for several reasons. First, I see value in teaching students to develop their academic voices in areas such as religion where they might feel emotionally charged or ill-equipped to examine these beliefs critically. If they struggle to produce clear writing because of the difficulty of the task, I hope they will benefit from it, become better writers because of it, and learn to develop an academic voice regardless of the content they are dealing with. I admit this will be a challenge, but it would be a much bigger error to steer clear of religious writing that students, who claim to plan to enter ministry professions, will most definitely encounter. I think we should prepare, educate, and equip students while they are in school when they have resources, such as an instructor, peers, a library, and other support, rather than leaving them to struggle on their own in their professions.

While many tasks included in these assignments may seem very difficult or uncomfortable for students, I believe the assignments also promote personal growth, and although this can be very difficult, personal growth is a worthy academic goal. While it may be uncomfortable to listen to someone else describe their beliefs that may be radically different from your own, this setting provides built-in reflection, discussion, and peer-support that should aid students in understanding and processing these discussions. If students are to learn to listen to others and take the mantle of responsibility we have all been given as human beings (and being kind, considerate, humble, and decent to each other), the effort is a necessary first step.



Instructors may be underprepared for these types of religious writing assignments and work. To address this, I have attempted to provide course options and assignment options that allow for different levels of expertise. I would advise that instructors choose the course option that best fits their knowledge to “keep the expert in the room” as Downs and Wardle describe. Discussions and written work should also be steered constantly back towards the rhetorical devices, composition theories, and writing discussions that will transfer and foster writing development in students. Instead of allowing students to discuss their beliefs in class, for example, instructors should ask students to examine their writing under the critical lens of audience awareness, purpose, or exigence. The instructor should be on guard for discussions that would chase religious tangents rather than further the writing and rhetorical purposes of these courses. Since instructors must cultivate a biblical worldview but may not hold any training in religious studies, they should learn to base their course efforts on biblical principles, rather than hermeneutics or exegesis.

This project seeks to add to the already existing models of curricula by offering secular and Christian institutions a chance to re-examine their present perspectives on the inclusion of religion in the teaching of writing. I hope to have shown the benefits of allowing students to write to personal interest, develop their religious worldview, and cultivate their critical thinking by allowing these writings in the composition classroom. I have argued for the inclusion of reflection and far-reaching transfer efforts as well as assessment strategies for first-year writing programs.

Finally, there is an opportunity for future research regarding this curriculum. As these models are employed, new assignments, assessments, discussions, and texts may be explored. There may be failures of these courses to meet objectives or a need for the objectives themselves

to be radically changed. I ask for others to take on the challenge and add to the pool of options for what works and what does not—and further refine the curricular options we offer to our students.

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## APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**

Office of the Vice President for  
Research & Economic Development  
Office for Research Compliance

June 5, 2017

Kristen Lushington  
Department of English  
College of Arts & Sciences  
Box 870244

Re: IRB # 17-OR-192, "From the Ground Up: Building the First Year Writing Program at a Postsecondary Christian Institution, Theoretical and Practical Considerations for Higher English Education"

Dear Ms. Lushington:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

*(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.*

Your application will expire on June 1, 2018. If your research will continue beyond this date, please complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, please complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, please complete the Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent forms to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



Stuart Usdan, Ph.D.  
Chair, Non-Medical IRB  
The University of Alabama

358 Rose Administration Building | Box 870127 | Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127  
205-348-8461 | Fax 205-348-7189 | Toll Free 1-877-820-3066

## APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

Appendix A: Study Consent Form

**Study Title:** "From the Ground Up: Building the First-Year Writing Program at a Postsecondary Christian Institution, Theoretical and Practical Considerations for Higher English Education"

**Investigator's Name and Status:** Kristen Lushington, PhD Student in Composition, Rhetoric and English Studies at the University of Alabama

**Institution:** The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, USA

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This study is being done by Kristen Lushington who is a graduate student at the University of Alabama. The study will be overseen by Dr. Amy Dayton, who is an Associate Professor of Composition and Rhetoric at the University of Alabama.

**Is the researcher being paid for this study?** No.

**Is this research developing a product that will be sold, and if so will the researcher benefit or profit from it?** No.

**Does the investigator have any conflict of interest in this study?** No.

**What is the study about? What is the investigator trying to learn?**

The study is being done to understand the curriculum decisions made at Christian post-secondary schools and the reasons why those decisions were made. The study also seeks to understand Christian professionals' writing expectations in the classroom and in their careers. One of the main goals of this study is to use the information and models from Christian institutions to create a new English curriculum for a new post-secondary Christian institution, Highlands College, located in Birmingham, Alabama. Here are some questions the study seeks to address:

- What theoretical foundations and best practices does the field of composition offer for writing and English skill development in Christian institutions? How can those skills be both transferable and functional for ministry professionals?
- What curricular positions are currently used by first year writing programs at sister institutions?
- What expectations do local, on-site faculty have for the students' writing skills and products, and how can those expectations be integrated into the curriculum?

**Why is this study important or useful?**

This study will help religious institutions use the best practices from writing professionals to build future English programs at college-level schools.

**Why have I been asked to be in this study?**

You have been asked because you are either an academic or ministry professional and your view on curricular and writing expectations would be valuable for this study.

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EXPIRATION DATE: 6-1-18

**How many people will be in this study?**

Around 15 people will be in this study.

**What will I be asked to do in this study?**

You will be asked to participate in a 30-60 minute interview. The investigator will ask you questions about the English curriculum at your school, your classroom expectations for student writing, what models you think are important for student learning, and/or your ministry/professional expectations for student writing. You will be audiotaped during the interview, and the investigator will be recording your responses.

**How much time will I spend participating in this study?**

30-60 minutes will be needed for the interview. After that, there are no additional requirements needed from you. However, you may ask to receive the final version of the manuscript to make sure your thoughts are presented accurately. If you request this, I will send you anything from your interview that I include in the final manuscript. The time you take to read those excerpts is based on your own reading speed. (I approximate it may take one hour to read the paragraphs involving your own interview.)

**Will the study cost me anything?**

The only cost is your time.

**Will I be compensated for being in this study?**

No.

**Can the investigator take me out of the study?**

The investigator may take you out of the study if your responses repeat information that other participants have said or if you offer information irrelevant to the study's focus.

**What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I participate in this study?**

There are no foreseen physical risks to this study. The only other possible risks are minimal but could involve changes in your reputation as an employee. This means that if confidentiality is somehow breached (your identity is linked to the information you provided), and someone you work with reads the manuscript, it may affect their opinion of you. However, should you give information that is irrelevant to the development of English curriculum, it will most likely not be included in the final version of the project.

**What are the good things that may result because of this study?**

You may find new ways to think about student writing or understand curricular decisions differently. Other than this, there may be no direct benefits to you.

**What are the benefits to society?**

This study will help Highlands College design a new English curriculum for college-level students.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

You will be given a false name (pseudonym) to be used for the duration of the project. You also

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do not have to answer any interview questions that you do not want to. There will not be any private information requested for this study.

**How will my confidentiality be protected?**

You will be given a pseudonym, and your real name and any other identifying information will be removed from your interview responses. All information gathered during this study will be stored on a password protected hard drive within a locked office. Only the investigator will have access to your interview responses.

**Do I have other choices to participating in this study?**

You can choose not to participate.

**What are my rights as a participant in this study?**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. It is your free choice. You can refuse to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop or withdraw at any time. There will be no effect on your relations with the University of Alabama, Highlands College, or the principal investigator.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (“the IRB”) is the committee that protects your rights. The IRB may review study records from time to time to ensure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

**Who do I call if I have questions?**

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints right now, please ask Kristen Lushington at [Parso004@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:Parso004@crimson.ua.edu). You can also ask Dr. Amy Dayton, at [adayton@ua.edu](mailto:adayton@ua.edu) or at 205-348-9460. Please ask any questions you may have before participating in the study.

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at [http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO\\_Welcome.html](http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html) or email the Research Compliance office at [participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu](mailto:participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu).

After you participate, you are encouraged to complete a survey for research participants that is online at the Outreach website, or you may ask the investigator for a copy of it and mail it to the University Office for Research Compliance, Box 870127, 358 Rose Administration Building, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127.

Please email a copy of this signed form to [parso004@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:parso004@crimson.ua.edu) and keep a copy of this consent form for your personal records.

I have read and understood this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions. I agree to take part in this study.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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EXPIRATION DATE: 6-1-18

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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