

First-Year Seminars and Senior Capstones

Bookending Writing Instruction in the
Undergraduate Curriculum

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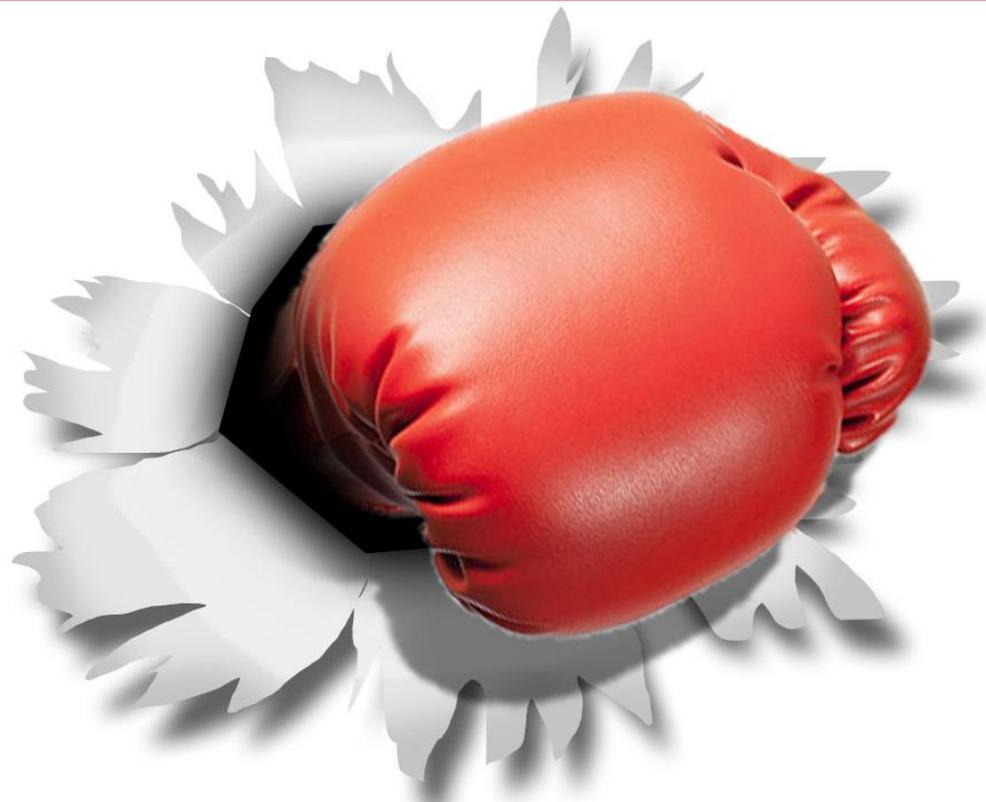
Diversity, Learning, and Student Success

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Writing remains a site of contention in higher education.



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Faculty Assessment of Student Writing

	FY/Sophomore	Junior/Senior
Use paragraphs	2.71	2.97
Write for different audiences	2.66	2.97
Develop a main idea	2.57	2.90
Write for different purposes	2.52	2.93
Organize a paper	2.49	2.91
Use supporting evidence	2.43	2.77
Use correct grammar and syntax	2.42	2.71
Employ correct mechanics (e.g., spelling)	2.39	2.85
Record data and/or use detail	2.37	2.87
Synthesize information from multiple sources	2.28	2.70
Analyze data/ideas/argument	2.20	2.73
Quote and paraphrase appropriately	2.13	2.63
Use, cite, and document sources	2.03	2.63

Source: Addison & McGee (2010). Writing in high school/writing in college.

Employers say the most emphasis should be placed on:

- Critical thinking and analytical reasoning (82%)
- Complex problem solving and analysis (81%)
- **Written and oral communication (80%)**
- The application of knowledge and skills in real-world settings (78%)
- The location, organization, and evaluation of information from multiple sources (72%)
- Innovation and creativity (71%)

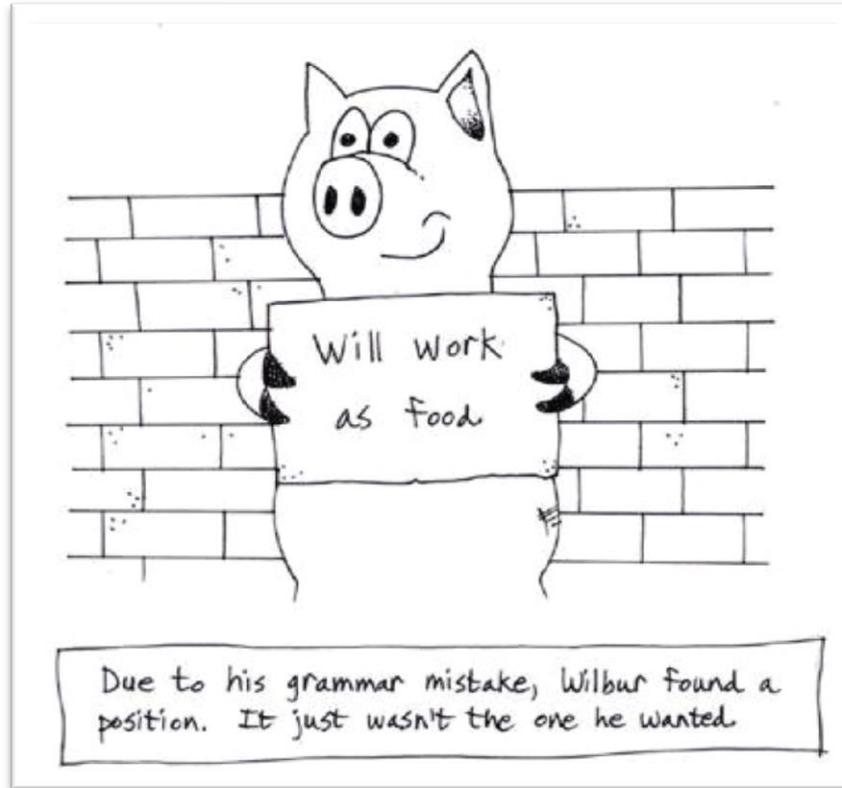
Source: Hart Research Associates (2013).

It takes more than a major.



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Yet, we focus on skill development and miss the bigger picture on college writing instruction.

Good Writing Practices Lead to Gains In...

- Deep Learning
 - Higher-order thinking
 - Integrative learning
 - Reflective learning
- Other outcomes
 - Personal and social development
 - Practical competence
 - General education

Source: NSSE. (2008). *Promoting Results for All Students: The Imperative to Look Within.*

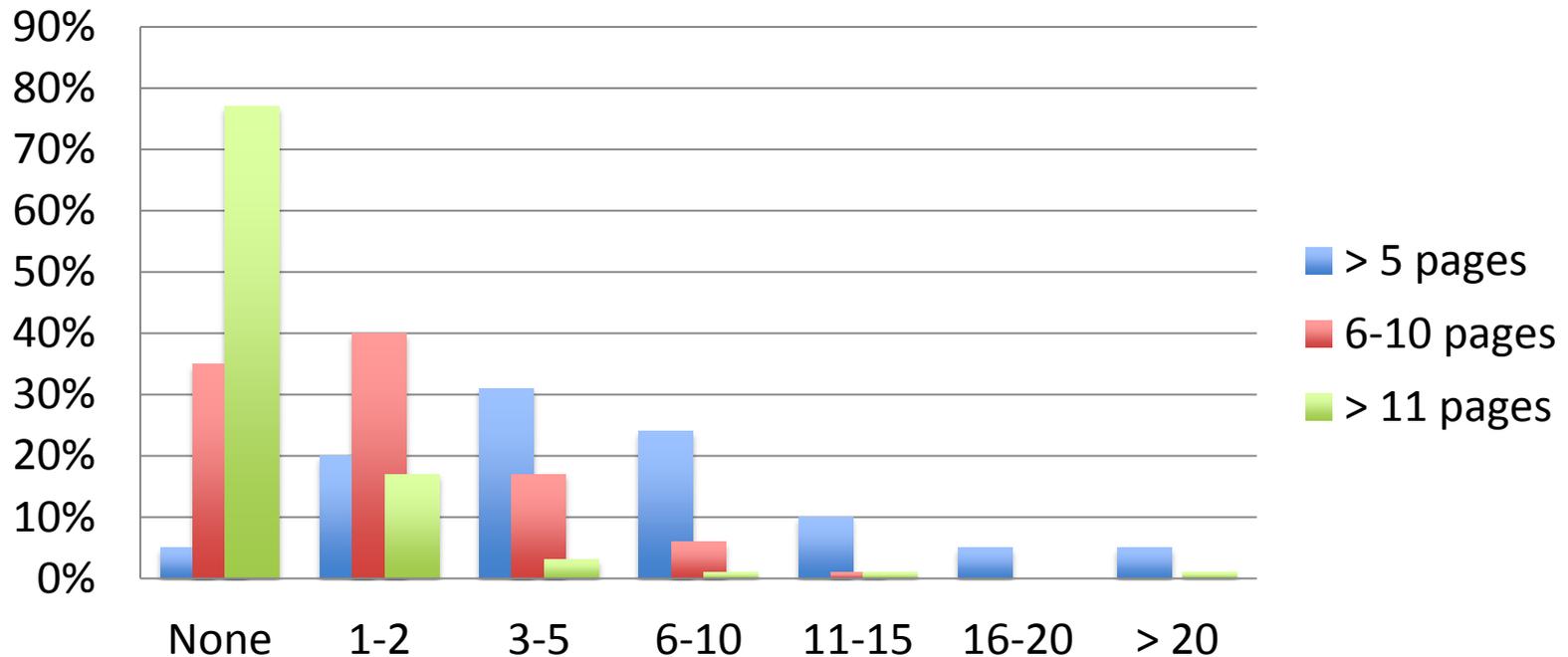


Purpose

- Get high-level view of writing experiences at beginning and end of college
- Examine the extent to which two high-impact practices—**first-year seminars and senior capstones**—serve as sites for effective writing practice
- Consider possibilities for—and barriers to—bookending writing across the undergraduate experience

How Much Are Students Writing?

First-Year Students

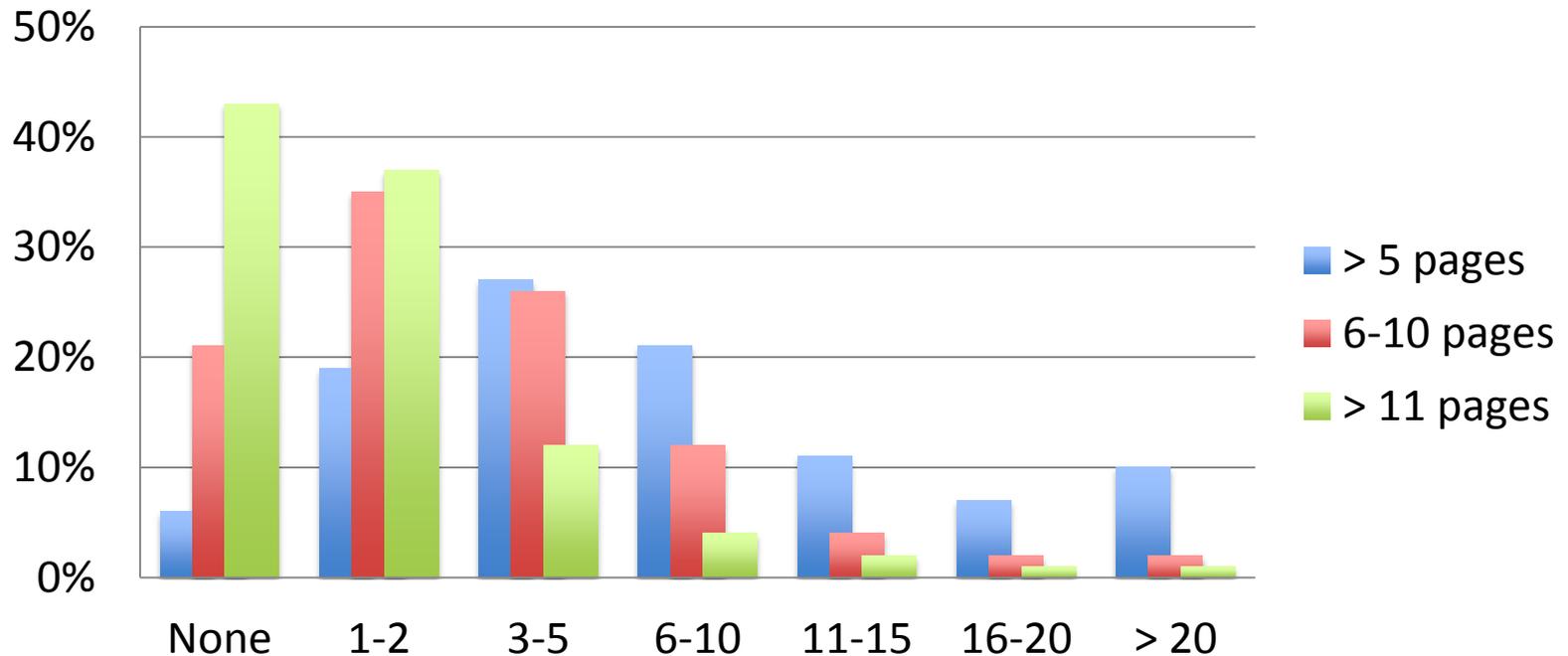


Source: NSSE 2013 Frequency
Distributions by Class and Gender.



How Much Are Students Writing?

Seniors



Source: NSSE 2013 Frequency
Distributions by Class and Gender.

Writing Experiences in College

First-Year Students

- Prepared 2 or more drafts of a paper—**51%**
(often or very often)
- Received feedback from faculty on draft or work in progress—**65%**
(quite a bit or very much)

Seniors

- Prepared 2 or more drafts of a paper—**45%**
(often or very often)
- Received feedback from faculty on draft or work in progress—**62%**
(quite a bit or very much)

Source: NSSE 2013 Frequency
Distributions by Class and Gender.



What Is the Impact of Effective Writing Practices on Student Learning?

NSSE Experiences with Writing Module

- Interactive writing processes
- Meaning-making writing tasks
- Clarity of writing expectations



Interactive Writing Experiences

<i>During the current school year, for how many writing assignments have you...</i>	First-Year Students	Seniors
Talked with peer or family member to develop ideas before writing	35%	30%
Received feedback from peer or family member before turning in assignment	46%	30%
Given feedback to a classmate about a draft/outline	38%	21%

Note. Percent responding *Most* or *All* writing assignments. NSSE 2013 Topical Module: Experiences with Writing

Meaning-Making Writing Tasks

Writing Task	First-Year Students	Seniors
Summarize material	54%	47%
Analyze or evaluate	60%	63%
Describe methods or findings (primary data collection)	33%	37%
Argue a position	51%	46%
Explain numerical/statistical data	22%	29%
Write in style/format of specific field	36%	54%
Address real or imagined audience	38%	34%

Note. Percent responding *Most* or *All* writing assignments. NSSE 2013 Topical Module: Experiences with Writing

English departments may be the default site for writing instruction in the first college year.

**WHERE ELSE ARE STUDENTS
ENCOUNTERING WRITING IN THE FIRST
YEAR?**



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National Survey of First-Year Seminars

Purpose

- Administered triennially over past 25 years
- Types of first-year seminars
- Seminar features
- Student characteristics
- Instructional characteristics
- Administration
- Assessment
- Module on HIPs

2012-2013 Administration

- 3,753 institutions were invited to participate
- 896 campuses responded (23.9% response rate)
- 804 (89.7% of sample) indicated that they had one or more FYS



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Types of First-Year Seminars

Seminar Type	Discrete Type (n = 788)	Primary Type (n = 786)
Extended Orientation	60.4%	39.1%
Academic – Uniform Content	29.4%	19.0%
Academic – Variable Content	28.7%	19.2%
Basic Study Skills	22.6%	3.9%
Professional/Disciple-based	16.4%	3.8%
Hybrid	23.4%	14.1%
Other	1.5%	0.9%



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Role of Writing in the First-Year Seminar

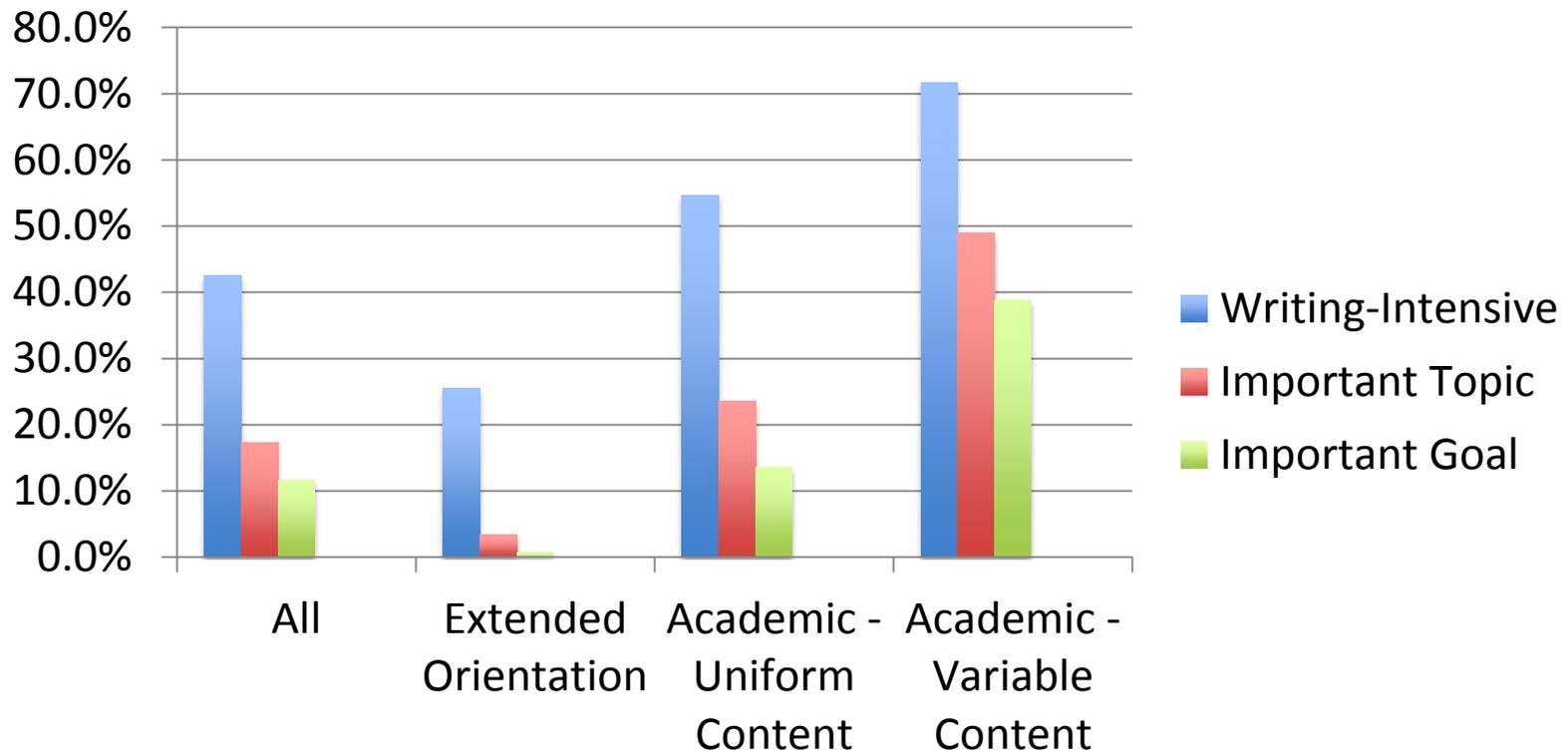
- Provide opportunities to produce and revise writing (42.5%)
- Writing skills are important course topic (17.3%)
- Developing writing skills is important course course goal (11.6%)



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Role of Writing in the First-Year Seminar



Where Do We See The Emphasis on Writing?

- In academic seminars of both types ($p < .05$)
 - Less likely in extended orientation and pre-professional seminars ($p < .05$)
- When section size is less than 19 ($p < .001$)
- When tenure-track faculty serve as course instructors ($p < .001$)
 - Less likely when student affairs professionals are instructors ($p < .001$)



Evidence of Interactive Writing Practices

	EO (<i>n</i> = 75)	AUC (<i>n</i> = 81)	AVC (<i>n</i> = 105)	Hybrid (<i>n</i> = 45)
Instructor feedback	1	2	11	2
Peer review	2	5	13	5
Writing center/writing tutor	1	4	5	3
Collaborative writing assignments	3	2	7	1

Evidence of Meaning-Making Assignments

	EO (n = 75)	AUC (n = 81)	AVC (n = 105)	Hybrid (n = 45)
Research paper	4	18	31	11
Expository writing	9	17	11	7
Article review, critique, analysis	4	19	13	11
Argument	0	2	7	1
Discipline-specific writing assignments	0	0	0	1

Other Types of Writing Assignments

	EO (n = 75)	AUC (n = 81)	AVC (n = 105)	Hybrid (n = 45)
Journal	21	18	6	12
Career exploration/academic planning	16	10	1	3
Personal exploration/reflection	22	20	6	13
Electronic writing	5	6	3	2
Response papers	22	14	19	11
Analysis of inventories	4	2	0	0
Career-related documents	3	3	1	0
Business writing	2	1	0	0

Evidence of Clear Expectations

- 44.3% of institutions that report seminars provides opportunities to produce and revise writing also assess writing as a course outcome
- 88.3% of institutions that identify development of writing skills also assess writing as a course outcome



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WHAT ARE THE SITES OF WRITING INSTRUCTION FOR COLLEGE SENIORS?



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National Survey of Senior Capstone Experiences

Purpose

- Types of capstone experiences being offered
- Structural characteristics and administration
- Instruction and pedagogy
- Assessment and evaluation of outcomes

2011 Administration

- 3,178 institutions were invited to participate
- 276 campuses responded (7.8% response rate)
- 268 (97.1%) report offering some type of capstone experience



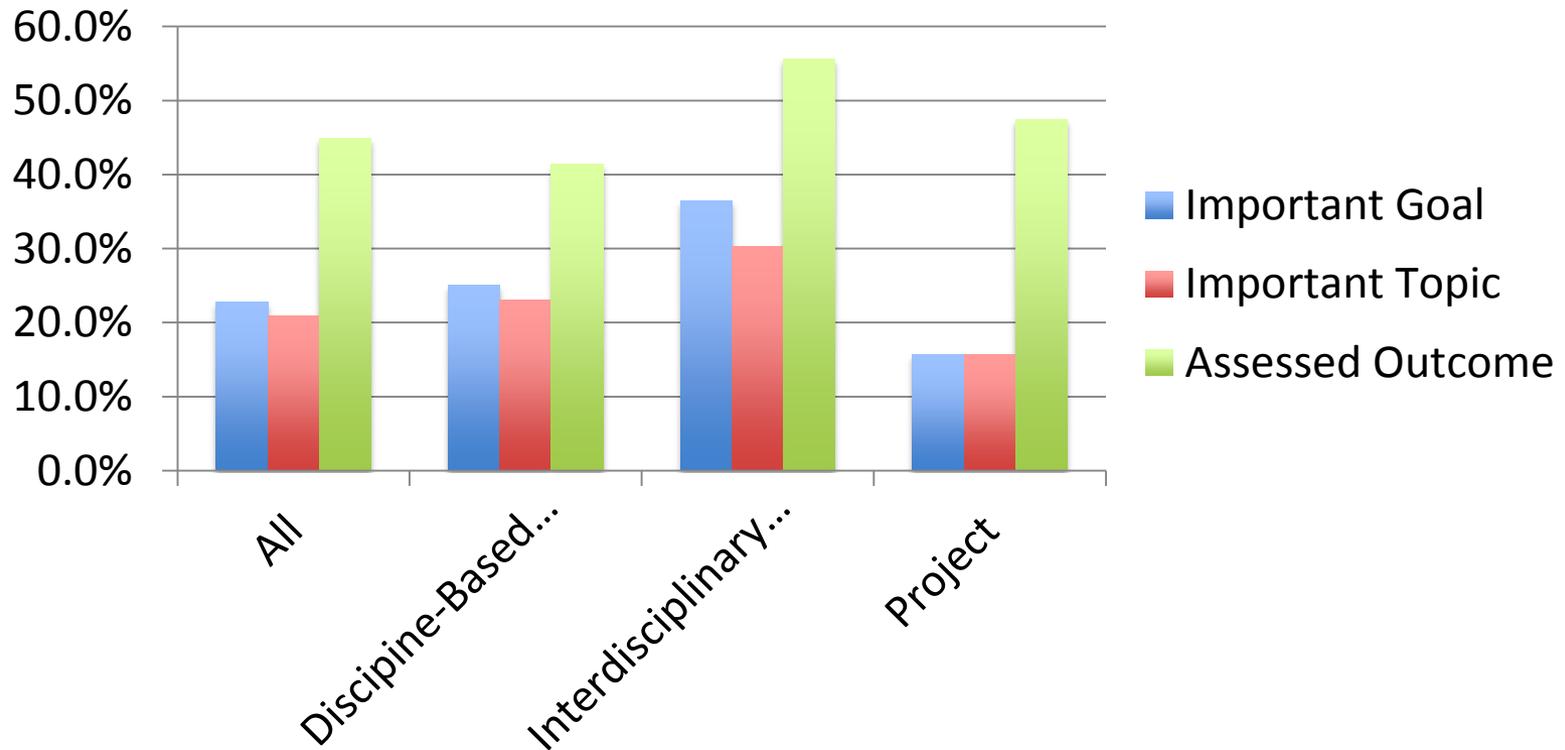
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Types of Capstone Experiences

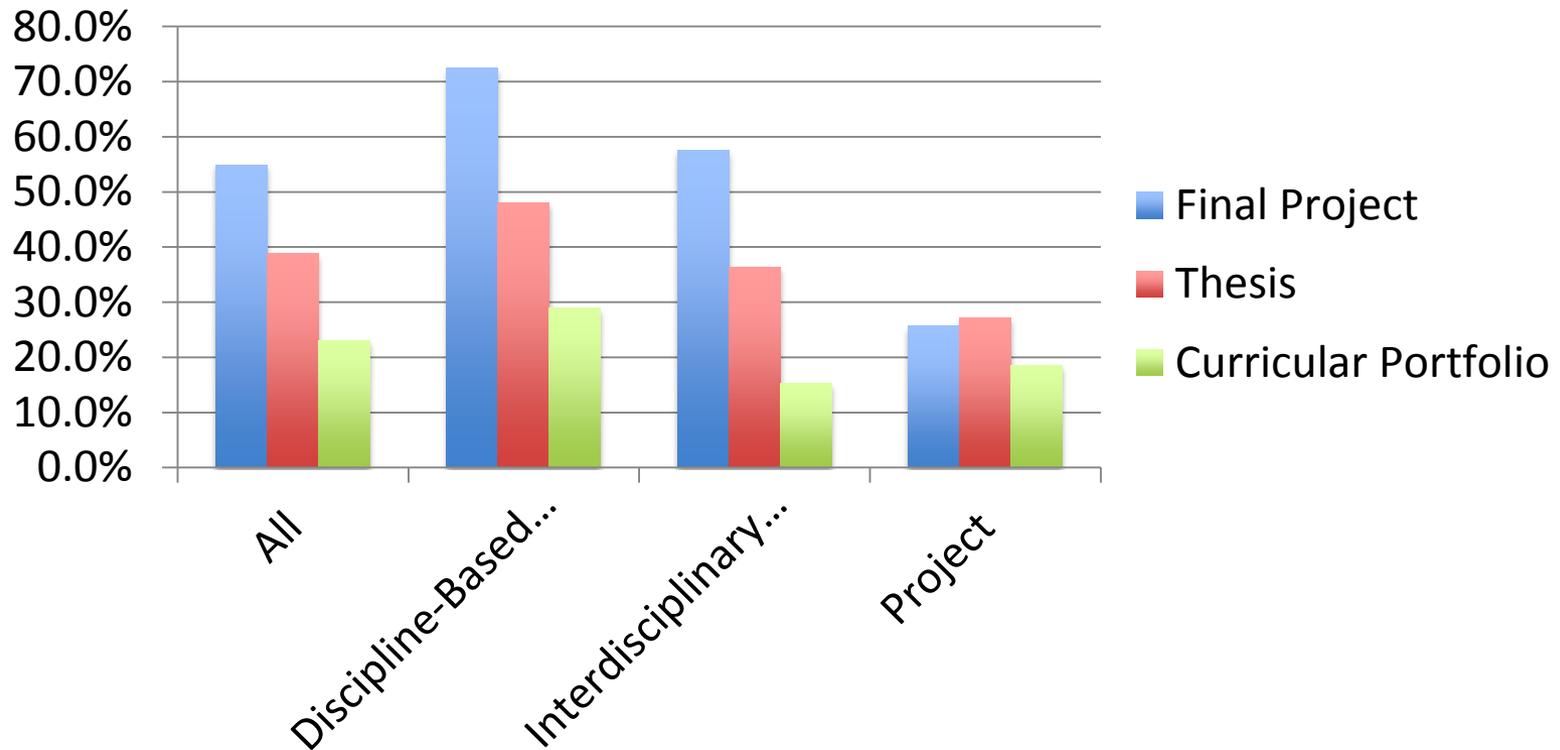
Capstone Experience	Discrete Type	Primary Type
Discipline-based course	84.7%	59.6%
Senior thesis/research paper	64.6%	12.9%
Exhibition of arts	58.2%	1.2%
Internship	46.6%	3.9%
Interdisciplinary course	33.2%	12.9%
Comprehensive exam	20.1%	2.4%
Other	7.1%	7.1%

Note. 27.5% of respondents reported offering a project-based capstone experience to their students, defined as senior thesis, internships, comprehensive exam, exhibition, or other.

Role of Writing in Capstone Experiences



Role of Writing in Capstone Experiences



Writing Assignments in the Senior Capstone

- Original research projects
- Integrative literature reviews
- Professional portfolios
- Reflective portfolios
- E-portfolios
- Analyses of real-world examples/data sets
- Interdisciplinary research papers
- Business plans
- Conference papers
- Wikis



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Interactive Writing Experiences?

The extent to which students have opportunities to give and receive feedback on drafts is unclear, though a review of the literature (Masiello & Skipper, 2013) suggests peer review activities and instructor conferences are built into many senior capstone experiences.



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So What Does It All Mean?

- Many first-year seminars and senior capstones appear to deliver the kinds writing experiences that support deep learning.
- Yet, faculty and employers tell us students aren't developing as writers to the extent that they should in college.
- Can we connect these two bookends of the college experience in a meaningful to improve student writing?



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Some Possibilities

- Many seniors not prepared for the research writing required in the capstone.
 - Build capacity for independent research in senior capstone beginning in FYS with developmentally appropriate assignments
 - Create links between preprofessional or discipline-based first-year seminars where writing is less prominent and the capstone for the major

Some Possibilities

- Extended orientation seminars and many academic uniform content seminars include writing assignments centered on personal reflection and academic and career planning
 - Use academic/career planning exercises in FYS as a springboard for integrative reflection in the senior year



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Some Possibilities

- The senior capstone serves as the site for assessment of learning in the major in particular or in the undergraduate experience more generally on many campuses.
 - Learning outcomes for the FYS can anticipate the outcomes for the capstone.
 - Instructor training and development for the FYS can help faculty map activities and assignments not only to FYS outcomes specifically but also to college outcomes generally.

Some Challenges

- How do we connect a largely centralized curricular initiative—the first-year seminar—to a decentralized initiative—the senior capstone—in a meaningful way?
 - What goals or learning outcomes have relevance both within general education and individual disciplines?
 - How do we articulate these?
- How do we support faculty teaching within these unique course models, especially around writing instruction?



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Questions/Comments

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