

First-Year Seminars and Senior Capstones

**Bookending Writing Instruction in the
Undergraduate Curriculum**

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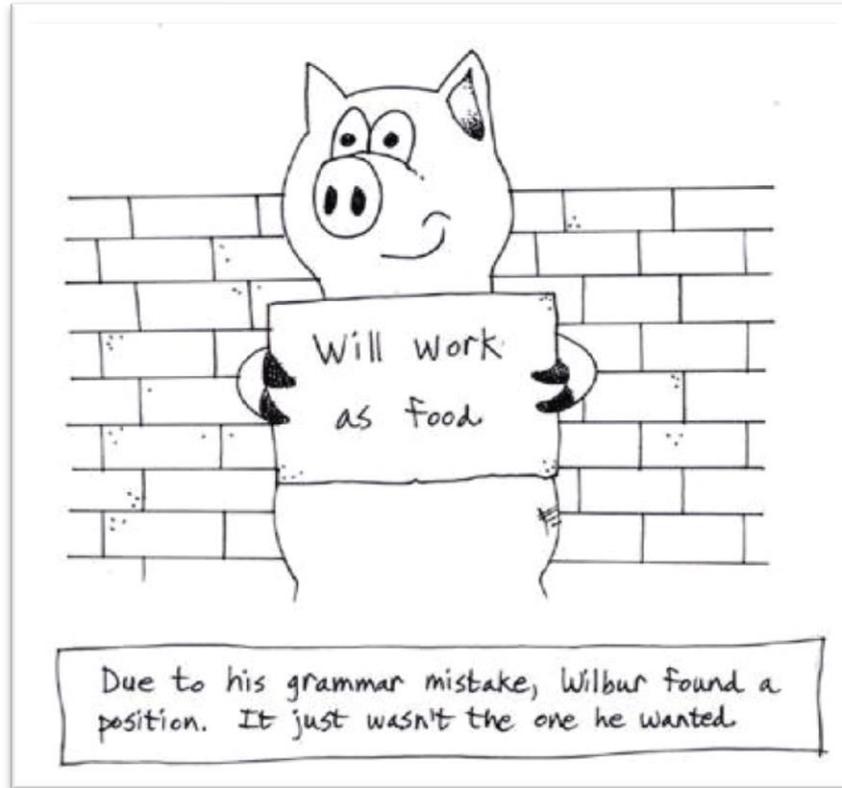
National Conference on Students in Transition

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The development of writing skills is an important college outcome.

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.*

www.sc.edu/fye

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.

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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



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

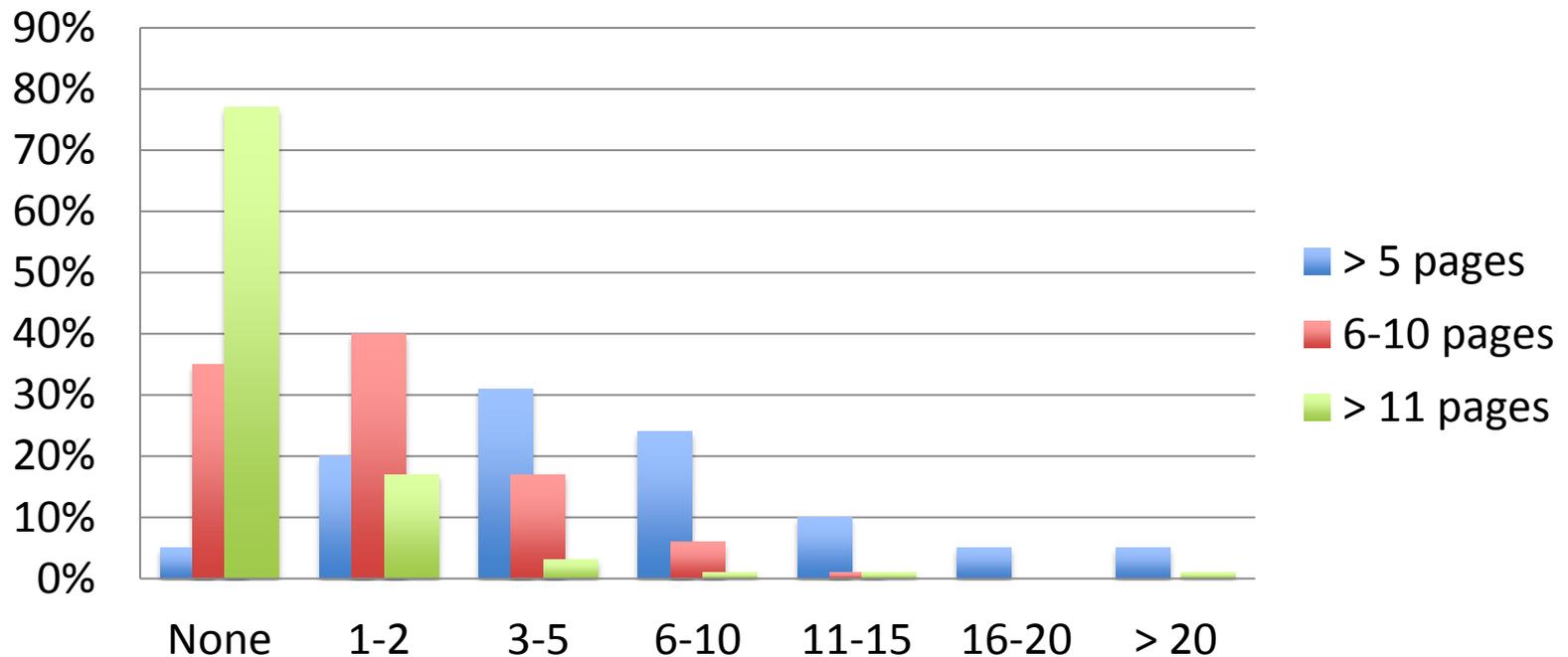
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Purpose

- 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

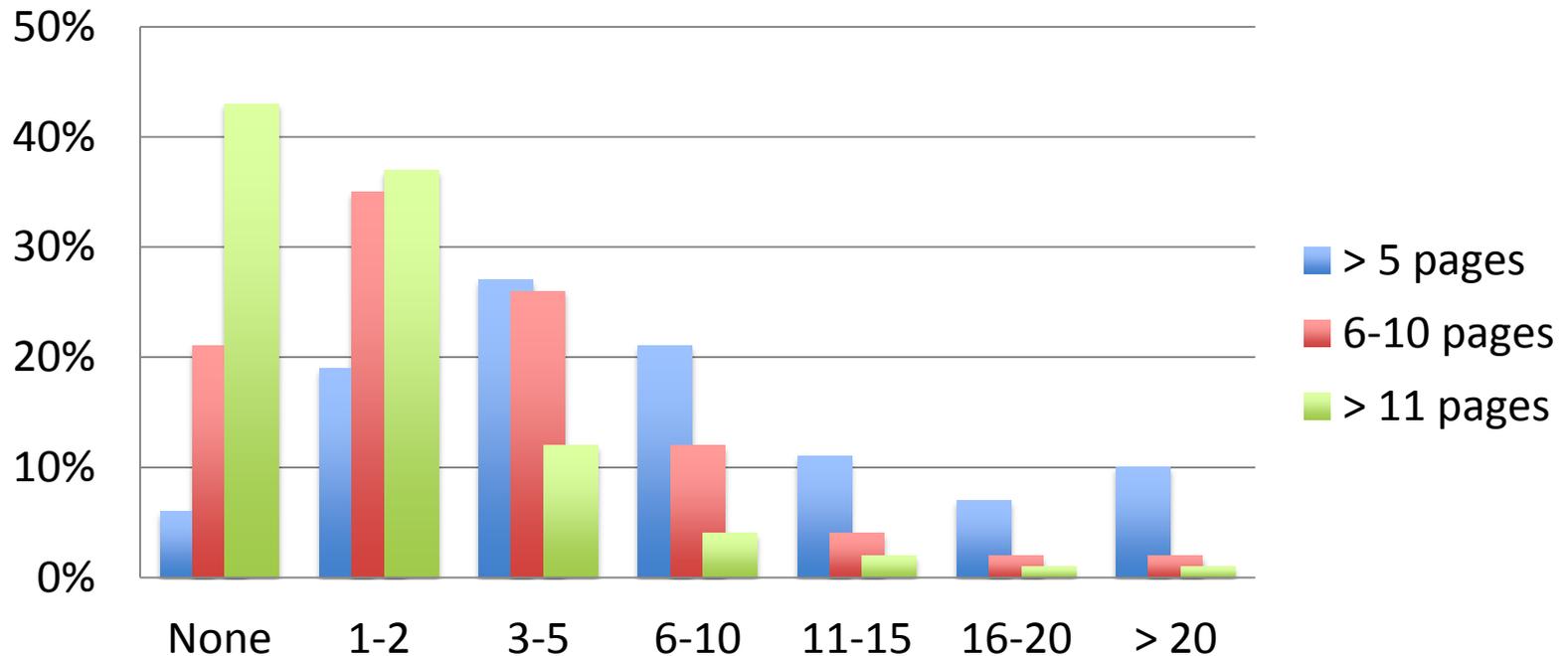
How Much Are Students Writing?

First-Year Students



How Much Are Students Writing?

Seniors



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)



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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

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%

Role of Writing in the First-Year Seminar

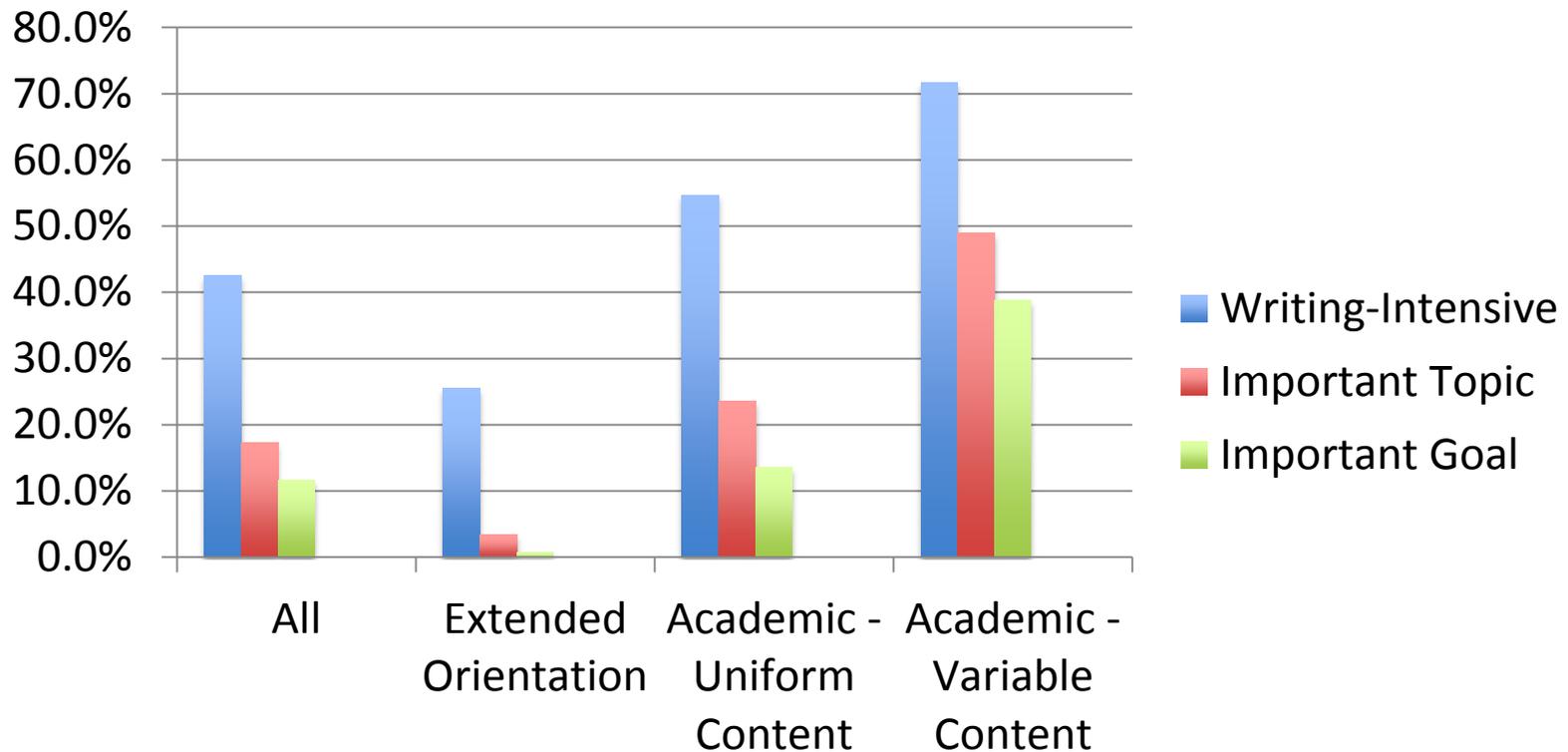
- Provide opportunities to produce and revise writing (42.5%)
- Writing skills are important course topic (17.3%)
- Developing writing skills is important course course goal (11.6%)



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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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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



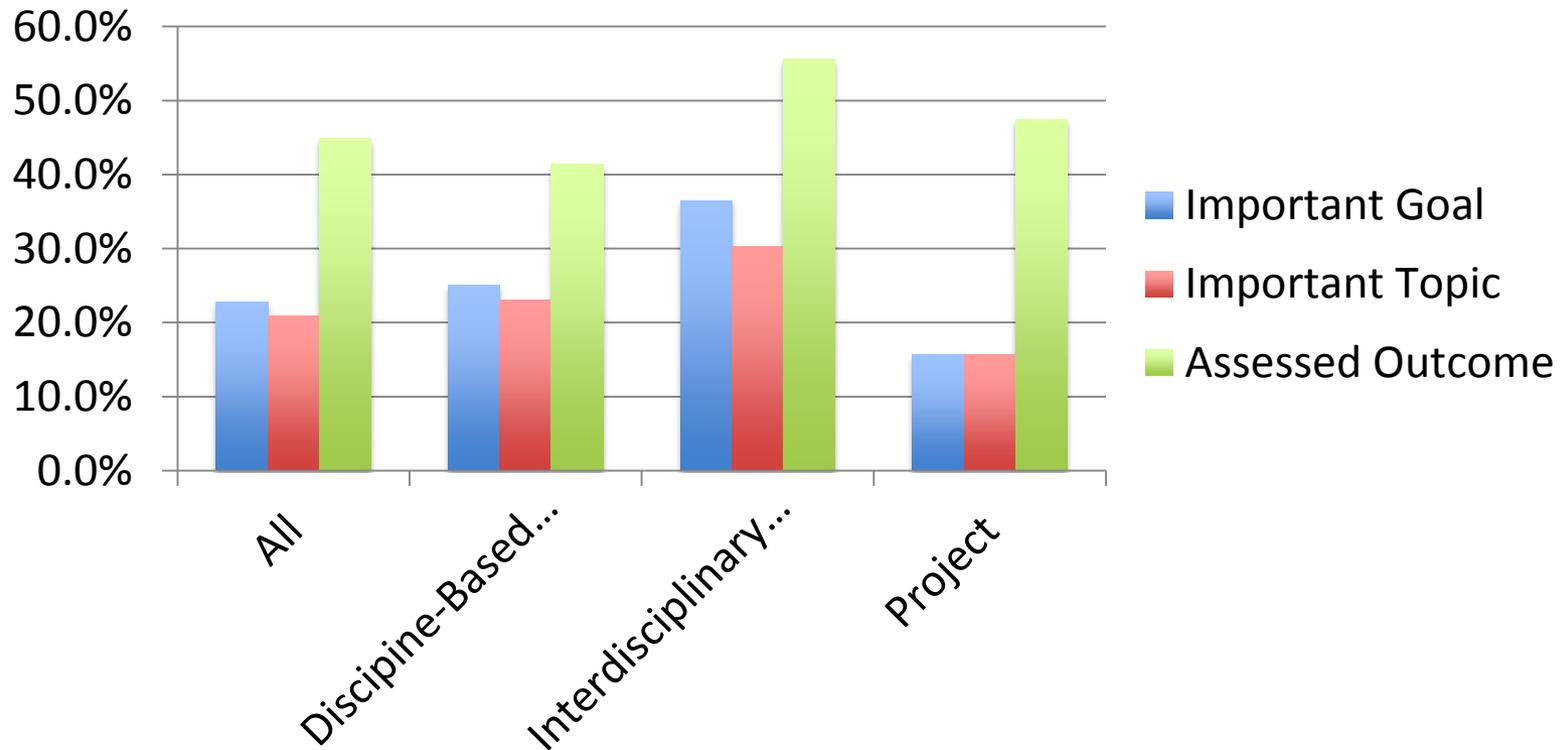
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Types of Capstone Experiences

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%

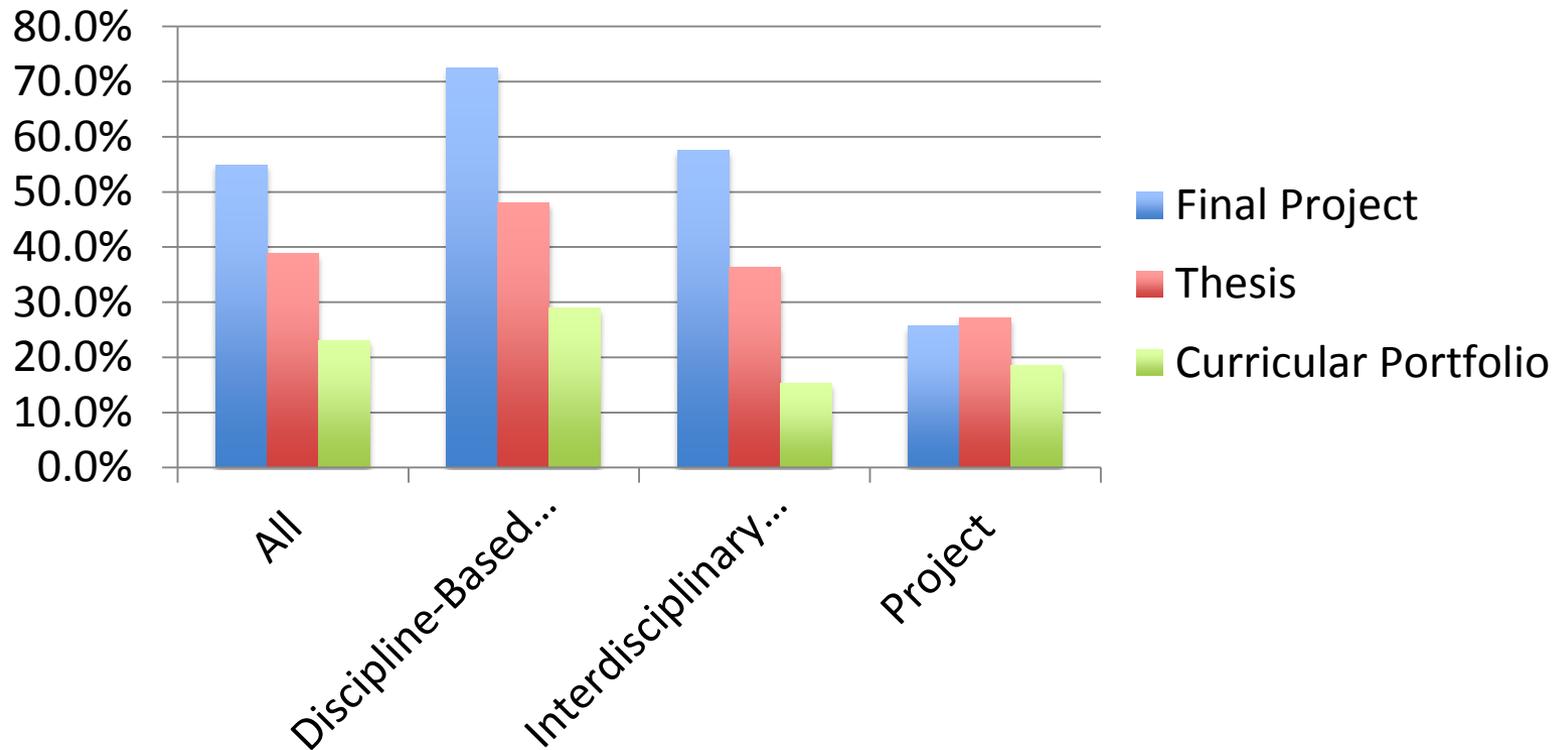
Note. 27.5% of respondents reported offering a project-based capstone experience to their students, defined as senior thesis, internships, comprehensive exam, exhibition, or other.

Role of Writing in Capstone Experiences



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Role of Writing in Capstone Experiences



Writing Assignments in the Senior Capstone

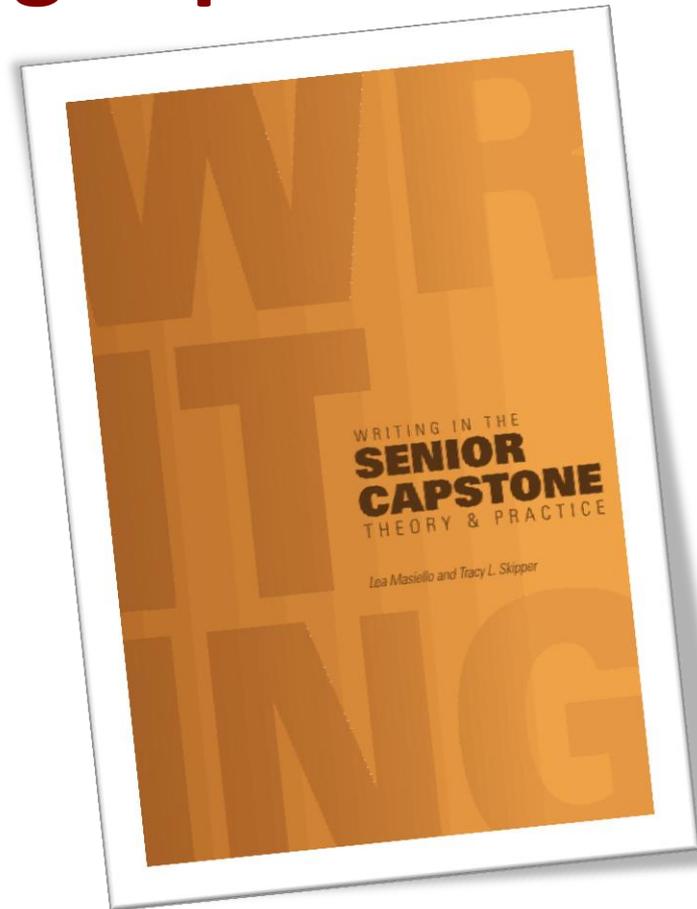
- Original research projects
- Integrative literature reviews
- Professional portfolios
- Reflective portfolios
- E-portfolios
- Analyses of real-world examples/data sets
- Interdisciplinary research papers
- Business plans
- Conference papers
- Wikis



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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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Thank You!

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