

Kinyon Teaching Statement for 2021 Writing Program Retreat

Vehicles of Discovery: Interdisciplinary Collaboration and the Creation of Communities of Practice within Autoethnography, Ethnography and Journalism.

On recently finishing my reading of seventeen 1733 Honors Writing portfolios, ending with the final autoethnography project, I am struck by the diversity of work that I received. One Hispanic student writes of growing up in a gang-dominated neighborhood where she was shot at when going to the park as a child. Her autoethnography represents a variety of perspectives, including those of a friend who eventually left gang life and became a teen court coordinator. Another student writes of her identity as a Sudanese American in conjunction with the accounts of other immigrants of different generations. A third writes of growing up in a refugee camp in Nepal, being abused as a child, immigrating, and working in a Denver center for refugees. Her autoethnography revolves around the wish to make better mental health care available to refugees. Several other students also write about their struggles with mental health. Papers represent issues and causes ranging from eating disorders and body dysmorphia to prejudice against the LGBT community. One student from an affluent background relates his week in a psychiatric ward following suicidal ideation and his gradual recovery and movement to mental health activism. This was not a set of portfolios one might expect at a school often stereotyped as lacking in diversity and dominated by a privileged, mostly homogeneous student body. I interpret the diversity I encountered in my Honors class as indicative of DU's recruiting and support for minority students and for students with mental health concerns. I see it as my role to build the type of curriculum where such students can tap into key aspects of their experience in their writing. According to their

interests, students drew on their unique personal backgrounds to situate themselves into a larger perspective and to provide a voice for their communities and causes.

In my WRIT 1133 courses, I found a similar dynamic when reading final student work. I received autoethnographies and oral histories about a range of issues: imposter syndrome among women of color in the STEM field, personal and family struggles during the pandemic, anxiety caused by early recruiting among student athletes, the experience of hybrid identity as the child of a Native-American father and Hispanic mother, the second-generation Vietnamese-American experience, immigration among those seeking a better life or fleeing oppressive regimes, the first-generation student experience. Inviting students to produce work of this type is important to me as a matter of principal, since I support work where students explore aspects of their own or other identities, finding social implications and activist potential when relevant. At the same time, I invite such work for my own personal reasons as a reader. These stories resonate with me, telling me something essential about lives I might otherwise never know of.

While these are the types of topics my students have addressed for many years, I find that teaching online asynchronous courses during 2020-21 has unique challenges stemming from a pandemic year and a year of struggle for social justice. I strove to develop assignments and course materials that students would find most relevant. To this end, I participated in conferences and collaborations that could help me in supporting students at a time when many felt isolated or discriminated against. For example, I participated in a panel at the online "Minds, Means, and Materials" Writing and Well-Being Conference this January. I found the conference helpful in providing me with new teaching ideas that in the current context align with trauma engaged pedagogy in fostering

mindfulness and well-being. My paper “Teaching Research Writing During a Pandemic: Promoting Mindfulness through Oral History and Autoethnography” situated my teaching in relation to Peter Kaufman’s concept of critical contemplative pedagogy, which stipulates the compatibility of introspective personal narrative with an outward concern for community. I also drew on Paul Freire’s concept of dismantling the teacher-student duality and on Barzebat and Bush’s emphasis on first-person focus, as explained in *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education* (2013). In the context of this framework, I outlined the changes that I made during the pandemic year to best foster student engagement through rapid response oral history of the unfolding pandemic and through autoethnography, a method through which students can use the personal to then situate their experience within a larger socio-cultural context.

In emphasizing ethnography in my WRIT 1133 and 1733 courses, I tap into a long tradition for DU’s Writing Program, where many of us lead students to produce ethnographic or autoethnographic work. To explain to students the value of ethnography for a writing class, I refer to Seth Kahn’s “Putting Ethnographic Writing in Context” (2011). In producing an ethnography, students acquire a new set of writing skills ranging from taking fieldnotes and transcribing interviews to shaping writing for diverse scholarly or popular audiences. Students also learn to navigate relationships “between participants and researchers, between writers and readers of ethnographic narratives.” Furthermore, as anthropologist and writing professor Durba Chattaraj stresses in “Anthropology and Writing Pedagogy,” anthropology’s “broad-based understanding of evidence facilitates transfer across disciplines” (2020). Given the interdisciplinary nature of ethnography, the value of ethnographic work for writing students has important implications for WAC and WID.

To facilitate my teaching of ethnography in online asynchronous courses during the pandemic, I have developed curriculum and teaching materials in collaboration with the DU Ethnography Lab (DUEL) of which I have been a member since its founding several years ago under the initiative of anthropologist Alejandro Ceron. One of DUEL’s central goals is to offer a space where students interested in ethnography can develop their ideas and skills. I have worked with Alejandro and other DUEL participants for several years in creating resources for the use of students in first-year composition courses. For spring of 2020, I organized a Conversations in the Disciplines filmed Zoom event with presentations by ethnographers Kelly Fayard, Alison Krogel, and Dinko Hanaan Dinko; these represented the incorporation of mixed methods research in anthropology, languages, and geography respectively. This resource has continued to be valuable in my 2021 research writing courses. In creating new materials for 2020-21, I collaborated with other DUEL members across campus to put together a series of videos for supporting WRIT 1133 students in conducting ethnography. A teaching innovation grant from the Writing Program was instrumental to helping me complete the video series as well as the compilation of other materials, such as annotated bibliographies related to my qualitative research units on oral history and ethnography. These and similar resources helped to make my teaching of ethnography successful during a time when the possibility for in-person events and support was limited by the pandemic.

I am also finding the opportunity to share the work I have done with DUEL with a broader audience through conference presentations and potential publication. This summer, I am participating on a panel about ethnography at the IWAC conference where I will present together with Alejandro Ceron and Dinko Hanaan Dinko in the panel

“Fostering Ethnographic Interactions and Collaborations: Implications for WAC and WID.” Our panel focuses on DUEL’s role as a catalyst for student, faculty, and community collaborations. My talk will showcase how my collaboration with DUEL has supported student ethnographic work through resources like the following: the recorded 2020 online Conversations in the Disciplines event in which ethnographers discuss their research, the sequence of videos that I made with other DUEL members about conducting ethnographic work, and one-on-one consultations for students conducted by DUEL members. In addition to this conference talk, I am also currently working on the joint paper “Building Community through Ethnography in Action” with several members of the anthropology department—Alejandro Ceron, Penske McCormack, and Zoi Johns—together with community partner Kassandra Neiss; we will soon be submitting the manuscript to *Annals of Anthropological Practice*. The article addresses how DUEL seeks to serve as a catalyst for ethnographic collaborations across campus and the surrounding community. My contribution focuses on establishing an ethnography curriculum for Writing Program students within the larger context of the use of ethnography in action by an interdisciplinary community of practice to produce meaningful change through community-engaged research. Overall, collaborating with DUEL has enriched my ethnographic teaching as well as helping me to create resources to share with other Writing Program faculty members, whether through personal communication or through the program’s Teaching Resources website.

While my collaboration with DUEL has motivated me to emphasize the role of ethnography in my WRIT 1133 and 1733 courses, the role of ethnography in my classes fits into a larger structure which also involves oral history and photo analysis. Together, these different approaches to qualitative and

text based-interpretive research address the Writing Program’s teaching goal to familiarize students with different research traditions and with ways of presenting this research to diverse audiences. In teaching oral history, I invited students to either write about the pandemic or to explore other topics, such as aspects of cultural heritage related to immigration or ethnic identity. While my spring 2020 oral history unit focused predominantly on rapid response oral history related to the unfolding pandemic, I wasn’t sure if students in my 2021 courses would continue to be invested in writing about the pandemic after a full year of experiencing it and perhaps wishing to forget about it. However, this was the route that a number of students chose to take. Students wrote about how the pandemic impacted them in different capacities—as athletes, musicians, or first-generation students, for example. Others interviewed family members or friends who were front-line respondents. Of students who chose to pursue traditional oral histories gathering stories from the distant past, many wrote immigration stories. To introduce the unit, I told students of my own family’s immigrant history in escaping from communist Czechoslovakia. This resonated with some students who interviewed relatives about their own immigrant heritage. In creating a project for a specific audience, students could either write an article or make a film. I find that allowing students to choose their audience and modality is a good way to instill audience awareness as well as awareness of the affordances and constraints of different modalities. A number of students made successful films, which I welcomed given my interest in fostering multimodal work. I nominated two of these films—one about immigration from communist Hungary and another about the first-generation student experience—for the Writing Program’s Fall Student Showcase for which I am one of the organizers.

To contrast with my primarily qualitative oral history and ethnography units, where text-based research functioned in a subsidiary role, I included in my research writing courses an initial text based/interpretive photo analysis unit. This assignment led students to practice different forms of text-based research: the synthesis and analysis of secondary sources, close reading of images, and the application of a critical frame. Students were asked to analyze a sequence of photographs on a subject of their choice through the lens of Lutz and Collins' "Photograph as an Intersection of Gazes," an article that applies the concept of the gaze to photographs of indigenous peoples as represented in *National Geographic* images from different eras. Following our reading of this article, I presented students with different examples of the type and scope of projects they might choose. We studied representations of the Japanese internment by photographers with different rhetorical visions: Dorothea Lange (whose photographs were censored for many years), Ansel Adams (whose more positive representations were welcomed by the war relocation authorities and published in the book *Born Free and Equal*), and Toyo Miyatake (who had an insider's role as an interred Japanese man). We looked at depictions of Native Americans by contemporary Native photographers responding to Edward Curtis (of whose North American Indian series DU's Special Collections owns a rare copy). We discussed issues in photo manipulation and photo ethics. We read about the circulation of individual iconic images such as Steve McCurry's "Afghan Girl" which appeared in different guises on the cover of *National Geographic* as a catalyst for the Afghan cause. I have in the past taught entire courses just on the rhetoric of photography, so it was hard for me to narrow down the material. While in my in-person research writing courses I have developed focused presentations and group work to help students in designing their own projects within a short time frame, I found it

challenging to successfully present this material through discussion boards in the context of a three-week unit for an online asynchronous course. This led to some students struggling with the assignment, which I primarily addressed through one-on-one conferences. In the end, I found that most students were able to complete meaningful projects on subjects such as immigration across the U.S.-Mexico border, FSA photography of the Great Depression, representations of Native Americans, or focused issues related to war photography. I have nominated a couple of projects for the Fall Student Showcase. One of these, a 1733 paper entitled "Capturing the Lives of Americans: Proof or Propaganda? An Analysis of the 'Killed' Photos of the Great Depression," focuses on the ways in which Roy Stryker, director of the historical section of the FSA, harshly selected which photos depicting life during the Great Depression should be circulated; an analysis of rejected photos in the negatives of which Stryker punched holes reveals that he rejected representations that depicted positive moments in the lives of the impoverished. In the other paper I nominated, an 1133 student discussed how Gordon Parks' photo essay "Harlem Gang Leader," his first for *Life* magazine, was selected and assembled by editors to depict violence and despair; this curation by editors distorted the more positive rhetorical vision represented in Parks' larger oeuvre. In both projects, the focus is on the rhetorical dynamic between the photographer's and editor's gazes and how this impacts the way that images circulate and become disseminated to different publics.

In the end, I found that many students benefited from my WRIT 1133 and 1733 online asynchronous courses. Since student evaluations have not yet come out, I will judge student responses to the course by comments made in the final Writing Program Portfolio reflective essays and by personal emails sent to me by students. Some of the comments

that students made in their reflective essays in final portfolios indicated to me that my course focus and assignment design were working. An 1133 student wrote “I was very interested in writing about real human issues going on in the world and things that hit close to home such as immigration families and the fight for a better home and safety.” One 1733 student wrote “I appreciate how I was given the valuable opportunity to experience my personal self in an academic way.” Another wrote: “Being able to choose and explore our own topics allowed for much more flexibility and freedom to write, which is something that helps me to flourish as a writer.” In personal emails, students appreciated my support in responding to their writing and helping them develop as writers. In a 6/7 email, a 1733 student wrote: “I would like to thank you for a wonderful class this quarter. I learned a lot and greatly appreciate your help with improving my writing and work overall.” In another 6/7 email, an 1133 student wrote: “Thank you for such a great quarter! (I kind of wish I could continue being your student and being a part of your course a little longer!) I have learned so much from this course and have appreciated all your support.” In a 6/15 email, an 1133 student wrote: “ I just read your comment on my final portfolio. I am touched by your kind words towards my writing. I had always struggled with writing as stated in my reflection essay, though I feel I’ve found a ‘grove’ in these past two writing courses. I really enjoyed my time in your course. I learned a great deal about writing as a whole and I believe that your influence helped me with that.”

The 2020-21 academic year was also the first time that I taught WRIT 1122 as an online asynchronous course. Keeping the same basic content of my in-person WRIT 1122 courses from previous years, I focused on the rhetoric of journalism, a concentration that is informed by genre theory research. In my WRIT 1122 “Rhetoric of Journalism” course, I teach students rhetorical awareness

of their audience and ways of employing rhetorical strategies in reaching their chosen audience. This approach to the course aligns with Beaufort’s definition of literacy as the ability to read and write in rhetorically effective ways for a specific audience or broader discourse community. Throughout the course, the discussion of rhetorical situations and strategies is embedded in a discussion of genre. In teaching the affordances and constraints of op-eds, travel essays, feature articles, or parodies in different modes and media, I draw on genre studies pedagogy. As explicated by Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff, the process of critically analyzing a genre and writing within it in rhetorically effective ways can facilitate the transfer of writing skills as students apply their learning to other genre conventions whether in college, in the public sphere, or at work. In order to facilitate transfer, I also ask that students accompany their articles with secondary texts, such as rhetorical analyses, reflections, or query letters to the editors of an imagined publication venue. The query letters serve to foster awareness of a tangible target audience; rhetorical analysis helps reinforce key rhetorical concepts such as logos, pathos, ethos, and Kairos; reflections and other forms of meta-analysis once again serve to facilitate transfer. I teach the rhetoric of journalism both because of how well this ties in with the Writing Program’s course goals and because I find that students become invested in journalistic writing and in the many options this gives them to find writing topics that interest them. I furthermore found that my rhetoric of journalism course lent itself well to the online asynchronous format. I used the Canvas discussion board as a place where students could respond to reading, generate ideas for projects, post work in progress, and respond to one another’s work in peer reviews. I also gave students detailed feedback on multiple stages of their composition process including brainstorming topics, annotated bibliographies, rough drafts, and final drafts.

My WRIT 1122 course evaluations for 2020-21 showed that students appreciated the feedback they received, the content and types of writing assignments, and the overall pacing of the class. A number of students responded favorably to receiving feedback that they could use in productive revisions of their work. Here are some representative comments: “Dr. Kinyon helped me tremendously with my writing style and finding my own voice through writing. I really appreciated how readily available she was when I needed some clarification and extra help. I found her feedback to be very helpful;” (1122-2) “The Professor was very helpful and offered good feedback on all writing stages;” (1122-2) “Professor Kinyon was great at giving in-depth feedback on assignments in a timely manner;” (1122-32); “She always provided thorough feedback that really helped me understand how I could improve my writing” (1122-33). In addition, students responded favorably to the content and assignments of the “Rhetoric of Journalism” course as can be seen in the following representative comments: “The different units helped me develop as a writer because it was my first time writing these types of articles and essays;” (1122-2); “I really enjoyed this class and was able to show and use my creativity which I loved;” (1122-2) “The assignments were fun and engaging.” (1122-32); “Professor Kinyon did a great job of allowing us to have the freedom to venture out into topics that we were curious about writing about” (1122-32). Overall, evaluations from WRIT 1122 indicated the success of my approach to teaching WRIT 1122, even as an online asynchronous course.

As I look back at my teaching this year—as well as the ways this was supported by my curriculum development, conference presentations, and research—I believe that I have successfully opened for students the opportunity to write about subjects that mattered to them. Many students chose to share very personal stories, ones that the

online asynchronous format perhaps aided by giving them the courage to write about painful situations relating to subjects such as mental or physical health, growing up in a broken home, or their difficult journey to college after experiencing racism against immigrants or impoverished circumstances. Others wrote about positive experiences: subcultures they engage in, cultures they encountered through travel, the success stories of people they interviewed for journalistic articles. Without imposing a didactic aim on my classes, I believe that I was able to encourage students to find a happy intersection between personal and public aims of writing, between writing for themselves and writing for specific public or scholarly audiences. One 1733 student wrote in her final portfolio reflective essay: “As a writer this year, I have developed the sense to combine my personal stories/passions with research...Despite not having English as my first language, I love to write in English. I love to play around with structures and words even if sometimes I do not know the meaning of words. The biggest pieces of information I learned in this class was to critically analyze pieces of research and how to incorporate them with passion into the paper.” Being myself an immigrant and a former ESL teacher, these words resonated with me. It can be a discovery to find the meaning behind words and to use those words with passion, whether to convey a personal story or to place one’s experience and thought into conversation with the research that others have conducted. Teaching writing during a pandemic and a time of turmoil, I was initially worried whether a writing course could be made meaningful to students dealing with so much pain, whether in their own lives or the world at large. I found that writing can indeed be meaningful, both as a vehicle of self-discovery and as a vehicle for communication.