

Research Project Portfolio: Research Reflection

When asking faculty members to participate in my research, I began my email by telling them how I was intrigued by UC Berkeley's method of teaching writing to undergraduate students, both inside and outside their disciplines. Specifically, I was – and continue to be – captivated by the way in which the university's writing curriculum is structured, and the reasons justifying the implementation of a model in which writing is taught outside disciplines. Thinking that the opinions held by faculty determined how writing instruction should be incorporated into the curriculum, I decided to focus my research on the willingness of UC Berkeley's faculty to teach writing within disciplines.

The results of my research surprised me, as I realized that UC Berkeley's writing curriculum is not structured in such a way *because* of faculty opinions, but rather *despite* them. As I analyzed to what extent faculty attempt to integrate writing instruction into their courses, whether or not they find it important to teach writing within disciplines, and their opinions on undergraduate student writing, my initial belief that the lack of writing instruction in UC Berkeley undergraduate courses was due to faculty's unwillingness to teach writing within their disciplines was replaced by the recognition that this issue was indeed a result of the university's writing curriculum.

While the conclusion I reached upon the culmination of my research study was unlike what I had expected, I have come to learn that this evolution of ideas is actually a core part of the research process. Every aspect of my research – from the initial literature review to the final analysis of my survey responses – revealed information that seemed to complicate my results. While this was sometimes frustrating, I came to understand that each additional piece of information added a layer of analysis to my study that made my conclusion more complex but also more authentic. Ultimately, the most important thing I learned about the research process is that it is highly unlikely for all of a study's findings to support one answer. Rather, the data must be viewed from a holistic perspective in order to reach a conclusion that incorporates the multifaceted information acquired.

In addition to gaining knowledge about the research process, I developed a deeper understanding of the satisfaction and pride that not only accompanies the culmination of the research, but also the completion of smaller parts of the project. When identifying faculty members to email my survey to, I studied course catalogues and laboratory research project descriptions to verify their involvement in undergraduate writing instruction. Upon reading this material, I was intimidated by the prestigious qualifications and stature of these field practitioners. Consequently, one of my greatest fears when beginning my project was that faculty members would dismiss my survey, and that I would receive no responses. For this reason, I was pleasantly surprised when almost 20% of the faculty I contacted took time to respond to my survey. The prestige that I had initially found intimidating changed into a reminder and confirmation of the importance of my research, as distinguished faculty members expressed their interest in my topic and indicated their willingness to be contacted for further information.

As my study allowed me to conclude that the lack of writing instruction in UC Berkeley undergraduate courses is a result of the university's writing curriculum – rather than faculty's unwillingness to teach writing within discipline-specific courses – I hope to extend this research to further investigate how modifications to the curriculum can be made. Specifically, I intend to explore the history of UC Berkeley's writing curriculum, in order to form a model on how its future can be changed.