

# Assignment Makeover



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*The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA*



# Your Experience as a Student

Think back to your undergraduate years.



Think of the writing project you found most meaningful.



Why was that project meaningful?

Write and talk from these.



# Meaningful Writing Project

A research study of the writing projects more than 700 college seniors across three universities (Northeastern Univ., St. John's Univ., Univ. of Oklahoma) named as the most meaningful of their undergraduate years.

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707 surveys from seniors at 3 schools  
27 one-to-one interviews with seniors

160 faculty surveys from faculty who were named as having taught classes in which students wrote their most meaningful writing project

60 one-to-one interviews with faculty



# Student Survey

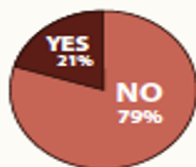
Think of a writing project from your undergraduate career up to this point that was meaningful for you and answer the following questions:

- Describe the writing project you found meaningful.
- What made that project meaningful for you?



# THE MEANINGFUL WRITING PROJECT

- 707 surveys from seniors at 3 schools
- 27 one-to-one interviews with seniors
- 160 surveys from faculty who taught the classes in which students wrote their meaningful writing project
- 60 one-to-one interviews with faculty

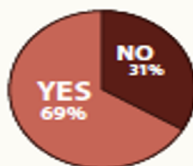


For the project you've described as meaningful, had you previously written anything similar?

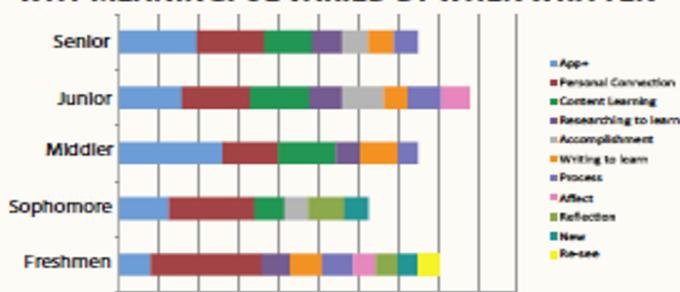


MORE THAN 1 IN 3 STUDENTS DESCRIBED PERSONAL CONNECTION AS A REASON WHY THEIR PROJECT WAS MEANINGFUL

For the project you've described as meaningful, are there ways in which this writing project might contribute to the kinds of writing you hope to do in the future?



## WHY MEANINGFUL VARIED BY WHEN WRITTEN



NEARLY HALF THE STUDENTS SURVEYED WROTE THEIR MWP IN THEIR SENIOR YEAR

WHY MEANINGFUL?  
FOUR MOST FREQUENT REASONS  
PERSONAL CONNECTION  
APP+  
CONTENT LEARNING  
RESEARCHING TO LEARN

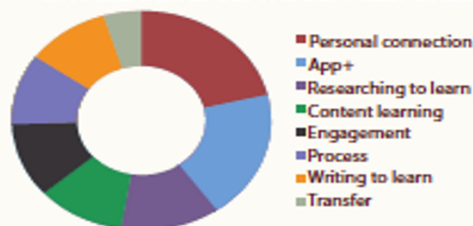
**52%** wrote their MWP in their major

**17%** wrote their MWP in an elective course

**29%** wrote their MWP in a general education course

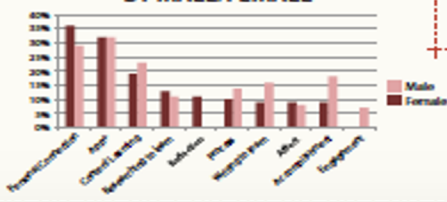
**52%** wrote their MWP in a required course

## WHY MEANINGFUL? FACULTY RESPONSES



28 students went out of their way to say they had no meaningful writing as undergrads.

## WHY MEANINGFUL VARIED BY MALE/FEMALE



**Northeastern:** RUH, 17,107 degree-seeking undergraduates, 7,638 grad students, 32% of applicants admitted, 83% graduate within 6 years, annual tuition/fees in 2013/14: \$41,686

**Oklahoma:** RUWH, 21,359 degree-seeking undergraduates, 8,779 graduate students, 80% of applicants admitted, 66% graduate within 6 years, annual tuition/fees in 2013/14: \$8,915

**St. John's:** DRU, 11,147 degree-seeking undergraduates, 4,819 grad students, 53% of applicants admitted, 55% graduate within 6 years, annual tuition/fees in 2013/14: \$37,260

meaningfulwritingproject.net

SOURCE: College Board

MICHELE EODICE  
University of Oklahoma

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St. John's University

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Northeastern University



# Coding student surveys

From 22 codes to describe students' responses to why writing project was most meaningful, we found these four occurring most frequently:

App+

Personal Connection

Content Learning

Researching to Learn



# App+

- It was meaningful because I was actually able to apply what I learned in class to "real-life" situations.
- It was meaningful because a number of companies that I was applying for jobs with were taking advantage of this and could be greatly affected if the bill was passed.
- It was applicable to the real world!



# Personal Connection

- I was able to balance personal discovery with an academic style of writing.
- They were academic papers but it was in a subject that I felt passionate about.
- It was something I had spent a lot of time working on and I actually cared about the specific data and topic.



# Content Learning

- Though I cannot stand the professor or the majority of what she teaches, her open-ended term paper allowed me to really explore my own theory on films and apply that to a really good term paper.
- It was interesting to learn that the "religion of peace and love" shunned others who did not believe exactly as they were supposed to.
- I learned a lot. Learned the current state of research in my field.



# Researching to Learn

- I approached the paper with a firm opinion that legalization should not happen. But, by the time I completed the research and finished the paper, I was pro legalization.
- I was able to examine the event from a specific lens so that I could learn about it in depth from one perspective.
- This project taught me how to do literature searches, and see how my education can be applied in the real world.



# Your Experience as a Teacher

Think of a writing project you currently assign [or would like to assign] that you believe *is* – or *could be* – meaningful to your students.



Why do you think students find that assignment meaningful, particularly in terms of MWP findings?

Write and talk from these.



# John Bean's "RAFTip"

**R**ole  
**A**udience  
**F**ormat  
**T**ask

**T**ask as  
**I**ntriguing  
**P**roblem\*

\*Instructor can frame the problem or guide the students to frame their own.



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# RAFTip

- **Role.**
  - *What's your job description?* NASA scientist? Nurse at a rural hospital? Job applicant? Concerned citizen? OU student?
  - *What does that imply about the purpose of this paper?* Persuade? Inform? Analyze?





# RAFTip

- **Role.** *What's your position? So what's this paper's purpose?*
- **Audience.**
  - *Who will be reading this? Hospital board? State legislature? Hiring committee? OU Daily readers?*
  - *What style, tone, and format will best appeal to this audience?*





# RAFTip

- **Role.** *What's your position? So what's this paper's purpose?*
- **Audience.** *Who will read this and what stylistic choices does that imply?*
- **Format (Genre).**
  - *What kind of writing is this? Memo? Op-ed? Proposal? Conference paper?*
  - *What design, organizational, and disciplinary conventions does this genre require? Why!?*





# Task as Intriguing Problem

Vague Prompts → “All about” reports.

“Write a literature review on one of the five “-isms” that we’ve studied in this course. Your lit review should reference at least five course readings and should use APA format for citations and references.”

Narrow Prompts → Self-answering questions.

“How persuasive is Ibram X Kendi’s argument about racism and policy in *How to Be an Anti-Racist*? How does he define racist policy and racist institutions? What are the limitations of assimilationist perspectives? How would you respond to his claim that it is possible for people of color to be racist?”



# Task as Intriguing Problem

**Problem-Solution:** Create an open-ended, problem-solution scenario that offers student's choice and variety.

## Position Announcement

\_\_\_\_\_ is a not-for-profit research and advocacy agency dedicated to furthering diversity, equity, and social justice through education and policy change. We are currently seeking to add three resident scholars to our Washington, DC office. The residents would be responsible for generating white papers, action memos, and educational videos on issues related to diversity and equity in institutional cultures such as corporations, schools, and governmental agencies. As a collaborative workspace, we are especially interested in researchers who can bring their unique disciplinary and life perspectives to bear on our shared problem-solving efforts.

Applications should include a cover letter\*, a resume\*, and a personal research statement of between 2500 and 3000 words. This statement should **focus a research agenda** by telling the story of your **personal engagement with the issue** and of your **research journey** up to this point. It should also reference a limited number (maximum 5) of key sources to **establish what scholars have already written, and what remains to be done.**

Personal research statements should be double-spaced and in 12-point font, following APA style for in-text citations and references.

(Human Relations 5203: Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice)



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# Task as Intriguing Problem

**Entering the Conversation (“They Say/I Say”):** Frame a scholarly conversation on a topic and ask students to enter the debate.

“We have read one author who argues that Joseph Conrad was a ‘thoroughgoing racist’ and another who maintains that *Heart of Darkness* is an irreplaceable critique of European colonialism. Something has got to give! In an academic paper of 5-7 pages, take a position on this apparent contradiction, drawing from both scholars and from the text of *Heart of Darkness* to support your stance.”



# RAFTip Example

*Using Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests, as well as the other readings, lectures, and discussions we have had in this course, write a 4-6 page essay answering the following question: Would you agree with Clendinnen's view of the conquest as one of extreme destruction and trauma? If so, why? If not, what is the best way to describe the nature of the encounter between Spaniards and Amerindians in colonial Latin America?*

*Assume that you are writing an academic paper for an undergraduate conference on Latin America. Also assume that your audience has NOT read this assignment and will attend your conference session because your title hooked their interest. Your introduction should explain the problem-at-issue before presenting your thesis. Because this is an academic paper in history, follow the manuscript form of the Chicago Manual of Style.... I will grade your paper using the following rubric:*

Adapted from Bean, *Engaging Ideas*, 101.



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