Conscious Adaptations: An Ecological Approach to Teaching Writing that Matters

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By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis draws from theories of rhetorical ecologies, situated rhetoric, and genre to argue for an ecological approach to teaching writing in the first-year, college writing classroom. Rhetorical ecology scholarship suggests that writing is ecological: writers both affect and are affected by the various and interconnected discursive, linguistic, social, political, material and cultural environments in which they are situated. A writer is constantly influenced by these interconnected systems, just as she/he contributes to their evolution and change. This thesis argues that the first-year writing course can prepare students to adapt more consciously and meaningfully to various rhetorical environments by helping them to recognize and draw from ecological systems as they invent. Genres and discourse communities represent two such systems within which writers compose. They are useful concepts to begin with in the ecological classroom; an understanding of how these systems affect academic writing provides students with strategies for adapting to multiple academic genres and disciplinary discourse communities throughout their college careers. Approaching academic writing as just one of the many ecologies in which students write allows them to embrace this writing with greater confidence and authority and to make connections between their academic compositions and their everyday lives.
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Many thanks,
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INTRODUCTION

“A better writer is a situated writer, who is motivated by the particular context in which a piece of writing is imagined, designed, executed, and delivered.”

–Ann Feldman, Making Writing Matter

Before she begins writing, a student develops an idea for her final paper from the conversations and readings of a specific course. She talks about this idea with her professor during office hours. At some point, she goes to the university writing center, as well as participates in an in-class writing workshop, for peer-input on her evolving paper. She adapts her argument in various ways, in light of these experiences. Later, perhaps, she loses a part of her document when her computer crashes, and she calls her university’s tech support. She asks herself: “why do I have to write this ridiculous paper?!?” After someone from tech support recovers an earlier version of her document, the student converses with a classmate to help her remember her lost ideas. The classmate may, himself, be influenced by some of her arguments and incorporate them into his own paper. Finally, this hypothetical student ‘finishes’ her paper and gives it to her professor. The professor makes comments and returns the paper to the student for revision. At this point, the student goes back to the writing center, as well as speaks again with her professor and classmate. She then makes what she considers the ‘final’ adjustments to her paper and turns it in. The ‘final’ paper is read only by the student’s professor for the purpose of a grade. When the student receives her paper back with the professor’s comments, she files it away as a ‘finished’ piece not to be revisited.

I propose such a hypothetical situation as typical across colleges and universities in the United States. Institutions of higher learning proclaim commitments to preparing students for
active participation in the communities of our complex world. The mission statement of Georgetown University, for example, states: “Georgetown educates women and men to be reflective lifelong learners, to be responsible and active participants in civic life and to live generously in service to others.” The Pennsylvania State University pledges that it “educates students from Pennsylvania, the nation and the world, and improves the well-being and health of individuals and communities through integrated programs of teaching, research, and service.” The “civic life” and “communities” which students will enter after college operate with ever-changing and fast-paced modes of communication. Our hypothetical student will most likely not become a professor in her major discipline, but rather leave her university for a career that requires her to inhabit multiple and varied communicative modes. Yet, the processes through which she is taught to write at the university continue to remain disconnected from such modes, by maintaining linear, individual, and isolated writing practices.

**HOW AND WHY DOES WRITING MATTER?**

In her book *Making Writing Matter*, Ann M. Feldman argues:

A better writer is a situated writer, who is motivated by the particular context in which a piece of writing is imagined, designed, executed, and delivered…When students see writing as a situated performance, they see themselves as agents called to action; writing becomes something other than a means to demonstrate to the teacher that the student has learned something…First-year writing classes should provide university students with a set of footprints, the first of many, marking a path that makes writing matter wherever they go and whatever they do. (Feldman, 1)

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b [http://www.psu.edu/ur/about/mission.html](http://www.psu.edu/ur/about/mission.html). Accessed 1/15/2012
Feldman’s comments, here, reflect a recent turn within rhetoric and composition scholarship towards theories of ‘situated’ writing, or the notion that rhetorical acts are largely dependent upon the context in which they occur. Feldman employs such theories to argue that students become more engaged in their writing when it is framed and experienced in situations beyond the classroom; when situated as “agents of action,” who write to influence social change, students learn to realize the wider effects of their writing. I concur with Feldman that “making writing matter” for our students requires writing assignments that are more than exercises of demonstrating content-learned through traditional academic essays written for one professor. As we have imagined with our hypothetical student, such papers, and presumably much of their content, are quickly forgotten after the receipt of a grade. That is not to say, however, that the paper did not matter to the student. For most students in contemporary universities, the paper matters because the grade matters; upon leaving the university, students’ GPAs increasingly affect what jobs they are competitive for and into which graduate schools they are accepted. GPAs are expected to be high.

Yet, setting aside the issue of the grade for a moment, we might consider how else academic papers are meaningful for students. If, indeed, students retain little of each paper’s content and do not go on to become academic scholars, then what transferrable skills do traditional academic essays offer to them? Many scholars and teachers would argue that the act of writing papers allows students to demonstrate and strengthen their ability to think critically, a skill that they will carry with them well beyond the university. The notion that writing reflects critical thinking has been embraced in first year writing classrooms since at least the 1970s with
the advent of cognitive process theories. Such theories maintain that writing is primarily the translation of a writer’s internal and individual thoughts to words on a page and that, consequently, the writing process may be taught according to certain universal steps. More recently, scholars of situated rhetoric argue that process theories do not adequately consider the influence of context; writing is not only the translation of an individual’s thoughts, as writers are largely affected by the context in which they are situated. Thus, the writing ‘process’ is not universal, but rather varies widely according to external factors. Following this line of thought, Feldman’s civic engagement pedagogy suggests that writing matters more when students view it in terms of its usefulness and influence as situated in their surrounding communities. In this thesis, I aim to build upon Feldman’s call ‘to make writing matter’ more for our students by proposing an alternative situated pedagogy to civic engagement, which employs an understanding of writing as ecological.

Indeed, teaching writing as a form of civic engagement may motivate students to become better writers, in so far as such engagement helps students to realize the effects of their writing beyond themselves, their grades, and their classrooms. However, just as writing must not always reflect critical thinking, it also must not always function as civic engagement. Students participate in acts of writing every day that may be, but are not necessarily, critical or political, such as when they update their Facebook status, post on Twitter, or send a text message. Feldman’s “set of footprints” metaphor implies a teleological notion of writing in which writers move along a fixed pathway towards a certain goal, an image which I contest. Feldman later
suggests, however, that writing should be taught as “participation in lived space” (Feldman, 9). Here, she sends a contradictory message; participation must not imply teleology.

In his book *Human Agency and Language*, Charles Taylor suggests that human language is “a range of activities in which we express/realize a certain way of being in the world.” Language does not develop innately within an individual, but rather is learned and comes to have meaning as part of a “language community” (Taylor, 234). Taylor likens such language communities to complex webs. He writes:

Language is not an assemblage of separable instruments, which lie as it were transparently to hand, and which can be used to marshal ideas, this use being something we can fully control and oversee. Rather it is something in the nature of a web, and to complicate the image, is present as a whole in any one of its parts. To speak is to touch a bit of the web, and this is to make the whole resonate. Because the words we use now only have sense through their place in the whole web, we can never in principle have a clear oversight of the implications of what we say at any moment. Our language is always more than we can encompass; it is in a sense inexhaustible. (Taylor, 231)

I quote Taylor at length to capture his implication concerning language’s “inexhaustible” potential; he suggests that there are limitless manifestations of how language may be used and what it may offer us. Taylor anticipates theories of situated rhetoric here by arguing that language exists within larger contexts from which it cannot be separated. For Taylor, the language web contains “inexhaustible” strands, which the human agent may activate through any act of speaking (or writing); in other words, the web contains a vast potential of material that humans use to invent new rhetorics. To activate a strand of the web often leads to unpredictable “resonances” or “implications”—i.e. effects—that depend on context. Taylor’s theory of language, then, works against the notion that linguistic or rhetorical acts lie along a fixed
pathway—the individual performing such an act does not do so by choosing her own
“instruments” or stepping into the next predictable footprint. Caught in a complex web of
language, an individual cannot necessarily arrive at a pre-determined endpoint, but rather must
embrace unpredictability and indeterminacy in what and how she articulates herself and to what
effect. When a student posts a comment on Twitter or a video on YouTube, for example, these
postings reach myriad audiences to various effects, unknowable to the student at the time of their
‘utterance.’ Postings that achieve unanticipated popularity and become widely re-distributed
have become known as ‘going viral,’ a phrase that implies their unpredictable resonance.

However, while Taylor’s web metaphor does much to suggest the abstract potentiality of
language for rhetorical invention, it does not capture the idea of living within language
communities, also known as discourse communities. Rather, Taylor maintains that the web is a
“background” against which humans interact (Taylor, 234). What, then, of Feldman’s
commitment to writing within “lived space?” There has been a recent surge in scholarship that
either proposes an ecology metaphor for writing, or maintains that writing is ontologically
ecological. The Oxford English dictionary defines ‘ecology’ as: “The study of the relationships
between people, social groups, and their environment; (also) the system of such relationships in
an area of human settlement.” Or “in extended use: the interrelationship between any system and
its environment; the product of this.” The dictionary defines ‘ecological’ as: “Of, relating to, or
involving the interrelationships between living organisms and their environment.” As Taylor
suggests, language is the means through which humans “realize” their “being in the world.” As
Feldman adds, writing is “participation in lived space,” or interaction with the environment in
which we write. This interaction, through language and writing, functions as an “interrelationship” between humans and their environment—it is, in that sense, ecological. In other words, while writing must not necessarily reflect critical thinking, civic engagement, or teleological movement, it does reflect ecological interrelationships between humans and their linguistic, social, material, and discursive environments. Thus, I propose that we may generatively allow for Taylor’s notion of language’s potential and Feldman’s notion of writing within lived space, by rejecting both the ‘web’ and ‘footprint’ images in favor of ‘ecology.’

**WRITING AS ECOLOGICAL: HOW AND WHY DOES THAT MATTER?**

Metaphors of ‘writing as ecology’ emerged in rhetoric and composition scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s. In his 1975 article “Eco-Logic for the Composition Classroom,” Richard M. Coe calls for a “new rhetoric” based on the concept of eco-logic—or, “any logic which considers wholes as wholes, not by analyzing them into their component parts”—an argument not unlike Taylor’s assertion that language “is present as a whole in any one of its parts” (Coe, 236/Taylor, 232). Concerning ‘ecology’ in the biological sense, Coe writes: “Contextual relativity has been ecologically valid for Homo sapiens. We are the most highly adaptable species on this planet because we are not ruled by highly-structured, rigid instincts. Instead we are able to behave in ways that are appropriate to surviving in various environments” (Coe, 236). Here, Coe implicitly suggests that writing is just one biological, ecological behavior used by humans to adapt to different environments. Marilyn Cooper’s 1986 article “The Ecology of Writing” employs an ecology metaphor to argue, similarly to Coe, that writing is contextual. Yet, Cooper confines her discussion of context specifically to the social community in which writing participates. Her
article suggests: “writers interact to form systems: all the characteristics of any individual writer or piece of writing both determine and are determined by the characteristics of all the other writers and writings in the systems” (“Ecology,” 368). Scholars such as Jenny Edbauer Rice, Margaret Syverson, and Sidney Dobrin have since built upon Coe’s and Cooper’s seminal texts to explore further how ecologies of writing, later described with the term ‘rhetorical ecologies,’ function systematically. Yet, how could this concept of writing as ecological possibly be important to how we teach writing as something that matters to our students?

Rhetorical ecology scholarship tends to embrace the assumption that, as writers, we live and write within social, discursive, cultural, political, linguistic, material, and biological systems, or ecologies, which influence what and how we write, just as our writing symbiotically influences these systems. While such scholarship has done important theoretical—arguably, paradigm-shifting—work in exploring how writing within rhetorical ecologies operates, there is a dearth of scholarship concerning how and why such theory may be relevant to teaching practices in the college classroom. Thus, for the purposes of this thesis, I am interested in how rhetorical ecologies are lived and experienced by certain types of subjects, first-year college writing students, and how these students’ writing may be cultivated through attention to such ecologies and experiences. The first-year writing classroom faces the significant task of preparing students to write at the college level across various different disciplines, as well as of providing them with a foundation upon which they may build beyond the university. Too often, however, the type of writing taught in this classroom is disconnected from other forms of writing expected and performed in other contexts. On a theoretical level, I will argue that an ecological understanding of writing highlights the vast potential for rhetorical invention from which all
writers draw and to which they adapt. If we, as writers, can recognize this potential offered by our environments, then we can adapt more effectively to them. I will call this recognition ‘conscious adaptation.’

With regards to the first-year writing classroom, I propose that writing will matter more for our students when taught not only as the expression of content-matter, the direct translation of critical thinking, or the means of civic engagement, but rather when approached as an ‘ecological’ endeavor—i.e. as a *living and dynamic way of being in the world*. Teaching writing ‘ecologically’ means teaching it with attention to the multiplicity of environments, systems, and potential in which and from which students write. By teaching methods of conscious adaptation, writing instructors can offer students constructive strategies for recognizing, utilizing, and writing within multiple environments. In his book *Lingua Fracta: Towards a Rhetoric of New Media*, Collin Gifford Brooke suggests: “The appeal of ecology as a conceptual metaphor is its ability to focus our attention on a temporarily finite set of practices, ideas, and interactions without fixing them in place or investing too much critical energy in their stability” (Brooke, 42). The notion of ecology particularly allows us to conceptualize the fluidity of writing across various contexts; texts and writers are constantly growing, changing, and adapting as they move through multiple environments. At the same time, however, Brooke warns that we must also be careful to avoid over-extending or not adequately defining the limits of such a metaphor. He writes: “One potential drawback of the ecological approach is the danger that it will become too expansive, becoming simply a backdrop or synonymous with ‘everything that happens’” (Brooke, 45). The concept of rhetorical ecologies does not mean that writers and their writing
exist in an unpredictable chaos; there are certain patterns that may be noticed and employed within rhetorical ecologies. Rather, an ecological framework allows us to recognize the potentiality and fluidity of writing on one hand, while also identifying some relatively stable structures, patterns, and conventions on the other. Methods of conscious adaptation teach students how to recognize such stability including, for example, the rhetorical conventions of a certain genre or discourse community. This approach matters because it does not limit students to one method, but rather offers them portable and flexible strategies for participating meaningfully within the various rhetorical environments that they will encounter both at the university and beyond it.

**THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS THESIS**

This thesis mainly argues that the first-year writing course can help to make writing matter for students by teaching it as an adaptive strategy for communication in constantly changing environments. In other words, to make writing matter is to teach it as a mode of existence for “participation in [the] lived space[s]” of our world. In the first chapter, I will expand upon theories of how rhetorical ecologies work and argue that the ecological approach allows for both the cognitive power of the individual writer and the strong influence of context with regards to rhetorical invention. In the second chapter, I will suggest that genre and discourse communities, as relatively stable ecosystems, are practical starting concepts for teaching conscious adaptation in the first-year writing classroom. In chapter three, I provide a sample syllabus for a hypothetical course that I have designed to employ the ecological
approach. This annotated syllabus includes theoretical rationale, assignment sequences, writing prompts, and discussion questions.
CHAPTER ONE: THE ECOLOGICAL APPROACH

“The systems that constitute writing and writers are not just like ecological systems but are precisely ecological systems...there are no boundaries between writing and the other interlocked, cycling systems of our world.”

–Marilyn Cooper, “The Truth is Out There”

In her 1986 article “The Ecology of Writing,” Marilyn Cooper proposed that writing resembles an ecology in that “writing is an activity through which a person is continually engaged with a variety of socially constituted systems” (“Ecology,” 367). She emphasized that these systems are complexly interconnected, rather than discrete. Yet, she limited her framework to include only social systems. Fifteen years after the publication of this article, Cooper reflects back on its ecology metaphor in her foreword to the anthology Ecocomposition: Theoretical and Pedagogical Approaches (2001).c She writes:

I might have written more about the changing patterns in the systems of writing and less about the structures and contents of the systems...I know that when I wrote that essay I did...see an ecology of writing as a metaphor: at least, I remember very clearly reading it over some years after it was published and realizing that the systems that constitute writing and writers are not just like ecological systems but are precisely ecological systems, and that there are no boundaries between writing and the other interlocked, cycling systems of our world. (“Foreword,” xiv)

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c Within the span of time between Cooper’s article “The Ecology of Writing” in 1986 and her foreword to Ecocomposition in 2001, ‘ecocomposition’ emerged as a new sub-field of rhetoric and composition. Ecocomposition mainly addresses conservation concerns, emphasizes nature writing, and draws connections between materiality and writing, highlighting that writing takes place not only in social contexts, but also in the material environments of the Earth. Cooper’s original article did not intentionally engage with this discourse, as it did not exist as such at the time. As she suggests here, she originally used the concept ‘ecology’ merely as a metaphor, rather than recognizing the deeper connections between writing and biological ecologies that ecocomposition would later highlight. In discussing ‘rhetorical ecology’ theory, which employs a broadened meaning of the term ‘ecology’ beyond the biological, I will not be specifically engaging with this subfield. However, as ecocomposition theories have been influential to rhetorical ecology theories, and vice versa, I will address some of this scholarship.
Cooper makes a significant theoretical move here by asserting that writing is *ontologically* ecological. It is the purpose of this chapter to build upon this ontological claim, which I will argue has significant implications for how we conceptualize rhetorical invention. Cooper’s move from metaphor to identification is situated within ongoing debates in the field of rhetoric and composition concerning the extent to which rhetorical invention is determined by the individual writer and/or her external context(s). This chapter briefly traces how such debates have been staged as a conflict between the so-called ‘cognitive process’ and ‘situational’ paradigms for writing. In light of this debate, I will then argue that an ecological theory of writing allows elements from both of these theoretical camps to converge as it explains that invention occurs *both* at the level of the individual writer’s mind and the various environments in which that writer is situated. This convergence empowers the writer in terms of rhetorical agency: as actors within rhetorical ecologies, writers make conscious and unconscious decisions that both adapt to and draw from the vast potential for invention within multiple contexts.

**Rhetorical Invention and the Writer**

In her book *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays*, Sharon Crowley explains that the ancient rhetoricians understood rhetorical invention as “any systematic search for, and generation and compilation of, material that can be used to compose a discourse suitable for some specific rhetorical action” (Crowley, 208). Carolyn Miller explains invention as “the canon of classical rhetoric through which arguments, or the substance of a message, are discovered or devised” (quoted in Bawarshi, 56). Classical rhetoricians believed that invention continually occurred throughout the composing process by rhetors performing oral, written,
and/or memorial acts both individually and communally. Rhetors relied upon shared assumptions, topics, and rhetorical strategies—known as *topoi* or, literally, ‘places’—that existed within their community as parameters for how and what they could invent. Later, with the rise of modernist epistemologies that privileged the rational mind of the individual, emphasis on invention as a communal act declined in favor of the idea that the individual determined the content of her discourse. Invention came to be considered as occurring mainly at the cognitive level before the act of putting pen to paper: the individual writer developed, or invented, ideas rationally within her own mind before writing them down. Such modernist notions influenced the rise of ‘current-traditional’ rhetoric in U.S. universities throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and invention subsequently fell out of favor as something that could or should be taught in the writing classroom. Current-traditional rhetoric placed emphasis, rather, on the arrangement and style of the written text. This shift, as Crowley and others have argued, led to instructors teaching writing in terms of semantics and grammar rather than content or argument.

Crowley suggests that process pedagogy, which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, importantly re-emphasized invention, particularly the concept that invention continues throughout the act of writing rather than merely before. Process theories maintain that writers are continually revising and editing, as well as discovering and inventing, new material as they move through various stages of the so-called writing ‘process.’ These theories privilege this process, usually understood as universally applicable, over the written products that result. For example, in a seminal text of the process movement titled “A Cognitive Process Theory of
Writing,” Linda Flower and John Hayes assert that “the writer's task is to translate a meaning, which may be embodied in key words…and organized in a complex network of relationships, into a linear piece of written English” (Flower and Hayes, 373). In other words, the writer invents by gathering information, thinking critically about it within her own mind, and then translating her thoughts to words on the page. According to Flower and Hayes, the processes of writing—i.e. “planning, translating, and reviewing”—are complex and hierarchal rather than linear; the writer may discover new information while writing, for example, and move back into the “planning” stage at various points (Flower and Hayes, 369). Flower and Hayes clearly maintain, however, that the goal of writing is to produce a linear text that is, in effect, the direct translation of the writer’s goals and thoughts. In terms of rhetorical invention, then, this model privileges the agency of the individual writer to choose, throughout the composing process, how best to direct and translate his thoughts. Flower and Hayes conclude their article by highlighting the individual writer’s control over invention: “By placing emphasis on the inventive power of the writer, who is able to explore ideas, to develop, act on, test, and regenerate his or her own goals, we are putting an important part of creativity where it belongs—in the hands of the working, thinking writer” (Flower and Hayes, 386).

In her initial article, Cooper reacts directly against cognitive process theories such as those espoused by Flower and Hayes. Cooper writes:

The problem with the cognitive process model of writing has nothing to do with its specifics: it describes something of what writers do and goes some way toward explaining how writers, texts, and readers are related. But the belief on which it is based—that writing is thinking and, thus, essentially a cognitive process—obsures many aspects of writing we have come to see as not peripheral. (“Ecology,” 365)
The “not peripheral” aspects to which Cooper refers are the social contexts in which writers invent and compose. She suggests that while process theories project a model of the “solitary author” who works within the “privacy of his own mind,” we must, rather, imagine an “ecological model” in which writers are constantly interacting with others in their social environments (“Ecology,” 372). Cooper argues:

For these ‘engaged writers’ ideas are not so much fixed constructs to be transferred from one mind to the page and thence to another mind; instead, ideas are out there in the world, a landscape that is always being modified by ongoing human discourse. They "find ideas" in writing because they thus enter the field of discourse, finding in the exchange of language certain structures that they modify to suit their purposes. Nor for them do purposes arise solely out of individual desires, but rather arise out of the interaction between their needs and the needs of the various groups that structure their society. (“Ecology,” 372-373)

Cooper’s ecological model emphasizes that invention does not occur solely at the cognitive level, but rather is inspired and influenced by social discourse communities. In other words, invention does not begin with thoughts and goals in the writers’ minds; rather, writers invent by responding to “ideas” and using “structures” that are already “out there” in their social contexts. According to Cooper, writers “search for” information within particular social situations and then, rather than “compiling” this content according to their own goals or plans as process theory suggests, they invent new texts by working within the rhetorical conventions and parameters of those situations. She suggests: “for each writer and each instance of writing one can specify the domain of ideas activated and supplemented, the purposes that stimulated the writing and that resulted from it, the interactions that took place as part of the writing” (“Ecology,” 369). Here, Cooper seems not to allow much in terms of the individual writer’s agency to invent—i.e. to ‘discover’ what and how to write.
Cooper’s article belongs to an increasing body of scholarship known as situated rhetoric, which argues for the important influence of social context on rhetorical invention. Situated rhetoric widely argues that process theory over-privileges the agency and centrality of the writer’s cognition and ignores the social exigencies, discourses, and rhetorical environments that also affect and determine invention. Crowley argues, for example:

[Process pedagogy] retains the modernist composing subject…the subject who is sufficiently discrete from the composing context to stand apart from it, observing it from above and commenting upon it. Furthermore, this subject is able to inspect the contents of the mind and report them to a reader without distortion, using language that fully represents a well-formed composing intention. (Crowley, 213)

In his book *Genre and the Invention of the Writer*, Anis Bawarshi similarly notes that while process pedagogy did much to re-emphasize invention, “it maintained the partial view of the writer as the primary agent of invention rather than as an agent who participates within a larger discursive and ideological agency” (Bawarshi, 60). Some notions of situated rhetoric have gone so far as to argue that an individual is not able to make rhetorical arguments that are not relative to and determined by surrounding social discourses. Stanley Fish argues, for example, that the self always exists within an “interpretative community,” which shares certain patterns of thought and communication that drive what (and how) knowledge may be developed, discovered, and communicated. He argues that “a situated self is a self whose every operation is a function of the conventional possibilities built into this or that context,” and that such a socially determined subject is always and already tethered by the local or community norms and standards that constitute it and enable its rational acts” (Fish, 346, my emphasis). In other words, it is not possible for a writing subject to stand outside and reflect upon the situation in which he is immersed and which determines his rhetorical choices; thus, Fish’s argument drastically limits
the agency of the individual writer. In her book *Invention as a Social Act*, Karen Burke LeFevre takes a more balanced approach arguing that “invention is a dialectical process in that the inventing individual(s) and the socioculture are co-existing and mutually defining” (LeFevre, 35). She argues that rhetorical invention is “first, an act that is generally initiated by an inventor (or rhetor) and brought to completion by an audience; and second, an act that involves symbolic activities such as speaking or writing and often extends over time through a series of social transactions and texts” (LeFevre, 38).

Clearly, Cooper’s original article fits within theories of situated rhetoric, as exampled by the texts outlined above. However, the above-mentioned scholars make similar arguments to that of Cooper without the use of an ecology metaphor. What, then, does the notion that writing is ecological add to our understanding of situated writing? And, how might such an idea help to make writing matter for students in the first-year writing classroom? LeFevre concludes her text with a brief evocation of ‘ecology,’ its first and only mention in the book. She writes: “we should study the ecology of invention—the way ideas arise and are nurtured or hindered by interaction with social context and culture” (LeFevre, 126, my emphasis). As mentioned above, Bawarshi refers to the “larger discursive and ideological agency” within which an individual writes. As discussed in the introduction, Taylor argues that to speak is “to touch a bit of the web” of language. Because of the existence of such a web, “our language is always more than we can encompass; it is in a sense inexhaustible” (Taylor, 231). These scholars all brush upon the notion that the individual writer invents within a complex and generative, rather than limiting, context. However, they each draw attention to a slightly different system from which writers write—LeFevre highlights the social, Bawarshi suggests the discursive/ideological, and
Taylor focuses on the linguistic. Let us recall Cooper’s argument in 2001 that writing is ontologically ecological, in which she highlights the “changing patterns in the systems of writing” and that “there are no boundaries between writing and the other interlocked, cycling systems of our world.” I juxtapose these scholars’ comments to highlight that the ecological approach particularly allows us to understand writers as agents situated with numerous and interconnected systems. As part of larger rhetorical ecologies, the social, discursive, ideological, and linguistic contexts for writing interact along with material and cognitive contexts. The interaction of these various systems is dynamic and fluid, as well as generative. When an individual writer invents, she will be affected simultaneously by any number of these systems. Yet, this is not to say that the individual, cognitive writer does not have agency within the complicated ecologies in which she writes; rather, the ecological approach highlights that the writer, as an ecological actor, draws from, adapts within, and contributes to her contexts. In this way, an ecological understanding of writing allows for theories of process and situated writing to converge. Furthermore, recognizing the systems in any given rhetorical ecology also highlights the potential structures, conventions, and content available in those systems for the writer to use. Rhetorical ecologies can become particularly meaningful for students when framed with such enlarging, rather than limiting, possibilities for invention. To support these points, we must look more closely at some of the systems that comprise rhetorical ecologies and the ways in which ecological actors invent and compose within those systems.

_ECOLOGICAL INVENTION_
After Cooper’s “The Ecology of Writing,” subsequent rhetorical ecology scholarship has substantially broadened the meaning of ‘context’ to understand it in terms of complex ecological interactions between writers and their multiple environments. In his article “Writing Takes Place,” Sidney I. Dobrin suggests that “writing is an ecological endeavor in that writing and rhetoric cannot be separated from place, from environment, from nature, from location” (Dobrin, 13). In other words, the act of writing cannot be understood only in terms of the writer’s cognition and ideological, discursive, social and linguistic contexts, because writers also exist as human bodies in a material world. Let us return to our hypothetical student, with whom we began in the introduction, to illustrate Dobrin’s point. If we recall, she loses a portion of her document when her computer crashes, and she must later re-compose this section. This event is largely material—the writer is constrained by the materials she uses to compose, namely her computer. Arguably, this is also a cognitive and affective event. The writer’s re-inventing of her original document most likely alters, due to lapse in memory or frustration over the situation, after the material instrument she is using fails her.

Yet, to argue that writers invent and compose within an “environment” is not only to recognize their physical and material environments, but also the myriad other environments, or contexts, in which they are immersed. Dobrin writes:

Context is the situated place where writing happens. Not just the physical environment where a writer writes, but the environment of writing, the ideological environment, the cultural environment, the social environment, the economic environment, the historical environment. (Dobrin, 19)

Here, Dobrin expands the notion of ‘context’ significantly to include numerous environments not typically associated with writing. Yet, these environments are not separate entities that can be
listed, as Dobrin’s comment implies. To argue that writers function within an ecology is to recognize the converging elements of these environments that act upon writers simultaneously and in complex ways. To put it differently, a rhetorical ecology is the interaction of the numerous environments, which writers inhabit and which impact their writing. For example, I currently write this thesis on my personal laptop at a desk in Lauinger Library at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. My physical location is affecting my cognitive functioning while I am writing: this floor of the library is loud, making it difficult to focus. At the same time, this location implies one of my social subject positions: I am currently a graduate student in English at Georgetown. Materially, the word processor on my laptop allows me to have two windows open at the same time; therefore, I am looking both at what I currently type and at a page of my introduction to ensure that I make clear connections between both sections. All of these systems are interacting to affect how and what I invent.

As with biological ecosystems, the multiple environments of writing may be observed on local and global levels. In her book *The Wealth of Reality: An Ecology of Composition*, Margaret Syverson writes:

Writers, readers, and texts…are actually situated in an ecology, a larger system that includes environmental structures, such as pens, paper, computers, books, telephones, fax machines, photocopiers, printing presses, and other natural and human-constructed features, as well as other complex systems operating at various levels of scale, such as families, global economies, publishing systems, theoretical frames, academic disciplines, and language itself. (Syverson, 5)

Like Dobrin, Syverson emphasizes that writers and their texts are situated within various systems. Yet, she also draws attention to these systems’ degrees of scale to suggest that a writer moves through rhetorical ecologies on different levels. For example, at a most local level, I am
using a computer to word-process my document. On a larger, more global, scale, I am working from concepts that have emerged from the complex epistemologies of the field of rhetoric and composition in the United States. The borders between such ecologies are porous and connected. For example, an individual course constitutes one specific ecology in which various systems interact: the social, political and cultural ideologies brought to the class by the teacher and students, the physical space of the classroom, and the epistemologies of the course’s disciplinary content. At the same time, that course exists within the larger ecology of its discipline, its university, and the language in which it is conducted. As complicated systems, these ecologies do not merely imply the static backdrops for writing or the tools that a writer uses. Syverson suggests, rather, that the various systems within a rhetorical ecology actively share the work of writing. She explains that “in complex systems[such as physical and rhetorical ecologies], processes—including cognitive processes—are distributed, that is to say, both divided and shared among agents and structures in the environment” (Syverson, 7). As in a biological ecology, the multiple elements in a rhetorical ecology “act and interact in parallel with each other, simultaneously reacting to and co-constructing their own environment” (Syverson, 3). It is difficult to conceptualize what Syverson means here—how do “agents” and “structures” in the environment “share” the work of writing? This could be simply to suggest that the contexts of writing determine how and what is written. To argue this, however, would seem to impose serious limitations on the writer. Syverson’s statement is more generative; she suggests that the structures in the writer’s ecology work together to “co-construct” that environment. Thus, we can understand that the individual writer works within and builds from the materials in her
environments in order to put words on the page—both internal cognition and external context work together in the emergence of any text.

In terms of invention, then, the rhetorical ecologies in which a writer is situated provide him with a vast potential out of which he may invent. In her article “Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies,” Jenny Edbauer argues for the continuous, distributed circulation of rhetorics, such as written texts, within rhetorical ecologies. She writes:

>a rhetoric emerges already infected by the viral intensities that are circulating in the social field…the intensity, force, and circulatory range of a rhetoric are always expanding through the mutations and new exposures attached to that given rhetoric, much like a virus. (Edbauer, 13-14)

In other words, texts do not remain confined to any certain context—like viruses in a biological ecology, rhetorics evolve and mutate without set boundaries. Once they reach the public sphere, texts move fluidly and in unpredictable ways as they are consumed and incorporated by unintended audiences in various situations. These texts offer the potential for other texts to be composed from them. What does this ‘potential’ mean, then, in terms of rhetorical invention and the individual writer? Let us recall LeFevre’s suggestion that invention is an act that is “initiated by an inventor (or rhetor) and brought to completion by an audience.” This idea follows the rhetorical situation or communication triangle model, first proposed in the field of rhetoric and composition by Lloyd Bitzer. Edbauer revises this notion to suggest that the act of invention does not necessarily begin with the writer, nor does the ‘finished’ rhetoric end with its intended audience. Rather, writers are motivated by and draw from the multiple rhetorics that are circulating in any given rhetorical ecology. Any ‘finished’ text lives on to contribute
ecologically to the make-up of the circulating system. Edbauer suggests that once a rhetoric occurs, it will “go on to evolve in ‘apparallel’ ways: between two species that have absolutely nothing to do with each other. What is shared between them is not the situation, but certain contagions and energies” (Edbauer, 14). The “energy” of the rhetorical ecology does not impose limitations on the writer, but rather provides a vast potential for invention from which the writer may work. This ecological potential comes from the materials that exist in the ecology to motivate, inspire, and direct the writer, such as conventions, genre systems, and other texts, as well as from the fluidity of these materials to be re-molded or used in different contexts. For example, a writer may employ the typical conventions of a particular genre system. Yet, he may decide to use those conventions to communicate ideas that he drew from an ideological system not generally associated with that genre. In this way, the writer works according to certain patterns within one ecology, while at the same time shifting these patterns to a slightly different context.

Returning to our hypothetical student will help to illustrate what these theoretical observations mean in practice. As this student composes a paper within the ecology of a certain course, she walks through numerous physical environments such her class, her professor’s office, her university tech support and the writing center; these spaces provide the material conditions from which she begins to write. She also draws upon the discursive and ideological environments presented to her by her professor and the course’s discipline, as well as by peers and tutors who help her to develop her paper. We have also added that she navigates emotional environments when she becomes frustrated with her technological tools, and when she feels that the paper is a pointless exercise. As she moves through these converging environments, she
makes certain cognitive responses and choices concerning the composition of her text. It seems, then, that her writing is ecological in the sense that we have been outlining above. Indeed, to this point it is. Yet, the student most likely does not *experience* her act of writing the paper as such. For example, she does not consciously recognize or reflect on the impact that these environments have on her writing, and more importantly, on how she may best employ, draw from, and build upon these contexts. Also, she does not recognize that her paper has any life outside the confines of that particular class. Once the paper is returned to her with the final grade, she files it away as ‘finished.’ If she receives a poor grade on the paper, she will most likely wonder where she has gone wrong as a writer. Largely, the student’s unsystematic sense of her paper results from the limited audience the paper receives and the typical ways in which student writing is initiated and framed. In order for a rhetoric to have the circulatory life that Edbauer describes it must enter into a public sphere. Yet, student work is typically written for an audience of one, the professor, severely limiting its public, ecological interaction with other texts and audiences. Furthermore, the issue of the grade frames papers as the individual cognitive work of the student. As one professor evaluates the merits of each individual student, that professor’s expectations and desires become the one external factor that is consistently dwelled upon by the student-writer while she invents.

In the writing classroom, conscious attention to the wider systems that influence and are influenced by written work can aid students’ cognitive, inventive power, as well as highlight students’ contribution to their local ecologies. To support this point, let us to turn to an example in which the writing instructor’s emphasis on ecological factors allowed a student to adapt and contribute effectively to a new ecology. A student from Georgetown’s History department,
whom I work with on a regular basis, recently came to me at our university Writing Center with
the assignment to “write an analysis of three books” on a topic of his choosing. The student had
already submitted a proposal for the project, which was returned to him by the professor with the
sole comment, “too broad, revise and resubmit.” The student was unsure how to proceed and
very concerned about not being able to accurately ‘read’ the professor’s expectations. He told
me: “I don’t know what I am doing wrong or where to begin.” An international student, he also
expressed to me that a ‘book analysis’ paper was not normally assigned in his native country. He
wanted to know: “what exactly does ‘book analysis’ mean?” Furthermore, as an ESL student, he
struggled with grammatical concerns when writing in English. While he was now working
within one type of rhetorical ecology—the English-using, History department at a U.S.
university—previous ecologies in which he had worked—the Mandarin-using History
department in his native China—were comprised of different systems of thought, assumptions,
genres, expectations, and language. The student stated that he saw no connections among his
current task of writing this particular proposal, his education in his native country, and his
previous courses at Georgetown. Yet, as he and I worked together to generate ideas for
narrowing his proposal, I noticed that he was using a book he had already written about in a
much different paper earlier in the year. Clearly, this student was drawing upon previous
classroom ecologies he had experienced in order to begin his process of invention. In order to
encourage the student to recognize how he could also draw from the genre system ‘proposal’ and
‘book analysis,’ as well as from the discursive ecology of this particular class, I urged him to
look at his classmates’ proposals and his professor’s corresponding comments, which had been
publically submitted to the course blog. The public forum of the blog allowed this student to
draw some ideas about the conventions and content of the genre ‘proposal’ from the work of his peers. Together, the student and I discussed what seemed similar about the form, structure, and content of the proposals that the professor had liked. By doing so, we were actively inventing from the ideas and conventions circulating within this student’s classroom ecology. Later, when the student brought his revised proposal back for my perusal, I noticed that several structural ideas I had offered him, as well as numerous grammatical turns of phrase from other students’ proposals, appeared in his revised paper.

Here, I particularly wish to highlight the student’s invention strategy as both adaptive and largely unconscious. The student was clearly adapting to his shifting ecologies by making connections between multiple contexts to invent a new proposal. Yet, he did so without noticing the agency that these environments were affording him. For example, when pressed on the issue of using a book from a previous course, the student apologized for not being able to come up with something ‘better.’ He did not view his connection between the courses as positive, worrying that his proposal was not ‘new’ or ‘interesting’ enough. Throughout our several meetings, he consistently remained concerned over the possible reactions of his professor. I am not suggesting that a writer must be conscious to ecological rhetorical environments in order to invent. I assisted this student to build from his environments without explicitly framing the process as ‘ecological.’ After multiple drafts, he ultimately wrote a complex, well-structured, and interesting proposal of which his professor approved. However, the student did so through a lot of guess-work, anxiety, and frustration. What I am proposing, then, is that we may employ the first-year writing classroom as a demystifying space in which to empower students to recognize how to use their contexts generatively. This may be done by providing students with
techniques of *conscious* adaptation to the multiple ecologies that they traverse. In other words, we can give students more control over their rhetorical choices by encouraging them to recognize how they can build from the various environments in which they write. As I will suggest in the following chapter, techniques of conscious adaptation may be cultivated by providing more social forums for student writing, encouraging students to draw connections between various ecologies, and analyzing genre systems.
In their recent article “Ecological, Pedagogical, Public Rhetoric” Nathaniel A. Rivers and Ryan P. Weber propose introducing students to rhetorical ecologies through a multi-faceted project in which student first rhetorically analyze numerous genres, then create their own ‘ecology’ of texts in response to a specific public policy issue at their school. In short, Rivers and Weber ask students to create an advocacy campaign so as to help them recognize how multiple texts (both highly visible and ‘mundane’) work together ecologically towards public change. Rivers and Weber suggest that students produce texts in several genres such as a Facebook page about their chosen issue, a proposal to their institution, a letter to the editor, and a letter to another agency, in order to experience how texts in multiple genres converge ecologically. This project is driven by Rivers’ and Weber’s commitment to teaching rhetoric as a socially connected endeavor beyond the confines of the writing classroom and the traditional professor-audience. Similar to Feldman’s work, their article assumes that writing ‘matters’ more to students when taught as public advocacy or service learning, as such projects allow students to see the effects of their writing in the ‘real’ world beyond the classroom. However, Rivers and Weber also convey a concern that first-year college students may not all be prepared actually to carry out such campaigns in the public sphere because of the “messy and risky engagement that advocacy often entails” (Rivers and Weber, 206). Thus, when piloting their project in a real
classroom, Rivers and Weber did not require their students to publish their work beyond the classroom, favoring instead the creation of a ‘proto-public’ in which students simulate public action within the ‘safe’ space of the classroom (Rivers and Weber, 206, 207).

I begin with Rivers and Weber, here, because I concur with the main learning goal of their project: to teach and allow students to experience how multiple texts, genres, rhetors, discourse communities and situations often interact around a given issue in a rhetorical ecology. Rivers’ and Weber’s pedagogy also importantly offers several key activities for the classroom, upon which I will build in this chapter: for example, having students recognize, analyze, and use different genres by creating multiple texts over various situations and points in time. However, I propose a shift away from using either proto-public (Rivers/Weber) or public (Feldman) advocacy as pedagogy. Despite such projects’ attempts to promote democratic engagement in students, their success in actually initiating change is impeded by a variety of institutional, logistical, and political reasons, which go well beyond the scope of the first-year writing course. Thus, students are often left with projects that either never leave the classroom (Rivers and Weber) or are disappointing in their ineffectiveness. Teachers generally grade such work on effort or on the students’ analysis of their project, in recognition that the students’ campaigns are unlikely to be effective to the ‘real’ intended audience. Thus, rather than experience how they can create rhetoric that ‘matters’ to a larger public, students are again reminded that their writing still only ‘matters’ to the professor and that its effectiveness still comes down to the ‘matter’ of a grade. Furthermore, students generally do not come to the first year writing course to become political activists but rather to learn skills that will enable them to write successfully in other college courses and eventually in their career. I am interested, then, in how we can employ some
generative practices from ecological pedagogies like Rivers’ and Weber’s without requiring public advocacy or ignoring academic writing.

The writing classroom, the academic disciplines, and the university also form types of public rhetorical ecologies in which students participate. If writing instructors are to prepare students to succeed in these spaces, then we must keep academic writing central in the pedagogy of the ecological writing course. To teach writing as meaningful through an ecological approach, I argue, does not require public advocacy but rather attention to the interconnected systems of genre, discourse community, social forums, and time, as pertinent to students’ lived realities. In this chapter, I will discuss why such attention ‘matters’ and how it may be cultivated through practical techniques. These techniques emerge from and will be organized around the following learning goals, which I see as most important to an ecological approach:

- Students will be aware of what constitutes a discourse community and how it affects its members’ communication. They will be able to identify which discourse communities they participate in and what effective rhetoric and writing in those communities looks like.
- Students will be able to recognize how various genres, both academic and non-academic, mediate social and rhetorical interactions within a discourse community. They will learn to identify and analyze how genres can be used effectively to invent.
- Students will be able to write in multiple generic modes and explain the appropriateness/effectiveness of their rhetorical choices. Students will learn to identify how multiple texts interact ‘ecologically’ within any one discourse community or around any one issue.
• Students will be able to recognize how sharing their work in social forums affects their rhetorical choices and will consider how their writings evolve over time and interact with other texts and discourse communities.

Ultimately, these goals and techniques are aimed at helping students develop more ecological, rhetorical habits of mind so that they may consciously adapt to any situation in which they write.\textsuperscript{d}

\textit{DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES AND GENRE SYSTEMS}

The struggles of my History student, discussed in Chapter One, to write an effective proposal and book analysis resulted in part from issues of genre and discourse community. This student did not begin by considering the genres he was expected to write within, but rather he started to write by attempting to generate content matter. The effort to invent became a struggle, as he was not explicitly aware of the purposes, parameters, and conventions of the academic genres ‘proposal’ and ‘book analysis,’ as they were functioning within the discourse community of his class. In professional academia, the genre ‘proposal’ allows for a certain type of social,

\textsuperscript{d} In this chapter, I discuss several teaching techniques, which I expand on in Chapter Three by providing a sample annotated syllabus that serves as an example of how an ecological writing course might transpire. Yet, I fully intend that this syllabus, as well as the practices discussed in this chapter, not be interpreted as a holistic or essentialist approach, but rather be adapted according to the unique make-up, strengths, and needs of the students and teachers in a particular writing classroom. Each classroom forms its own local ecosystem in which the individual subjectivities of each student and teacher, institutional constraints and goals, material resources and limitations, and the surrounding cultural, social, and political environments influence the type of teaching and learning that occurs. Therefore, the concept of conscious adaptation, which we will discuss mainly as techniques for students to use when inventing and composing, also applies to the writing teacher. If she makes herself conscious of the local make-up of her class, and its fluctuations throughout the course, she may adapt her ‘sets of [teaching] practices’ to address its specific needs. Thus, in the following sections, when I refer to ‘stabilizing the ecology,’ it is with the recognition that as writing instructors we must also always be open to adapting our approach.
rhetorical interaction to be carried out—namely, academics frequently submit proposals to their departments, institutions and other organizations, in order to apply for acceptance into conferences and for research grants. The expected conventions of the proposal—500 words, concise prose, usually future tense, for example—allow a scholar to explain a still underdeveloped project that is situated in a larger research question, argument, or problem. If effective, the proposal provides the reader, who functions in a vetting capacity, with a sense of the potential merit of the project without using language that is overly vague or deterministic. When assigning something akin to the ‘proposals’ we write so often professionally, it is easy to forget that students are probably not as familiar with that genre. Of course, the genres we assign for our students function within slightly different discourse communities than our own—as academics we write as experts within the professional discourse of our disciplines, while students write as novices within the discourse community of the classroom. Explicit attention to genre as it functions within the specific discourse community in which students are situated will provide students with direction, material, and purpose as they begin to invent. My History student, for example, struggled to communicate his ideas in proposal form without lapsing into utterly vague language. As he and I looked at proposals written by his classmates, we were able to highlight which texts effectively communicated a viable project within the parameters of that genre, which ones did not, and why. Once the student analyzed some examples of the specific genre from the specific discourse community in which he was situated, he had a much clearer sense of how to begin. This understanding provided him with a springboard from which to invent in a manner effective to his local ecology. I am proposing, here, that teaching writing ecologically begins
effectively with conscious attention to genre and discourse community as two ecological systems that students can learn to recognize and adapt to. Let us turn, then, to learning goal one.

_Learning Goal #1_: Students will be aware of what constitutes a discourse community and how it affects its members’ communication. They will be able to identify which discourse communities they participate in and what effective rhetoric and writing in those communities looks like.

In his paper “Approaching the Concept of Discourse Community,” Jonathan Swales explains discourse communities as having the following elements: “common public goals,” “forums” for communication, expected genres, and feedback loops (Swales, 6). Based on these characteristics, we can understand a discourse community as a type of local ecosystem, within larger rhetorical ecologies, in which spatial, material, and discursive elements interact to influence certain patterns of behavior. As with biological ecosystems, ‘discourse ecosystems’ constantly evolve—this evolution may happen very quickly or much more slowly depending on the characteristics of the surrounding environment and community. Discourse communities range from the local—an academic department at a particular university, for example—to the more global—an academic discipline as practiced across numerous universities. As mentioned above, the college classroom forms a particular type of discourse community, which is rooted in the larger ecologies of a department and discipline, but which includes slightly different genres, feedback loops, forums, and goals. Discourse communities also exist on a non-academic, and often less apparent, level. Swales suggests, for example, that individuals who share a hobby constitute a discourse community, as they hold similar goals for participating in that hobby.
People with the same hobby communicate and give feedback about their shared goals in a common language through public forums and genres such as magazines, blogs, and interest groups (Swales, 10). Writers’ discourse communities play a large part in determining what and how they invent and communicate. Thus, learning to recognize the communities from which they write will provide students with direction for later noticing the ecological potential of those communities and composing the most effective texts for them.

Writing instructors can first approach learning goal one, stated above, with attention to discourse communities with which students are the most familiar. For example, we might begin with something like the following sequence: first, we can introduce students to the concept of ‘discourse community’ and then ask them to identify non-academic, familiar discourse communities in which they partake. To initiate such a discussion, we might simply ask: In what situations/groups do you communicate with others about shared goals or interests? Students are likely to begin with the most personal—i.e. friend groups, sports teams, clubs, etc. We can encourage the students to think on more ‘global’ scales—i.e. religious congregations, athletic associations, disciplines, nations, etc. We can then ask them to consider what shared goals, forums, genres, and feedback loops exist in such communities and how these elements facilitate communication in different ways for particular purposes. The social networking site, Facebook.com, for example, is a forum that allows ‘friend group’ discourse communities to work towards shared goals such as advertising upcoming parties/events, staying in touch, sending birthday wishes, and sharing mutually interesting links. Numerous genres are used on Facebook to communicate these goals and provide feedback such as the private message, the public wall-
post, the status update and the photo. Given the familiarity of this site for most students they should be able to easily identify these characteristics.

We might then encourage the students to consider a different example: the writing classroom also forms a discourse community with the common goal of improving its members writing. Numerous genres exist within the community such as the response paper, the research paper, the syllabus, and the peer review rubric that allow participants to interact and give feedback towards their shared goal. Juxtaposing something familiar like Facebook with something less familiar like the writing classroom will give students the opportunity to conceptualize the ways in which academic and non-academic groups all form discourse communities, albeit with slightly different characteristics. If students become more conscious as to how effectively they communicate on Facebook, what effective communication in that community looks like, and what other systems affect that space, then they will also begin to bring a heightened awareness to these same issues with regard to the writing classroom and university.

Learning Goal #2: Students will be able to recognize how various genres, both academic and non-academic, mediate social and rhetorical interactions within a discourse community. They will learn to identify and analyze how genres can be used effectively to invent.

The above-mentioned discussion of discourse community leads into the introduction of genre, as a necessary element for engaging in any such community. Genres may be conceptualized as yet smaller ecosystems within any larger discourse system, as they facilitate
particular rhetorical moments that are dependent upon and contribute to their surrounding environment. In his book *Genre and the Invention of the Writer: Reconsidering the Place of Invention in Composition*, Anis Bawarshi explains that genres form “rhetorical ecosystems” that “coordinate a symbiotic relationship between rhetorical habits and social habitats.” Genres are types of rhetorical ecosystems in that they are “dynamic sites in which communicants rhetorically reproduce the very conditions within which they act” (Bawarshi, 82). In other words, genres largely shape how certain discursive and rhetorical behaviors are carried out by rhetors in larger systems. At the same time, ecologically, genres contribute to shifts in their larger environment, while the communicants working within genres also modify how genres function. Bawarshi suggests that “genres maintain the social motives which individuals interpret and enact as intentions” (Bawarshi, 77). In short, rhetors largely begin from within the parameters of a certain genre, rather than inventing from scratch. That is to say, writers’ content, mechanics, and form are determined, enabled, expanded and limited by the genre that is appropriate to the situation and community in which they are inventing. To put it metaphorically, the genre is to the writer as clay is to the sculptor. Just as the sculptor cannot create without a material, a writer cannot write without a genre. The genre largely determines what and how a text takes ‘shape.’ Just as the sculptor may modify her materials by adding to them, resisting them, or taking something away from them, writers may change or push the boundaries of genres. Thus, the typified action of a genre system evolves over time according to the behavior of the actors within it and the other systems in that ecology. Given the effect of genres on the social interactions of a discourse community, then, attention to how they function provides a good starting point for invention. By being able to consciously identify not only the
discourse community in which they are situated, but also the genre in which they are working, students will have more leverage from which to invent.

As with discourse communities, writing instructors can introduce the concept of genre to students by beginning with the familiar. Once students have discussed the discourse communities in which they take part, we can ask them to identify which genres they use as modes of communication in those communities. Students will learn to analyze these genres, by discussing which social relationships the genres mediate and which generic elements, conventions, turns-of-phrase, and form are used, etc. A recent study, “The Writing Lives of College Students,” reports that college students most frequently use the genres of text message and email. Instant messages and social networking sites are the seventh and eighth most used genres, behind lecture notes, academic papers, and research papers (Grabill et al, 4-5). Clearly, students are familiar with the genres ‘research paper’ and ‘academic paper;’ however, students may not immediately perceive that they can approach and analyze these texts in the same way as text messages and email. I propose, then, that a juxtaposition of a familiar genre like ‘text message’ with a more intimidating genre like ‘research paper’ will enable students to make productive connections between the ways these genres mediate certain social interactions and purposes.

A practical sequence on genre may be conducted as follows. After an introduction to the concept of genre, students will rhetorically analyze the genres ‘text message’ and ‘research paper’ in a comparative exercise. Students will consider questions such as: ‘in what types of discourse communities are these genres used?’ ‘What types of social interactions do these genres mediate?’ ‘How/why are they effective (or not) for their particular discourse
communities/purposes?’ ‘What elements—form, conventions, vocabularies, mechanics, etc.—enable (or disable) their effectiveness?’ ‘What limits do these genres contain?’ The juxtaposition of an academic and non-academic genre, here, will help students to recognize the ubiquity of genres in their lived realities. Writing a text message is an intuitive rhetorical act for most students, while writing an academic paper is not. Becoming more conscious about the way they mobilize genre in their everyday realities, such as when they text, will allow students to recognize how they can also consciously adapt their prose when inventing and composing in the more unfamiliar genres of academia. At the same time, it is important to emphasize how the particularities of genres such as text messages and research papers allow for very different kinds of social interactions and functions situated within certain discourse communities.

**Learning Goal #3:** Students will be able to write in multiple generic modes and explain the appropriateness/effectiveness of their rhetorical choices. Students will learn to identify how multiple texts interact ‘ecologically’ within any one discourse community or around any one issue.

Later in the writing course, students can begin to re-conceptualize the seemingly discrete elements ‘genre’ and ‘discourse community’ as ecological through projects that require them to analyze and invent multiple texts in a given discourse community that surround a particular issue. With their proto-public advocacy project, Rivers and Weber emphasize that they want students to “create their own concatenation of texts and to consider how these texts might circulate and coordinate within their ecology” so as to “move students beyond the idea that most
public change happens through a single author writing a single text for a single audience” (Rivers and Weber, 204). In other words, their project emphasizes the variety of genres, audiences, texts, and writers that circulate in a given rhetorical ecology around a seemingly discrete event. Building upon Rivers’ and Weber’s pedagogy, I suggest a similar project, which I will call the ‘Academic Ecology Project,’ to teach academic writing. Like the public advocacy campaigns that Rivers and Weber emphasize, academic writing also functions ecologically. An article in a professional journal, for example, emerges from a concatenation of rhetorics including but not limited to: a call for conference papers; a conference proposal; a conference paper and corresponding audience feedback; a call for articles; an article expanded from the conference paper; peer-review feedback; multiple emails between scholar and publisher; cited works within the article; and conversations with peers. Similarly, a student paper emerges from the concatenation of a syllabus; a writing prompt; office hours with the professor; visits to a Writing Center tutor; rough drafts edited during peer review; scholarly articles cited; and emails between professor and student. The Academic Ecology Project seeks to encourage students to recognize the multiple texts, genres, people, and audiences that go into the academic work of their major discipline and how they can work within, draw from, and contribute to that ecology. The project will require that the students create and reflect on multiple texts in various genres and interact with several audiences in several forums.

The project may follow a sequence such as that outlined here: after learning about genre and discourse community, students will conduct an interview with a professor in their chosen or anticipated major (i.e. discourse community) to explore what ‘academic papers,’ ‘research papers’ and other genres are like in that field. This activity is inspired by Rivers’ and Weber’s
suggestion that students completing their public advocacy project interview an administrator at the university to discuss their proposal for change and its institutional and material efficacy. Rivers and Weber argue that the interview functions as a “kind of audience and material analysis,” as students must consider the viewpoint and subjectivity of the administrator as well as the institutional and material constraints—cost, politics, bureaucracy, ideology, etc.—that would impact their proposed project (Rivers and Weber, 206). Similarly, in the Academic Ecology Project students must consider the subject position of the professors, while gathering information from them concerning the material, institutional, ideological, cultural, and discursive systems within which they work and expect students to work. Also, this activity requires that students make multiple deliberate rhetorical choices appropriate to certain situations and compose in several genres, both familiar and unfamiliar. First, students will need to select a professor and contact that individual via a genre appropriate to such a social interaction—a professional email, for example, or a phone call. Presumably, the students will already be familiar with such genres. Then, within the genre ‘interview,’ a genre they may not have composed before, students will invent questions about the professor’s academic discipline and written work. The interview requires at least the following deliberate rhetorical choices imbedded in material and institutional systems: the students will decide in which material forum the interview will take place—for example, they may decide to conduct the interview via telephone, in the professor’s office, or via email—and they will consider how their choice might affect the rhetorical interaction between themselves and the professor—i.e. they must decide which forum is most appropriate and effective given the institutional relationship of professor/student. At the interviews, students will ask questions about the methods and types of ‘writing’ that exist in their chosen disciplines.
Here, they will engage with the discursive and ideological, as well as material and institutional, environments of the discipline. For example, students may ask professors which genres they most usually write in, which genres they generally assign for students, which conventions exist in each, and how these genres facilitate the professors’ goals within their disciplines in a particular way. Students might also question the professor concerning the material or institutional channels necessary to get work published in that field.

After the interview, students will synthesize their findings by writing in a reporting genre—such as ‘newspaper article’—or preparing a presentation in an oral genre—such as ‘PowerPoint.’ So that students engage with a public audience of their peers, they will share their report with the rest of the class. Students will also analyze a sample paper (professional article or sample student composition) from their discipline with attention to its generic and rhetorical elements and compare their findings with their interview results. By this point, they should be able to consider how their rhetorical analysis of the sample paper supports and/or contradicts the viewpoint of the professor concerning academic writing in that discipline. Upon completion of the project, the students will have analyzed and/or composed in the following genres in the ecology ‘academic writing:’ 1) professional email 2) interview 3) reporting genre 4) academic paper 5) critical reflection.

The success of this project in encouraging conscious adaptation skills depends upon the meta-cognitive discussion that surrounds it both in class and through writing. The goals of the project are two-pronged: at the end, students should be able to work within various genres to enact a rhetorical event(s) and to synthesize information concerning the rhetorical systems in the ecology of their discipline. After completing the project, students should write a reflective piece
in which they discuss what they have learned and experienced. With regards to the project’s first prong, the students should analyze the rhetorical choices, or adaptations, they made in completing the project. This analysis should demonstrate the connections that the students made between the various genres and rhetorical situations in which they participated and how these elements worked together to generate information concerning writing in their major-disciplines. The students should communicate a growing awareness about their invention as intentional to the multiple genres and systems they navigated. Concerning the second prong, successful reflections would synthesize and analyze the information gathered and discerned about writing in the students’ particular fields and then discuss the students’ understanding of their roles as writers in those fields. Ideally, drawing from the information compiled throughout the project, the students will be able to identify and articulate specific strategies for consciously adapting to the rhetorical ecologies of their majors, which they will carry with them beyond the first-year course.

**SOCIAL FORUMS AND TIME**

As noted in the epigraph to this chapter, Rivers and Weber highlight that within rhetorical ecologies, “the complexity of both rhetorical analysis and production comes in large part not from solitary texts or discursive acts, but from how texts and acts articulate and permeate across time and space” (Rivers and Weber, 208). Writers and texts do not evolve simply from interaction with each other in discrete spaces at fixed points in time; rather, they become more complex as they continually interact over time and across spaces.
Indeed, students’ academic writing undergoes such complex evolution; for example, my History student built upon his work from a previous semester to compose a new paper in a different genre for another course. Departments generally require that students complete the major by writing a capstone or thesis project that represents the evolution of their knowledge and writing skills from ‘novice’ to ‘Bachelor’ in the field. Students generate their topics for these projects from the knowledge that they have acquired in numerous courses throughout several semesters as a major. However, such projects rarely require that students make continual connections within and between courses throughout their college careers or that they relate their academic work to their future plans and everyday lives beyond the university. Typically, students and professors perceive the writing performed in each course as discrete. These limited perceptions result in large part from the traditional forums and feedback loops available for student writing: students write to an audience of one professor for the purpose of receiving a good grade in that particular course. Thus, while student writing is ecological in its production, it ceases to be ecological after its ‘publication,’ as it misses the opportunity to interact with other texts. It is easy for students to view each text that they write as irrelevant to the writing that they do in other classes, unconnected to the work of other students, and separate from the discourse communities in which they participate beyond college. Yet, such a view ignores how a student’s compositions can interact meaningfully with those of other students and develop over time both within and beyond the university. I am arguing here that the first year writing course should encourage students to approach their written work as interconnected, ongoing, and social. Specifically, the academic student conference and the e-portfolio cultivate this ecological
outlook by providing students with the opportunity to share their writings with their peers and to map their written work over time. This brings us to learning goal four.

*Learning Goal #4*: Students will be able to recognize how sharing their work in social forums affects their rhetorical choices and will consider how their writings evolve over time and interact with other texts and discourse communities.

The academic student conference highlights each individual student’s evolving skills over the span of one writing course, as well as allows multiple students’ writings to interact. By ‘academic student conference,’ I do not mean peer review workshops already commonly practiced, in which stakes for student writing are typically low. The benefits of peer review for editing purposes have been well documented; however, I am suggesting a more public and professional forum, in which students present relatively polished pieces, as a complement to peer review workshops. The academic conferences of professional scholars serve as a model for how an academic student conference could proceed most ecologically and meaningfully. At professional conferences in the humanities, for example, scholars form panels around a common topic and publically present short papers to an audience of their peers. After the paper presentations, a discussion is conducted between the panelists and their audience; throughout this discussion, panelists and audience members offer connections between the presentations, push for deeper analyses, and posit questions. Often, scholars are inspired and influenced by ideas that circulated within the local ecology of the conference, adapting these ideas into further
presentations and publications. Thus, the social interaction of multiple texts and writers at the conference generates new, more complex texts over time.

Participating in similar conferences gives students the opportunity also to experience and reflect on the ecological, continuous interaction of multiple writers and texts. The academic student conference may proceed as follows: several days before the conference, a class discussion about the genre ‘conference paper,’ a polished piece of writing that still contains underdeveloped conceptual components, will help students to prepare for their presentations. At the conference, several students will present short papers around a common theme, followed by a subsequent discussion between the presenters and audience members. To provide a sufficiently public, peer audience, the students in several first year writing courses will visit the various conferences held by each class. Therefore, the presenters will be ensured an audience of their immediate classmates, as well as peers working on similar material. Such a format allows the student presenters to experience first-hand how their work is received within the ‘first-year writing’ discourse community, comprised of multiple class-groups, at their university. After the conference, time will permit for students to incorporate ideas that circulated within that ecology into an expanded essay. To recognize and emphasize the adaptations that they will make before, during, and after the conference as conscious and purposeful, the students should continually reflect on their experience. The following questions, addressed in class discussions or in short response papers, will help students to think critically about the generic, temporal, material, and social contexts of the conference: In what ways did I adapt to the conference paper genre, by presenting my ideas on a topic in a certain way? What rhetorical choices did I make when writing within that genre? How did I adapt to the immediate space and time of the conference
when I was presenting? In what ways did the experience of writing the conference paper differ and/or resemble the act of orally articulating my work? How did my audience react to my presentation? Did I have to defend or support my ideas in unexpected ways? How did my paper evolve after it interacted with the work of my peers at the conference? Did I incorporate ideas from other students when I expanded my paper? Has my experience at the conference influenced any of my other compositions? Did any audience members incorporate ideas from my presentation into their own work? Again, this reflective component is crucial for helping students to become conscious as to their rhetorical choices at the conference and in their subsequent papers, as well as aware of their learning throughout the activity.

Students will also experience rhetorical evolution, conscious adaptation, and social interaction through the e-portfolio. In her article, “Postmodernism, Palimpsest, and Portfolios: Theoretical Issues in the Representation of Student Work,” Kathleen Blake Yancey argues that portfolios, whether electronic or paper, allow students to understand their writing relative to their past, future, and present contexts. Yancey suggests that the portfolio helps a student to understand the knowledge that she “has brought with her from previous experiences to current time as she explores what she seeks to know now” as well as to connect what “she learns in one setting [to] what she is learning in another class” (Yancey, 741). Portfolios also allow a student to translate “what she is learning into the context of the future, one where she may explore questions she cannot answer now, or, alternatively, in a context more focused, that of her professional aspirations” (ibid). Yancey’s comments here importantly address the practical necessity of transferring academic writing skills beyond the first-year classroom and the university. On a broad scale, an ongoing e-portfolio provides students with a space to organize
their writings throughout their four years at the university and beyond it; to observe their growth and change as writers; and to identify the skills that they are constantly cultivating.

This work begins in the first-year writing course. Within that specific semester, the e-portfolio allows students to track the evolutions of multiple papers and to interact with one another’s work. For example, students might upload their conference papers before and after their presentations onto one page of their portfolio to emphasize the expansions and adaptations made in the later paper. If one student wants to refer to another student’s paper that inspired her at the conference, she may do so easily by accessing that student’s portfolio afterwards. This forum is social, as students can keep their e-portfolios open to audiences such as peers, teachers, writing center tutors and other mentors who can provide constructive feedback through blogging and trackback functions. For example, a professor or peer reading an essay on a student’s portfolio may post a direct link to an article pertinent to that essay on the portfolio’s blog page.

Beyond the first-year course, e-portfolios support students as they adapt their writing to different environments at the university. For example, in the course that we have been discussing here, students might include the ‘Academic Ecology Project’ in their portfolios. After they leave the first-year writing classroom, students may refer back to this project as a framework for approaching subsequent papers in that discipline. As they learn more about writing in that field, they may update and add to this framework. The e-portfolio particularly facilitates the ecological evolution of the project in that it allows for the inclusion of various mediums such as links to other sites, photos, videos, and blogs. For example, a student might include in their ‘Academic Ecology Project’ a link to the Purdue Owl Website highlighting how
to cite sources in her discipline, or to the website of her department outlining expectations for writing in that major.

Furthermore, e-portfolios allow students to conceptualize how and why their academic writing skills matter in non-academic contexts. For example, if students are diligent in adding to their portfolios, they will have a large collection of their compositions in one location when they prepare to apply for graduate schools and jobs. This collection will allow students to reflect on their academic progress and to write about their skills and knowledges in cover letters and graduate school statement of purposes. The compositions on their e-portfolios will represent, in an easily accessible, social, and material format, the students’ navigation of various genres during college; reflecting on their rhetorical agility, as illustrated in the portfolio, will help students to recognize that they can also adapt consciously and meaningfully to professional genres after graduation.
CHAPTER THREE: BRINGING IT TOGETHER

“Any type of language learning involves establishing ownership.”

–John Whitman, Local Knowledges, Local Practices

This chapter provides a syllabus, which I have designed for a potential first-year writing course that employs the ecological approach. This syllabus is intended to be liberally adapted according to the local needs of a particular classroom. The course is imagined as a required first-year writing class, aimed at preparing students to engage in academic discourse. It assumes a semester-long, fourteen week course, in which the class meets twice a week. (This syllabus can apply at either a four-year or two-year institution.) In what follows, I provide an annotated version of the syllabus; the italicized text indicates what the students would see and the regular text offers reflections on rationale, analysis, and teaching suggestions. A print-ready version of the syllabus and all writing prompts, as the students will see them, are included in the Appendices A-E.

(ACADEMIC) WRITING DEMYSTIFIED: ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES FOR MAKING IT MATTER

Two main reasons motivate my choice for the title of this course: first, the phrase “(academic) writing demystified” serves to communicate to students what practical skills the course will offer—i.e. the ability to ‘demystify’ or decode ‘academic’ writing, which students may perceive as esoteric, complicated, or boring. Second, the phrase “adaptive strategies for making it matter” alludes to the main learning goal of the course: to provide students with
strategies for adapting more consciously, effectively, and meaningfully to any situations and environments in which they write. This goal rests on the assumption that the ability to recognize the external ecologies that affect their writing and to make their rhetorical choices with purpose will help students to approach writing as a meaningful and important activity. This assumption, as well as my choice to use the word ‘demystifying,’ is inspired by Bawarshi’s claim that analyzing genres as “sites of action” can “demystify invention” so that students may “participate more consciously and critically” in rhetorical acts (Bawarshi, 48). In addition to addressing genre, this course teaches discourse communities and rhetorical ecologies as other sites of action that can be productively ‘demystified.’ I chose, however, not to use specific rhetorical terms such as ‘genre’ and ‘rhetorical ecology’ in the course title, so as to present the course in an accessible and attractive manner to students not familiar with rhetoric and composition studies.

The phrase “making it matter” draws directly from the title of Ann Feldman’s book *Making Writing Matter*, in which she argues that writing ‘matters’ more to students when understood as situated in specific social interactions such as community service projects. This course applies Feldman’s argument to academic writing, as another form of rhetorical, social interaction. I purposely substitute the ambiguous word ‘it’ for ‘writing’ in the course title in order to leave exactly ‘what’ we are making ‘matter’ open to debate. Near the completion of the course, a lively discussion may be facilitated as to what now ‘matters’ more to the students. In line with ongoing course discussions, we can ask questions that push students to consider what we mean by ‘writing’ and ‘meaningful’: are their ‘final’ products more meaningful after participation in the course and recognition of rhetorical ecologies? Their writing processes? Their ability to recognize and adapt to genres? Their participation in certain discourse
communities? How might these factors be more meaningful? To whom? Relative to what? Of course, some students will experience some unpredictable and unintended effects that will be fruitful to investigate and discuss.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** How, where, why and for whom do we write in our everyday life? How, where, why and for whom do we write at the university? This course will explore the idea that the writing we do every day—on Facebook, in emails, on blogs—is not so different from the writing that we do in the academy. When we write something, we must adapt to the discourse community and the genre in which we write. At the same time, our community and genre provide us with material from which to compose texts that are new, interesting, and effective. The main purpose of this course is to develop strategies for recognizing the following: what affects our writing; what strategies we can use to make our writing easier and more meaningful; and how we might adapt effectively to any situation in which we write, both in college and beyond.

**LEARNING GOALS:**

- Students will be aware of what constitutes a discourse community and how it affects its members’ communication. They will be able to identify which discourse communities they participate in and what effective rhetoric and writing in these communities looks like.
- Students will be able to recognize how various genres, both academic and non-academic, mediate social and rhetorical interactions within a discourse community. They will learn to identify and analyze how genres can be used effectively to invent.
- Students will be able to write in multiple generic modes and explain the appropriateness/effectiveness of their rhetorical choices. Students will learn to identify how multiple texts interact ‘ecologically’ within any one discourse community or around any one issue.
- Students will be able to recognize how sharing their work in social forums affects their rhetorical choices and will consider how their writings evolve over time and interact with other texts and discourse communities.

**READINGS:**

4) Bawarshi, Anis. “The Genre Function” and “Sites of Invention” from Genre and the Invention of the Writer: Reconsidering the Place of Invention in Composition.

Whenever possible, this syllabus provides students with models of the genres in which they are asked to write. For example, because I ask students to write several ‘rhetorical analysis’ pieces, I include the Bitzer, Edbauer, Rivers/Weber, and Bawarshi texts as examples of that genre. Also, as these articles discuss and debate similar concepts, they serve as a model of the conversation that scholars in the same discourse community forge around mutual questions and of the interconnected ecology of texts that emerge around a given issue. Graff’s and Birkenstein’s book particularly emphasizes academic writing as a conversation, as well as provides some accessible and practical templates for students to use when entering that dialogue.

At the same time, I maintain that a course focusing on student writing should not over-use professional articles as course material. The students should provide much of the course reading by posting their own writing, as well as artifacts from other courses and communities pertinent to them, on the course blog and their e-portfolios.

**ONGOING PROJECTS:**

1) E-Portfolio, 20%
2) Genre Analysis Paper, 20%
3) Genre Translation, 10%
4) Academic Ecology Project, 20%
5) Final Academic Ecology Paper, 20%
6) Participation, 10%

**SCHEDULE:** (Note: All assignments are due and should be turned in by uploading them on your e-portfolio by the next class period, unless otherwise noted.)
**DAY ONE: WHAT IS WRITING? HOW DO WE DO IT?**

*In-class: Introduction of online syllabus and e-portfolio project. Discussion.*

**Assignment:** Publish your e-portfolio online, making it accessible to the class. Include, for now, your biographical information. Put a link to your portfolio on our online course syllabus. Look at the portfolios of at least two other students. *Due: 24 hours before next class.*

In his essay, “Writing without Friction” Keith Hjortshoj notes:

Most scholars enter and remain in their fields because so many interesting questions remain unanswered, or as yet unasked. Yet we typically introduce undergraduates to these fields through knowledge already assembled, debates already held, theories and methods already formulated, and questions already answered…this inversion tends to disconnect undergraduate education from real scholarship. (Hjortshoj, 57)

This class period intentionally begins with the highly debatable, “interesting” questions—what is writing and how do we do it—that drive the field of rhetoric and composition. This not a course that seeks to mold students into scholars of that particular field; however, drawing from Hjortshoj, I begin with these questions so as to excite students about the course topic and to encourage them to critically examine their assumptions concerning writing. In response to these questions, students may offer certain commonplaces concerning the individuality of invention—‘I have to wait for my ideas to come to me before I can write’—or the universality of writing—‘writing should be clear.’ Or, it may be difficult for the students to agree on a set definition. Such disagreement will allow a lively discussion in which we may suggest to students a main theme of the course: writing is not universal, but rather differs according to the community, time, and space in which it is ‘situated.’ Such a discussion will set the stage for a course that seeks to
challenge the student’s previous perceptions about writing and explores the ecological complexity of the “unanswered” question, ‘what is writing.’

As discussed in Chapter Two, the e-portfolios are introduced early so as to emphasize them as dynamic spaces that the students will consistently add to and modify throughout the course (see Appendix A). I have included the following quote by Kathleen Blake Yancey at the top of the writing prompt: “Whenever we seek to ‘map’ materially or metaphorically, we might go ‘multiple,’ as in the case of using x-rays—taken from various vantage points—to represent and thus assist in constructing a more accurate diagnosis” (Yancey, 740). After providing students with the prompt, we can use this quote as an entry point for discussing how a portfolio allows writers to represent a more “accurate” map of their writing. The syllabus will be online as a common ‘portfolio’ not unlike the individual e-portfolios that the students will create. For example, direct links to the course readings or to useful websites may be posted on the electronic syllabus, as well as a running blog for questions and a link to each student’s e-portfolio. The discussion on this day begins to address the complexity of writing in order to prepare students for later concepts such as ‘rhetorical ecology.’

**Day Two: What Are Discourse Communities?**

*In-class: Discussion.*

**Assignment:** Identify a discourse community of which you are a part. Write a short response paper (250 words) that addresses the following questions: how can we determine that this group is a discourse community? What common goals does the community share and how do members communicate concerning these goals? Read at least two other student’s papers.
Now that students have been briefly introduced to the idea that writing is ‘situated,’ they will be able to engage in a more detailed discussion about discourse communities as examples of this situatedness. As mentioned in Chapter Two, a question-based discussion will identify the following characteristics of a discourse community as outlined by John Swales: common goals, genres, social forums, and feedback loops. After this initial discussion, the class will be prepared to analyze several discourse communities suggested by the students. This analysis, conducted as a class, will serve as a model for the type of analysis expected of each student in the short response paper. As the class has not yet explored the concept of ‘genre,’ I intentionally design this assignment to be written in a genre typical to the classroom setting and assume that the students have written a ‘short response paper’ before.

**Day Three: How do we write within discourse communities?**

*In-class: Discussion.*

*Assignment: Upload or post a link to a piece of writing from your chosen discourse community.*

In this class period, we can extend the concept of discourse communities by discussing what types of writing are performed in these communities and how that writing allows for certain social interactions to be carried out in specific ways. The class might begin with the students sharing their short essays—this will give the class a variety of discourse communities to use as examples, as well as provide a social forum for the students to share their work. (Students might also work in partners to share their papers). We can facilitate discussion with questions arising from the student samples: how do people communicate in this community? And, how do their modes of communication lead to (or inhibit) the goals of the community? This general
conversation about the ‘types’ of communication that exist in the students’ discourse communities and how this communication facilitates or inhibits the community’s goals will prepare students for a more thorough and specific introduction to genre in the next two class periods.

**DAY FOUR: WHAT ARE GENRES?**

*In-class: Discussion and Partner Work.*

**Assignment:** Read Bawarshi’s “The Genre Function” and “Sites of Invention.” Upload or post a link to another example of ‘genre’ from your chosen discourse community.

We can begin this class by putting the following words on the board: ‘patient medical history form,’ ‘greeting card’ and ‘obituary’ (all three are genres, as suggested by Bawarshi, which will most likely not be immediately obvious as such to the students) and then ask, without using the word “genre,” what these three phrases have in common. As they have not yet read Bawarshi, the students may or may not suggest that the phrases are all ‘genres.’ If they do not suggest ‘genre’ with the first group of words, we might then offer the following: ‘play,’ ‘short story,’ and ‘poem.’ It is more likely that students will suggest ‘genre’ as the commonality in this case, as these words are typically taught as literary genres. This juxtaposition exercise will provide a springboard for discussing what ‘genre’ might mean beyond a way to categorize literary texts.

In preparation for reading Bawarshi’s chapters on their own, students can unpack the following description of genre as a class: “Genres are places of articulation…Genres also place writers in positions of articulation…Genres exist because writers produce them, but writers
produce them because genres already exist” (Bawarshi, 9). Bawarshi’s suggestion that genres can motivate and mold social/rhetorical action, just as writers use and mold genres may prove a challenging concept for students. In this case, as discussed in Chapter Two, the genre as the writer’s ‘clay’ provides an illustrative metaphor for students to visualize Bawarshi’s idea. The class can also discuss a genre familiar to most students (such as the Facebook page or personal email) to begin addressing how genres motivate and mediate writing in specific situations. Then, in pairs, students will be able to discuss the ‘piece of writing’ that they identified from their discourse communities with regards to whether it constitutes a genre, how, and why. What specific social interaction does that writing mediate? In what specific ways? In addition to reading Bawarshi’s texts as homework, students are asked to post a second genre from their discourse communities, as it is expected that they will have a broadened sense of what constitutes a ‘genre’ following this class period.

**DAY FIVE: BAWARSHI**

*In-class: Discussion.*

**Assignment:** Read sample genre analysis paper and begin composing your own. **Due:** first draft, Day Nine.

This class period focuses on exploring Bawarshi’s texts, paying particular attention to his rhetorical analyses of specific genres, as these analyses model those which the students will be expected to write. He analyzes, for example, the ‘patient medical history form’ as a genre that “helps organize and generate the social and rhetorical environment within which the patient and doctor use language to interact and produce meaningful, situated action” in the “material” and
“discursive” site of the physician’s office (Bawarshi, 82). This reading extends beyond the metaphor that the genre is the writer’s ‘clay,’ in that Bawarshi places agency on the genre as the active enabler of communication rather than the static materials a writer uses. We can encourage students to press upon what Bawarshi means when he suggests that the genre enables the patient and doctor to “produce meaningful” action. How is this action made more meaningful through the specific genre of the health form? How does that genre enable the specific social interaction between doctor and patient? How might other genres produce different (and perhaps less or more meaningful) effects? What might the patient health form look like in a different genre? How could its boundaries be challenged, and/or why would we want to do so? We may ask similar questions of the genres that the students posted from their own discourse communities.

In this class period, the genre analysis paper is introduced (see Appendix B). If possible, it would be helpful to provide students with a sample paper written by a former student, so that they may have a more precise model of the genre expected of them. Otherwise, Bawarshi’s text serves as a model.

**Day Six: How do we translate between genres?**

*In-class: Group Work.*

**Assignment:** Continue working on your genre translation. **Due:** presentation, Day Eight.

In his essay, “Translation and Appropriation in Foreign Language and Writing Classrooms” John Whitman argues that the writing classroom may learn from the foreign language classroom the “major lesson that…any type of language learning involves establishing ownership, what I have called appropriation” (Whitman, 195). He suggests that the expectation
placed on writing students to learn ‘academic’ writing involves “appropriating” a new language—that of academics—with its own mechanics, jargons, conventions, and cultures. This appropriation, Whitman argues, is not unlike learning the language of a foreign people and culture. Whitman’s argument is reminiscent of David Bartholomae’s seminal assertion that students must “invent” the university when they write for a professor by learning to “approximate” the academic discourse. According to Bartholomae, audience awareness in the traditional student/writer-professor/reader exchange is “a problem of power and finesse” as the successful writer must be “either equal to or more powerful than those she would address” (Bartholomae, 609-611). Whitman similarly emphasizes the unequal power structure in the classroom between teacher and student, arguing that the “language of school” is the language of the middle class; thus, some students have a farther distance to travel when learning to appropriate academic discourse. In light of this inequality, Whitman suggests a shift in perception:

Assumptions about ownership of language are deeply embedded in all levels of our educational culture. There is no straightforward way to remove the birthright and even the stakes, except by changing the game. One change is to make the target not the language owned by some, but rather varieties of language that are up for grabs. From this comes the project of making everybody a translator. (Whitman, 195)

Whitman maintains that if academic discourse is taught as ‘translation,’ then all students are empowered, especially those whose entry into the academic community is not easy or immediately apparent. Translation suggests that no one community possesses the right to a language but rather that rhetorical agents continually move between linguistic, discursive, and cultural environments; translation is also ecological in that respect.
In his writing classroom, Whitman uses an activity in which students ‘translate’ between genres, just as a foreign language student translates between languages. This activity, he suggests, allows students to approach academic writing as something that may be learned, rather than as something that should be somehow intuitive or already partially understood. I draw from Whitman, here, in line with my argument that academic writing can matter more to our students when they view it as just another ecology to which they adapt, rather than as a discourse not accessible to them. Thus, the genre translation assignment (Appendix C) seeks to provide students with the opportunity to practice moving between genres and to explore how such movement affects social positions and interactions.

The students should begin with the genre that they are already analyzing in the genre analysis paper, as they are developing a critical familiarity with that genre. Day Six is intended as a period in which students can brainstorm together in groups about how they might ‘translate’ the content of their chosen genres into a different one. It is important to facilitate a discussion on this day about what such a ‘translation’ entails. Similar to linguistic translation, genre translation requires attention not only to language but also to the cultural, social, and material elements in a discourse community. Therefore, what adaptations of style, language, medium, and content must be made in order to convey a similar message in a different genre? In this class, we can also discuss the power dynamics associated with various discourse communities and genres, and what it means to move between them: how do certain genres enable certain power dynamics? What ‘acts of translation’ are required by people not within that community? How might a genre translation alter these dynamics?
**Day Seven: Genre Translation, Cont’d**

*In-class:* Continue working on genre translations.

*Assignment:* Prepare for presentation of genre translation.

This class period may be used for students to continue working on their genre translations. Also, we can begin to address how students should present their translations to the class. The students might be asked, for example, to prepare a brief summary of their original genre and how they changed it. They should also be prepared to discuss what rhetorical choices they made in the act of translation.

**Day Eight: Presentations**

*In-class:* Presentations of genre translations. Discussion.

*Assignment:* Add Part Two (concerning your genre translation) to your genre analysis paper.

*Due: first draft, Day Nine.*

On this day, students will speak to the class about their genre translations; the peer audience provides another social forum for the students’ work. After the students have presented, they will engage with the work of their peers by discussing various translations. What choices did the students have to make in order to move from one genre to another? What alternative effects do they anticipate, or did they experience, from such a move? Did the social interaction, power dynamics, or discourse community also change? What social/cultural/material factors did they have to consider? Later, the students will add 500 words to their genre analysis papers concerning such questions. The two stages of that assignment are intended to emphasize the evolutionary quality of written work; as the students delve deeper into the concept of genre,
as well as learn more terminology and concepts useful for rhetorical analysis, they are given the opportunity to adapt their papers accordingly.

**DAY NINE: PEER REVIEW**

*In-class:* Workshop genre analysis papers in small groups.

**Assignment:** Makes changes to genre analysis papers according to group feedback. Be prepared to present your papers in the next class.

Much scholarship has argued for the benefits of small group student writing workshops. In his article “LITCOMP,” for example, Wayne Booth suggests that the value of such workshops lies in the time students spend “discovering whether understanding has occurred or why it has not…Students learn, painfully, that their colleagues find them bullying, pedantic, ignorant, silly, dull, or sycophantic” (Booth, 68). The small group format allows students to experience directly the reception of their drafts from a peer audience. In this class period, students might work in groups of three to four. As this is the first period in which the students will engage in peer review, a brief conversation at the start of class will prepare them for the activity. The class can discuss, for example, what is expected and effective in the genre ‘rhetorical analysis’ so that students have a clear sense of what they are looking for in each other’s papers. After the peer review activity during this period, we can prepare students for the upcoming conference by addressing its format.

**DAY TEN: ACADEMIC CONFERENCE**

*In-class:* Present genre analysis papers.
Assignment: AFTER you present: Think about how your paper was received by your colleagues at the conference and the experience of orally presenting your work. Post a brief paragraph (250 words) to the course blog discussing the experience of the conference and if/how it provided you with a sense of your paper’s effectiveness/areas to be further developed and improved. Also, reflect on the genre of oral presentation: what adaptations did you make to your paper so as to present it orally? The final draft of your paper is not due until Day Fourteen. Thus, you have ample time to make changes to your work: it is expected that you will make continual revisions to this paper, particularly as we delve more deeply into the ‘rhetorical analysis’ genre in the coming weeks.

Like the group peer review, the student conference format provides students with a space in which they may experience their papers’ effects on an audience of their peers. As the students will now present to the entire class, the audience is bigger and the stakes are raised. Also, the oral presentation of the conference paper is another rhetorical genre, about which the students will later reflect. Please see Chapter Two for a more detailed description of how the conference might proceed. Indeed, such a practice is time-consuming; yet, I argue for the importance of each student presenting his/her work, rather than only a selection of students. Thus, two days are provided for the conference.

DAY ELEVEN: CONFERENCE

In-class: Present genre analysis papers.

Assignment: Post a syllabus from a different course on your e-portfolio. Look at the syllabi posted by at least two other students.
After all the students have presented their work, we can follow up by discussing their experience with them. How will their papers change based on the feedback of their peers at the conference?

**DAY TWELVE: ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES AS DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES**

*In-class: Syllabus Analysis.*

**Assignment:** Read Rivers’ and Weber’s “Ecological, Pedagogical, Public Rhetoric.”

In this class we will begin to apply the concepts of genre and discourse community to academic writing. On Day Two, we already suggested to the students that our class and other academic classes form discourse communities as part of the larger university, academic departments, and disciplines. We will significantly expand on that suggestion for the rest of the semester.

Bawarshi suggests that the classroom represents a “site of action” mediated by a “range of complex written and spoken genres” (Bawarshi, 118). Also, the classroom brings together the complex interaction of multiple sociocultural/political/material systems forming a type of local rhetorical ecology. Bawarshi further notes that “as they reposition themselves within and between” classroom genres “teachers and students acquire, negotiate, and articulate different desires, which inform the choices they make as participants” (*ibid*). One such genre, which drives many of the subsequent interactions in the course, is the syllabus. Bawarshi writes:

> The syllabus plays a major role in establishing the ideological and discursive environment of the course, generating and enforcing the subsequent relations, subject positions, and practices teacher and students will perform during the course. (Bawarshi, 119)
As such, the syllabus provides a good starting point with which to introduce the concept of academic ecologies. Introducing the syllabus as a genre on Day Twelve takes advantage of the fact that the students have already been following it for several weeks. Thus, they will have more experience from which to discuss how it has mediated their actions.

We can begin by asking how the syllabus ‘generates’ and ‘enforces’ the goals, expectations, and social interactions of the course. What can the syllabus tell us about the expectations, as well as the audience and the context, for the social interactions of the course? How does it mediate the relationships among the students and between the students and teacher? What might it tell us about the wider contexts of department, discipline, and university? After this discussion, students can form groups of 3 or 4 to analyze and discuss the sample syllabi that they posted from other courses. This activity intends that students will begin to conceptualize the relevance of our writing course for their courses in other academic disciplines.

**DAY THIRTEEN: WHAT IS A RHETORICAL ECOCY?**

*In-class: Unpack Rivers and Weber.*

*Assignment: Read Edbauer’s “Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies.”*

This class period focuses on critically reading the Rivers and Weber piece, which provides a succinct summary of the concept ‘rhetorical ecologies’ and an interesting reading of the Montgomery Bus Boycott as such an ecology. Rivers’ and Weber’s article looks at the various genres and systems—both mundane and public—that intersect around issues in the public sphere seemingly motivated by ‘one’ rhetorical incident. It argues, for example, that the
Montgomery Bus Boycott, while popularly perceived as beginning with Rosa Parks’ refusal to give up her seat, actually emerged from a convergence of texts, including meetings and meeting minutes held by civil rights leaders; the speeches spawned by those meetings; and the social conversations in everyday locations such as beauty parlors and grocery stores about those speeches.

Rivers and Weber argue: “We want to move students beyond the idea that most public change happens through a single author writing a single text for a single audience” (Rivers and Weber, 189). Historical and current events provide a good basis for introducing rhetorical ecologies during this class period, as these issues are recognizable and accessible to the students. After discussing the Montgomery Bus Boycott, students will be able to consider what other ‘public changes’ occur ecologically and what texts/people/institutions/systems contribute to those changes.

**DAY FOURTEEN: RHETORICAL ECLOGIES, CONT’D**

*In-class: Are academic discourses ‘ecological?’ Genre analysis papers are due.*

*Assignment: Post a link to the departmental website for your major on your portfolio. Take note of the various genres and texts that appear on the site. Find an academic article from that discipline (from a peer-reviewed journal, for example) and post a link/upload it. Read Graff and Birkenstein.*

Edbauer’s text presents a more in-depth theoretical discussion of how rhetorical ecologies function in the public sphere, as well as provides an interesting rhetorical analysis of the “Keep Austin Weird” campaign in Austin, Texas. Her text will further our conversation with the
students concerning how multiple texts interact in rhetorical ecologies, often with unpredictable effects and to unintended audiences. The article brings together many concepts that the students have been working with thus far and will provide students with some specific terminology from the discourse of rhetoric and composition that they may incorporate into their rhetorical analyses.

The class might look closely at Edbauer’s discussion of ‘Keep Austin Weird,’ as another model of rhetorical analysis genre and as an example of how genres move, evolve, and are ‘translated’ between ecologies. Edbauer explains that two independent stores produced one specific rhetoric, ‘Keep Austin Weird’ bumper stickers, in reaction against the influx of chain-stores in Austin. The slogan went viral throughout the city of Austin: it evolved into various rhetorics, was translated into multiple genres, and was used in response to different exigences within numerous discourse communities. The public library, for example, produced bumper stickers that proclaimed “Keep Austin Reading,” while Cingular telephone company, ironically one of the companies that the original movement reacted against, used the slogan ‘keepin’ Austin weird’ on its advertisements. Companies and communities incorporated the slogan onto T-shirts, mugs, and tote bags for various audiences. This example of rhetorical evolution provides an opportunity for students to consider how exigencies and genres create motivation for certain rhetorics, as well as how political/social/cultural motivations are affected and mediated by genre and genre translations in interconnected webs. The evolution of the ‘Keep Austin Weird’ slogan highlights how rhetorical ecologies move in response to differing perspectives around a common rhetoric or issue. After discussing Edbauer’s article, the students will be prepared to consider how rhetorical ecologies might work in academia.
DAY FIFTEEN: ACADEMIC ECOLOGIES

In-class: Group work. Discussion.

Assignment: Write a short rhetorical analysis about your selected academic article (500 words).

Consider the exigence, genre, and discourse community of the piece, as well as how it incorporates and engages with other texts. Due: first draft, next class

In this class, we introduce the ‘academic ecology project,’ which asks students to explore how academic disciplines function ecologically (see Appendix D). First, the class might analyze a few departmental websites to consider how the departments function as rhetorical ecologies. For example, students may consider what genres/texts on the website—professor CVs, course descriptions/syllabi, requirements for the major, thesis permission forms, links to other sites, event postings—tell us about the department as a discourse community. What social/cultural interactions does the site mediate?

Beginning to consider the academic department as an ecology in this class prepares students to address the academic/research article as part of that ecology. In small groups organized according to major, students will look at the articles the students provide in terms of how the authors situate themselves within a certain discourse community (the discipline, for example, or a sub-field within a larger discipline). The students should also consider how the genre ‘academic article’ seems to be functioning, motivating and mediating the articles in various disciplines. The Graff and Birkenstein text will help the students to notice and talk about the rhetorical moves that scholars make in order to situate themselves in a wider conversation/ecology.
**DAY SIXTEEN: THE INTERVIEW**

*In-class:* Work on interviews.

*Assignment:* Draft your interview and send a professional email to the professor of your choice.

*Due:* first draft of interview, next class.

The interview presents the students with the opportunity to work within another genre, participate in another social forum, and gather information useful to analyzing the academic writing of their chosen fields. Students will compose and conduct an interview with a professor in their major (or in the discipline they suspect might become their major). As a genre, the interview mediates the relationship between an information-gatherer and information-giver; thus, students should consider which types of questions are appropriate and effective to this genre.

The students should ask their professors about the types of genres, forums, and feedback loops that exist in the discourse community of their disciplines. For example, students might gather information about the following during the interview: the genres of writing that professors most often work within as professional scholars in their fields; the professors’ writing processes and perceived audiences; the cutting edge debates in the field; how writing practices have changed over the professors’ careers; what types of writing the professors expect from students; how the professors view student writing as similar/different from the professional writing of their fields.

The analyses that the students have done on their scholarly articles for this class will be useful for informing their questions: what have the students observed so far about academic writing in their major field and want to question the professors about? The students should also ask the professors for an ‘artifact’ from their disciplines—for example, a sample student paper (with permission); a conference paper/article; a course syllabus; a grading rubric, etc. The students
will analyze and add these artifacts to their academic ecology projects, as another example of a genre performed in their chosen fields.

Additionally, the interview will be an exercise in translation between discourse communities. As we have been working throughout the course on some rhetorical terms such as ‘exigence’ and ‘rhetorical ecology,’ we can remind students that professors in other disciplines may not be familiar with these terms. The students will have to ‘translate’ these concepts accordingly. In this period, we can also talk briefly about the genre ‘professional email,’ which the students will use to contact their chosen professor to set up an interview. These emails will not be peer reviewed so as to enact a more realistic (i.e. quick) email exchange.

**Day Seventeen: The Interview, Cont’d**

*In-class:* Peer Review/Practice Interviews.

*Assignment:* Conduct your interview sometime before the next class period.

Students will participate in another group peer review during this class period. Each student will review the interviews of two or three other students.

**Day Eighteen: Reporting Back**

*In-class:* Discussion. Group Work.

*Assignment:* Write your interview report (500 words). *Due:* At least twenty-four hours before next class. Read the interview summaries of at least 2 other students.

To prepare students to write a report about their professor interviews, this class period looks at samples of ‘reported interview’ genres from various media. It may be useful here, for
example, to find samples of interviews with professors published by students in the university’s newspaper. We can ask: how do these reports ‘translate’ from interview to prose? What language/conventions/grammar are used? What rhetorical choices need to be made? What kinds of conclusions are drawn from the interviews and articulated in the articles?

We can also discuss with the students what specific types of information they have learned from their professor interviews. Again, it can be useful in this class period to have students work in groups according to their majors, before reconvening for class discussion. We can urge the students not to draw definite conclusions from the interviews—i.e. this is what ‘academic writing’ looks like in discipline x—but rather to analyze the information with respect to the professors’ subject positions. We might suggest how difficult it may be for professors to talk objectively about their writing from an expert perspective and ask: how do the professors’ perspectives enhance, change, or differ from what we gleaned from our academic article analyses? How do the professors’ perspectives differ from our perception of that discipline in popular culture? What types of writing do the professors perform that students typically do not? What are the expectations for how students should ‘translate’ between professional and classroom genres in the field?

**DAY NINETEEN: SHARING FINDINGS**

*In-class:* Share interview reports. Discussion.

*Assignment:* Compare your analyses of the syllabus, journal article, professor interview, website, and artifact to begin connecting your observations about the rhetorical ecology of your major field. You will draw from the previous writing you have done for the project, and your
ongoing observations, to form your Final Rhetorical Ecology paper (see Appendix D). Due: first draft, Day Twenty-One

On this day, students will draw connections between the various genres and texts that they have been analyzing from their major field. First, the students will share their interview reports as a class or in their major groups. Then, we can facilitate class discussion through the following questions: How do certain genres of writing allow scholars to facilitate certain modes of inquiry? How do these genres maintain certain conventions and common practices, as well as allow for new discoveries? Why might they do so? How do the expectations of student writing in the discipline seem to differ/connect with the work of professional scholars? What translations are expected of students in the field? What other genres might be useful to change, translate, or further develop in that field? How do the genres and texts we have looked at so far seem to interact within the ecology of each discipline? How do these genres and texts connect to those in other disciplinary ecologies? How are the ecologies of different disciplines similar/different?

**Day Twenty: Academics in the ‘Public’ Sphere**

*In-class: Discussion.*

*Assignment: Continue work on final rhetorical ecology paper.*

In this class period, students will work in their major groups to brainstorm how the academic scholarship of that field is manifested in more popular genres. We can discuss which ‘publics’ certain genres of academic writing participate in with greater or lesser frequency and to what effect. For example, now that the students have analyzed some examples of scholarly articles, they should be able to discuss what acts of translation are necessary for ‘translating’ that
scholarship, written for an academic discourse community, to a newspaper article, written for a more general public discourse community. Students in science or anthropology might look at articles written for National Geographic; English majors might look at film/book reviews; pre-med students might look at popular medical advice websites; History students might look at a History channel program, etc. Students will consider: what might be ‘lost’ in translation from a scholarly genre to a more popular one, and vice versa? What might be gained? What rhetorical choices concerning language, form, and medium must be made to translate academic work for a general audience? Who creates these more ‘public’ rhetorics? For whom? How is ‘academic’ opinion or expertise represented? What types of writing might the students do once they leave the university with this major? How does the ‘public’ discourse surrounding an academic field constitute an element in that field’s broader ecology? This activity is intended to encourage students to draw connections between their work in the university and the world beyond the Ivory Tower.

**DAY TWENTY-ONE: PEER REVIEW**

*In-class*: Review final rhetorical ecology papers in small groups.

*Assignment*: Make changes to your papers, taking into account your peers’ suggestions. Prepare to share your work on Day Twenty-Three. *Due*: final draft, Day Twenty-Three.

Peer review on this day can proceed in the same format as in previous class periods.

**DAY TWENTY-TWO: EXTRA DAY**
As this course is designed to be adapted to the specific circumstances and needs of each local class, an extra day is left open on the syllabus in the assumption that some activities may take longer than anticipated, a class period may be cancelled, etc.

**DAY TWENTY-THREE: CONFERENCE**

*In-class:* Share final rhetorical ecology papers and e-portfolios.

*Assignment:* Look through your e-portfolio and that of at least 2 other students. Notice how your writing has evolved over the course of the semester. Think about how your writings have interacted, drawn upon each other, etc. Come to the next class prepared to discuss some ‘strategies of adaptation’ that you have learned from this course. How might you approach writing differently in subsequent courses. Also, think about the title of the course: “Adaptive Strategies for Making it Matter.” What, specifically, matters more to you now with regards to your writing?

As the students’ final rhetorical ecology papers are somewhat long, the students might present them informally on this day. We can also discuss as a group what connections/similarities/divergences the ‘academic’ writing in various fields seems to reflect.

**DAY TWENTY-FOUR: FINAL DISCUSSION**

This class period will bring together the themes and strategies developed throughout the course. A discussion such as that described on the second page of this chapter should prove interesting.
APPENDIX A:

E-PORTFOLIO PROJECT

“Whenever we seek to ‘map’ materially or metaphorically, we might go ‘multiple,’ as in the case of using x-rays—taken from various vantage points—to represent and thus assist in constructing a more accurate diagnosis.”

–Kathleen Blake Yancey, “Postmodernism, Palimpsest, and Portfolios: Theoretical Issues in the Presentation of Student Work”

As Yancey suggests, one map or picture of something does not accurately represent that thing: multiple images, maps, or representations will provide a fuller sense of it or a “more accurate diagnosis.” To create a deeper representation of your writing, you will create an on-going e-portfolio, where you will, at the very least, publish all of your writing for this course. Think of this portfolio as a ‘map’ of your work as a writer. The format and medium of the portfolio will allow you to include writings from other courses/forums, links to resources useful to you, pictures, and multi-media texts. Please make your portfolio accessible to all members of this class, as we will be frequently engaging with each other’s work. Your portfolio will be graded. More importantly, however, I encourage you to continue adding to your portfolio after this semester. The e-portfolio provides a unique space in which you may track and reflect on your evolution as a writer. Eventually, it will become a resource for you when you brainstorm for your senior thesis and apply to graduate schools and jobs.

By the end of the semester, your portfolio should include:

1) A short biography (name, hometown, intended major, sports/hobbies, family)
2) A picture that represents how your mind works as a writer
3) A link to at least one resource useful to you (ex. Purdue Owl, departmental website of your major, Grammar Girl)
4) All of the writing for this class, organized according to a carefully chosen rhetorical rationale
APPENDIX B:

GENRE ANALYSIS

“Genres are places of articulation...Genres also place writers in positions of articulation...Genres exist because writers produce them, but writers produce them because genres already exist”

—Anis Bawarshi, Genre and the Invention of the Writer

As Bawarshi suggests, and as we have been discussing, genres are much more than ways to categorize literature. They also provide us with motivations and materials for how and why we write, and they mediate our social interactions. In this essay, you will explore how a particular genre enables, limits, and affects communication in a certain discourse community. There are two parts to this assignment. This is Part One. We will discuss Part Two later.

Some suggestions for how to begin:
1) Think about a discourse community in which you either participate or can easily access/observe.
2) Carefully consider what genres this community uses to communicate—some of them may not be obvious!
3) Choose a genre from that community and take a look at 3 examples of it.
4) Rhetorically analyze the genre by considering the following questions:
   a. In what ways does this genre initiate a social interaction in the community?
   b. In what ways does this genre mediate that communication? In what ways does it provide the rhetor with material/guidance/conventions/language specific to the situation?
   c. How could you imagine pushing the boundaries of the genre? What effect could this have on the social interaction?
   d. Could the same information/content be communicated in a different genre? How so? How would a different genre mediate the social interaction differently?
5) Address these questions in a genre analysis essay of 500 words. When deciding how to compose your essay, use Bawarshi’s text and the sample student essay as models of the rhetorical analysis genre. After we workshop our papers, present them in a conference, add Part Two, and study genre more deeply, your papers will evolve into a larger paper, due on Day Fourteen.
APPENDIX C:

GENRE TRANSLATION

“Any type of language learning involves establishing ownership, what I have called appropriation.”

–John Whitman, Local Knowledges, Local Practices

When we enter a new discourse community, we usually ‘appropriate’ the language of that community and adapt to the genres that it uses. In other words, we must often translate between communities and genres to make them more accessible to us. What are the effects of such translation?

In this assignment, please begin with the genre that you are writing about in your genre analysis paper. Consider what the content of that genre might be like ‘translated’ into a different one. For example, what would your Facebook timeline be like as a play? What would a birthday card be like as a short story? What would the Patient Medical Form be like as a T-Shirt slogan? Think about how this translation will affect the function of the genre within its discourse community. Can you communicate a similar message in a different genre? How will the message/effect change? How will the translation enable or disable the social interaction mediated by the original? You may decide that the translated version fits better within a different community. How so? Why?

This assignment has two parts:

1) Make the translation. You will present your original genre and the ‘translated’ version of it to the class, as well as discuss the choices that you made and why you made them.

2) Write a 500 word rhetorical analysis of your translation. Please address in your paper: What rhetorical choices did you make, and why? How did the context/effect/function of the original genre change in the translated version? What social, cultural, and material choices did you have to make? What new social, cultural, and material effects did the translated version lead to? This analysis will become Part Two of your original Genre Analysis paper.
APPENDIX D:  

ACADEMIC ECOLOGY PROJECT

“Rhetorical action [is] emergent and enacted through a complex ecology of texts, writers, readers, institutions, objects, and history.”

–Nathaniel A. Rivers and Ryan P. Weber

As Rivers and Weber note, rhetorical action is motivated and generated through an interconnected ecology of texts, people, and systems. Attempting to understand these complicated ecologies helps us also to understand our positions as actors within them and how we may better adapt to them. In this project, you will explore just some of the texts that participate in the ecology of your major field. You will gather and analyze the following texts:

1) Syllabus (in-class analysis)
2) Scholarly Article (written analysis, 500 words)
3) Department Website (in-class analysis)
4) Interview (written report, 250 words)
5) Artifact such as student’s paper, course rubric, professor conference paper, etc. (in-class analysis)
6) Public Genre (in-class analysis)

Over the next few weeks, we will be analyzing these texts both orally and in writing. In your final paper for the course—the Final Academic Ecology Paper—you will bring your observations and analyses together to write about how the academic ecology of your field operates, what place you see yourself occupying in that ecology, and what adaptive strategies you have gathered from observing this ecology. This paper will be 1,000 words. The first draft is due on Day Twenty-One.
APPENDIX E:

STUDENT SYLLABUS

(ACADEMIC) WRITING DEMYSTIFIED: ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES FOR MAKING IT MATTER

COURSE DESCRIPTION: How, where, why and for whom do we write in our everyday life? How, where, why and for whom do we write at the university? This course will explore the idea that the writing we do every day—on Facebook, in emails, on blogs—is not so different from the writing that we do in the academy. When we write something, we must adapt to the discourse community and the genre in which we write. At the same time, our community and genre provide us with material from which to compose texts that are new, interesting, and effective. The main purpose of this course is to develop strategies for recognizing the following: what affects our writing; what strategies we can use to make our writing easier and more meaningful; and how we might adapt effectively to any situation in which we write, both in college and beyond.

LEARNING GOALS:

- Students will be aware of what constitutes a discourse community and how it affects its members’ communication. They will be able to identify which discourse communities they participate in and what effective rhetoric and writing in those communities looks like.
- Students will be able to recognize how various genres, both academic and non-academic, mediate social and rhetorical interactions within a discourse community. They will learn to identify and analyze how genres can be used effectively to invent.
- Students will be able to write in multiple generic modes and explain the appropriateness/effectiveness of their rhetorical choices. Students will learn to identify how multiple texts interact ‘ecologically’ within any one discourse community or around any one issue.
- Students will be able to recognize how sharing their work in social forums affects their rhetorical choices and will consider how their writings evolve over time and interact with other texts and discourse communities.

READINGS:


**ONGOING PROJECTS:**

- E-Portfolio, 20%
- Genre Analysis Paper, 20%
- Genre Translation, 10%
- Academic Ecology Project, 20%
- Final Academic Ecology Paper, 20%
- Participation, 10%

**SCHEDULE:** (Note: All assignments are due and should be turned in by uploading them on your e-portfolio by the next class period, unless otherwise noted.)

**DAY ONE: WHAT IS WRITING? HOW DO WE DO IT?**

*In-class:* Introduction of online syllabus and e-portfolio project. Discussion.

*Assignment:* Publish your e-portfolio online, making it accessible to the class. Include, for now, your biographical information. Put a link to your portfolio on our online course syllabus. Look at the portfolios of at least two other students. **Due:** 24 hours before next class.

**DAY TWO: WHAT ARE DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES?**

*In-class:* Discussion.

*Assignment:* Identify a discourse community of which you are a part. Write a short response paper (250 words) that addresses the following questions: how can we determine that this group
is a discourse community? What common goals does the community share and how do members communicate concerning these goals? Read at least two other student’s papers.

**DAY THREE: HOW DO WE WRITE WITHIN DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES?**

In-class: Discussion.

Assignment: Upload or post a link to a piece of writing from your chosen discourse community.

**DAY FOUR: WHAT ARE GENRES?**

In-class: Discussion and Partner Work.

Assignment: Read Bawarshi’s “The Genre Function” and “Sites of Invention.” Upload or post a link to a ‘genre’ from your chosen discourse community.

**DAY FIVE: BAWARSHI**

In-class: Discussion.

Assignment: Read sample genre analysis paper and begin composing your own. Due: first draft, Day Nine.

**DAY SIX: HOW DO WE TRANSLATE BETWEEN GENRES?**

In-class: Group Work.

Assignment: Continue working on your genre translation. Due: presentation, Day Eight.

**DAY SEVEN: GENRE TRANSLATION, CONT’D**

In-class: Continue working on genre translations.

Assignment: Prepare for presentation of genre translation.

**DAY EIGHT: PRESENTATIONS**

In-class: Presentations of genre translations. Discussion.
Assignment: Add Part Two (concerning your genre translation) to your genre analysis paper.

Due: first draft, Day Nine.

**DAY NINE: PEER REVIEW**

In-class: Workshop genre analysis papers in small groups.

Assignment: Makes changes to genre analysis papers according to group feedback. Be prepared to present your papers in the next class.

**DAY TEN: ACADEMIC CONFERENCE**

In-class: Present genre analysis papers.

Assignment: AFTER you present: Think about how your paper was received by your colleagues at the conference and the experience of orally presenting your work. Post a brief paragraph (250 words) to the course blog discussing the experience of the conference and if/how it provided you with a sense of your paper’s effectiveness/areas to be further developed and improved. Also, reflect on the genre of oral presentation: what adaptations did you make to your paper so as to present it orally? The final draft of your paper is not due until Day Fourteen. Thus, you have ample time to make changes to your work: it is expected that you will make continual revisions to this paper, particularly as we delve more deeply into the ‘rhetorical analysis’ genre in the coming weeks.

**DAY ELEVEN: CONFERENCE**

In-class: Present genre analysis papers.

Assignment: Post a syllabus from a different course on your e-portfolio. Look at the syllabi posted by at least two other students.

**DAY TWELVE: ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES AS DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES**
In-class: Syllabus Analysis.

Assignment: Read Rivers’ and Weber’s “Ecological, Pedagogical, Public Rhetoric.”

Day Thirteen: What is a Rhetorical Ecology?

In-class: Unpack Rivers and Weber.

Assignment: Read Edbauer’s “Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies.”

Day Fourteen: Rhetorical Ecologies, Cont’d

In-class: Are academic discourses ‘ecological?’ Genre analysis papers are due.

Assignment: Post a link to the departmental website for your major on your portfolio. Take note of the various genres and texts that appear on the site. Find an academic article from that discipline (from a peer-reviewed journal, for example) and post a link/upload it. Read Graff and Birkenstein.

Day Fifteen: Academic Ecologies

In-class: Group work. Discussion.

Assignment: Write a short rhetorical analysis about your selected academic article (500 words). Consider the exigence, genre, and discourse community of the piece, as well as how it incorporates and engages with other texts. Due: first draft, next class

Day Sixteen: The Interview

In-class: Work on interviews.

Assignment: Draft your interview and send a professional email to the professor of your choice.

Due: first draft of interview, next class.

Day Seventeen: The Interview, Cont’d
In-class: Peer Review/Practice Interviews.

**Assignment**: Conduct your interview sometime before the next class period.

**DAY EIGHTEEN: REPORTING BACK**

In-class: Discussion. Group Work.

**Assignment**: Write your interview report (500 words). **Due**: At least twenty-four hours before next class. Read the interview summaries of at least 2 other students.

**DAY NINETEEN: SHARING FINDINGS**

In-class: Share interview reports. Discussion.

**Assignment**: Compare your analyses of the syllabus, journal article, professor interview, website, and artifact to begin connecting your observations about the rhetorical ecology of your major field. You will draw from the previous writing you have done for the project, and your ongoing observations, to form your Final Rhetorical Ecology paper (see Appendix D). **Due**: first draft, Day Twenty-One

**DAY TWENTY: ACADEMICS IN THE ‘PUBLIC’ SPHERE**

In-class: Discussion.

**Assignment**: Continue work on final rhetorical ecology paper.

**DAY TWENTY-ONE: PEER REVIEW**

In-class: Review final rhetorical ecology papers in small groups.

**Assignment**: Make changes to your papers, taking into account your peers’ suggestions. Prepare to share your work on Day Twenty-Three. **Due**: final draft, Day Twenty-Three.

**DAY TWENTY-TWO: EXTRA DAY**

**DAY TWENTY-THREE: CONFERENCE**
In-class: Share final rhetorical ecology papers and e-portfolios.

Assignment: Look through your e-portfolio and that of at least 2 other students. Notice how your writing has evolved over the course of the semester. Think about how your writings have interacted, drawn upon each other, etc. Come to the next class prepared to discuss some ‘strategies of adaptation’ that you have learned from this course. How might you approach writing differently in subsequent courses. Also, think about the title of the course: “Adaptive Strategies for Making it Matter.” What, specifically, matters more to you now with regards to your writing?

**DAY TWENTY-FOUR: FINAL DISCUSSION**
BIBLIOGRAPHY


