

Quick Overview
**A Longitudinal Study of Undergraduate Writing at
the University of Denver**

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Most of the surprisingly little that we know about the development of writing abilities in the college years comes from research based either on samples taken at occasional points in student coursework or on case studies of small numbers of students. Neither method provides a sufficiently fine-grained, systemic portrait of writing growth over time. In the past ten years, owing to their cost and complexity, only two substantial longitudinal studies involving large numbers of college student writers has taken place, at Stanford and at Harvard. The present study will complement and extend that research by analyzing factors that contribute to (and perhaps inhibit) the acquisition of writing skills for various types of students in various fields of study, with various writing experiences. After all, learning to write in college is mixture of acquiring general skills and discipline-specific skills further complicated by individual and social factors. Findings from this research project will have both local and national implications for curriculum and pedagogical design, as well as build basic knowledge in advanced literacy development and characteristics of undergraduate writing.

- What are the writing experiences of University of Denver undergraduates?
- What types of writing do they complete between their first and senior years?
- How does their writing change? What strategies or processes do they develop, and how do their beliefs or knowledge about writing change?
- What factors or circumstances influence this development and how?
- What are the features of undergraduate writing at different points in students' careers and among different types of students?
- What relationships exist between the types of writing that students are assigned to complete for classes and the kinds they elect to do on their own?

These are the primary research questions to be investigated during a four-year longitudinal study of undergraduate writers at the University of Denver. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the sparse professional literature comprising longitudinal studies of writing during the college years that are grounded in a large corpus of student texts.

A random sample of 125 first-year students enrolled in WRIT 1133, WRIT 1522, and WRIT 1633 during the spring quarter 2007, will be invited to participate in the study, which will collect several kinds of data:

- Copies of all the course-related writings that the students complete each quarter.
- Copies of student-selected non-course related writings that students produce each quarter. These include poems, fiction, or other self-sponsored writings; emails; writings for websites, blogs, wikis or other digital media; posters, brochures, journals, sketchbooks, and so on.
- An online survey to be completed once each quarter.
- A one-hour interview once each year.

During two of the quarters, I estimate that it will take students two hours to complete the requirements of the study. During the third quarter, I estimate it will require three hours, the extra time due to the interview

component. At the outset, participants will receive \$50 per quarter upon completing all of parts of the study. This stipend will increase each year.

All data collected for this study will be kept on password-protect server space to be accessed through the DU Portfolio program. A pseudonym system will be developed to identify and track all of the data gathered for this study. Only the Principal Investigator and his assistant will have access to the key that associates participants' real names to their pseudonyms.

Co-investigators include 4 additional writing program faculty members. Eight extensively trained DU students serve as research assistants, primarily to help conduct interviews.

Longitudinal Study of Undergraduate Writing Draft Survey Questions

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your major?
3. How many credits have you earned at DU?
4. How would you characterize your own writing abilities?
 - a. I'm a strong writer who excels in most writing situations.
 - b. I'm a proficient writer who generally does well in most writing situations.
 - c. I'm a competent writer who generally does OK in most writing situations.
 - d. I'm a struggling writer who often does OK in writing but occasionally doesn't do well.
5. How would you characterize your attitudes toward writing.
 - a. I enjoy writing most of the time.
 - b. I enjoy doing some kinds of writing but not all.
 - c. I tolerate writing, but not with enthusiasm.
 - d. I will avoid writing when possible.
6. Think about one specific class you're taking this quarter. What is the number and name of that course?
 - 6a. Does this course require writing? If "no" go to question 7. If "yes" continue to question 6b.
 - 6b. About how many individual writing assignments will you have in this course?
 - 6c. About how many total pages of writing are required in this course?
 - 6d. Which of the following types of writing will you be doing in this course? (List provided.)
 - 6e. In this class, will you have the opportunity to revise your writing after feedback from the instructor?
 - 6f. In this class, how much class time is spent on writing (discussing assignments, generating ideas, doing peer response, talking about research strategies or revisions, reading other students' papers, etc.)
7. Think about one specific class you're taking this quarter. What is the number and name of that course?
 - 7a. Does this course require writing? If "no" go to question 8. If "yes" continue to question 7b.
 - 7b. About how many individual writing assignments will you have in this course?
 - 7c. About how many total pages of writing are required in this course?
 - 7d. Which of the following types of writing will you be doing in this course? (List provided.)
 - 7e. In this class, will you have the opportunity to revise your writing after feedback from the instructor?
 - 7f. In this class, how much class time is spent on writing (discussing assignments, generating ideas, doing peer response, talking about research strategies or revisions, reading other students' papers, etc.)

8. Think about one specific class you're taking this quarter. What is the number and name of that course?
 - 8a. Does this course require writing? If "no" go to question 9. If "yes" continue to question 8b.
 - 8b. About how many individual writing assignments will you have in this course?
 - 8c. About how many total pages of writing are required in this course?
 - 8d. Which of the following types of writing will you be doing in this course? (List provided.)
 - 8e. In this class, will you have the opportunity to revise your writing after feedback from the instructor?
 - 8f. In this class, how much class time is spent on writing (discussing assignments, generating ideas, doing peer response, talking about research strategies or revisions, reading other students' papers, etc.)
9. Think about one specific class you're taking this quarter. What is the number and name of that course?
 - 9a. Does this course require writing? If "no" go to question 10. If "yes" continue to question 9b.
 - 9b. About how many individual writing assignments will you have in this course?
 - 9c. About how many total pages of writing are required in this course?
 - 9d. Which of the following types of writing will you be doing in this course? (List provided.)
 - 9e. In this class, will you have the opportunity to revise your writing after feedback from the instructor?
 - 9f. In this class, how much class time is spent on writing (discussing assignments, generating ideas, doing peer response, talking about research strategies or revisions, reading other students' papers, etc.)
10. Think about one specific class you're taking this quarter. What is the number and name of that course? If you have no other courses, please go to question 11.
 - 10a. Does this course require writing? If "no" go to question 11. If "yes" continue to question 10b.
 - 10b. About how many individual writing assignments will you have in this course?
 - 10c. About how many total pages of writing are required in this course?
 - 10d. Which of the following types of writing will you be doing in this course? (List provided.)
 - 10e. In this class, will you have the opportunity to revise your writing after feedback from the instructor?
 - 10f. In this class, how much class time is spent on writing (discussing assignments, generating ideas, doing peer response, talking about research strategies or revisions, reading other students' papers, etc.)
11. About how many hours per week do you spend doing writing that isn't required, that you do because you're interested in it (email, facebook, blogs, fiction or poetry, keeping journal, etc.)?
12. What kinds of non-required writing do you do?
13. About how many hours per week do you spend doing non-required reading (newspapers, magazines, books, reading blogs and other sites on the internet, etc.)?

Longitudinal Study of Undergraduate Writing Draft Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about the kinds of writing and writing instruction that you had in high school.
2. How does the kind of writing you did and learned in high school compare to the kinds of writing you do here at DU?
3. Please tell me about the writing you're doing for each of your courses this quarter.
4. Please tell me about any writing you do in your free time.
5. What is your typical process for writing a paper? Does this process vary for different types of tasks or situations? Has this process changed at all?
6. Have you recently done any new types of writing? If so, what are they?
7. Have you recently developed any new insights about writing or about your own writing? Have you learned any new skills or techniques?
8. Please tell me about the kinds of writing you most like to do.
9. Please tell me about the kinds of writing you least like to do.
10. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your writing experiences at DU?