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Inventing Metagenres: How Four College Seniors Connect Writing Across Domains

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Abstract: In this article, I challenge the scholarly consensus that suggests students only rarely forge meaningful connections between the genres they compose in different domains of writing (Reiff and Bawashi; Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak). I argue that the genre and domain categories composition researchers have imposed through data collection and analysis account for at least some of what has been identified as students' inability to articulate how they transfer prior knowledge. When four focus groups and ten college juniors and seniors were interviewed and prompted to compare and contrast their own writing from various contexts, they forged idiosyncratic, action-oriented metageneric connections that are not limited by domains. My data, illustrated here by close discussions of four of these students, suggests that this student-driven metagenre-invention process may have three benefits for students, teachers, and researchers: it enables students to access prior genre knowledge that they may not have otherwise considered relevant; it enables students to re-envision their goals as writers; and it offers researchers and teachers insight into ways we might foster transfer by attending to students' idiosyncratic metageneric connections.

Introduction

Findings from the 2013 CCCC Listening Tour suggest that, though college students are writing prolifically in school and beyond, they do not see their writing across contexts as related in any meaningful way.[1] In one account of the Listening Tour's findings, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reports, "students…don't see formal academic and informal personal writing as connected. Less than 20 percent of students in the [Listening Tour] survey felt that writing on social networks and other informal contexts could help them become better writers." In a *Council Chronicle* piece on the same study, Linda Adler-Kassner corroborates these findings, noting that "students see themselves 'writing in silos, so what they do outside school is not what they do inside school'" (Collier 11). These Listening Tour findings closely reflect the conclusions Mary Jo Reiff and Anis Bawarshi reach in their cross-institutional study on students' use of prior genre knowledge. The authors find that students fail to tap much of their prior experiences because their genre knowledge gets trapped in the particular "domain"—"school, work, and outside of school and work"—where the student composes the genre (318). Because students associate writing in a specific domain with that domain only, the reasoning goes, they fail to transfer potentially useful prior knowledge. The authors explain: "students might assume such a strong correspondence between particular genres and specific domains that they may not call on (or may not be aware that they are calling on) potentially useful resources that they associate with other domains" (324).

This essay challenges this premise, suggesting that writing teachers and researchers find students unable or unlikely to transfer genre knowledge across domains because the questions we ask of them often invoke these domains and therefore eclipse other possibilities. For instance, one Listening Tour question asks, "How do you compare the writing you do for 'everyday' purposes to the writing you do for school or work?" This question itself might signal to students a barrier between domains. Rebecca Nowacek points out that "theories of transfer" in particular "assume that an individual is moving among fundamentally *different* scenarios and seeking to identify some similarity" (19). Indeed, most studies that address transfer across contexts begin with the premise that writing in academic, workplace, and community settings is different, often asking questions of students that highlight the differences between the categories they hope students will transfer between. Some of these studies

frame academic genres in contrast to professional genres, highlighting the difficulties students have transitioning between the two (Anson and Forsberg; Beaufort; Dias, Freedman, Medway, and Paré; Freedman, Adam, and Smart). Others highlight the differences between writing for school and writing for the community by focusing on students' struggle to move between them (Deans, Mathieu). Others yet focus on the struggles students have transitioning knowledge from their "self-sponsored" writing to academic or other settings (Brandt, Courage, Gere, Grabill et al., Rosinski). These insights are valuable, demonstrating the ways that students' writing experiences *differ* across contexts. But by reiterating domain-based categorization schemes in their research methods or questions, however, these studies may also implicitly reify the differences between the genres that students take up in these domains. Furthermore, these categories limit our ability as teachers to help students make connections and our ability as researchers to see the connections that students are already making.

Carolyn Miller reminds us that genres, as "a rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigence," perform the simultaneous work of helping writers develop and understand their intentions and of helping writers frame and recognize the social exigencies both motivating and driven by those intentions (163). In that way, genre does more than alert writers to the actions they may take to achieve a particular end: it constitutes those actions by providing socially recognizable means, based on exigencies grounded in "social patterns and expectations," to understand that end *as an end*, and to pursue it as such (Miller 158). As Miller writes, through genre, we learn "that we may eulogize, apologize, recommend one person to another, instruct customers on behalf of a manufacturer, take on an official role, account for progress in achieving goals"—in other words, learning a genre not only helps us learn "what ends we may have" but also constitutes our understanding of and actions toward those ends (165).

In my study, many students explained the similarities between the writings they composed by grouping them into categories, or what I call "metagenres." I define metagenres as *groupings of* genres based on similarities in purpose, impetus, or rhetorical moves. My use of this term is based on Michael Carter's definition of a metagenre as a "dynamic" category linking genres that share "general ways of doing" (392-3).{2} The metagenres I present in this article are idiosyncratic, anchored in students' groupings of their own work, and particular to the writing experiences each individual student has amassed and can draw on. The metagenres that students develop in my study, then, illustrate the *patterns of* exigencies they experience and actions or goals they pursue. These goals do not arise wholly of the student or situation but rather are located "in the social world," the product of a "mutual construing of objects, events, interests, and purposes" (Miller 157). Insofar as that is the case, the fact that students actively *interpret and define* the relationships between the social situations in which they find themselves by grouping them into metagenres does more than shed light on their understanding of genre as social action; it also primes the possibility that they might see broader groupings of social actions as potentially relevant to one another (Miller 156). As Miller writes of genres, "our stock of knowledge is only useful insofar as it can be brought to bear upon new experience: the new is made familiar through the recognition of relevant similarities; those similarities become constituted as a type" (156-7). The same is true of metagenres. If genres are dynamic typified rhetorical actions that both "reflect and construct recurring rhetorical situations" (Devitt 36), then metagenres are dynamic typified *groupings of* social actions that reflect and construct *sets of* situations, as interpreted by the writer who forms the grouping. Looking closely at metagenres, then, also teaches us more than "what ends we may have": it teaches us ways to re-envision the relationships between those sometimes seemingly disparate ends, relationships that might in turn increase our ability to "[bring our stock of knowledge] to bear upon new experience" (Miller 156).

Over the 2012-2013 academic year, I conducted a study that asked how students understand genres and their relationships. Rather than imposing genre or domain categories by asking students to see or not see connections among the domains in which they write, I asked students to talk about an array of texts they had written for many different situations or domains. My study thus differed in one key respect from many of the inquiries described above: when I invited students to discuss their compositions in relation to one another, I did not focus my questions around possible domains or categories those texts might fall into. This simple shift in method yielded a substantial difference in outcome. I found that, when prompted to consider possible relationships between their writing, eight of the ten students I interviewed forged distinctive and unconventional connections linking their various compositions that emerged from different domains. Moreover, students based these connections on the *purposes* of their compositions, aligning themselves with what genre theorists have told us that genres do (Bazerman, Devitt, Miller). That is, my findings from student interviews resonated with Miller's conception of genre as social action: when students related the writing they composed across domains, they drew connections based not on formal features or superficial patterns, but rather on the similar purposes or goals of their texts. Much like Jeanne Rose's students in Teaching Students What They Already Know, my study's participants seemed to "already possess a tacit understanding of genre," one that they expanded into metageneric reasoning (34).

I suggest that we pay closer attention to how students categorize their own writing experiences. Based on excerpts

from focus group discussions and discourse-based interviews with four of the ten college writers I interviewed, I show that, when prompted, students invent categorization schemes for their own writing that can and do transcend the stereotypical divisions that composition scholars and teachers often impose. I contend that the idiosyncratic categories students developed to group these genres serve two primary ends: they enable students to understand, in a new light, their own goals as writers; and, with that new framework as a guide, these categories may enable students to access prior knowledge that they may not have otherwise considered relevant. I ultimately argue that prompting students to forge their own metageneric connections in the writing classroom has the potential to transform the extent to which students tap and transfer their genre knowledge from across *all* contexts.

Accessing Prior Knowledge, Disrupting Categories

Studies of writing transfer that address students' use of prior genre knowledge suggest that most students struggle to use it effectively (Reiff and Bawarshi; Rounsaville, Goldberg, and Bawarshi; Robertson, Taczak, and Yancey). This is particularly the case when we consider students' ability to draw on their knowledge of genres that seem (to us) far removed from a new writing context. Reiff and Bawarshi's study of students' use of prior knowledge concludes that, with the exception of a few macro-genres such as letters and reports, students do not see the genres they write in one domain as relevant to the genres they write in another—and do not take advantage of genres that come from outside their academic experience when trying to figure out a writing task in an academic setting. In *Writing Across Contexts,* Kathleen Blake Yancey, Liane Robertson, and Kara Taczak report that, though "the students [they] interviewed did understand writing both inside and outside of school as *writing*," they saw their out-of-school writing as "expression," which the authors argue limits the value and applicability of their prior knowledge (110-11). In both of these studies, researchers report students struggling to see the potential relevance of genres that come from what Kevin Roozen calls a "far-flung network" because, as part of a different domain or category of writing, those genres seem irrelevant to the task at hand (Comedy Stages 3).

The authors of these studies argue that there are ways to foster the "boundary crossing" attitude (Reiff and Bawarshi) that makes it more likely for students to see genres from different domains as valuable sources of transferrable knowledge. Reiff and Bawarshi suggest that instructors attempt to facilitate "domain crossing" by "disrupting the maintenance of strict domain boundaries" (331). To facilitate transfer of knowledge across domains, teachers might attempt to "delay and, as much as possible, interrupt the habitual uptakes long enough for students to critically examine their sources and motivations," thereby making space for students to discover alternate alliances or ways that their writings for different locations may share common features (331-2). Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak offer the example of Rick who, upon facing a "critical incident," is able to "map similarities" across his first-year writing class and his science classes; he then draws on his new understanding to create a successful poster for chemistry class (120-5) and write more effective conclusions (136). The authors suggest that instructors can foster Rick's ability to see genres as contextually malleable by teaching key terms and certain types of reflective thinking.

Some studies document cases where students' experiences with the genres they write in one context might help them re-envision their approach to genres in seemingly unrelated or dissimilar writing contexts—absent teacher intervention. Articles based on the Stanford Study of Writing, such as Jenn Fishman, Andrea Lunsford, Beth McGregor, and Mark Otuteye's Performing Writing, Performing Literacy, make an explicit effort to find points of commonality between students' writings across contexts. Jean Ketter and Judy Hunter's case study in Creating a Writer's Identity shows how their subject, Erin, is able to learn from both her writing experiences for classes and her writing in the university public relations office. The authors emphasize, however, that it is the contrast between these sites of writing, rather than connections, that helps Erin develop as a writer. Studies by Kevin Roozen and Angela Rounsaville demonstrate that students do draw many useful connections between their academic and non-academic writing. Roozen's work sheds light on how students' writing and performance experiences beyond school interanimate their academic writing and vice versa. Roozen profiles several students whose extracurricular experiences seep into their academic and professional writing: for example, Lindsey learns about literary textual analysis from her biblical interpretation practices (Tracing Trajectories); Charles learns about performance and class presentations through spoken word poetry (Journalism, Poetry); and Angelica learns about journalism through her personal writing from childhood (From Journals to Journalism). In each of these cases, Roozen finds that students' non-academic writing informs their academic or professional writing in some way, crossing typical divides. Similarly, Rounsaville demonstrates in Situating Transnational Genre Knowledge: A Genre Trajectory Analysis of One Student's Personal and Academic Writing that the student she profiles, Sofia, draws on her experience with out-of-school genres, such as LiveJournal, when she later composes her personal statements for college (350-1). Roozen and Rounsaville's approaches, which both look closely at non-overt ways that students connect and move their writing knowledge across domains, are especially helpful counterpoints to the scholarly consensus that students struggle to make these sorts of connections or repurpose their knowledge across

contexts.

Although these studies acknowledge that students can and do draw knowledge from unanticipated contexts and forge unexpected connections between genres, they do not, for the most part, propose a viable alternative to the organizational schemas offered by teachers and researchers that at times obfuscate useful connections students might draw across domains. In Ways of Knowing, Doing, and Writing in the Disciplines, Carter draws attention to students', teachers', and researchers' tendency to categorize writing along disciplinary lines and makes a case for disrupting those categories. Though Carter focuses specifically on academic writing, his approach offers a model for re-envisioning writing across all contexts. Carter disrupts ingrained disciplinary divisions by identifying ways that writing for seemingly unrelated disciplines actually shares common "ways of knowing and doing." For example, Carter shows how political science and microbiology, seemingly worlds apart, actually both draw from the "empirical research" paradigm (396-7). By foregrounding commonalities rather than differences, Carter's work provides "an implicit challenge to the disciplines as separate divisions of declarative knowledge" and suggests that attending to the *purpose* of writing in various disciplines tells us more about it than the disciplinary label (410). His approach to re-grouping writing knowledge based on disciplinary goals or epistemologies shows that writing knowledge has the potential to be "much more fluid" than the separation of disciplines or contexts of writing might suggest (410).

When I asked students to discuss their writings from various contexts, I did so with the idea in mind that they, like Carter, might locate commonalities that disrupt the categorization schemes to which teachers and researchers might default. My approach also leaves open the possibility that writing knowledge might be "more fluid," and fluid in different ways, than prior research suggests; and seeks to identify unexpected connections between writing across contexts. My approach differs from Carter's, however, in that his work seeks these connections from an official, faculty-expert perspective, and mine seeks them from a student perspective. Where Carter's goals, in keeping with his approach, include improving writing instruction across the disciplines, re-orienting faculty workshops based on disciplinary epistemologies, and facilitating faculty collaboration across fields, my goals include offering students an opportunity to group the writings they compose in and beyond academic settings in ways that make sense to them—based on goals, epistemologies, or something else entirely. Just as Carter emphasizes the importance of ensuring that WID faculty can claim expertise about writing in their fields, I emphasize the importance of ensuring that students can cultivate expertise over their own metageneric connections.

Methodology

With the aim of discovering ways that students relate the writings they compose in various domains, I conducted a three-part research study, combining a survey (n=319), focus groups (4), and discourse-based interviews (10). The interviews were based on writing sample submissions (84 total, with an average of seven submissions per interviewee). My initial goal for this research study was to explore issues of cross-contextual transfer. To that end, I began with the following central research question: "How do students transfer, partially transfer, or not transfer their writing abilities between and across the various domains in which they write?" Based on preliminary analysis of initial survey data, however, I revised the original transfer-focused question into what I saw as its two constituent parts:

1. Drawing on any resources or prior experiences, how did students "figure out" how to compose the texts they submitted to the study?
2. If at all, in what ways do students relate their texts and writing experiences to one another?

These questions helped me look more closely at two separate components of transfer: the ability to draw on prior knowledge and the ability to make meaningful connections between writing experiences. My focus group discussions and interviews focused on these two questions with the goal of enabling participants to base their responses on specific writing experiences or texts rather than general experiences or memories. (See Appendix 1 for the focus group protocol and Appendix 2 for the interview protocol.)

In this article, I focus on results from students who participated in all four stages of the study: the survey, a focus group, writing sample submission, and an interview. Eight of the ten students who participated in all four stages were college seniors, and two were college juniors; seven were male and three female. Of the ten students who participated in all stages of the study, eight practiced metageneric reasoning in some way, and the four I profile in this article offered a range of clearly articulated examples. The chart below demonstrates the number of times that, when given the opportunity to connect their texts in some way, participants engaged in metageneric reasoning.

Table 1. Number of Metageneric Connections Made by Participants.

Participant	Opportunities to draw connections	Metageneric connections	Connections unrelated to genre	Discussion of another topic
Izzy	5	5	0	0
CJ	4	3	1	0
Robert	2	2	0	0
Preston	2	1	1	0
James	3	1	1	1
Nkem	4	3	1	0
Diddy	5	3	2	0
Erika	3	2	0	1
Yuri	4	0	3	1
Silver	4	0	3	1
TOTAL	36	20	12	4

As this chart demonstrates, the four participants I selected for this essay (Izzy, CJ, Robert, and Preston) engaged in metageneric reasoning slightly more frequently or as frequently as four of the eight others.

When analyzing the data, I checked participants' self-reports against their writing submissions to ensure there were no striking discrepancies. In addition, I emailed a draft of this essay to the four central participants to seek their feedback. Two participants, CJ and Izzy, offered extensive supportive comments, and the other two participants offered no critical comments. See Appendix 3 for more information on methodology.

Findings and Analysis

The outcomes of my focus group discussions and interviews suggest that, in both our data collection and our analysis, writing researchers and teachers would benefit from looking for the ways that students connect their writings based on their own organizational schemas. When I asked participants to explain the relationships (or lack thereof) between their writings, their responses did not reiterate domain-based divisions or state the obvious. Rather, the relationships that students identified between the writings they composed were often based on larger goals that transcended situations and genres. Students' explanations reveal that relevant generic knowledge and experience may come disguised in unexpected packages. In this section, I present seven metageneric categories that four different students used to link their various writing endeavors. I present these in order of more typical or expected to less typical or more unexpected. That is, while the first few metageneric umbrellas I present reify to some degree the traditional domain-based divisions that scholars might default to when discussing student writing, the latter metagenres cross typical boundaries and present fundamentally different organizational schemas. These metagenres are presented in the students' own nomenclature, which calls attention to their individual and sometimes surprising ways of making meaning.

Slight Disruptions: CJ

CJ,{3} a senior marketing and management major, triathlete, and prolific blogger, distinguishes the writing he composes by grouping it into two primary metagenres: writing that "closes a conversation" and writing that "opens a conversation." For CJ, these categories mostly correspond to the domains of academic writing and online writing, respectively, whether the online writing is self-sponsored, for an internship, or for an extracurricular group. Here

CJ explains his concept of writing to instigate dialogue (open a conversation) versus writing to prove (close a conversation):

> [Online writing] is much more of a dialogue or at least my attempt at creating one.…I'm intentionally leaving information out, or I'm pushing people to respond back, whereas that's like the exact opposite of what you want to do in school, right? [For school] you want to leave absolutely no question that this is the right answer. And any comments or questions that your professor has is probably going to be a bad thing, right?…[In academic writing] I'm covering all my bases.

CJ raised the categories of opening a conversation versus closing a conversation eight times during our interview and once during the focus group discussion. Under the umbrella of "opening a conversation," CJ also includes blogging and other writing for social media, such as writing for Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Under the umbrella of "closing a conversation," CJ includes genres within the academic domain such as research papers and his business and marketing case analyses, which he referred to throughout the focus group discussion as the "two-page-double-space-report-essay-whatever."

CJ presents a stereotypical case in some ways due to his expected distinction between academic and non-academic writing as well as due to his relatively negative attitude toward school writing. Here he explains his metageneric distinction as it applies to academic essays and blog posts in particular, pointing out why he finds one genre more appealing than the other:

> The two biggest differences is the analytical, like essay writing…so there has to be a conclusion at the end, like there has to be a right answer and a point which…can be very confining and frustrating at times because…especially when there isn't a right answer and you just weighed some very good alternatives and then you have to decide and be like, so we should do this! With blogging it's nicer because you…what you do more often than not is you just present options and you're like…so you always want to have sort of a tying in of the possibilities and potential but it's more of a like what if we did this? Let's talk about it in the comment section. You try and push some interaction as well. But you're not telling people what you should do, you're presenting options and opening up more like a discussion or a debate, which I like a lot more.

Rather than seeing genres as limited a priori by domain or format, CJ thinks of genres in terms of how they both respond to and drive the situations he finds himself in. As "a nexus between an individual's actions and a socially defined context," the genres that CJ takes up enable him to see how his goals and social intentions are a part of larger patterns, both personal and social (Devitt 31). In this way, CJ's close attention to the various genres he composes helps him gain insight into his goals and priorities, enabling him to view them as part of a pattern of what he values (or does not value) about writing.

While CJ clusters most of the genres related to "closing" a conversation with academic writing and most of the genres related to "opening" a conversation with online writing, he does complicate these seemingly automatic domain-centric categorizations to a degree. For example, for one of his school-related blogging assignments, he sees the potential for his work to be "read by professionals all over the world," noting that "it's very real." Though for academic purposes, this writing falls into the metagenre of "opening a conversation" for CJ. Similarly, CJ explains that even his "closing a conversation" academic writing has taught him a key strategy that he draws on in his personal writing: the need to insert "a qualifying paragraph," one that admits to the limits of his knowledge or experience. He explains that "having to do that in school definitely came over into me writing personally because I'm just so aware of it now." CJ transfers the "qualifying paragraph" move from his academic writing to his personal writing because he realizes that projecting a credible *ethos* is equally important in both domains. In this case, researchers and teachers might observe that domains of writing—school versus non-school—are not the primary factors guiding CJ's metagenres. By pointing out a commonality between his writing in both domains, CJ shows that his invented metagenres of "opening" and "closing a conversation" have the possibility of transcending location.

Moderate Disruptions: Robert

While CJ's connections yield student-centered metagenres, they do not alter typical grouping schemas in a profound way. Robert's metagenres, however, begin to reallocate typical genre-domain associations. Like CJ, Robert is disillusioned about writing for school, which he dismisses as relatively unimportant to him and mostly clumps into the category of "writing for a grade" (and discusses no further). Though he does not have much to say about "writing for a grade," Robert explains that the texts he composes under the metagenre of "writing for money" are very important to him. In the metagenre of "writing for money," Robert includes scholarship essays, grant

essays, and grant applications, which he has composed for personal reasons, as a part of the campus trail club, and as an anthropology research assistant. Robert explains that for these types of writing, "the purpose is much more tangible." He believes these genres and their larger metagenre of "writing for money" to be valuable because, in his words, "if I don't get the money for the grant, that means the research can't happen, which means that the outcome of the research can't happen, and I like to think that the research I participate in is for the benefit of society." He explains how this also applies to scholarship essays:

> It's kind of the same thing with a scholarship. Where, if you write, I mean scholarship money is usually much smaller than for a grant, but it's still for the same purpose, where you are the society, and you have to think, I'm writing this on behalf of me, and I need this money to continue whatever I want to do.

Certainly epistemic or scholarly writing aims to forward the "greater good" of developing students into critical thinkers, but in this case Robert especially appreciates the writing he composes that brings about a materially demonstrable yield. Instead of viewing his scholarship essays as "personal" writing and his grant applications "professional" or "academic" writing, depending on whether they are for the trail club or anthropology research, Robert sees them as part of the same metagenre because they have the same end goal. Here again, we see a student look beyond domain to instead group his writing based on "what ends [he] may have" (Miller 165).

Robert also identifies the metagenre of "reactionary writing" to encompass the texts he composes when he is frustrated—in his words, the writing he does when he is "fueled by some sort of internal pressure," and needs to "kind of bust the cap off of it." The two main pieces he discusses as part of this metagenre are from different contexts: one is an assigned essay he wrote for his study abroad program in the Grand Canyon and the other is a piece of self-motivated creative writing that he composed while riding the Amtrak train from Los Angeles to Washington, DC. In the first piece, Robert critiques museums from an archeological point of view. The second piece was catalyzed by Robert's frustration toward the people who began crowding his train car as it approached DC. His response was to write a "really angry piece about a prostitute and a gangster" to which he said he "threw in swear words and like all this stuff." Robert groups these pieces together because they are catalyzed by his state of mind, itself a result in part of his experiences studying abroad. He explains:

> Both of my pieces…were reactionary to my semester, for the past 8 months or 9 months or so I've been traveling a lot, and going through a lot of mental changes, and kind of getting angry with myself for various reasons of the way I used to think and how I'm thinking now.

Robert lumps several of his blog posts into this "reactionary" metagenre as well, explaining that they are also a way to blow off steam. While we might expect Robert to classify his essay on museums as "academic" writing and his blog posts and creative fiction as "personal" writing, Robert connects these genres as part of a metagenre, priming himself to identify ways that the strategies he deploys in one may be relevant for the other.

It is worth noting that, while Robert's museum essay was for an academic context, he does not relegate it to the "writing for a grade" metagenre. Indeed, this essay was one of many academic assignments that participants identified as exciting and valuable. It is also one of many that Christopher Thaiss and Terry Zawacki might label as "alternative" (*Engaged Writers*) or one that Paul Prior (*Writing/Disciplinarity*) and Mary Soliday (*Everyday Genres*) might call a "wild" rather than a "domesticated" genre. In fact, many of the academic assignments that students shared in their writing submissions and during the interviews are not "typical" academic assignments at all: CJ (discussed above) shared a blog assignment for a business class; a bioengineering major shared an assigned "journal entry" that incorporates audio recordings; and Preston (discussed below) shared a mock policy memo. While not all academic assignments submitted were this original or unusual, the writing samples I collected suggest more fluidity between writing assigned for school and writing outside of school than the "formal essay" versus "personal journal" division would suggest. Indeed, it is possible that students' experiences with "wild" genres (Prior, Soliday) or academic assignments that require creativity played a role in helping them transcend the academic-nonacademic divide when analyzing their own compositions.

Major Disruptions: Preston and Izzy

The final two students whose metageneric connections I present also make connections spanning locations, writing styles, and other typical generic divides. Both students connect the various genres they compose by their goals rather than their contexts or conventions. Preston, a senior marketing and government and politics double major who is also an active blogger, identifies the metagenre of "writing where you're supposed to put the conclusion first." This metagenre encompasses the policy memos Preston writes for his government and politics major as well as the blog posts he writes both out of personal interest and for a policy organization. In these types of writing,

Preston says, "you have to first write a conclusion paragraph and then explain how you got there." He explains that putting the conclusion "at the beginning" is "the "smallest slash biggest thing…that completely blows your mind" after having learned to write essays for school. As Preston identifies it, this move differs from simply asserting his argument in a thesis statement because the "conclusion" must actually be the very first thing he writes in order to appeal to an audience uninterested in a slow-moving academic approach. Preston acknowledges that this "conclusion first" move looks different in different genres, but the common structure is the same, and the cause for the structure—the need to appeal to readers on a tight schedule or who may not read the whole piece —is consistent across instances.

We can see Preston's metagenre at play in two pieces of writing he submitted for the study: an introduction to his (personally motivated) live blog on Proposition 6, or the Maryland same-sex marriage referendum, in the 2012 elections; and a mock policy memo, assigned in one of his government and politics classes, that advises Secretary of State Clinton on how respond to the 2011 Egyptian "Tahrir Square" protests. The first writing sample, below, presents the driving themes of the to-be-written live blog, beginning with the argument that Maryland is a critical election battleground:

Maryland 2012 Election Results LIVE: Question 6 Gay Marriage Issue to Be Decided

███████ in Politics 7 months ago

2   0   6   reddit this   20

While many see Maryland as an uninteresting "blue state," Maryland is a critical battleground this year. Perhaps not for the presidential race: every analysis out there puts the state firmly in Obama's safe zone, but for the referendums being put to the people there.

Maryland's DREAM Act, allowing undocumented immigrant minors who meet certain stipulations recieve in-state tuition for college, is being put to the vote as "Question 4." Meanwhile, gay marriage is being put on the ballot in Question 6, tabletop gambling in question 7, and Gerrymandering in Question 5.

Maryland 2012 Election Results LIVE Question 6 Gay Marriage Issue to Be Decided

The second text, though stylistically more formal and direct, is similarly succinct and also opens with the primary argument:

ACTION MEMO FOR SECRETARY HILLARY CLINTON

FROM: Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs|

SUBJECT: The United States' Position on the Egyptian Crisis

Recommendation

That you urge the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and Field Marshal Tantawi to adhere to the June deadline for a substantive transition to a civilian president and government; and that you urge President Obama to attach penalties in military aid to failures to adhere to that deadline.

Approve _____   Disapprove _____

In both of these genres, Preston explains, the "conclusion" to some extent needs to come at the beginning—the writer needs to get straight to the point without any delay. Instead of categorizing these texts as "for school" and "for personal reasons," Preston sees them as embodying a certain practice: appealing quickly to the busy reader. While these genres differ widely in terms of purpose, strictness of structure, and level of formality, Preston categorizes these texts by their common rhetorical strategy. This uniting theme is something that Preston can look for in future genres he composes—and is something that he might not have seen if he understood these texts merely as examples of his "online" versus "academic" writing.

Interestingly, when Preston proposed this metagenre during a focus group conversation, other participants also began making connections to the category, suggesting genres of their own. One student noted that she would include, in the same metageneric category, films that begin with flashbacks. CJ (discussed above) said he would include "journalism," news writing in particular, and a bioengineering major added that he would include the bioengineering articles he writes, which all must begin with an abstract. While most of the metagenres I present are unique to the individual's way of grouping his or her work, this particular metagenre—the metagenre of "writing where you're supposed to put the conclusion first"—happened to catalyze a group conversation that yielded other unexpected genre candidates that cross domains for the meta-category.

The two final metagenres I present, both proposed by Izzy, similarly cross typical domain-based boundaries. Izzy, a senior double majoring in English and psychology, is also a writing tutor and part of a mental health club on campus. The first metagenre that Izzy proposes, which she calls "I'm trying to get something from [the reader]," contains an email recommendation for her advisor (for a national award), a research article she wrote collaboratively with graduate students in psychology, and a grant application for her student club. Instead of categorizing these by domain, as (for example) "communicative," "academic," and "extracurricular/professional," Izzy groups these writings by her understanding of their similar goals. With the recommendation, Izzy notes "I'm trying to get them to do something": consider her advisor for the award. For the psychology article, Izzy explains that she and her co-authors want to convince the readers that "this is something that you should really consider" for publication. The grant application is also trying to convince the audience to do something for her: to give her $2000 for her organization. Similar to Robert's "writing for money," this metagenre links Izzy's writings in terms of their illocutionary effect: Izzy does not simply want to convince the reader; she wants to convince the reader to do something very specific for her.

The final metageneric category I present takes Izzy some time to cobble together, as she thinks aloud through the process of distilling the similarities between various writing tasks she has undertaken. She begins by noting that a number of her writings fall under the category of "analysis," "review," or "critique." She describes her literary analysis essay about *Measure for Measure* (for English class) and her review of the play *Peter and the Starcatcher* (on Tumblr) both as "kind-of like a review." She also connects her literary analysis of *Measure for Measure* with her critique of the article Finding Benefit from Cancer for psychology class, explaining they are "kind of analysis in a way." Upon later thought, Izzy explains that "in general, a critique is a review. So that's interesting. Both of these [the psychology critique and the play review] are reviewing things." She eventually reaches this conclusion:

I think that anytime you're reviewing something, you're looking at it, analyzing something, you kind-of approach it in the same way. Even if this was a research article and this was a play, you look at both of them. You kind of see what worked, what didn't work. So like, both of these are a critique.

In addition to her analysis essay of *Measure for Measure* (for school), Tumblr-posted critique of *Peter and the Starcatcher* ("for fun"), and psychology article critique (also for school), Izzy includes in the "review/critique" metagenre the reviews she writes for Yelp. She likes to review the restaurants she visits, in particular. One that she submitted for the study, a review of Perricone's Marketplace and Café in Miami, makes the same general moves as her longer reviews and critiques for school.

One aspect of a successful "review/critique" that Izzy reports is the need to identify and offer specific examples of strengths and weaknesses. All four of Izzy's "analyses" do this to a greater or lesser degree; the psychology article, play review, and Yelp review do it most thoroughly. Here, I use Izzy's writing submissions to illustrate more closely how she identifies metageneric connections when comparing stylistically different writings across contexts. Although Izzy abstracts commonalities among the texts she composes in different locations, she does not make the mistake of using the same style or format in these texts. In the excerpts below, Izzy makes the same moves— she identifies and offers examples of strengths and weaknesses—but in styles that differ enormously.

In both Izzy's psychology article critique and her Tumblr review of *Peter and the Starcatcher*, she describes in detail, through analysis, the strengths of the text. In her psychology article critique, Izzy discusses some strengths of the study's research design:

> These measures [Likert scales] were paired with the qualitative design of an open-ended interview question inquiring into the patient's ability to find benefit after treatment. I believe this design is particularly useful for the goals of this study because it is examining the unique experience of the participant, which may not have been explored to as much depth if the participant were to answer a Likert scale questionnaire instead.

In her Tumblr review of *Peter and the Starcatcher*, Izzy also analyzes strengths, in this case of the play's set design:

> The best part for me was the lack of the high tech flying gear that is common in recent shows like Spiderman and the reliance on simple props like ladders and ropes, along with the audience's imagination, with the actors at one point asking the audience to imagine a cat flying across the stage when really there was a rag looking thing attached to a rope. It became very meta at times, which was pretty cool.

In our interview, Izzy pointed out to me that, while both this paragraph and the one above describe strengths of the article and play, one key difference between them is the basis of authority from which she can judge. In the first, Izzy evaluates the study from the perspective of a researcher, drawing on the values of the field of psychology, whereas in the second, Izzy evaluates the play as a person, bringing to the table only her own reactions. Because this is the case, Izzy suggested, she has more liberty in the second critique to call attention to whatever suits her, as opposed to pointing out expected elements (such as research design). She also can take more liberties with her style.

Izzy describes as well how in both her review of the play and her critique of the article, she devotes a paragraph to presenting their weaknesses. Here she critiques one element of the cancer study for her psychology assignment:

> Another limitation of the study is that it examines correlation, not causation. Their results state that finding benefit is 'related' to better outcomes, but this may not necessarily mean that they cause better outcomes. Instead, the patients who are already psychologically and physically more well off are more likely to respond that they have found benefit. This distinction is not very well discussed in the article.

In her evaluation of the play, on the other hand, Izzy's critique—which addresses the playwright's possible misreading of what his audience would find funny—is more lively and jumpy:

> One thing I didn't like about the play was the character of Mrs. Bumbrake, Molly's nana who was a woman (I think? Although many were confused whether or not it was a woman or cross dressing gay man) played by a man. Normally I am all for cross-gendered casting or even cross dressing, but his entire role seemed to exist upon the fact that the audience would be uncomfortable with the idea of 2 men together (most of the character's scenes involved him acting flamboyantly and getting into risqué situations with different men while wearing a dress and talking in a high pitched voice) and that was where the "humor" came from. I didn't quite know what to make of it.

The juxtaposition of these two texts shows just how different the styles are that Izzy takes on—even if she's "doing the same thing," as she suggested, with the two pieces of writing. Instead of categorizing these texts according to domain, as "academic writing" and "personal writing," Izzy sees these texts as part of the same overarching metagenre and classifies them by their shared purpose. However, grouping her genres into the metagenre "review/critique" does not erase the necessary differences in rhetorical moves that Izzy makes when composing in different contexts. Izzy's similar aims in these two different genres help her locate "the intersections" between them (Carter)—but without erasing their substantial differences on the paragraph and sentence level.

The seven metageneric umbrellas I identified above function as "working theories" (Flower) in the minds of the students who are writing across various contexts, for assorted purposes, and in many genres.{4} These students' metageneric connections reach beyond the conventional categories ("academic," "self-sponsored," or "professional") to link their writings in ways that made sense to them. My findings suggest that when asked whether they see any connections across *all* their written compositions—not just those for school—students connect those compositions not by where they take place, but by *what they do*. Asking students to review the various individual texts they had already composed and to draw connections among them enabled students to make connections based on their own unique oeuvres rather than already-instantiated domains—which in turn enabled them to focus on their goals as writers rather than simply sites of writing. Even CJ, whose "open a conversation" versus "close a conversation" division seems at first glance to reify the school/non-school divide, bases the admission criteria for his metagenres on *purpose*, not place.

Implications

While students' metagenres are not comprehensive, neither are they superficial. They are more than simply analogies or thoughts on what certain writing tasks have in common. Rather, they are students' working theories about how their written texts might perform certain types of work in the world. This is especially clear in the case of connections that Robert and Izzy make that lead them to group their writings by illocutionary effect. Even in the less obvious cases, however, students' metageneric connections have the potential to be quite valuable. As Miller writes, when we learn a genre, "we learn to understand better the situations in which we find ourselves" (165). To that I would add that when students make connections between the genres they compose, grouping them into metageneric categories based on their sense of rhetorical moves or purpose, they may learn to understand better the *range and array of situations* in which they find themselves—and how they might better understand themselves as agents both constrained by and able to act in those situations.

In addition to helping students develop a richer understanding of their goals, the metageneric reasoning that my interviews prompted also has the potential to facilitate transfer from unexpected locations, broadening what students think of as viable sources of prior knowledge. Because transfer hinges, to some degree, on the ways that writers see and make use of their prior knowledge (Reiff and Bawarshi; Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak), it hinges as well on the categorization and classification schemes that writing instructors often unintentionally forward (Soliday)—and that students fall back on, consciously or unconsciously, as they process their prior knowledge of the genres they compose. My study shows that opening up space for students to form their own categorization schemes based on their goals, motivations, or other factors has the potential to open new avenues for students to transfer and recontextualize (Nowacek) previously untapped knowledge. If we, as researchers and teachers, honor and capitalize on the idiosyncratic connections that individual students draw between their writing experiences, we might enable them to forge unexpected avenues of transfer, permitting them to move their discursive resources across what once seemed to be impermeable boundaries.

Indeed, students' self-devised metageneric umbrellas offer more than idiosyncratic categories or a behind-the-scenes glance into students' minds at work: they offer a pedagogical approach to facilitating transfer of learning. If students have at their disposal plentiful "discursive resources" but do not draw on or transfer those resources, then their vast genre knowledge across contexts goes to waste (Reiff and Bawarshi). Opening the space for students to forge connections among their writings across unexpected locations is one way to help them *guide themselves* through "high road transfer," or transfer that "depends on deliberate mindful abstraction of skill or knowledge from one context for application in another" (Perkins and Salomon 25). Metacognition is almost universally lauded in composition studies as a key method for promoting successful transfer of learning (Clark; Downs and Wardle; Fishman and Reiff; Frazier; Jarratt, Mack, Sartor, and Watson; Moore; Nelms and Dively; Rounsaville, Goldberg, and Bawarshi; Smit; Wardle Mutt Genres and Understanding 'Transfer'; Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak).{5} My study suggests that metageneric reasoning may be one especially promising metacognitive approach.

We can thus move this approach from research to pedagogy: if we ask students to create their own personal,

flexible categories of writing, they may come to see genres as dynamic means to address repeated social exigencies, as social actions that they can adapt and re-categorize according to the work they perform. By opening a space for students to forge metageneric connections along whatever lines make sense to them, teachers might enable students to step beyond the typical categories that organize genres based on *where they circulate* to imagine metagenres that link their compositions based on *what they do*. If transfer is ultimately an act of recontextualization (Nowacek), then the strategy of inviting students to create their own metageneric categories may enable them to transfer in complex ways, re-mobilizing their experiences from *all* the "complex and far-flung network of literate engagements" they participate in (Wardle and Roozen 111). In addition, when asked to compare their various writings, all of the students I interviewed seemed to adopt a "problem-exploring" rather than "answer-getting" disposition (Wardle, Creative Repurposing). That is, when explaining the relationships between their writings, students were reflective and willing to consider multiple possibilities rather than attached to getting a right answer. Prompting students to consider the relationships between their own texts might prime them to tap their "problem-exploring" sides rather than taking an "answer-getting" approach.

In addition, I do not conclude (or feel it urgent to conclude) that there is any number of primary metagenres at play for all or most student-writers. As Mikhail Bakhtin notes in The Problem of Speech Genres, "the wealth and diversity of speech genres are boundless because the various possibilities of human activity are inexhaustible" (60). Rather than trying to limit the types of speech genres we notice or the ways we categorize them, Bakhtin urges that "special emphasis should be placed on the extreme *heterogeneity* of speech genres (oral and written)" (60). Even as we strive to study and understand genres, Bakhtin argues, we must take special care to not lose sight of this heterogeneity. In the same way, seeking out an overarching system of metageneric categories is not necessary for any one student to benefit from the process of metageneric reasoning. If knowledge is local and dynamic, then encouraging students to study and chart their own idiosyncratic metageneric patterns is a worthwhile endeavor in itself. Reiff and Bawarshi echo this notion in Tracing Discursive Resources. They explain that it does not matter whether students' genre connections are accurate in any absolute way. "What matters," they write, "is how evoked genres trigger and guide students' task recognitions and access to prior knowledge, which is likely to affect the kind of transfer that occurs" (324). The key concern here, then, is not whether students' metageneric connections map on to some sort of absolute reality but rather how students are able to use those connections to make meaning. In this way, students' own dynamic metageneric maps may very well be more effective knowledge-making tools than any externally imposed set of categories or divisions.

By asking students to look closely at texts they have actually composed, comparing and analyzing their goals and moves in each, we might help students activate the "tacit genre knowledge" Rose identifies among her composition students (25). Doing so might also have the potential to open unexpected avenues of prior knowledge —and thus unexpected sources of transfer or recontexualization. I suggest that teachers ask students to create a dynamic document, based on their own texts, that links the myriad genres they compose—possibly by purpose, motivation, or rhetorical patterns, but also possibly by something else the student might see. This exercise would work equally well in a FYC, WAC, WID, or Advanced Composition course environment. During a class period, students could perform this mapping exercise by hand on paper, linking genres with arrows and circles. As a more extended project, students could map their writings on a website that links clusters of genres and texts in different metagenres. Once students have identified and mapped their metagenres, the teacher can ask students how they might draw on their prior knowledge in new ways, prompting them to extract transferrable strategies based on shared goals. The odd alliances that this exercise is likely to yield can offer students new angles with which to approach their writing projects. It can also provide a visual representation of ways their writing knowledge traverses domains—as well as how it changes as it moves.

In the spirit of "not statements" (Freadman) or "not talk" (Nowacek, Reiff and Bawarshi), this exercise can also encourage students to identify ways the texts they group in a particular metagenre are "similar, but not." Once students have grouped their genres in various categories, they can see more clearly how writings that may share big-picture similarities actually differ quite profoundly on the micro-level. As we saw in Izzy's psychology article critique and play review (above), similarities in the metagenre's ends—to "review/critique"—do not equate to similarities in tone, syntax, diction, or basis of authority across constituent texts. By comparing, contrasting, and analyzing their own writings in this metageneric way, students can gain a greater depth of understanding about how and why genres that share large-scale goals might use very different linguistic means to achieve those goals —or, conversely, how writings with similar syntactic patterns, levels of formality, or organizational schemas might in fact differ profoundly in terms of larger goals. An exercise like this might enable students to intervene in their own metageneric reasoning and map-making patterns, transcending domain-based connections and forging unexpected connections instead. These unexpected connections could provide students with access to a wider range of potentially transferrable knowledge.

Conclusion

The picture I paint of students' metageneric reasoning challenges the notion that students only rarely transfer understanding between disparate domains. While drawing connections between genres and transferring knowledge across domains are different, being able to transfer writing experiences across domains first requires a student to see those experiences as connected in a meaningful way. The students I interviewed describe seven unique metageneric umbrellas that make sense for their own writing experiences. The outcomes of my group discussions and interviews indicate that two relatively minor interventions at the level of research method—having students analyze an array of *their own texts* and priming awareness of the fact that there *might* be alternate ways to connect genres across contexts—is all it took for these students to foster meaningful metageneric connections. In other words, students are not opposed to or unable to connect their writings in meaningful cross-contextual patterns; they only need the space to look more closely and the freedom to see their texts through their own eyes. This shift in focus has the potential to unlock a plethora of transferrable knowledge that would otherwise lie dormant. It also has the potential to offer student-writers a new way to view themselves, based on the ends that their metageneric categories might be working toward.

Understanding genre as social action has enabled us to learn more about the actions we value and the situations that both constrain and facilitate those actions. Metagenres do the same, but more broadly: by grouping genres based on shared aims, metagenres shed light on *patterns of* intentions working in tandem with social exigencies. The metageneric labels that students choose for their work tell us far more than common, externally-applied domain labels precisely because they reveal shared ends between diverse texts. By viewing not only genre but also metagenre as action, we open up the possibility for both researchers and students to discover shared ends we may not have otherwise seen.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Focus Group Protocol

I. Introduce Study; Provide Consent Forms

- The goal of this conversation is to learn about the writing you do in and out of school.
- This study has been approved by IRB and will be recorded.
- I will ask for pseudonyms at the end.
- Please read consent forms and sign if you are interested.

II. Distribute Food

III. Procedural Overview

- Conversation should be discussion style (talk to each other, not just to me).
- Note taker is here to ensure we get data in case recorder fails.
- Eating your burritos during the conversation is encouraged!
- Expected to take one hour total.

IV. Introductions (Opening Question)

- Name
- Major(s)
- Favorite and least favorite things to write

V. Introductory Question: Framing Writing in All Domains

You all write for your classes, but you also write in your personal life and possibly for other things outside of school. And when we say "writing," we don't necessarily mean essays—texts are writing, blogs are writing, videos and poems and emails and lab reports are writing.

Can you name types of writing that have been most important for you to do and do well since you've started college? They can be for class but don't have to be—they can be anything. Just list them / throw them out there.

VI. Transition Questions: Learning to Write in Different Domains

1. Let's start with writing that you did outside of school—either for an extracurricular, internship, job, personal reasons, etc.
   - Think of a specific example of something you wrote in the last few months—it can be formal or informal, something you did once or something you do every day. First can you describe it and make sure you mention what it was meant to accomplish or do.
   - Can you explain how you figured out or learned how to do it?
   - If you want, you can also say if you think it worked or not…

2. Now let's choose something you wrote that's academic. Choose something you wrote for a class (or academic reason) in the last few months that had something unfamiliar or new about it.
   - Can you describe the specific assignment and how you tried to figure out how to do it?
   - You can say if you think it was successful or not if you want…

VII. Key Questions

So we've talked about how you figured out how to do specific types of writing and how you learned to write in general. Now the last thing we're going to do is some comparing and contrasting.

1. So let's do some compare/contrast. Let's take the two things you just talked about. If they really don't work for this, you can choose something new, but try to stick with them.
   - Do these pieces have anything in common? Or are they completely unrelated? Or both? Try to be as specific as possible. (If you come up with things that you didn't think of the first time, you can jump back in.)

2. Can you think of any ways that the writing you do outside of school influences the writing you do in school, or vice versa? Or are they totally separate? Can you explain? If you have any specific examples, that would be great.

VIII. Closing Question

The goal of this discussion was to talk how the writing you do outside of school and for school relate to each other, or not, as well as how you learned or figured out how to do writing that wasn't necessarily directly taught to you. Have we missed anything?

Conclusion

- Thank participants
- Explain Wufoo writing submissions procedure and possible interviews
- Remind participants to choose pseudonyms

Materials and Resources:

- Food (burritos, chips, salsa, guacamole, cookies, and bottled waters), plates & napkins
- Roster
- Consent forms and manila envelope
- Audio recorder and towel or handkerchief
- Assistant for note taking
- Index cards and sharpies for name tents and pseudonyms (on the inside)

Appendix 2: Interview Protocol

Before Interviews

1. Email participants 2 days prior to ask them to re-read their submitted pieces before coming in for the interview, if possible. Attach submissions.
2. Review students' texts myself.

During Interviews (45-75 min total)

Materials

- Consent form, general protocol with questions, student-specific notes (if applicable), audio recorder, student

pseudonym, $10 cash
- Blank/unmarked (hard) copies of texts and/or texts on iPad, present and available

Consent Process

- Offer consent form.
- Step out of the room to "fill up my water bottle" while participant reads and chooses whether to participate.

Goals (say aloud)

1. to see ways that these very different writings might or might not relate to or inform one another;
2. to see how the different versions of you play out in these different pieces;
3. to see how learning from one piece of writing may have transferred (or been re-applied) in another—or not.

Interview Procedure

A. Ask student to choose one piece (from his/her array) s/he wrote for non-school reasons. Provide the student with a pen and tell him/her s/he can annotate if s/he'd like. Ask the following questions about that piece:
   1. What motivated you to write this?
   2. Can you talk me through this piece, paragraph by paragraph (up to one page)? What are you doing in the paragraph? Why are you doing that?
   3. Who are you acting like or who are you trying to be in this piece? What character are you taking on?
   4. How did you figure out how to write this? What other writing or things you've done in the past is it similar to or different from, if any?
   5. Can you point out specific phrases that make you sound the way you wanted to sound? Or that make you sound "in character"?
   6. Where did you learn to write that phrase or to sound like that? What were you drawing on?
   7. Is there anything you would change in here, now that time has passed, to improve it?
B. Ask student to choose one piece s/he wrote for school.
Ask same questions as above; alter slightly when necessary so they make sense.

C. If time, ask student to choose any other piece s/he would like to talk about (can repeat as many times as time will allow; make sure 15 minutes remain for parts D-F).
Ask same questions as above; alter slightly when necessary so they make sense.

D. Place two or three pieces alongside each other; keep others on the table as well.
   1. How, if at all, are these two/three pieces related to one another (besides the topic or being by/about you)? Or are they unrelated?
   2. Can you point out specific places where you may have drawn on prior knowledge or writing experience? Places you might have drawn on something you understood from one of the other pieces?
   3. Are there any ways that these pieces of writing have influenced each other? Or not? Other things you have written since? Are there things you learned or knew from doing one that you could or would apply to the other or something else? Or not?
   4. Can you rank the "characters" of each of these from easiest to hardest to play? Why is it easier or harder (or were you more or less successful) to take on one character rather than another? How did you figure out how to take on the particular role you did?
   5. Are there any other resources that you drew on to write these (that we haven't mentioned yet)?
E. Demographics/Pseudonym
   1. If I write about you in my study, I have to describe you, demographics-wise—and also include things that generally give an overview of who you are. Anything you'd like me to include or say there?
   2. You gave X as your pseudonym during the group discussion you participated in. Are you comfortable with that still?
F. Closing
The main goal of this conversation was to talk about how your writings across your life relate to one another, or not; how you figured out how to write things, especially things that are not for school; and how you may have applied things you learned in one context to other contexts. Is there anything else important you can think of or that we left out?

*Give participant $10 cash.

After Interviews

1. Send follow-up thank you email.
2. Mark $ exchange in spreadsheet.

Appendix 3: Methodology

Human Subjects Research

This qualitative study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the author's institution.

Research Site, Participants, and Recruitment

The site of this study was a large state university. The initial survey, from which focus group and interview participants were recruited, was distributed to a listserv of 3390 students (or approximately 13% of the university's undergraduate population) who had participated at some point during their college career in one of the campus's Leadership and Community Service-Learning programs.

Focus group participants were recruited from students who responded to the survey, and interview participants were recruited from students who both attended the focus groups and submitted writing samples. That is, each stage of data collection also served as a means of recruiting participants for the subsequent stage of data collection. Twenty-seven students participated in the focus groups, 14 submitted writing samples, and 10 participated in the interviews. Of these 10, one identified as African-American, one as Caribbean-American, one as Indian-American, one as Japanese-American, three as Jewish-American, and three as White.

Data Collection

Data collection spanned November 2012 through April 2013. To develop a rich understanding of the genres students reported composing, ways they figured out how to compose those genres, and ways they related those genres, I used the following data collection methods:

Survey: In November 2012, I distributed a survey to a listserv of 3390 students and received 319 responses (9.4% response rate). Because I do not draw on survey data in this article, I will not go into further detail about the survey here.

Focus Groups: In February 2013, I conducted four 50-minute focus group discussions in order to get a preliminary sense of the ways that students might compare and contrast their writing experiences. I also used focus groups to discover possible ways that students report transferring knowledge or "figuring out" how to write in new situations. See Appendix 1 for the focus group protocol.

Writing Submissions: After each focus group discussion, I sent all participants a link to Wufoo (an online form) with an invitation to submit writing samples. Fourteen students (approximately half of the focus group participants) submitted documents.

Interviews: In March and April 2013, I conducted 10 discourse-based interviews with students who submitted writing samples. These interviews ranged in length from 45-90 minutes. The goal of the interviews was to gain more detailed information, with writing samples as a guide, of ways that students figured out how to compose their documents and how (if at all) students relate their writings across contexts. See Appendix 2 for the interview protocol.

In all, I collected 319 survey responses, 3 hours and 28 minutes of focus group recordings, 9 hours and 54 minutes of interview recordings, and 84 writing submissions, totaling 387 pages.

Data Reduction and Analysis

After collecting the data, I transcribed all focus group discussions and interview recordings. I transcribed these verbatim. In sum, my transcriptions totaled 351 pages (73 pages of focus group transcriptions and 278 pages of interview transcriptions).

Coding: Coding was non-exclusive. Each datum could be assigned multiple codes. In this section, I only discuss coding schemes for the focus group discussions and interviews, as those are the sources of data I draw on in this article.

Initial Codes: I first coded with a mix of data-driven and theory-driven descriptive codes (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall,

and McCulloch; Miles and Huberman; Saldaña): Description, Figuring Out, Evaluation, Relational Reasoning, Stance/Ethos, Future Use, Theories of Writing, Transfer, and Process. These codes helped me to reduce the data significantly from 351 transcribed pages to 141 pages (Miles and Huberman 10-11).

Analytic Memos: After closely reading and annotating printed copies of the reduced data, I composed 14 substantive analytic memos, ranging in length from 4-12 pages, single-spaced. These memos were primarily organized by participant and combined data and observations from their interviews and focus group contributions.

Second Cycle Coding: In my second stage of coding, I returned to the excepted data with new patterns that had emerged in the process of composing and reviewing the analytic memos. I developed these second-stage codes inductively as I sought out recurring themes in the memos. The four primary codes I applied were Ethos Source, Relational Reasoning, Rhetorical Velocity, and Transfer. I broke each of those into sub-codes as well. Metageneric Reasoning is one sub-code of Relational Reasoning.

Notes

1. The Listening Tour, organized jointly by CWPA, TYCA, and CCCC, reflects an effort among these professional organizations to gather information directly from college students about their writing experiences both within and outside of school. ([Return to text.](#))
2. This differs from Janet Giltrow's definition of metagenres, which she describes as "atmospheres of wordings and activities…atmospheres surrounding genres" (195). Bawarshi and Reiff, in *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*, refer to Carter's "metagenres" as "macro-genres" (208), but I retain Carter's own terminology. Metagenres as I define them differ from "genre sets" (a set of genres used by a particular community) and "genre systems" (groupings of genre sets) because they do not necessarily reflect genre groupings associated with a particular activity or community (Bawarshi and Reiff). ([Return to text.](#))
3. All names used are pseudonyms chosen by the participants. ([Return to text.](#))
4. By "working theories," I mean theories that are "operational," "situated," and "always under revision" (Flower 90). ([Return to text.](#))
5. Nowacek qualifies this position by arguing that metacognition is important but not necessary for successful transfer to take place (30). ([Return to text.](#))

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