# Using Genre to Bridge Research, Professional Writing, and Public Writing at University of North Dakota: A Program Profile

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**Abstract:** To illustrate how genre pedagogy and public writing pedagogy can inform one another, this program profile describes the second-semester composition course at University of North Dakota, ENGL 130: College Composition II: Writing for Public Audiences. In this course, genre works as a rhetorical bridge across an interlinked sequence of research, professional, and public writing assignments focused on a contemporary topic of public interest. The course maintains a public orientation throughout: as a simulated genre system, the course constitutes a protopublic, or a rhetorical space in which students can learn about public debates, rehearse public discourses, and prepare for future performances of public genres with rhetorical awareness in their repertoire.

In the introduction to their recent collection, *Genre and the Performance of Publics*, Mary Jo Reiff and Anis Bawarshi contend that rhetorical genre studies (RGS) has examined genres in "relatively bounded" academic and workplace contexts, at the expense of attention to the "less predictable," "more diffuse" generic activities at play in public contexts (4). To account for this oversight, they call for research that places RGS and public sphere scholarship in dialogue so that each might illuminate the other. Following Reiff and Bawarshi's suggestion that this dialogue "can contribute to research on and the teaching of public discourse" (5), writing instructors and writing program administrators (WPAs) might be interested in how genre pedagogy and public writing pedagogy fit into the conversation, too.

Genre pedagogy and public writing pedagogy share some important similarities. Genre pedagogy promotes students' awareness of genres as typified social and rhetorical actions. While it must by necessity teach students specific genres, its wider goal is to help them learn, and perhaps change, any genre they may encounter. Amy J. Devitt calls this critical genre awareness, or "a conscious attention to genres and their potential influences on people and the ability to consider acting differently within genres" ("Teaching" 347). In a similar vein, public writing pedagogy asks students to analyze, critique, participate in, and perhaps change public discourses. Many public writing assignments and courses introduce students to "written discourse that attempts to engage an audience of local, regional, or national groups or individuals in order to bring about progressive social change," according to Christian R. Weisser (90). Both pedagogies, in other words, seek to trace and transform rhetorical praxis. Both pedagogies can wield a critical edge, too, when they draw students' attention to the ways discourses and genres include and exclude certain participants from public, professional, and disciplinary debates. Given these similarities, genre pedagogy and public writing pedagogy seem to be natural allies.

To illustrate this alliance, I will profile the second-semester composition course that I helped develop as the Academic Director of Composition{1} at University of North Dakota. In ENGL 130: College Composition II: Writing for Public Audiences, genre works as a rhetorical bridge across an interlinked sequence of research, professional, and public writing assignments focused on a contemporary topic of public interest, such as food, poverty, sustainability, or globalization. During the semester, students act as concerned citizens who must investigate the course topic globally, nationally, and locally. Through this investigation, they develop a collaborative community project that addresses a relevant local problem or issue. They write many genres in the process, including annotated bibliographies, literature reviews, recommendation reports, and grant proposals, and they analyze the distinctions among these genres along the way. As with many courses of its kind, ENGL 130 culminates with a public writing assignment: students must make deliberate, mindful decisions about two genres with which to reach a public audience—such as op-eds, social media campaigns, websites, brochures, infographics, and podcasts—in support of their community projects. Accompanying these materials, students write a reflective rhetorical analysis justifying their

execution of those genres.

In most cases, these genres and projects are simulations; only occasionally do they result in actual publications or presentations. Some readers may question the value of such simulations. After all, we know that writing is best learned *in situ*, as a response to actual exigencies using live genres to accomplish meaningful social action. Rhetorical simulations, the argument goes, are poor approximations of their real-world counterparts: they serve functions related to schooling, not to social action in specific contexts. Because of these limitations, many advocates of public writing pedagogies have turned to community literacy and service learning pedagogies that immerse students in real-world rhetorical situations. However, I argue that simulations can be valuable pedagogical tools in some public writing classrooms. At UND, community partnerships are hard to come by, given its location in Grand Forks, a small city with rural surroundings. In such a context—one shared by a great many other institutions— classroom simulations can be a valuable addition to our pedagogical toolkit, particularly when we teach public writing courses. Simulations enable students to imagine community partnerships and envision innovative rhetorical means for supporting them, even when such partnerships are hard to come by.

Genre pedagogy is fundamental for the simulation's pedagogical success. At base, ENGL 130 simulates a genre system, or a series of interlocking genres, each of which follows upon the other in order to accomplish a larger sociorhetorical goal—in this case, investigating and intervening into debates about a pressing public topic. In fact, the simulated genre system allows ENGL 130 to function as what Rosa Eberly calls a protopublic, or a rhetorical space in which students can learn about public debates, rehearse public discourses, and prepare for future performances of public genres with rhetorical awareness in their repertoire. The course immerses students "in the praxis of rhetoric" (Eberly 170), providing them with a framework for learning new genres, including public ones, and putting them into practice within a simulated rhetorical context.


## Institutional Context and Program History

UND is a flagship, state-funded university with an approximate enrollment of 15,000 students. The Department of English houses the composition program, which has long had a two-semester composition sequence, in part because of a mandate from the North Dakota University System (NDUS). Each year, roughly 1300 students take the first semester requirement, ENGL 110,{2} and some 1600 students take ENGL 130, with ACT scores and dual credit largely accounting for the difference.

ENGL 130 is relatively new. Prior to 2014, UND had two options from which students could choose to fulfill the second semester composition requirement. The first option, ENGL 120, introduced students to research writing. Most sections based discussions and assignments on a book-length, popular cultural critique such as Barry Glassner's *Culture of Fear* or Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed*, which provided content and worked as models of extended, source-based writing. Generally speaking, the course was supposed to serve the broad range of majors across the arts, humanities, sciences, and social sciences. In contrast, the second option, ENGL 125, focused on business and technical writing, and it generally aimed to serve students in business, engineering, and UND's large aviation program. As with many courses of its kind, ENGL 125 often incorporated resumes, cover letters, professional correspondence, reports, and other genres; the specific approach to teaching these genres could vary widely from section to section.

This two-course option posed pedagogical and administrative challenges. Pedagogically speaking, each course included features that the other did not, which left students without as rich of a learning experience as might be possible. Students in ENGL 120 still needed the instruction in practical and professional documents that was the domain of ENGL 125, and students in ENGL 125 needed the deep engagement with writing and research in a rhetorical context that was germane to ENGL 120. Administratively speaking, the two-course option also made scheduling difficult, and often unpredictable, for the department. Compounding the problem, ENGL 125 gained an unwarranted reputation as the "easier" option of the two, which meant that enrollments for that course filled up fast. Students who were unable to take ENGL 125 often got "stuck" taking ENGL 120 instead, and could sometimes be bitter about the result.

In response to these difficulties, Lori Robison, the Academic Director of Composition before me, applied for a grant from UND's Office of Instructional Development to design a new course, which she conceived of as a blending of the two options. The result was ENGL 130, and her vision, including topical readings, research reports, a grant proposal; and, especially, public writing, still serves as the course's foundation today. For Lori, this course design united ENGL 125's practical-minded instruction in business and technical writing with ENGL 120's extended intellectual inquiry into a topic, issue or question. The emphasis on public writing, she reasoned, would make the course, its writing, and its research all the more meaningful: it could lead students to see researching and writing from sources as more than

classroom exercises, as rhetorical necessities when addressing complex topics, developing community projects, and persuading audiences in specific, often local, contexts.

During the spring of 2015, my second semester as WPA, I invited a small group of senior lecturers and graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) who had taught ENGL130 (then only in its second semester) together to discuss their struggles and successes teaching the new course. Working together, we revised the assignments to make their expectations and distinctions clearer and to establish some baseline, program-wide uniformity upon which instructors could build.{3} At the same time, I sought to implement a genre-based pedagogy in the course for two main reasons. First, genre helped solve the uniformity problem by uniting the course around a central concept, even as individual sections focused on different topics. Second, it amplified the rhetorical nature of the course in ways that can facilitate transfer. While the sequence of research, professional, and public writing assignments had always introduced students to specific genres—the resume, say, or the proposal—I realized it also had the potential teach them *about genre* as a rhetorical and social phenomenon. As I will discuss below, this pedagogical focus aims to help students develop a transferrable awareness of genre's rhetorical nature. By highlighting the similarities and differences in conventions, structures, semiotic modes, methods of audience address, *kairos,* and authorial roles across genres, students can begin to recognize, use, and adapt those features in any new genre they might encounter down the line —especially in public genres.

## Course Overview: Assignment Sequence and Rhetorical Genre Awareness

Before I elaborate on this genre pedagogy and the ways it can speak back to public writing pedagogy, I want to offer a brief overview of the foundational assignment sequence that drives the course. Every section of ENGL 130 revolves around a theme, which instructors choose based on a topical reader. Recent topics have included technology, globalization, gender, and creativity. The thematic readers tend to be the focus of the first unit in the course (although most instructors return to them periodically), during which students read a range of selections in order to develop baseline subject matter knowledge. Students build on this baseline through primary and secondary research and a series of assignments that follow upon one another in a tightly interlinked sequence:

- Assignment 1: Literature Review: In this assignment, students develop and answer an inquiry question through analysis and synthesis of secondary sources. Students are asked to end with additional questions about the ways their topics or issues manifest locally.
- Assignment 2: Recommendation Report: Based on their literature reviews, students conduct primary research into their topics, examining how broad issues surrounding technology, globalization, gender, or sustainability affect local publics. Primary research often requires students to contact actual individuals in the public to gather relevant information. Based on this research, students develop recommendations for local projects to address the issue, and they advocate for one.
- Assignment 3: Grant Proposal: Working in groups, students compare the recommendations from Assignment 2 and decide on one they would like to pursue further. They collaborate on a grant proposal, seeking funding for their projects in response to a specific request for proposals (RFP) circulated by the instructor.
- Assignment 4: Writing for Public Audiences: In this assignment, students must create materials in support of their grant projects. Working individually (but in consultation with their group members), they select two genres they believe will best serve the project. Students have chosen to create documents in an array of genres, including informational brochures, opinion-editorials, social media campaigns, and organizational websites aimed at public audiences. Typically, these audiences are imagined ones, given the difficulty in developing real community partnerships mentioned above, as well as the potential risks some students may feel in publishing their work (see Gogan). Instead, the focus remains on building students' rhetorical awareness. To that end, accompanying their public documents, students compose a reflective rhetorical analysis justifying their choices of genre and explaining the decisions they made in design, structure, word choice, argument, information, evidence, or whatever other components they deem necessary for explaining their choices in composition.

Although experienced instructors often introduce variations depending on their individual proclivities (e.g., some prefer an annotated bibliography to a literature review), most sections of ENGL 130 follow some version of this sequence. Most also supplement these assignments with supporting genres, including reading responses, inquiry emails, survey questions, resumes and cover letters, and project progress reports. Taken together, these assignments give students experience writing in multiple genres for multiple audiences, real and simulated.

## Genre Pedagogy as Bridge

As I collaborated with the working group to develop a version of the above sequence in the spring of 2015, I began thinking that the course, with its tightly woven sequence of assignments, could be a good vehicle for genre pedagogy. The goal, according to advocates of genre pedagogy, is not necessarily for students to "master" any one genre. Rather, students in a genre awareness course can gain "enough experience with those genres that at least some elements of those genres might serve as antecedents when students acquire unfamiliar genres in the future" (Devitt, "Teaching" 346). In other words, genre awareness pedagogy can facilitate transfer. The specific genres students learn in a composition course like ENGL 130 may not match exactly the ones they will need in their majors, in their careers, and in their public interactions as citizens, but they can become rhetorical resources for addressing those new, different situations. After all, as Devitt puts it, "Just as writers perceive unique situations as somehow similar and so perceive and use the same genre, writers perceive newly encountered situations as sharing some elements with prior situations, and so they use prior genres when writing new ones" ("Transferability" 220). Following Devitt's logic, ENGL 130 aims to promote students' knowledge about the intimate rhetorical link between genres and situations. With each assignment, students learn how conventions, forms, audiences, writers' roles, research practices, writing processes, contexts, and timing coalesce into a genre. With this higher-order, transferrable rhetorical awareness in mind, they can decide when and how to import, adapt, repurpose, or discard genre conventions to suit the current situation.

To support this process, students in ENGL 130 analyze and reflect upon the rhetorical similarities and differences among genres as they move from assignment to assignment. How, for instance, can they adapt the academic conventions driving a literature review when reporting some of the same information to support a grant proposal from a non-academic organization? How do quotations from an interview function rhetorically in a recommendation report, versus a testimonial on an organizational webpage? How might audiences respond differently to informal or colloquial language in an inquiry email versus a tweet? By asking such questions, genre pedagogy front-loads "a metacognitive understanding of genre [that] can help students make connections between the type of writing assigned in the Composition course […] and the writing genres they encounter in other disciplines" (Clark and Hernandez 65)—and publics, I would add. This process of analyzing and comparing genre models, along with the writing they produce as part of the simulation, can help students develop a flexible, transferrable, rhetorical awareness so they can recognize, and participate in, *any* new genre they may encounter, including public ones.

In ENGL 130, this flexible rhetorical awareness acts as a bridge that students can use to cross from research to professional to public writing. I imagine it as a simple wooden suspension bridge, where each genre is a plank that must be traversed to get from one side to the other. While students do pause and linger on a single plank (genre) at times, they often have feet on multiple planks (genres) simultaneously. As they cross, each plank acts as a foothold or foundation that helps them move successfully to the next plank. The students, in other words, "use the genres they know when faced with a genre they do not know" (Devitt, "Transferability" 222). Genre analysis, genre models, peer review, and instructor feedback collectively act as the ropes that span the bridge, as supportive handholds for an otherwise precarious crossing. With each new genre, students can continually consider and reconsider what it is, who uses it, how it is used, what its conventions might be, and how its affordances compare with other genres in their repertoire, particularly the antecedent ones they just recently encountered in the simulation.{4} Such questions and techniques, Ken Hyland argues, can "provid[e] learners with an explicit rhetorical understanding of texts and a metalanguage by which to analyse them" (25). Often, genre pedagogy advocates have argued that it prepares students for active, reflective learning of disciplinary and professional genres (cf. Russell; Clark and Hernandez; Soliday; Artemeva). In the following section, I will elaborate on how pedagogical attention to the rhetorical dimensions of various genres can support public writing pedagogy, too, using the ENGL 130 simulation as an illustrative case-in-point.

## Genre Pedagogy for the Public Writing Classroom

As a core part in UND's Essential Studies program, ENGL 130 shares goals that Weisser suggests are core features of public writing pedagogy: to "prepare students for citizenship in a democracy, for assuming their political and social responsibilities, and for lives as active participants in public life" (3). According to common language on the ENGL 130 syllabus, "Essential Studies courses are designed to help students become stronger in areas that have been identified as particularly important for professional, private, and civic life in the 21st century: being able to think and reason well, to communicate effectively, to judge the credibility of information, and to engage in complex and respectful ways with social and cultural diversity." This program description suggests that citizenship, broadly defined as active participation in public life, entails effective communication, information literacy, and attention to diversity. Composition courses that focus on public writing can meet these goals especially well when they are infused with genre pedagogy. Through genre pedagogy, students can see how different genres encourage certain forms of citizenship while discouraging others. They can learn how information and arguments gain persuasive traction in relatively typified ways. Armed with this knowledge, they can develop a willingness and confidence to contribute to

public debates.

One way in which ENGL 130 promotes students' genre knowledge, willingness, and confidence is through its simulation of a genre system. According to Melanie Kill, a genre system is a "constellation" of genres that are "coordinated through a series of appropriately-timed and expected uptakes" (i.e., the relationships that hold between two or more genres) that allow writers "to enact complex social actions over time" (Kill 212; see also Bazerman, "Systems"; Dryer; Tardy). In other words, genre systems are sequences of genres that follow upon one another in a highly regularized manner—much like the bridge I described above—so that users can accomplish complex activities in expected ways. Likewise, ENGL 130 also sequences genres such that each one enables certain social actions and learning goals and sets up the next one. At the same time, the course necessitates a host of other genres that do not follow one another sequentially; such genres are part of a wider genre ecology that informs students' writing. According to Clay Spinuzzi and Mark Zachary, "A *genre ecology* includes an interrelated group of genres (artifact types and the interpretive habits that have developed around them) used to jointly mediate the activities that allow people to accomplish complex objectives" (Spinuzzi and Zachary 172). Here, we can see the limits of my linear bridge metaphor. When students take research notes, email potential interviewees, or record meetings with group members in a calendar, they draw upon a broader, non-sequential ecology of genres to accomplish immediate activities and support the work of the central genre system.

Significantly, classroom and institutional genres like syllabi, assignment sheets, and grades are part of this larger ecology, too, and they point to the simulated nature of the central genre system. Some scholars have called such simulation tasks into question. Aviva Freedman, for example, hypothesizes that explicit teaching of genres is neither necessary, nor possible, nor useful because writers tend to learn genres without explicit instruction, and the rules of genres are too complex to teach effectively, especially out of context (236). Similarly, Elizabeth Wardle contends that most FYC assignments can be categorized as "mutt genres," which approximate their disciplinary, professional, and public counterparts but serve different exigencies (769-774). According to Brian Gogan, teachers of public writing often share these concerns, which are demonstrated by their argument "that a public rhetoric and writing pedagogical approach makes rhetoric and writing more real" (543). However, Gogan takes issue with this claim because it "position[s] reality as antecedent to rhetoric" (a la Bitzer) rather than constituted by rhetoric (a la Vatz). For that reason, he argues that "public rhetoric and writing teachers need to expand their definition of authenticity" and emphasize "the practices by which writers and readers rhetorically legitimate reality—that is, practices of legitimation that might be studied and developed in the classroom" (543).

Genre pedagogy, I argue, can highlight such "practices of legitimation" by simulating the ways communities create and share meaningful sociorhetorical actions. As I explained above, scholars like Devitt ("Teaching"; "Transferability") and Hyland maintain that FYC courses can teach students *about* genre—much as Wardle advocates for teaching students *about* writing—by introducing genres not as inert forms or templates that can be learned once and for all, but as dynamic social and rhetorical entities that can be studied, enacted, and changed. Even if the genres in such courses are only approximations of their real-world counterparts, we can legitimate those approximations by emphasizing their function as rhetorical resources for future use and holding them up as fodder for critical analysis, and thus critical awareness. According to David R. Russell and Arturo Yañez, instructors who highlight and negotiate genre knowledge with students can help them forge new "genre pathways" that aid them in "expanding their involvement with [new] activity systems" (352), constituting the means for learning in new, expansive ways that most of us desire in our writing courses.

By explicitly embedding genres in a simulated genre system, as well as a wider ecology, ENGL 130 draws students' attention to the very fact that such things as genres, genre systems, and genre ecologies exist, in classrooms as well as publics. Ideally, they can then transfer this knowledge to academic, professional, and public situations beyond ENGL 130. For this reason, the course's system of genres might be thought of as a "protopublic," which Frank Farmer glosses "as a rehearsal site where preparatory work is taken up in anticipation of that moment when, fully fledged, our students will take center stage in their roles as committed, informed, and rhetorically effective citizens" (9). In other words, the course offers students a legitimate space to rehearse genres in preparation for future public performances. It is a "staging ground" (Farmer 6) on which students can "play" at and, in some cases, enact public discourses.

The topical readings that begin ENGL 130 support these rehearsals and performances in several ways. First, they provide students with a baseline of subject-matter knowledge to build upon as they cultivate an informed perspective on an issue, much as citizens gather information in order to enter into public debate. Second, when conversations about these readings turn to their rhetorical and generic dimensions, as they often do, students can come to see the "rhetorical interactions that converge around public issues and that construct publics" (Reiff and Bawarshi 7). In other words, rhetorical genre analysis of readings can alert students to the ways generic commonplaces function in public conversations about the course theme, thus promoting their critical awareness of public genres. As Amy Kielmeyer,

one of our lecturers, is fond of saying, the selections from the readers also serve as models of public writing, of the kind of work we hope students will compose by the end of the semester. We thus "begin with the analysis of public discourse" (Wells 338) by looking at the genre expectations of sample readings and putting them into conversation with one another. In this way, students' reading and writing is "public" in its orientation all along: they read and write with a public *mindset*, even if they are not directly writing to public audiences *per se* until later assignments. The class thus treats publicity not as "a condition of reception and review," but as "an activity directed by rhetorical processes" (Gogan 539). Such a pedagogy bypasses discussions about a piece's success in reaching (and convincing) a pre-existing public, attending instead to reconstructions of the rhetorical actions informing any given reading.

As they establish their baseline subject matter knowledge, discern what has been said about their subject, and analyze how it has been said, students plan and compose the first major assignment, the literature review. The principle behind the assignment is to help students extend their subject matter knowledge through secondary research in the library. They develop an inquiry question to drive their library research based on their perceived knowledge gaps or their particular interests. The sources they find constitute a tightly focused archive of secondary sources on their specific issue. As they put the sources in dialogue with one another, students can hone the academic writing skills—particularly working in conversation with sources—that they were to have learned in ENGL 110 (or through other means). In some cases, such conversations highlight "what gets said" and "who gets heard" (Weisser 98) so as to "illuminate how public discourse can both enable and limit public participation and change" (Reiff 101), a key feature of much public writing pedagogy. That said, as I will explain in the final section of this profile, such attention to the material causes and effects of inclusion and exclusion is not necessarily a pervasive feature of the course from section to section.

What is pervasive from section to section is that the first assignment acts as a springboard for learning new professional and public ways of writing in subsequent assignments, including the recommendation report. This second major assignment tasks students with investigating their issue locally—meaning on campus, in Grand Forks, in North Dakota, or regionally, in the Upper Midwest—following new inquiry question(s) they develop at the end of their literature reviews. By allowing students to choose the scope of their "local public," the assignment lives up to the fundamental notion in public writing pedagogy that "the public sphere is always constructed" (Wells 326); in this case, it is constructed, at least in part, by students themselves. As they identify local publics, they begin to consider the specific individuals, groups, and organizations with stakes in a given issue. These interested parties may exist prior to students' writing, but they are "called into existence" (Gogan 539) *as a public* by students' inquiries into their common and competing needs, investments, worries, and concerns.

If, as Gogan writes, "rhetoric is constitutive of publics" (539), then so, too, is genre. Indeed, students in ENGL 130 address their local inquiry questions through primary research, which often requires them to use genres like inquiry emails, interview questions, and surveys. Such genres mediate students' interaction with others in "the public," whether representatives of local organizations, elected officials, or members of other academic disciplines who, following Farmer, may in certain circumstances act as members of a disciplinary counterpublic (97-99). In this way, the recommendation report "incorporate[s] writing assignments that rely upon negotiation and contact with others in the public sphere" (Weisser 43). Rather than rely on sound bites and gut reactions (as in the worst forms of public writing), students must be responsive to and sensitive to the needs and perspectives of these individuals and organizations. The recommendation report thus "facilitate[s] the transitions for students from academic discourse to the type of discourse they might use in the 'real world'" (Weisser 43). Students come to see how research, an activity usually associated with academic writing, is of value in the public as well because it serves not as mere support for a pre-existing argument, but as a thoroughly rhetorical means of engaging with publics in an ethical manner.

Without this ethical orientation, the recommendation report might not be convincing to its audience. For this assignment, each student must write to a small number of peers who act as a concerned citizens group, thus formalizing the protopublic nature of the course and the assignment sequence. Using primary and secondary research, each student develops a set of recommendations for a local project and aims to convince the group members that one project is the most compelling to pursue in the grant proposal, which I discuss in more detail below. These collaborative groups resemble Weisser's description of the public sphere "as a temporary and unstable meeting of conversants who come together to discuss some topic of mutual interest" (47). They also provide students with an identity or an *ethos* from which to write: Charles Bazerman suggests that various volunteer political and community organizations of the kind we are simulating are a primary venue for enacting citizenship: "these groups have had their own internal systems and genres of communication" which constitute "a major site for the development of individuals as citizens" ("Genre and Identity" 26). In other words, the genres and genre systems of unions, chambers of commerce, the gun rights lobby, feminists organizations, and farm bureaus (to take a few examples) play a fundamental role in framing and enacting citizen identity in various publics today. Of course, each of these various publics entails insider knowledge that is difficult to simulate—hence Freedman and Adam's objection

that "it is simply not possible at all to prepare students for the rhetorical demands of a workplace [and, by extension, a public] while operating within the institutional constraints of a university classroom" (130). However, ENGL 130's simulation does not attempt to extricate itself from its educational context. Instead, the course's simulation shows students that various publics have insider knowledge and characteristic ways of writing—genres—that they can learn how to navigate through genre awareness. To that end, the recommendation report, coupled with the grant proposal, allows students to rehearse a citizen role within a simulated, protopublic community group that seeks to identify public needs and advocate successfully for public change.

According to Weisser, students who engage in conversation (or at least imagine themselves in conversation) within such "volunteer organizations [and] community outreach programs" may see or envision more "tangible results from their public discourse" (107). In the same way, the grant proposal is designed to help students identify potential, tangible results from the public and publically oriented writing they have completed thus far in the course. The assignment includes a specific request for proposals (RFP) that the instructor creates and circulates to the class (although occasionally instructors might try to identify actual real-world RFPs for students). Students must then collaborate with their committee to write a grant proposal seeking funding for the project that they decide is the most compelling and the best fit for the RFP. Some of the more interesting projects thus far have included proposals to fund community garden plots, the development of family studies courses as part of UND's Essential Studies program, and travel for student engineers to bring new, sustainable technologies to the developing world. In proposing such projects, students must engage in what Tosh Tachino calls "knowledge mobilization," or "the process of moving knowledge from formal research into active use" (179). Successful knowledge mobilization, according to Tachino, requires mindful attention to uptake, to the ways in which writers can adapt the features of research genres when composing public genres.

Often, knowledge mobilization is a key feature of the final assignment as well: given that it asks for public documents in support of grant projects, the Writing for Public Audiences assignment requires students to rework their research and their arguments yet again for wider (imagined) public audiences in new genres. Students can choose any two genres to meet this goal, and they have chosen to create informational brochures, opinion-editorials, social media campaigns, and organizational websites in support of their projects. In keeping with public writing pedagogy, these documents seek to raise the public's awareness of the issues students have been investigating and to invite public action in response (at least hypothetically, since students are not required to share these documents beyond the classroom protopublic). For instance, a student who had been researching and writing about obesity decided to synthesize her knowledge into a "listicle" (an article wholly or partially consisting of a list) involving practical steps readers could take to eat better and exercise more regularly. Although she did not publish it in a venue where listicles are common, such as Buzzfeed, she did repurpose her earlier research for the new genre via references and links. In so doing, she mobilized knowledge, bringing it from an academic genre system into a public, or at least protopublic, genre ecology.

Key to this process is students' self-selection of genres for the project. Up to this point in the semester, the assignment sequence has acted as a tightly controlled genre system. However, recent syntheses of RGS and public sphere scholarship maintain that public discourse is rarely so clearly determined. As Reiff and Bawarshi put it:

> [L]ess clearly defined public contexts […] function less as systems and more as assemblages in which object-motives are not as shared, in which the mediational means are more wide ranging and subject to transformation, in which participants are not as institutionally ranked and roles are not as clearly demarcated, and in which genre uptakes are less 'disciplined' and predictable. (4)

In other words, public genres and uptakes are not as scripted as their academic and workplace counterparts. They are more ecological, in Spinuzzi and Zachary's sense, than systemic, in Bazerman's sense. As a protopublic, ENGL 130 offers students a convenient rehearsal space in which they can make sense of, and practice contributing to, these more diffuse public genre ecologies. Using the awareness of genres as rhetorical actions that they have been developing all semester, they can play with the message they wish to send, the audience(s) they may reach, the means they believe will persuade, and the ends they hope to accomplish.

To formalize their genre awareness, the assignment asks students to justify those choices in a reflective rhetorical analysis. After all, the genres that can afford entrance into one public discussion may not be as effective for participating in others; students must be able to articulate why they chose one genre over another, given the specific topic and its rhetorical circumstances. This aspect of the assignment is a relatively recent addition. An earlier version gave students a small number of genres from which to choose, and did not ask them to justify those choices. Thus, students could compose a few Facebook status updates in support of their project and call it an easy job done. They tended to treat the assignment as "icing on the cake"—as the "fun" work after the hard work of the previous projects. While there is no problem with students enjoying their composing, it also seemed apparent to the working group that students did not in fact see the project as a culmination of the course's rhetorical skills, genre awareness, and public

orientation. With rhetorical justification in the mix, we can get a bead on students' mindset when composing and, ideally, draw their attention to the ways genres can help them enter into the complex, diffuse discourses that make up various publics.

## Teaching Public Genres: Limitations and Opportunities

Instructors and WPAs interested in infusing genre into public writing pedagogies might be interested in several cautions, in the limitations and lessons I've learned in administering this program. On a theoretical level, as I indicated above, ENGL 130 does not inevitably promote critical awareness of ideologies, power relations, and practices of inclusion and exclusion. If proponents of public writing pedagogy want students to see how public genres can be "used to justify the dominance or subordination of certain classes or groups in public settings" (Weisser 101), then they will have to front-load that critical work. As I have discussed, the potential is there in genre pedagogy, but it happens in some sections more than others—particularly those taught by instructors more versed, and more comfortable, in leading such discussions. I have taken two tactics to address this issue. First, I worked with representatives at Oxford University Press on a webinar with Jordynn Jack and Katie Rose Guest Pryal, the authors of our textbook, *How Writing Works*. During their webinar, Jack and Pryal overviewed for lecturers and GTAs the impetus behind genre pedagogy, particularly its potential to help students learn, use, and change genres. My hope is that instructors took what they learned and applied it when they teach ENGL 130.

Whereas some instructors may be uncomfortable engaging in overtly politicized critique of genres and genre systems, others are anxious about teaching and evaluating the digital and multimodal compositions that increasingly characterize public writing. The multiple and diffuse affordances of digital genres can be daunting to instructors who characterize themselves as "bad," or at least inexperienced, with technology. For this reason, WPAs with the means may want to sponsor workshops for instructors on teaching and evaluating digital and multimodal genres as part of professional development for public writing composition programs—a future goal for me at UND.

As I indicated in the beginning of this program profile, the biggest limitation remains our course's relationship to actual publics: when Lori Robison originally conceived of ENGL 130, she hoped that certain sections could partner with local community groups and organizations, much like the service learning courses that Weisser characterizes as harbingers of composition's interest in public writing (53-56). The course's simulated genre system currently works in lieu of such a partnership by bringing students into a simulated protopublic where they can rehearse public genres. But we haven't given up on actual public partnerships, either. For example, in May 2017, we worked with UND's Essential Studies program, as well as the College of Engineering and Mines and the Honors program, on an annual "UNDergraduate Showcase." ENGL 130 instructors invited select students and student groups to present their public writing at the showcase. Such venues, Wells contends, "establish a point of exchange between the private, the domain of production, and some approximations of the public sphere" (335). And indeed, if our classrooms can be thought of as protopublics, then the showcase opens their discourse to wider audiences. In part, this audience may be an expanded form of the classroom protopublic, given that students and faculty will be the main attendees. However, even these attendees can act as members of the public. For example, during the showcase, I listened to a poster presentation by an ENGL 130 student who had worked with her group to propose an after school program that would teach Grand Forks students about nutrition and exercise. My colleague Bret Weber, Associate Professor of Social Work, was also listening. As a member of City Council, he was awestruck at the nutritional gaps facing so many children in the city, and he was impressed with the proposal; he gave the student his card and encouraged her to contact him about giving a presentation to the City Council. In this way, the showcase set up the opportunity for interactions with public audiences; if the student takes the initiative, it could lead to an actual public program. Although this interaction was admittedly fortuitous, the showcase planning committee hopes to attract local businesses, non-profits, and community groups to future events, which could form the basis of additional public partnerships for the composition program.

For these reasons, ENGL 130 is very much a work in progress, particularly in the way it supports students' public writing. Any program invested in public writing will experience similar problems with implementation, both in the delivery of instruction and in community partnerships. In the meantime, though, simulated genre systems can lead students across a broad range of research, professional, and public genres. Those genre systems can also facilitate protopublic experiences for students, the staging grounds where they can cultivate a powerful awareness of public genres as social actions that they can carry with them into future public writing situations.

Koepke have offered valuable feedback on the course as they have taught it, as have the lecturers and graduate students who are too many to name. Finally, I would like to thank the editors and reviewers at *Composition Forum*, particularly Christopher Minnix, for the time, attention, and feedback on drafts of this program profile.

## Notes

1. UND's composition program has two WPA positions. The Academic Director of Composition is a tenured or tenure-track faculty member whose primary responsibilities include developing curriculum, training GTAs, fielding grade complaints, and adjudicating plagiarism cases. The Administrative Director of Composition is a non-tenure-track Senior Lecturer who receives a course reduction to focus on scheduling, transfer credit requests, annual performance reviews for lecturers and GTAs, and so on. Both individuals collaborate closely on their various responsibilities. (Return to text.)

2. ENGL 110 is currently undergoing revision from a general skills academic writing course focusing on reading and analyzing long, complex texts to a teaching-for-transfer model inspired by Yancey, et al., that encourages transfer by asking students to develop a self-styled theory of reading and writing. (Return to text.)

3. Although we prefer to preserve instructor autonomy, a review of syllabi and student evaluations indicated that some instructors simply imported their ENGL 120 or 125 assignments into the new course with little change. By implementing a common assignment sequence, we gained a springboard for future innovation. (Return to text.)

4. Such questions drive the core apparatus of our genre-based textbook, *How Writing Works*, by Jordynn Jack and Katie Rose Guest Pryal. (Return to text.)

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