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Anthropology and Writing Pedagogy: Why Anthropologists should Teach Writing

Dr. Durba Chattaraj
Ashoka University, India

Abstract

In an increasingly interconnected world, learning how to think anthropologically—learning how to think with difference—should be an essential part of the process of higher education. Yet many students may never take a single anthropology course during their undergraduate career. In such a milieu, it is important for anthropologists to both teach and actively participate in the curriculum design of the first-year writing seminars that are part of the core curriculum of many universities and colleges globally. While first-year writing programs predominate in the United States and the United Kingdom, they are growing internationally as well, particularly in liberal arts institutions. In this article, I argue that anthropologists should teach first-year writing seminars at their educational institutions for three reasons: first, anthropology as a discipline is ecumenical about evidence; thus, it introduces students to a wide range of evidentiary practices early on. This broad-based understanding of evidence facilitates transfer across disciplines. Second, encountering anthropology in a writing seminar attracts students towards pursuing majors, minors and elective classes in the discipline. Finally, through the discipline's core methodology of participant observation, lived experience, rather than a synthesis of pre-existing texts, is the core source from which arguments and conclusions about the social world are derived. In an increasingly unequal world where representation in, and access to, written text is concomitantly unequal, it is important that students are introduced to multiple ways to understand and think about human experience. The methodology of participant observation destabilises slightly for undergraduate students the authority of written text as the main, and, often singular, source of knowledge.

Introduction

In a recent interview, anthropologist Tim Ingold talked about the urgency of encouraging an "anthropological attitude" in students:

> Although only a tiny proportion of the students we teach—at least at introductory levels—will go on to become practicing anthropologists, our task is nevertheless to foster an anthropological attitude that all of them may take into whatever walks of life they subsequently follow. Preparation for anthropology is preparation for life, and it lies in the cultivation of a readiness to both listen to others and question ourselves. Second, whether this preparation and the results that flow therefrom yield to "fruitful analysis," as you put it, depends on what we mean by analysis. If we mean the processing and interpretation of empirical data in the normal scientific sense, then the answer is no. But if analysis means a critical interrogation that opens simultaneously to the self and to the world, then the answer is a definite yes! (Ingold 2016)

Many anthropologists, myself included, share the belief that learning how to think anthropologically — learning how to think with difference — should be an essential part of the process of higher education. If we then take seriously the proposition that anthropology should be for everyone, not just for majors, minors, and the even smaller number who will go on to become professional practitioners of the discipline, how can anthropologists reach out to students who are unlikely to ever take even an introductory anthropology class?

I believe that a partial solution to this problem is for anthropologists to actively seek out and teach the compulsory first-year writing seminars that many liberal arts universities and colleges offer. In this article, I focus primarily on writing programs in liberal arts universities and colleges in North America and the United Kingdom, which tend to offer both anthropology and sociology, and also to have dedicated writing programs and composition classes at the college level. I regret this uneven focus, but I bring to it the perspective of now teaching and building the writing program at a major liberal arts university in the Global South. I find that my arguments have relevance for the South Asian liberal arts context, and the field of writing studies has explored the successes and challenges of teaching dedicated writing seminars in universities in Poland (Petric 2005), Yemen and Japan (Reichelt, Lefkowitz, Rinnert and Schultz 2012) and Kaula Lampur (Al-Zubaidi 2012), among others.

These seminars are known by many names, such as Freshman Composition, Critical Thinking Seminars, First-year Communications, Writing Seminars, Gateway courses, among others, and they are intended to be the space where students learn the "basics" of academic reading, writing and critical thinking. What is taught in such courses varies widely, and there is little consensus on what should be covered in their curricula (Beaufort 2007; Yancey, Robertson and Taczak 2014). Still, some common features of these important courses include teaching students how to make an argument that is supported by reasoning and evidence, teaching students to understand academic writing as part of a structured argumentative tradition, teaching students how to read academic and other sources critically, teaching students how to cite and avoid plagiarism, teaching students how to do basic (mostly textual) research, and teaching students to analyse and synthesise across (again mostly textual) sources. In addition, some courses focus heavily on grammar, mechanics and style.

In many universities these seminars are offered through English departments or programs in Composition or Rhetoric, which are often housed within the English departments. If anthropologists teach in such institutions, where the first-year writing experience is owned by a single discipline, they should attempt to broaden the focus and scope of these seminars to include interdisciplinary perspectives because writing and critical thinking within the university setting cannot and should not be the preserve solely of one discipline.

Indeed the necessity of interdisciplinary engagements with critical thinking and writing at the first-year level has long been recognised in many universities, facilitating the emergence and growth of Writing in the Disciplines (WID) and Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) programs.[i] In this article, I argue that anthropology departments should actively encourage anthropologists to teach first-year writing seminars at their educational institutions for three main reasons: first, because anthropology as a discipline is ecumenical about evidence, it introduces students to a wide range of evidentiary practices early on, and this broad-based understanding of evidence facilitates transfer across disciplines. Second, encountering anthropology in a writing seminar attracts students towards pursuing majors, minors and further classes in the discipline. Finally, through the discipline's core methodology of participant observation, lived experience, rather than a synthesis of pre-existing texts, is the core source from which arguments and conclusions about the social world are derived. The methodology of participant observation destabilises slightly the authority of written text as the main (or indeed the only) source from which knowledge can be created, and students should thus be exposed to thinking anthropologically about social practices early on. [ii]

I believe that anthropology departments should take the lead in institutionally supporting the teaching of writing and critical thinking seminars geared towards students who may never take major or minor courses in the discipline. In order to facilitate this type of teaching, departments need to create systems by which more-generalised forms of teaching and knowledge production can be encouraged and professionally evaluated within the discipline. In addition, I suggest that early-career anthropologists consider opportunities for employment specifically *within* university writing programs.

The current situation of precarity within academia, particularly for new PhDs within the social sciences and humanities, has been widely written about (Fredrickson 2015). In such an environment, where jobs for tenure-track employment within anthropology departments are scarce, employment in a structured writing program can provide a viable, less-precarious, and rewarding career path. Within the United States, anthropology departments tend to offer either tenure-track employment and non-permanent, fixed-term or zero-hours adjunct positions, with little in-between, save for the occasional one-to-three year visiting positions. In the same country, some established writing programs are taking the lead in offering stable and recurrent contract-based employment (in some cases with the possibility of creating tenure lines). This is in part because writing, creativity and critical thinking are viewed as "essential" parts of undergraduate education, and as much-needed "skills" for the competitive job market (Bughin et.

al. 2018). As a result, university writing programs in the United States (but also globally) are growing, even as the humanities, and to a lesser extent the social sciences, are increasingly viewed as less essential than STEM subjects.

A focus on the growth of writing programs highlights how this STEM versus Humanities/Social Sciences opposition is a false dilemma. If writing, critical thinking and creativity are essential to a university education, these dispositions (rather than skills) are always taught *through* disciplines and fields of scholarly inquiry. At the introductory level at least, the disciplines and fields of inquiry through which writing education is most commonly imparted are the humanities and the social sciences. As I argue in this article, anthropology is a particularly fruitful discipline through which to teach writing and critical thinking.

While contract-based employment may not be the ideal solution to the question of precarity within academia, it is hard to argue against a job that provides a living wage and essential benefits, such as health insurance, especially when compared to the adjunct alternative. Based on my experience, I recommend that early-career anthropologists apply to seek out employment in writing programs, not as a job of last resort, but as a rewarding location from which to build a career that merges anthropology and writing studies with pedagogy.[iii]

Sometimes emerging scholars of anthropology can view tenure-track employment within the discipline as the holy grail of jobs; the only thing that one should aspire to. This is not the case. Teaching within a writing program can provide an alternative which benefits both emerging scholars and the discipline at large. Such teaching can spread "anthropological attitudes" more broadly among college students and can enrich and transform writing practices within the discipline itself in productive ways.

Writing in the Disciplines

Recent scholarship in Writing Studies within the United States has focused increasingly on the question of transfer — of how the writing strategies and practices that a student learns in a university writing seminar may be effectively utilised in other academic and professional settings (Beaufort 2007; Yancey 2014; Reiff and Bawarshi and Reiff 2010). Some of the recommendations include moving away from generalised first-year composition classes that purport to teach a form of universal and one-size-fits-all writing, to discipline-specific writing instruction in which student attention is drawn to the genre conventions and contexts of the specific disciplines and discourse communities within which they are writing. This focus on generic and disciplinary contexts and conventions allows students to develop a metacognitive understanding of the writing process as they participate in it, which then facilitates transfer. Thus, paying attention to discipline-specific practices is important for writing instructors who teach in composition-based programs that are housed in English departments, for those who teach in Writing in the Disciplines programs, and for instructors within disciplines who need to be able to hone and adapt student writing towards the genre conventions of their field.

In the sections that follow, I discuss specific conventions within anthropological discourse, focusing on the question of evidence. I hope that through reading this article, writing instructors will gain a greater understanding of the particularities of evidence within anthropological writing, and some ways in which they can discuss differing disciplines' widely divergent evidentiary practices within their writing seminars. I also hope that instructors within the discipline of anthropology will emerge with an understanding of how to facilitate students' metacognitive awareness of what is expected of them within anthropological writing contexts, particularly a familiarity with the use of a wide range of evidence.

After the "reflexive turn" in the 1980s, anthropology as a discipline began to pay a great deal of attention to its rhetorical practices, particularly the conventions of ethnographic writing and representation, and the unequal power relations which lie at the heart of anthropological research. At the core of this inequality is the relationship between the anthropologist (often, though certainly not always, an outsider with an elite education) and the subject (often, but certainly not always, a culturally, economically or politically marginalised group) (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Behar 1996).

While a great deal of productive attention has been paid to the problems of representation and power in ethnographic writing, considerably less attention has been paid to the nuts and bolts of what makes an effective ethnography from the perspective of outsiders to the discipline. How is a novice reader with no background in the discipline meant to read an ethnography? What should a student bring to their reading of ethnography, or to their writing of "papers" within the discipline? While Gay y Blasco and Wardle's 2007 book *How to Read Ethnography* attempts to answer these questions, Judith Reynolds argues that while the above-mentioned book has advice on how to read, "It has little to say

about what readers bring with them to their reading of these texts or how ethnographic texts can be used in relation to specific "projects" or tasks such as course assignments, whether these are based on fieldwork or just on texts" (2010).

Reynolds makes the important point that there is often not a lot of material, or indeed a lot of discussion, of how students should write and respond to assignments in anthropology classes. Where anthropology classes may most often focus on concept mastery and content acquisition rather than rhetorical practices (for example, an assignment may focus on the intellectual substance of Mauss's argument about reciprocity in *The Gift*, rather than *how* has Mauss written, presented and constructed his argument in order to persuade readers of its validity) how are students then to understand and produce responses to anthropological knowledge through writing? How should first-year students read, write and thereby think in anthropological ways? Bringing anthropology into writing seminars, where the primary focus of the class is on the rhetorical practices and writing methods of the discipline, helps to answer these questions and foster the kind of "anthropological attitude" in students that Ingold talks about. Of course, the fact that these courses then act as places where we can attract students to other anthropology courses, at a time with the discipline is suffering from low enrolments, as has often happened with my students, certainly doesn't hurt.

A writing seminar rooted in the discipline of anthropology in addition to ethnographic content must address the following questions about its rhetorical practices in a very concrete way: What writing practices does the discipline follow? How have these practices changed? What forms of argumentation are acceptable? What forms of evidence "count"? What is the particular relationship between theory and evidence that distinguishes ethnographic writing from other forms? These questions are explored throughout this article. I also discuss the challenges and rewards of teaching critical writing through anthropology, given that the students in writing seminars typically do not engage in the discipline's core methodology—participant observation. I argue that even if students do not conduct primary research, through understanding the construction of ethnographic texts they gain a valuable ability to relate theory to observable, real-world practices.

I am a trained cultural anthropologist who taught in a Writing Program for seven years. The United States-based university where I taught "brings together a uniquely discipline-based writing curriculum," as part of a Writing in the Disciplines (WID) approach. Katherine Harrington posits that "the fundamental aim of all Writing in the Disciplines (WID) work is to facilitate students' learning and understanding and their ability to contribute to the dialogue and knowledge generation processes of their fields of study" (Harrington 2011).

A WID approach to teaching writing within the university posits that writing is not only the stronghold of the departments of English or Composition. Rather, students will undertake writing assignments in a variety of disciplines throughout their undergraduate career. Therefore, they may learn and hone the fundamentals of critical writing through any of a variety of disciplines united by a common writing curriculum. Because they teach writing through a common curriculum in a wide variety of disciplines, WID departments tend to foster and encourage interdisciplinarity. My colleagues in the Writing Program taught and practised in the fields of political science, art, art history, English, geography, history, philosophy, planning, anthropology, film studies, and business, among others.

I have taught writing seminars in the departments of Anthropology and South Asia Studies. I have found that teaching writing through anthropology is very helpful to students because of the wide variety of evidence that is used within the discipline. The breadth and range of evidence permitted within contemporary anthropological research prepares students for writing and argumentation in other disciplines, and thereby encourages transfer. Students can use their exposure to multiple forms of evidence in anthropology writing seminars to bridge out into other classes and other types of writing. Ultimately, no matter the discipline from which students take their writing seminars, the goal is for students to develop metacognition of how and why to present and vary evidence based on a given discourse community, preparing students to transfer the knowledge from their college writing seminars to other contexts of writing and critical argumentation (Ross 2013, 33). I believe that several practices within anthropology can shed light on how this might be done.

Anthropology and Writing Pedagogy

Anthropology, as a discipline, is ecumenical about evidence. While anthropology's main methodology is participant observation—based on long-term and extremely detailed everyday observation of a particular social setting or phenomenon—within a contemporary ethnography one is likely to encounter extremely diverse forms of evidence (Bernard 2011). These include, but are not limited to: historical and archival evidence, statistical evidence, journalistic evidence, state reports and documents, oral histories, case studies, visual evidence, maps, genealogies, anecdotes, legal

documents, interviews and surveys, and reflexive first-person accounts. In addition, anthropology is poised between the humanities and social science (Bernard 2011, vii). An ethnography may contain strong humanistic elements, including lyrical and moving descriptions of a way of life or social suffering or pain, and strong social scientific elements, such as detailed data and quantitative evidence about the social phenomenon being studied. For example, Nancy Scheper-Hughes *Death Without Weeping* (1992), about the violence of everyday life in Brazil, includes narratives of the death of children (and the social conditions of extreme deprivation which produce "indifference" to them) which are tragic and deeply moving, as well as quantitative data about the political economy of the place that she is studying. It is this wide-ranging use of evidence, poised between humanistic and scientific, quantitative and qualitative, general and specific, which makes anthropology a particularly useful discipline from which to teach writing.

This breadth of evidence also facilitates transfer, as students in an anthropology-based writing seminar are exposed to various forms of evidence, which they are likely to encounter in other writing situations and courses. They also learn how and when to use particular forms of evidence (for example, quantitative versus qualitative evidence, or historical narrative versus journalistic accounts).

A majority of the students that I have taught have had most of their previous high-school-level writing experience in English classes, where their main mode of analysis was literary analysis, and their main source of evidence was textual. Students were most familiar with providing direct quotations from the text (in most cases novels or works of fiction) as evidence for their argument. Indeed, the connection between writing and literature is so strong that in the incoming class of 2014 at a major United States university, almost a third of students, in their first essays, called Anne Fadiman's non-fiction work *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* (1997) a "novel," thereby implying that they see most single-author books as novels, and are not familiar with other forms of non-fiction writing.

Regardless of the discipline in which a paper is being written, for many first-year college students, the default mode of providing evidence tends to be a direct quote that is seen to support the reason that is being explicated. Papers are often riddled with direct quotations, even in writing situations and disciplines where they are inappropriate and not part of genre conventions. In some cases, students paraphrased a small section of the text rather than providing direct quotes. Students tended to be less comfortable with summarising larger arguments or lines of reasoning provided in the text. They also did not have a great deal of familiarity with types of evidence which were not encapsulated in coherent and tightly bound texts, such as books and articles, and did not seem comfortable with delving into other types of scholarly sources for evidence, including newspapers and online databases. Finally, students had little or no experience with breaking out of text as a source of evidence—many of my students reacted largely with incredulity when encouraged to think about how lived experience, or the lives of people around them, could be the source of material and evidence for scholarly research.

Unlike in disciplines where the main mode of analysis and source of evidence tends to be textual, the basis of an ethnography is almost always real-world experiences based on long-term participant observation. Participant observation involves "going out and staying out, learning a new language … experiencing the lives of the people you are studying as much as you can … Participant observation involves immersing yourself in a culture and learning to remove yourself every day from that immersion so you can intellectualise what you've seen and heard, put it into perspective and write about it convincingly" (Bernard 2011, 258).[iv] This situation, where the wellspring of evidence is bound up not just in the printed words of a writer, but in the spoken words of people in the world, provides students with important exposure to alternate forms of knowledge production and evidence which are based on experience. It encourages them to question the centrality of the written text.

In the writing program that I taught, writing seminars were built around a single text, which students branched off to write a range of papers — from summaries to outlines, to argumentative to research-based. Let us consider a text that I assign in one of my classes on informal economies (economic practices which are not regulated by the law, but which are not necessarily criminal or illicit). *Pirate Modernity*, by Ravi Sundaram (2010) is not a conventional ethnography, nor is it deeply rooted within the method of participant observation, but given that the discipline of anthropology is now increasingly ecumenical not just about forms of evidence, but also about methods and sources, it is hard to argue that this is a major problem for practitioners of the field. *Pirate Modernity* tells a story about the rise of urban informality in New Delhi after the failure of formal urban planning, and it combines historical and archival research, media analysis, visual rhetoric, ethnography, interviews, field notes, first-person accounts and statistical evidence to support its arguments. Students have branched out from this text to write papers which include varied forms of evidence, appropriate to the subject being studied. While the modes of evidence that they employed varied greatly, students were able to make informed rhetorical decisions about first, what types of evidence would be

appropriate for their research topic, and second, what types of evidence might be most persuasive to an audience of their peers.

Since the writing program at which I taught was built around extensive peer review[v], in which each paper is critiqued and commented upon by classmates multiple times, students working with one form of evidence (e.g. historical) would routinely review the work of another student working with a completely different form, for example statistical. In this way, students gained a wide exposure to the appropriate use of different forms of evidence, even when they were concentrating on a singular form. Below I provide some examples of the types and range of evidence (beyond more-standard textual evidence that focuses specifically on the research text or on other scholarly sources such as journal articles) that students used in my writing seminars. To one extent or the other, these forms of evidence are both prevalent and acceptable within anthropology and were present in the text which the students were basing their research.

Reflexive/Personal Experience

Anthropology sees narrating and examining personal experience both as a valid form of knowledge production and as a source of evidence in some cases (Behar 1996). A student in my class, in addition to examining films and poetry, wrote about how a sense of alienation produced in him a love of fast cars because he couldn't identify with mainstream cultural practices in Brazil. Driving became an outlet for him as a self-described "cultural outsider".[vi] In another example, a student writing about the changes in the physical infrastructure of Shanghai described in great detail his experience of the current hyperreality of the city's fast-moving urban life and what this might mean to its residents, and compared it with experiences of visiting the city in earlier times. He felt confident doing this given that *Pirate Modernity* itself begins with the author's reminiscences of New Delhi in the past and his shifting experiences of New Delhi's accelerated present.

1. **Thick description**: As conceptualised by Clifford Geertz, drawing on the philosopher Gilbert Ryle, thick description is the extremely detailed description of a moment or an event or practice set within its conditions of significance, within its social and cultural context. It involves a profusion of detail describing an event or process, but the description involves not just the events taking place, but also their cultural meaning, context and their interpretation (Geertz 1958). Several students were both taken by this method and attempted to use an extremely modified, micro-scale, limited version of it. Students in my food anthropology class used this method to minutely analyse and write about their family meals or feasts that they had attended in terms of cultural meanings and contexts.
2. **Statistical:** Several students wrote papers on how informal transport systems (e.g. not centrally planned or legally regulated) provide an efficient form of transport in developing countries. They used statistical evidence, culled from media sources and government documents, as well as journal articles, to provide evidence for their arguments.
3. **Historical evidence and primary sources**: Students who wrote about the history of urban planning in India examined both New Delhi's original masterplan from the 1950s, as well as newspaper reports from the time regarding the implementation of the plan. Students also examined primary sources, such as internal government memos, and the master plan itself.
4. **Media analysis:** Many students wrote about topics, such as particular informal housing settlements (or slum settlements) in India, regarding which there were not many scholarly sources. So they culled information about these settlements from extensive analysis of newspaper sources and other online sources.
5. **Self-conducted surveys and interviews**: A student who wanted to write a paper about the market for used textbooks at the university (a kind of informal market) conducted a small survey with fellow students to see if they supported having a centralised and formalised place for their sale. She also interviewed students regarding their views on a centralised textbook marketplace and used their responses as evidence in support of her proposition.
6. **Literary and cultural analysis:** A student from Brazil became interested in why young people took high risks and enjoyed speeding. He wanted to write a paper on the thrill of speeding and the emotions behind it. As a business major, he was more comfortable with quantitative evidence, but he realised that statistics regarding speeding would not suffice here. So he wrote about the emotions produced by speed, after reading Marc Auge and Henri Lefebvre, as well as the movie *Crash*, and a poem by E.E. Cummings about cars.

These are some of the forms of evidence that students have become familiar with through the course of their writing within this seminar. Students who focused on one form of evidence, such as statistical, became familiar with other forms, such as reflexive writing or historical research, through the peer review process that is an intrinsic part of

writing seminars at the university where I taught. Peer review allows students to become familiar with diverse forms of evidence and challenges them to provide convincing, adequate and audience-appropriate evidence to support their reasons and propositions. In a scenario where such a wide range of evidence is acceptable, peer review and instructor feedback keeps the students on track in terms of writing pieces that are convincing, rigorous and discipline-appropriate. For example, during peer review, one student told her peer that his paper on car culture lacked quantitative evidence in places where some statistics on car ownership would further support the proposition. Conversely, a student's paper on micro-finance was critiqued for being overly data-heavy and dry, and lacking in explanation and sufficient interpretation of the statistical evidence provided.

A second benefit of being exposed to the wide range of evidence permitted within anthropology is that students break out of previous habits of an over-reliance on direct quotations in order to support their arguments. They begin to use quotations sparingly, and generally only where appropriate. In most cases, they can identify the rhetorical purpose behind their inclusion of a direct quotation and are certainly able to see that quoting or paraphrasing text is not the only way to support an argument, and in fact may be quite inappropriate in certain contexts and disciplines, such as Economics, while remaining central to others, such as English.

"I can do that?!": Questioning the Centrality of Text

Through writing practices within the discipline of anthropology, students are also, importantly, able to break out of the centrality of text itself as the main source of valid evidence. Indeed, within anthropology, the anthropologist's account of lived experience, rather than a synthesis of texts, is the source from which arguments and conclusions about the social world are derived. This slightly destabilises the authority of the text itself as the main source from which academic writing is culled. In general, students whose previous experience with writing has mostly been limited to literature courses find this ability to generate data from the world around them to be interesting, engaging, and promising. The "I can do that!" students have repeatedly asked me, with some incredulity, about the possibility of including interviews, personal experience, or descriptions of spaces or social events that they have experienced, within their papers. Those who choose to follow these leads, in whatever small and limited way within a one-semester writing seminar, find the experience rewarding and helpful for their writing. This process of learning to break out of text is important, as they receive a lesson early in their college careers that the world as they experience it, and social practices as they see them, are also possible and legitimate sources of knowledge, as much as a government report or a book in a library may be. This knowledge is important in fields ranging from business to law to journalism to public policy and medicine, but holds even greater significance; access to and representation in text in an unequal world is inherently unequal. Thus, questioning the centrality of text in a university setting allows for an acknowledgement of a massive social world that is largely excluded from it. For example, interviewing workers at a university as part of a first-year writing seminar about the role of the university in the world, and attempting to derive conclusions from those interviews, would lend itself to a very different way of seeing than that which would be produced by reading textual sources (even critical ones) about universities.

I believe that the wide range of evidence that students are exposed to within writing seminars grounded in anthropology aids in the process of transferring knowledge from one writing situation to another. Given the range of evidence that students encounter, they get a glimpse, however brief, of how evidence can take multiple forms, beyond quotation, and even beyond textual evidence. They learn that evidence differs based on discipline, audience, and discourse community (Ross 2013, 33). Through peer review and revision, they are able to identify appropriate contexts for particular forms of evidence and are able to modify their writing based on the audience they are writing to. Once the students are aware of these divergent forms, they are somewhat more prepared to modify and change their evidentiary practices based on the different discourse communities that they will encounter throughout their writing careers, whether as students, professional academics or citizens outside the ivory tower.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that within WID programs, anthropology is a fruitful discipline from which to teach writing because through anthropological writing students are exposed to a wide range of evidence and data. Encountering this range early in their college writing careers prepares students for the divergent evidentiary practices of different disciplines, fields and writing situations. The tremendously rewarding process of teaching in a Writing in the Disciplines program has made me aware that ultimately, no matter the discipline from which writing is being taught (whether anthropology or English or Business Studies), students should be made aware of the specific forms of evidence that are employed in the discipline. They should also be made aware that what constitutes evidence within another discipline can vary greatly. Courses should include some exercises which make students aware of different

forms of evidence which are acceptable in different fields. These exercises could include analysing how different disciplines may approach a similar topic. For example, in my Informal Economies course, students have also looked at how political scientists, economists, journalists and policymakers have approached the same topic—informal economies—very differently. Similarly, instructors within a literature course could spend time examining and sharing with students how different fields have examined the main themes of their course, with large variations in what might be considered acceptable evidence. For example, they could develop exercises around analysing what forms of evidence are used within the class, what other discourse communities may accept this form of evidence, why this particular form of evidence is used as opposed to another form, and finally, what forms of evidence will be considered invalid in other disciplines, fields or writing situations. In this way, students might develop metacognition of how and why to present and vary evidence based on the discourse community, thereby preparing them to transfer the knowledge about evidence gained from their writing seminars to other writing situations.

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Notes:

[i] For a history of the development of Writing Across the Curriculum programs see Russell (1990). Katherine Harrington's 2011 article on assessment strategies in Writing in the Disciplines pedagogy provides an excellent overview of the field.

[ii] An added benefit of anthropologists actively engaging in writing program pedagogy and writing studies research is that such engagements will enrich the field of writing studies itself, particularly with respect to the idea of culture. It can be argued that scholars of writing studies have at times used the culture concept in a manner that is overly simplistic, if not actively essentialising — see Atkinson 2004; Kubota and Lehner 2004.

[iii] I meandered into teaching in a standalone writing program after being unable to achieve tenure-track employment in the discipline of anthropology after applying for over 100 jobs over a three-year period. In retrospect, I consider this meandering — which I once saw as a personal failure and a source of great shame — as a gift. Working in a writing program where I received a living wage, essential benefits such as health insurance, and dignified conditions of work was a far better choice than the option of teaching as an adjunct in an anthropology department where I would have received none of the above. These were the two options I had in front of me in 2010, aside from exiting academia entirely. Equally importantly, working in the field of writing studies and pedagogy has opened up new intellectual and teaching engagements for me that have been integral to my growth as a teacher and a scholar. I now work at the intersection of two fields of scholarly inquiry.

[iv] Bernard's definition of participant observation echoes much discussed and debated tensions within anthropology about the assumptions that this definition makes about the anthropologist (always assumed to be from an outside culture, generally a Western and elite one), and the people observed (who must then be from a different, often more marginal culture). While "native anthropologists" have extensively critiqued this definition, it nonetheless remains the most standard one within the complex and hotly debated field of anthropological research methods.

[v] Students also write to a community of peers. The concrete audience for their writing is their peers in the class, rather than the instructor or some abstract and hypothetical "public" audience.