

# Partnering to Understand Undergraduate Research and Writing Longitudinally: the UPWARD Project

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# Introductions & Overview

52 *freshmen* from earlier study >>>

3 *seniors* for longitudinal study



Alyssa




Emma



John

# Research Questions

- How do students understand research and writing? As connected?
  - How have their understandings changed?
  - To what do they attribute influence?
- 

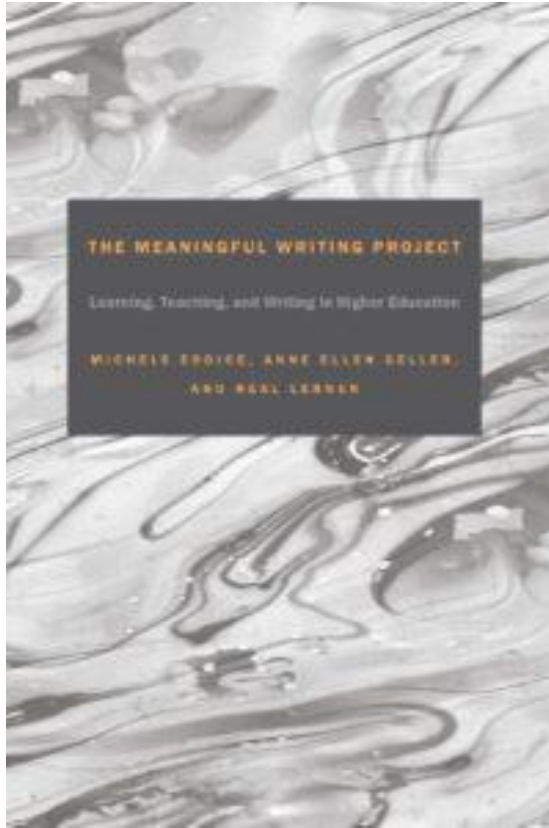
“research”--construction based on:

- what *authority* is/what sources are
- *activities* and *uses* of authority in sourced writing
- its *purposes*

## ACRL Framework

e.g., Authority Is Constructed and Contextual

“Learners . . . develop and maintain an open mind when encountering varied and sometimes conflicting perspectives”



## Meaningful writing experiences

involve:

- agency
- engagement (with faculty, other students, content)
- connections (past interests, future selves)

(Eodice, Geller, and Lerner, 2017)

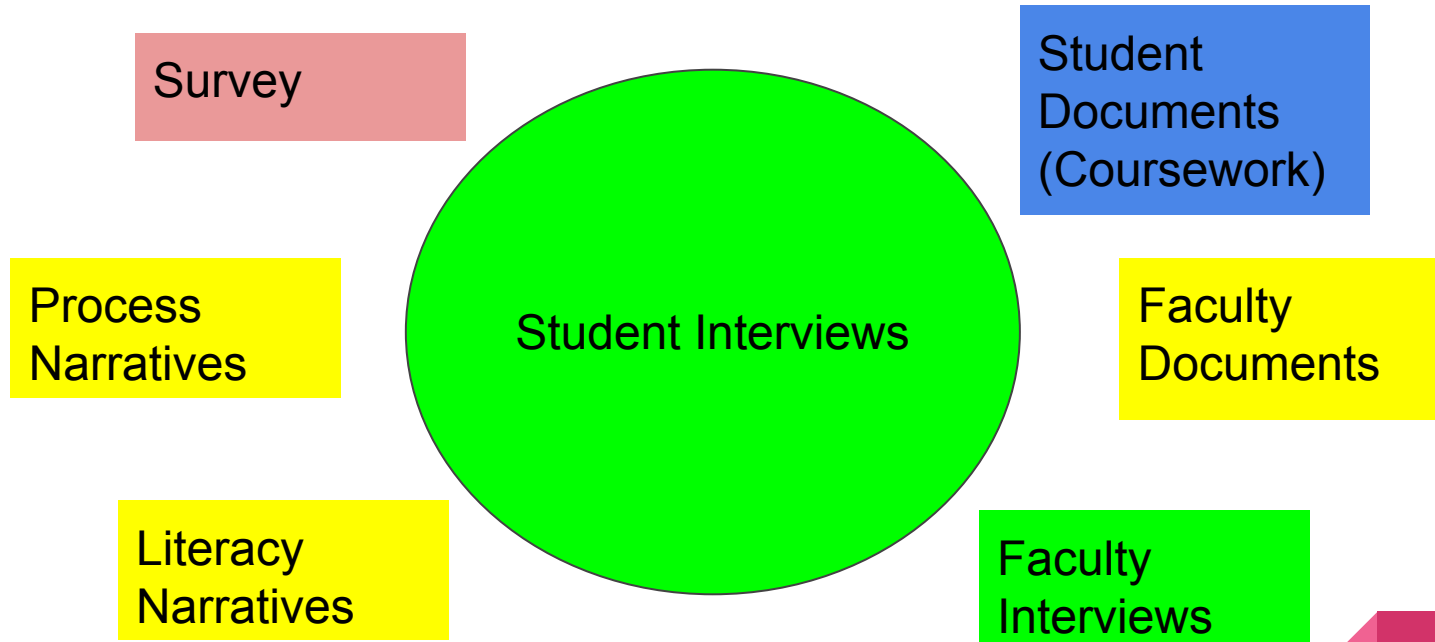
|        | Course Contexts for<br>More Meaningful Experiences | Course Contexts for<br>Less Meaningful Experiences  |
|--------|--|---|
| Emma   | Gender & Identity (Study Abroad)                   | Principles of Integrated Instruction:<br>Math/Science Focus, English<br>Literature Gen Ed (Study Abroad),<br>Independent Study (English<br>Literature Gen Ed) |
| John   | Econometrics                                       | English Literature Gen Ed,<br>Strategic Management  |
| Alyssa | Research Methods (Criminal<br>Justice)             | Business Management &<br>Organization Behavior, English<br>Literature Gen Ed (Online)   |



Methods, etc.



# “Collective Case Studies” (Creswell)



## Research Questions

- How do students understand research and writing? As connected?
- How have their understandings changed?
- To what do they attribute influence?

## Structural Codes

→ understand research  
understand writing

→ change

→ influence

change\capacity for growth\ "more developed rese

00:00:00/00:00:00

**Document System**

- Documents 343
  - NilanDocumentInterviewTranscriptDescriptive160819KathyCara 343
  - Sets 0

**NilanDocumentInterviewTranscriptDescriptive160819KathyCara**

45 *Alissa Nilan:* I was a much more developed researcher than I was when I wrote this one. Um, this one I think was from my – it was the summer I was going into my sophomore year, so that was two years ago now.

46 *Bill Carpenter:* Sure.

47 *Alissa Nilan:* And just from this time I didn't – not that I didn't know how to research, but I guess I didn't have all the tools I needed, and I wasn't really as invested in my research then as I was when last semester I wrote this one.

**Code System**

- Code System 343
  - influence 53
  - change 14
    - capacity for growth 2
      - learned that there's more to learn about research 1
      - now want to continue research after graduation 1
      - "didn't have all the tools" "I wasn't really as invested" 2
      - "more developed researcher" than sophomore 1
    - research method 7
    - confidence 4
    - interest in research 1

**Retrieved Segments**

0 I didn't have all the tools I needed, and I wasn't really as invested in my research

- NilanDocumentInterview... [ 47 - 47 ]
- change
- capacity for growth
- "didn't have all the to..."

## First Cycle

- Structural Coding
- Descriptive Coding


## Second Cycle

Pattern Coding

Cross-Case Analysis

# Major Findings

# Major Findings

The top right corner of the slide features a decorative arrangement of overlapping triangles in various shades of blue, ranging from dark navy to light sky blue.

Finding #1: Undergraduates come into our courses and workshops with very different understandings of research and writing that shape their experiences.

Finding #2: The research and writing experiences that undergraduates find meaningful change their understanding of research in some way--e.g. sense of authority, self-efficacy, research as an ongoing process.



Finding #3: Meaningful research and writing experiences can happen for undergraduates when:

- Students have agency.
- Students conduct primary research, assisted by means and methods.
- Faculty provide guidance and feedback, and remember students.

Finding #4: The meaning and potentiality of research and writing experiences are not necessarily manifested in projects and grades, often because of students' strategic investment of resources perceived to be limited.


# Case Study #1: Emma

# Emma

- Elementary Education Major
- Contexts:
  - Study Abroad Course
  - Upper-Level Education Course



# Emma: Finding #1

- Emma seems to understand research in several, sometimes contradictory ways
  - “Just – so, when I think of research, I enjoy, like, research and finding out for information, but I also – research for me – it's much more I'm told to do it . . . And it's much less about what I want to do. It's more about what I am told. Like, I have guidelines I have to follow.”
  - At one point, she defines research as “the hassle of kind of like finding credible sources.” A paper that she writes for an English course is not a “research paper” but an English paper because she works with two novels assigned as part of the course.
- 

# Emma: Finding #2

- A course on women and gender that she takes in South Africa is pivotal to her understanding of sources
- After this experience, an important way that she understands research is as “talking to people . . . Just hearing stories and hearing their facts 'cause that's how they do research in a lot of the places.” She is able to acknowledge that people as sources “have their different opinions”
- “I had no idea if these people were telling the truth or not. You've not looked, um, at the Internet. Like, you cannot verify them. But you just had to take all these, like, 20 to 30 people you've spoken to, make your judgment call, and then write about it”



# Emma: Finding #3


- **Agency:** Emma chooses her topic from a list that includes “being a female in South Africa.” She notes that, while she is in the course, 300 schoolgirls are kidnapped in Nigeria, which may contribute to her interest in this topic
- **Primary Research:** Emma interviews dozens of South Africans whose views on gender and equality differ based on their respective age, gender, and socioeconomic class.
- **Faculty Guidance/Feedback:** In this project, the professor provided students with a worksheet that they needed to use to collect background information about her interviewees, and then she discussed her ideas about the significance of this demographic data with Emma



# Emma: Finding #3

“But I would also specify their – so we had to do – we had to turn in a sheet with the first name, the ethnicity, and, like, the culture, and just, like, the age of the people we've asked. So then we had to, like, reference just their first name in the paper.

So then my teacher would, like, look back and say, "Okay. Well, she's from this part of town," or, "She was born in Botswana, but she came to South Africa when she was seven because – for, like, a better life, or for this, or for that." So then in the paper a lot of the information and the explanation behind the people and who said what was already on this, like, extra sheet of paper.”





# Emma: Finding #4

- In her education course, Emma understands her A grade as not so much based on her work as fulfilling the requirements of a checklist
- “But that's just how a lot of education professors are in the sense that we – that's why, like, a lot of education majors – like, we don't expect Bs just because teachers will kind of give us every guideline necessary for us to get that A. And if you don't follow it, then that's your purely your fault”
- Emma does not recall what she received on the primary research paper study abroad paper and she does not save a copy of the paper.



# Case Study #2: John

# John

- Business Administration Major
  - Minors in Finance and Economics



# John: Finding #1

- John brings an understanding of research and writing to a gen ed English class that conflicts with course expectations. Sources are limited to “expert opinion”: “You know, there wasn't a whole lot, I thought, [of scholarship] to analyze about either one of them.”
- John’s understanding of research aligns with his Business/Econ/Finance courses, where projects are competitive, sources are experts or specialized databases, and the data speaks for itself.



## John: Finding #2

- John changes as a researcher: In Econometrics, John acquires a sense of himself as a researcher through a demanding stats project. Its meaning for him resides in the self-efficacy he experiences when teaching himself the tool (statistics) to use the method (software/databases).



# John: Finding #3

- Primary research: John's meaningful research experiences involve primary research methods using specialized software and databases.
- Faculty guidance: John quotes his professor as saying, "tell the story of the variables," which is the only time John elaborates on data as more than self-evident.



# John: Finding #4

- One reason John finds the ENG 2200 project “meaningless” is that he knows he did not do well on it (a performance orientation rather than grade orientation).
- John finds the Econometrics experience meaningful because of its difficulty, not due to the grade.



# Case Study #3: Alyssa



# Alyssa

- Criminal Justice and Business Double Major
- Contexts:
  - Online English Literature Course
  - Criminal Justice Research Methods



# Alyssa: Finding #1

- Before taking her criminal justice research methods course, Alyssa's experience with research appears to have been mostly negative and not meaningful.
- Gen ed lit course: "I didn't really feel the need to go out and really do a lot of research and pull from a lot of sources, because I didn't know any better really."
- CJ research methods: "I actually didn't think I was going to like this course, when I – oh I guess I saved it for my senior year. I was like I don't – I don't want to do that. I don't want to sit in research all day[.]"




## Alyssa: Finding #2

- Alyssa's online gen ed lit course was not a meaningful experience for her. She was trying to fulfill the professor's expectations just to get a good grade.
- She was just "getting the information that she [the professor] asked for into the paper."
- As a result, she describes relying on the techniques and resources she learned in high school, rather than progressing in her research abilities.



# Alyssa: Finding #2


- In contrast, her criminal justice research methods course was a meaningful experience for her.
  - “I don't really think it solidified for me until I took this course, and it was all about research that it finally meant something to me, so it's just...I guess just understanding the why behind it, like the why were we researching and we are we – why is it important to look at a credible source versus Wikipedia or something? That there is a difference between them and that you have to look and make sure it's a credible source before you just take it as true kind of thing, so.”
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# Alyssa: Finding #2


- “Because even if you're just looking up something silly, you kind of have to pay attention to where you're pulling your information from, because you don't want to sound ridiculous. And you're like, “Oh I got this answer.” And it's totally wrong. So even if it is something silly you should kind of take enough pride in your work to make sure that the information you're gathering is accurate and is correct. So I just think in general it really applies to a lot of places in other than just academic wise.”
- “I think now I'm a lot more confident and it I would feel comfortable going out and doing any sort of research now, because I know even though this course was focused on criminal justice, it also focuses on just the basics of any sort of research.”




# Alyssa: Finding #3

- In her online gen ed lit course, she just tried to answer the question the professor gave her by picking a stance and supporting it.
  - She acknowledges that she “wasn’t really as invested” in research for this course.
  - She did not have any agency in her choice of topic, and although she was working with primary texts, she approached them as a textbook, and she did not develop any kind of relationship with her professor.
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# Alyssa: Finding #3

- In her CJ course, Alyssa chose her own topic and was genuinely invested in it.
  - “...but then after doing it I realized oh wow, this is something I love. This is something I'm interested in, and it takes my two passions. It's criminal justice and football.”
  - “[B]ecause it is a topic that I enjoyed, it never felt like a project to me, and I think that that's why I was interested in possibly continuing to pursue it even after the course is over.”
  - “It was a field that I wanted to discover and learn. It was something that was interesting to me, so I was able to use sources and really use engage, like engage in my sources more in this paper [CJ] than in this one [gen ed lit].”
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# Alyssa: Finding #3

- In her CJ course, she is involved in primary research through developing a hypothetical research project.
  - “I talked about setting up a comfortable environment, where whoever you're interviewing would be comfortable in telling you the truth, and make sure that they understand that this isn't a legal issue. This is a research issue and you're not in, you know, you won't be identified, or. So because I would be taking the precautions to make it as comfortable as I can to get the most accurate information I could, I don't think it would be a credibility issue for myself.”
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# Alyssa: Finding #3

- In CJ, Alyssa's professor significantly influences her experience in the course.
- "He always told us at the beginning of the course, you know, 'You can take your research as far as you want.'"
- "So I guess in the beginning of class, or in the beginning of the course, uh, we were taught kind of how to go about reading an article, because obviously they can be 50 pages easily... So how to pull and where to pull from. So [the professor] taught us about how you should read the abstract. Decide if it's something you need to read, and then kind of go on and how to go about tackling an article like that."



# Alyssa: Finding #4

- Alyssa received an A on her gen ed lit course paper, which exempted her from having to take the final, yet she is somewhat dismissive of the experience.
- She “didn’t really feel the need to go out and really do a lot of research and pull from a lot of sources.”
- “I don’t really think sources played a lot into it, because from what I’m looking at my work site [Works Cited], it doesn't really look like I had a lot of sources.”



# Alyssa: Finding #4

- Even though Alyssa received a B on her CJ project, the experience was still more meaningful and impactful to her understanding of research.
- “Throughout my college career I feel like this [the research methods project] is where I was finally comfortable using outside sources and comfortable reading articles, and journals, and using them to apply it to something that I was trying to research and something that I found interesting. So I think that I successfully used sources to write this paper and to form this project.”



# Alyssa: Finding #4

- “[I]f you would have asked me before I wrote this paper or before I took this class, I probably would have told you oh yeah, like I'm a good researcher. I know what I'm doing. But then after taking this I realized I'm not a good researcher and now I've learned from this class and I've learned a lot on – so I'm sure that there is more out there that I can learn.”



# Implications

(to learn more, see

<http://upwardproject.online/>)