

Guest Editors' Introduction

Writing To/With the Real World in the Southwest

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Welcome to the special issue of *Prompt* focused on the University of Arizona Writing Across the Curriculum program. In this Editor's Note, co-editors Aimee and Emily Jo invite readers to imagine student writing at the University of Arizona (U of A) in Tucson, Arizona, where four mountain ranges encircle the city. While Tucson is known for marvelous sunsets, perhaps the most emblematic image of the region is the Saguaro cactus. Standing tall against the desert landscape, the bluish gray to pale green, ribbed Saguaro can live up to 200 years and grow to 40 feet tall, sprouting arms only after 75 years in the Sonoran Desert (Arizona Sonora Desert Museum, n.d.). Their prickly spines can be as long as three inches, offering protection from desert critters. For millennia, the O'odham have respected Saguaro as nourishers of the community (Indian Reservation, 2025; National Park Service, n.d.). Saguaro sustain the desert, feeding generations. Their flowers offer nectar for insects and bats. Birds, mammals, and people eat their fruit. Over time, the trunk serves as a nesting site. The Saguaro is a symbol of resilience in the desert from which we seek lessons as directors of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) at U of A, a Hispanic-Serving and land-grant institution founded on seized land of the O'odham and Yaqui peoples.

WAC at U of A was initially funded in January of 2020, just months before a once-in-a-century pandemic. When it is estimated that over half of WAC programs fail to persist (Thaiss & Porter, 2010, p. 558), how to sustain WAC programming was and remains an urgent need. Along with the rest of the world in spring 2020, U of A navigated tremendous stressors—work-from-home Zoom teaching, caring for children or elders, furloughs, and devastating labor loss. WAC needed to be resilient, like Saguaro in the desert. The vision was to sustain a vertically integrated Writing Across the Curriculum program that supports student writers to connect writing knowledge from first-year writing, general education (GE), and capstone writing experiences in their major (Cox, 2010; Melzer, 2014). Specifically, U of A students complete a first-year writing course, called Foundations, at least two GE courses approved as writing intensive pedagogy, and at least one writing emphasis course in their major. First in foundations writing, students begin their academic writing journey learning about genre, writing as a process, and reflection in the English writing program. Students continue this writing journey when they complete two GE writing intensive courses that integrate writing as a tool for learning and require a sustained writing project with a well-defined rhetorical situation that involves revision. Finally, capstone writing experiences typically happen in the last two semesters of a learner's journey where students write in authentic genres of their major in a writing emphasis course taught by faculty in their discipline. With a stronger vertically-integrated writing curriculum, U of A's WAC program persisted and received the 2022 Exemplary Emerging WAC Program from the Association of Writing Across the Curriculum (AWAC). This special issue celebrates several faculty who have contributed to the resilience of U of A's award-winning WAC program. We uplift the labor of faculty who work with university writers at various touchpoints across a developmental trajectory.

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U of A Context

Housed in the university's center for teaching and learning, U of A WAC embraces localized, coalitional practices of faculty development as pathways to sustain writing pedagogy committed to linguistic justice. Aligned with the goals of a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), we advocate for meaningful writing experiences across the curriculum. We lean on resonant scholarship in antiracist WAC pedagogy (Baker-Bell, 2020; Condon & Young, 2013; Inoue, 2021; Perryman-Clark, 2023; Young et al., 2014), culturally sustaining or asset-based pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017), multilingual writers (Shapiro et al., 2016; Zawacki & Cox, 2014; Zhang-Wu et al., 2023), and the Meaningful Writing Project (Eodice et al., 2016, 2025). All support commitments to servingness for Latina/o/x students, which calls for not simply enrolling Hispanic students but systematically serving them (Barajas, 2017; G. Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; G. A. Garcia & Koren, 2020; González, 2024; Kareem, 2023; Tinoco, 2025; Venegas, 2017). Servingness amplifies the role of university education for students, according to Venegas and coauthors (2017), to “connect the content of the class to their *real world*, make the work of the class directly ‘useful’ and relevant to their day-to-day lived realities” (emphasis added). This commitment to curriculum that connects to the real world is also, as Eodice, Geller, and Lerner demonstrate, a frequent marker of meaningful writing, especially to support consequential connections for student writers. This special issue is a humble appreciation of these commitments to writing pedagogy in higher education and the value of real-world writing to and with diverse communities locally and disciplinarily.

U of A is located 100 miles southeast of Phoenix and 60 miles north of the US-Mexico border where the US city of Nogales is contiguous with the port of entry city of Nogales in northern Mexico, spanning the Sonoran Desert. Tucson boasts the Saguaro National Park and is designated an UNESCO City of Gastronomy (see [Visit Tuscon](#)). On campus, students and faculty often hear the loud boom of fighter jets leaving or returning to Davis-Monthan Air Force Base just south of campus. The top three employers in the greater Tucson area are Raytheon Missiles, Banner University Medical Center, and the University of Arizona. Substantial in size, over 5,000 faculty and staff at U of A serve 40,000 undergraduate and 10,000 graduate students. While more than half of the students are Arizona residents, U of A student demographics do not align exactly with the greater Tucson community. Approximately 43% of the city is Latino/a/x¹ while just 27% of U of A students are (Census Dots, n.d.). About a quarter of our students are over twenty-five years of age. Distinct for its status as an HSI, U of A is a flagship public R1 that was designated a land-grant institution in 1890, which was twenty-seven years before Arizona became a state (The University of Arizona, 2025a). Its top five majors include Psychology, Business Administration & Management, Legal Professions, Communication, and Nursing. With a desert sky, U of A boasts stellar degree programs in aerospace engineering and planetary science as well as animal sciences, biology, cybertechnology, dance, entomology, information sciences, and public health.

To serve students across disciplinary fields, WAC operates a program of tiered, contextualized training to instructional faculty. We promote the principle in writing studies that all writers have more to learn (Rose, 2015) and that students' diverse language and literacy practices are assets to integrate into the writing process. Our program embraces students as learners experiencing writing across contexts whose developmental trajectories support increased rhetorical dexterity (Gere, 2019). According to Dan Melzer (2014), this should be a hallmark of a university's “connected writing curriculum” (p. 83). For students, this means most have a common introduction to academic writing, and as they advance toward a degree, they navigate very different disciplinary writing, sometimes simultaneously.

Real-World Writing at U of A

The assignments in this issue represent the kinds of real-world writing that students experience during their journey through foundations writing, general education courses, and writing in the major (see The University of Arizona, 2025c). The featured prompts were designed by faculty who have participated in WAC professional development. They teach a variety of course modalities and calendars, such as asynchronous 7.5-week sessions and traditional, in-person 16-week semester courses. Some teach in large-enrolled, lecture-style courses of 50 to 150 students with the support of TAs, writing tutors, or undergraduate preceptors. Others teach smaller, writing-intensive classes with only 20 to 30 students. Their assignments align with WAC's mission (The University of Arizona, 2025b). Projects invite students to reflect on lived experiences, to understand real-world genres, and to practice real-world writing for their future careers. Some engage with Generative AI. Some emphasize writing as a tool for learning. Others assign writing for authentic contexts and audiences. As such, students write for diverse purposes that draw on personal experience, simulate real-world scenarios, navigate multimodal projects, learn professional genres, communicate real-world topics to communities, and write collaboratively. The special issue includes writing assignments that reflect writing across the curriculum at U of A. Each essay is written by faculty members whose courses serve students at different touchpoints across their undergraduate experience in general education and writing in the major.

Real-World Through Lived Experiences

The first two pieces illustrate the importance of students' home, ancestral, and community knowledges. By validating students' real-world, lived experiences, instructors offer students an opportunity to make connections between content knowledge and familial knowledge, supporting transfer and connections between the two. The authors highlight writing-to-learn and reflection as opportunities to invite students into their disciplines, and they argue that these writing experiences are particularly important for marginalized students who are often gatekept from academic spaces. The authors illustrate these points through their own instructional perspectives but also through rich collaboration and partnership with students and student examples, which further solidifies the meaningfulness of these writing opportunities for building trust and relationships in the classroom. Instructors across all disciplines can incorporate similar writing assignments that emphasize what students already know and acknowledge how they know as valuable and important for their learning.

In the first piece, "Rooted: Writing Counterstories in Environmental Education," by Leona Davis, she provides a decolonized writing-to-learn assignment, elevating the importance of ancestral and community knowledges to environmental studies. Through detailed undergraduate student examples and anecdotes with this assignment, she illustrates the importance of these opportunities for interpreting environmental issues and building trust within the classroom.

The next piece, "To Be Human is to Be Limited: Student Perspectives on Self Through Meaningful Reflective Writing," comes from Public Health and is co-authored by faculty member Laura Gronewold and undergraduate Teaching Assistants Alyssa G. Norris and Sylvia Persin: it emphasizes the effectiveness of the writing opportunities from multiple stakeholders in the classroom. The assignment and reflection emphasize the role of student choice and positionality, which provides a bridge between the funds of knowledge students bring with them into the classroom and the domain knowledge of the disciplines they are entering into.

Real-World Contexts and Genres

Three pieces in this issue illustrate the role of real-world genres in supporting students' transfer of learning in general education or in the major. They illustrate creative approaches for students to learn about artificial intelligence, multimodal writing, and collaborative writing. Common in the assignments is an awareness of genre, which, as a threshold concept in writing studies, is a challenging framework, but one that supports learning transfer and adaptability (Driscoll et al., 2020). By experiencing how genres help discourse communities achieve goals, reinforce shared values, and communicate to various audiences, students experience how and why writing works across contexts. The U of A program leans on genre awareness when training instructors from all disciplines to support students' transfer of writing across contexts, and these pieces illustrate tangible ways to begin these conversations. The writing assignments introduce and encourage students to enter their field via authentic scenarios and communities. As Eodice, Geller, & Lerner (2025) remind us, a main reason we should assign writing is to develop students' disciplinary and professional identities. The final pieces offer strategic ways in which instructors develop real-world assignments that enable students to engage authentically in contexts and to transfer writing knowledge into future writing situations. The prompts highlight the importance of both *content* and *genre* as elements for writing assignments with relevant disciplinary connections. Instructors across disciplines can benefit from learning about how to situate writing in their disciplines' values and practices.

In "Engaging Students in Implementing Generative Artificial Intelligence: Creating Simple Infographics to Reinforce Sustainable Living Concepts," Crimmins and Prudic showcase a writing project in a General Education course in the Natural Sciences approved as a writing intensive course. The project highlights a timely issue with which instructors are grappling, artificial intelligence, and how a multimodal genre that is authentic for students can support this pedagogical reckoning. Students at U of A from several courses to fulfill the requirement Natural Sciences. In this GE course, however, students consider how to write for the public about environmental issues. Ever the citizen scientists, Crimmins and Prudic share a project in which students learn about infographics and Generative AI.

In "Employing Different Writing Tasks to Support Genre Awareness in a Nursing Writing Emphasis Course," Lateefah Collingwood and Aimee Mapes reflect on changes made to a high-stakes literature review assignment in a required writing emphasis course in the Nursing major. The revised assignment shifts the focus from simply compliance with APA format by integrating sustained reflective writing. As a result, the multi-step assignment helps nursing majors to synthesize scholarly research through a culturally congruent patient care framework by adapting the findings of the literature review into a reflective infographic.

Finally, in "Grey Areas and Egress: Artifact-Based Collaborative Learning in Cybersecurity Ethics," Ryan Straight provides tangible, real-world examples for students to manipulate, play, and engage with. His assignment capably prepares future cybersecurity professionals to model authentic disciplinary genres while also learning to write collaboratively. Through several writing tasks, students respond to critical, case-based scenarios.

Real-World Writing Across the Curriculum

In this special issue, the assignments demonstrate strategies for making writing matter across the curriculum at U of A through participatory, equity-minded pedagogy. All represent the commitment to supporting student writers aligned with the goals of WAC at U of A to support inclusive writing instruction across all disciplines with broad student reach. Common across this special issue are realities of teaching writing in our institutional context in Tucson, Arizona. At U of A, WAC is a coalition of teacher-scholars committed to supporting writing in the real world

of southern Arizona. Like the Saguaro, our WAC program builds resilience through sustained engagement with diverse faculty and the community we serve.

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Notes

¹This statistic does not account for our worthy and essential undocumented and unhoused community members.

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