

Colloquium on Student Writing

Education Professors' Perceptions of and Attitudes toward Student Writing

Trevor J. Gambell
university of saskatchewan

University professors from various disciplines within Education often comment on the inabilities of student writers and the errors displayed in their writing. Working from the premise that faculty attitudes towards and perceptions of student writing likely reveal their own knowledge of the writing process and their own expectations of students as writers, Education professors were asked in a survey to list and rank perceived student writing errors and problems, to describe the types of written course requirements demanded of students, and to note the types of written examinations set for students.

The results of the survey are reported in conjunction with professors' comments and examples of student writings, and explanations are provided for some perceived student difficulties. Discussion of positive aspects of student writing lead one to conclude that student writing is generally perceived as being acceptable. However, there are recurrent writing problems that do not seem to be developmental and that need regular attention of faculty and students.

When all findings were analyzed, it appeared that, rather than identifying student errors in syntax and mechanics, professors were identifying the inability of students to deal successfully with the argumentative mode. Though the majority of professors demanded that students write in the argumentative mode, they were unaware of the rhetorical demands of this mode of discourse, and the major difficulty with student writing appeared to be the students' inability to deal with the rhetorical aspects of this mode.

Les professeurs d'université rattachés à diverses disciplines en sciences de l'éducation font souvent état des difficultés d'écrire de leurs étudiants et des fautes relevées dans leurs travaux. En posant comme prémisse que les attitudes du corps professoral envers la façon d'écrire des étudiants et les perceptions de ces derniers en la matière révèlent probablement leurs propres façons de comprendre l'art d'écrire et leurs propres attentes vis-à-vis de la performance des étudiants, on a demandé aux professeurs en sciences de l'éducation de dresser par ordre d'importance une liste des fautes d'écriture et des problèmes des étudiants en la matière, de décrire les types de travaux écrits que les étudiants doivent faire ainsi que le genre d'examens écrits que les étudiants ont à passer.

Les résultats du sondage ainsi que les commentaires des professeurs et des exemples tirés des écrits des étudiants sont présentés; on donne en outre des explications pour certaines des difficultés des étudiants. L'analyse des aspects positifs des écrits des étudiants nous amène à conclure que ces écrits sont perçus règle générale, comme étant acceptables. Certains problèmes, qui ne semblent pas des problèmes de développement, reviennent cependant toujours et exigent, de la part des professeurs comme des élèves une attention toute particulière.

Une fois toutes les données analysées, il est ressorti qu'au lieu d'identifier les fautes

syntaxiques et techniques des étudiants, les professeurs avaient mis en lumière l'inaptitude des étudiants à manier l'argumentation. Bien que la majorité des professeurs demandent à leurs étudiants de rédiger leurs travaux de cette manière, ces derniers ne connaissent pas les exigences propres à ce type de discours. La principale difficulté des étudiants résiderait donc dans le fait qu'ils ne savent pas rédiger en tenant compte des aspects rhétoriques de l'argumentation.

At the University of Saskatchewan, as on many campuses throughout Canada, faculty are concerned about what is perceived as the poor writing ability of students. In our College of Education, other professors approach me with student assignments displaying unsophisticated writing and rhetorical features. These professors are vague when asked to describe the writing problems perceived, and students are equally unclear what the issues and problems really are. Global statements about poor essays or inferior writing are voiced, but all too often it is difficult having people identify or list specifics. What is the problem, and just how extensive is it?

To answer these questions I developed a questionnaire with which to determine what College of Education professors at the University of Saskatchewan perceive as problems in undergraduate student writing. My interest was to determine the specifics of what were perceived as student writing problems. However, I also wanted to discover if any relationships existed between professors' perceptions of student writing problems, the types of written course requirements (major papers and examinations) demanded of students, and attitudes towards writing as conveyed by comments and examples of student writing. The questionnaire was developed in part drawing from categories and types of error identified by Diederich (1974) and from my own lecture material on rhetorical modes.

The extensive questionnaire¹ was distributed to all 73 full-time faculty members (excluding those on sabbatical leave) at the beginning of the first term of the 1983–84 academic year. They had until the end of term to complete the questionnaire and were encouraged to collect and attach samples of student writing during that time. Although anonymity was guaranteed on responses to the questionnaire and in the reporting of results, some respondents made themselves known and some also commented at length.

The questionnaire asked for considerable data; in fact, its length discouraged some professors from responding. I anticipated that length might be a problem but considered that completion of the questionnaire would be spread over the length of the term. As it turned out, most completed it at a single sitting. There is little doubt that the length of the

questionnaire and the amount of time required to complete it at one sitting discouraged some from doing so. After several written reminders and knocking on doors, I collected 33 responses representing 52% of the full-time teaching faculty on campus that term.

Respondents were asked to indicate their departments, levels and types of courses taught (junior or senior, compulsory or elective), whether they required written examinations in their courses, the types of examinations set, and the types of assignments used. Then came a detailed listing of student writing errors which respondents checked and marked, and to which they could add and give examples of collected student writing to illustrate error types.

The questionnaire bias toward errors, error types, and error analysis, a traditional grammar approach to language study, and a focus on product with little concern for process will appear conservative and unsophisticated to readers of this journal, but this approach was deliberately chosen. With the exception of professors of English education and those in cognate areas, I decided not to assume that professors were aware of a process approach to writing and writing research nor that they had a sound background in generative grammar, developmental syntax, rhetoric, discourse, evaluation of and response to writing, and aspects of composition theory. By a *process approach* to writing I refer to awareness of and attention to the stages through which the writer goes when creating a written product which the professor evaluates as final copy. The process includes the stages, usually referred to as prewriting, writing, and post-writing or revising. The movement through stages is usually thought of as recursive rather than linear.

Professors' comments about student writing prior to the study led to this assumption. However, such discussion did lead me to believe that they would be relatively familiar with error types and error analysis using traditional grammar terms. (I do not belittle my colleagues in making the assumption; I could not be expected to be aware of current developments and research in their areas of educational discipline.)

I begin with the background findings. There was a good balance between junior courses (first and second years, 22 responses) and senior courses (third and fourth years, 25 responses); 14 professors checked both. Also, a fair balance existed between compulsory or core program courses (18 responses) and elective courses (22 responses) with 7 professors checking both. Therefore the results should represent undergraduate courses throughout the four-year B.Ed. elementary and secondary programs and student selection of courses.

Almost all professors required written midterm and final examinations. (At the University of Saskatchewan final examinations are required

unless an instructor applies for and is granted an exemption.) The most common type of written examination was one requiring short essays, defined as those taking less than 30 minutes to write. Very few professors used single sentence or multiple choice formats. The majority (three-quarters) of the respondents required students to write in essay format in connected discourse, where students needed to substantiate a topic or issue and to develop a written response which required organization of thought and content.

Written assignments were used as part of course requirements by all but two professors. The most common type of assignment was described as a critical analysis paper (15 responses). This type of assignment demanded an argumentative (persuasive) mode of discourse, including a definite structuring of the paper and the need to arrive at a conclusive statement which followed logically from the argument.

Three types of assignments were equally popular. The research paper requiring review of literature was used by 12 professors; the research report which described original research done by the student was used by 11 respondents. (Original research at the undergraduate level is generally limited to conducting an experiment with children using a particular instructional mode or using materials developed specially, undertaking a small survey, or replicating part of a research study conducted and reported elsewhere.) The conceptual development paper made up the major type of written assignment issued by 11 professors. This paper required the expository (descriptive) mode of discourse. (As some professors required more than one written assignment, the total exceeds 33.)

PERCEIVED PROBLEMS AND DEFICIENCIES IN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT WRITING

The questionnaire was organized under five subheadings around which discussion is presented. The subheadings are the five categories used to group items in the questionnaire. Items might appear to be arbitrarily categorized to some readers, but I attempted to classify items in ways that might seem most logical or consistent to professors specializing in other than English education. Respondents were asked to both check and rank items. Items were checked if they appeared in student writings, and all checked items were ranked according to frequency of occurrence.

After presenting the findings in each category, I discuss possible causes for the student writing problems and deficiencies identified by professors. These explanations are developed from written comments made by the professors but primarily from the examples of student writings they provided.

TABLE 1
Problems in Syntactic Construction: Tallies and Rankings

	<i>Total Checked</i>	<i>Total Weighted Rankings</i>
1. Sentence fragment, incomplete sentence	20	50
2. Comma splice, fused sentence (main clauses joined only by a comma without a conjunction, or nothing at all)	17	47
3. Run-on or strung-together sentences (more than two main clauses unless they are short, of the same pattern, or separated by semicolons)	17	50
4. Subject-verb agreement	17	42
5. Pronoun-antecedent agreement	15	33
6. Pronoun reference	15	47
7. Verb tense: wrong form, improper sequence, needless shift	19	35
8. Parallel structure	18	40
9. Misplaced modifiers (especially dangling participles)	14	31
10. Other(s) (please specify)	6	10

Problems in Syntactic Construction

Sentence fragments and errors in verb tense appeared slightly more often than did other items.² When weighted rankings were considered, sentence fragments and run-on sentences were equal in frequency. Following closely in ranked occurrence were comma splices and errors in pronoun reference. Sentence fragments, incomplete sentences, comma splices, fused sentences, and run-on or strung-together sentences – the first three items in Table 1 – are all problems dealing with coherence and cohesion between and among sentences and ideas. Such problems may result from the writer's losing the subject or idea while composing, and neglecting to go back to the subject or idea as first stated. Sentence fragments may result from a desire to add information which is antecedent to the previous sentence. This suggests an add-on approach to writing. Sentence fragments may also be explained by the writer's simply adding ideas and thoughts as they spring to mind. The writer does not pause to integrate the thoughts and to structure them before committing

TABLE 2
Problems in Usage: Tallies and Rankings

	<i>Total Checked</i>	<i>Total Weighted Rankings</i>
1. Carelessly omitted words or parts of words, especially endings	18	44
2. Adjective for adverb and vice versa	17	40
3. Confusion of subject and object forms of pronouns <i>I, we, he, she, they, who</i> (Many linguists accept <i>who</i> as an object form, especially in questions, but <i>whom</i> is not accepted as a subject form)	15	37
4. <i>Shall-will, should-would</i>	13	30
5. Abbreviations in sentences	15	29
6. Contractions (such as <i>don't</i>)	14	36
7. Possessives: Omitted or misplaced apostrophe (<i>her's, it's, your's</i>)	23	47
8. Other(s) (please specify)	4	9

them to paper. Nor does the writer attempt to integrate one sentence or idea with another. Writing that contains sentence fragments, along with comma splices and run-on sentences, will likely read as disjointed, fragmented, even desultory discourse.

Problems in Usage

Professors were sometimes confused themselves between usage and syntax. Some commented that students' use of prepositions for adjectives ("Like I said") and collective nouns taking a singular verb ("Edmonton is in town for a football game") were syntactic problems. In this usage category, possessives ostensibly created most problems for students, followed by careless omission of words or parts of words, then use of adjectives for adverbs and vice versa.

In each category professors were asked to rank items (errors) checked from most commonly occurring to least commonly occurring. For purposes of analysis, rankings were weighted and added to give a total for each item. When weighted rankings were totalled, the use of possessives again was the most commonly perceived problem in usage, followed by the other two described above.

TABLE 3
Problems in Conceptualization: Tallies and Rankings

	<i>Total Checked</i>	<i>Total Weighted Rankings</i>
1. Paucity of ideas	19	57
2. Lack of logical development	26	74
3. Lack of coherence	18	45
4. Ideas or argument not leading to the stated or logical conclusion	22	57
5. Inability to address the topic or subject	13	28
6. No clear notion of audience	12	16
7. Use of unrelated ideas and information	19	26
8. Other(s) (please specify)	1	6

Having analyzed the student examples provided by respondents, it seemed to me that problems with use of the possessive probably arise when students overcompensate when uncertain what usage applies. They tended to use an apostrophe before *s* when unsure and consequently overgeneralized to instances when it was incorrect.

Careless omission of words or parts of words occurred probably because students neglected to proofread. This conclusion of mine was corroborated when I spoke with students, and professors volunteered similar comments in the general comments section of the questionnaire. The use of adjectives for adverbs and vice versa is common in casual speech: the "good/well" and "nice/nicely" distinctions are ones which are not made usually in informal talk, but it is necessary to make the distinction in formal writing. These students and many students encountered in teaching were not familiar with the formal usage demands of academic writing, and the problem suggests a lack of familiarity with appropriate levels of usage.

Problems in Conceptualization

The items that make up this category are of a rhetorical nature; they point to the inability of the writer to address and develop the problem, theory, or argument; to structure the written response; and to address clearly the topic and the audience. In the questionnaire, professors checked lack of logical development as the greatest problem in this category and ranked it

considerably higher than any other category item. The next most commonly checked item was that of ideas or arguments not leading to the stated or logical conclusion. Paucity of ideas and use of unrelated ideas and information were listed together as the third most commonly perceived problem of conceptualization.

When professors' comments and student writings were analyzed, it appeared that the problem as conceived – lack of logical development – arose from the students' inability to develop an argumentative paper and, as part of that development, select and order ideas to lead to a sound, well-argued conclusion. Paucity of ideas might be related to an inability to select appropriate central ideas and supporting or secondary related ideas or to a lack of ideas.

By way of comment, one professor made an interesting and significant statement to the effect that there was a student preoccupation with wanting to impress him by adopting uncritically his point of view. This professor also commented that students were vague in backing their arguments.

Analysis of the data in this category, along with professors' written statements, led to speculation that professors would certainly have perceived a paucity of ideas where students offered their own perspectives and drew on little else to substantiate those positions. It is the hope of many instructors that students read widely and develop a variety of perspectives on an issue, problem, theory, or area of research. Students need to feel secure in adopting a broad perspective especially when it would seem to be at variance with that of a professor. It is the efficacy of the students' arguments that must be evaluated by the professor, and students need to be aware of the criteria for evaluating argumentative writing.

Problems in Organization

The items in this category describe the types of problems that arise during the actual writing of a paper – the writing or composing stage – after the student has conceived the argument or thesis or while developing the argument or thesis. Problems of conceptualization are, of course, manifest also during the writing stage, but problems in organization occur in the design and organization aspects of writing. The most commonly perceived problem in this category and the one highest ranked was the inability of students to organize an argument or thesis. Three other items followed: inability to substantiate an argument or thesis, lack of evidence of an introductory statement of purpose, and lack of evidence of a summary statement. Careless or needless repetition followed as a third area of concern. When weighted rankings were totalled, inability to sub-

TABLE 4
Problems in Organization: Tallies and Ratings

	<i>Total Checked</i>	<i>Total Weighted Rankings</i>
1. Paragraphing	18	35
2. Careless or needless repetition	20	51
3. Inability to organize an argument or thesis	30	81
4. Inability to substantiate an argument or thesis	24	63
5. Nonevidence of an introductory statement of purpose	23	46
6. Nonevidence of a summary statement	23	45
7. Other(s) (please specify)	1	15

stantiate an argument or thesis was the second most common problem perceived. Given these perceived problems I concluded that students were unfamiliar with the organization of an argumentative piece of writing. Part of the problem appeared to be differential expectations among faculty of what constitutes an acceptable format for writing an argument.

Mechanical Problems

Mechanical problems are those that bear little or no relationship to conceptualization or organization of an essay. Such problems in most cases would not be cause for serious concern; in abundance, they detract from what might otherwise be a soundly conceived and well organized essay.

Spelling was perceived to be the most common problem, followed by punctuation. When weighted rankings were totalled, punctuation was ranked slightly ahead of spelling; together they accounted for the greatest professorial concern in this category. An abundance of spelling errors in student essays gave many professors cause to question the quality of the arguments developed in papers. Errors in mechanics, when they reach epidemic proportions, probably result in a lower grade than would otherwise be given if the same paper were purged of such errors. Grobe (1981), in a study of quality ratings of high school students' narrative essays, found that the best predictors of teachers' ratings were composition length and freedom from spelling errors. Over three different grades, spelling was the most powerful predictor of quality scores.

Many mechanical problems such as spelling and punctuation could be eliminated if students proofread their papers and then had a competent speller and writer proofread the paper also. Several professors made comments to the effect that the most common confusion of students was between the use of the colon, semi-colon, and comma. Such confusion would also account for some comma splices and run-on sentences.

RECURRENT WRITING ERRORS

The major types of writing errors mentioned by respondents in this survey have a history of recurrence. They are the types of errors that cause difficulties for students year after year. Such aspects of writing need constant attention from students and instructors.

In 1974, Diederich found that the following errors occurred most frequently in the writings of American secondary school students: sentence fragments and incomplete sentences, comma splices and fused sentences, run-on or strung-together sentences, carelessly omitted words or parts of words, careless or needless repetition, and the use of adjectives for adverbs and vice versa. (The errors are listed by frequency of occurrence.) In my survey the most frequently perceived errors were, in order: sentence fragments and incomplete sentences, run-on or strung-together sentences, comma splices and fused sentences, incorrect pronoun reference, carelessly omitted words or parts of words, and incorrect use of possessives.

An extensive study by Pringle and Freedman (1985) of writing abilities in two modes (argumentative and narrative) of Grades 5, 8, and 12 students in Ontario produced results remarkably similar to mine. The run-on sentence, comma splice, and sentence fragment ranked first, second, and third respectively in the category of punctuation errors, and apostrophe errors formed the second category. These researchers found that there was lack of overall improvement in many kinds of errors between Grades 5 and 12.

The similarities among the findings are striking. The same types of errors recurred in these university students' writings; these aspects of writing are probably not developmental and will not disappear with maturity (or formal education). Pringle and Freedman concluded that mechanical and conventional errors are more likely to occur in writing tasks that students find difficult, and in their study the argumentative mode was the more difficult. Such errors present ongoing problems for the students represented in this survey, and constant attention must be given them by students and professors.

GENERAL ASPECTS OF STUDENT WRITING

These Education professors were not yet at the point of dismissing their students as incompetent writers. When all their comments about positive aspects of student writing were compiled, there were over 1000 words. Comments were grouped into the general categories which I discuss.

There existed the temptation to seek a scapegoat for what some professors perceived as the inadequate preparation of students to manage the writing demands of university work. Their belief was that the university should not become involved in the remediation of student writing deficiencies: high schools (and elementary schools) should prepare students for the demands of university writing. The university has its standards, however articulated and defined, and it is up to the students to meet them. Should students require remediation in writing, as evidenced by poor grades for written work, seeking such help is the responsibility of individual students. The issue of university and professorial responsibility for student writing standards is yet to be addressed in our College of Education.

There also existed a tendency for some faculty members to compare today's students with those of a generation or more ago. Professors who had been teaching for 10 or more years were able to develop this perspective. Their comments were mostly positive: today's students were making efforts to improve their writing. A minority of professors perceived little or no change in student writing competency over 10 years.

Several respondents commented on what they perceived as an unquestioning and uncritical attitude in student writing. Students were too ready to accept and parrot the words and thoughts of others; they bowed too much to external authority in their writing, resulting in poor argumentative essays. Sometimes the external authority was the professor; at other times it was a noted writer, researcher, or theorist.

On several occasions, comments were made in which junior students were compared to senior, after-degree, or graduate students. Such comparisons suggested a positive change in the quality of student argumentative writing over the duration of their university education. Such comments also implied that student writing problems may exist in different degrees at different levels and that the problems are really confined to the junior years.

Some comments of a general nature give a good idea of the substance of most of the positive comments. One professor wrote:

The identification of "faults" above (in the questionnaire) makes it appear that I

take a negative view of the ability of my students to write acceptable themes. Such is NOT the case. I simply identified those errors appearing in a small minority of papers. Most of my students: (a) have good ideas; (b) express them clearly; (c) are concise – at the expense of some fragmentary sentences.

Another respondent commented:

In many ways I do not find papers without merit. For the time that our students dedicate to the process of research and writing, many of the products are competent, if not amazing – quite a few demonstrating a professional flair. A problem I have is knowing if the presentation is the student's or the author's. Thus the many strengths I note may well be a mirage, but I have seen spontaneous writing, i.e. exams that impress me. Is it their innate ability to use written language?

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Schwartz (1984) conducted a study similar to mine at about the same time. She had students and professors in different disciplines state their preferences for different paired stylistic versions of prose and their reasons for the preferences. She discovered that students chose one style while professors chose the other. Schwartz concluded that the different choices resulted from different expectations of what constituted good writing. I reached a similar conclusion in my study.

Schwartz found little apparent similarity between what faculty want in writing and what students think faculty want. This mismatch of values and expectations concerning writing was at the core of my findings also. Students perceived good writing as that which met the perceived expectations of the professor. Thus they wrote noncritical and unsupported essays in an expository mode which were designed to appeal to the perceived academic biases of their respective professors. Many professors, on the other hand, expected argumentative essays where the student conceived a thesis or argument, supported the position taken, critically analyzed a variety of references and sources, and demonstrated true understanding as a result of argumentative discourse. Professors were more broadminded than students thought they were; students were more tentative and cautious than professors hoped they would be. These differential expectations led to the perceived need for an expository mode by students while professors expected an argumentative mode. Both groups were disappointed.

Argumentative and Expository Modes

The argumentative and expository modes dominated as the types of discourse demanded by professors in their course requirements involving

written assignments. The perceived major problems in the categories of conceptualization and organization of student writing concerned the argumentative mode and to a lesser extent the expository mode.

It was quite clear that professors often believed that students were able to deal successfully with the requirements of argumentative writing – generation of relevant ideas, organization of ideas into topical ideas and supplementary ideas, logical development of ideas and argument, ability to conceive of and to address a particular audience, statement of purpose, summary of argument, and focus on task.

This conclusion leads me to suggest that students need to be *taught* to write in the argumentative mode and that the provision of such advice be a faculty-wide responsibility. Each instructor requiring the argumentative mode – the majority in my survey – would be advised to spend some instructional time outlining the requirements and procedures for writing in the argumentative mode. A similar suggestion would apply to instructors demanding an expository mode in their courses. Another possibility would be for one designated professor to provide instruction in the dominant modes of discourse to all students through a workshop approach.

This problem with student facility in the argumentative mode was also cause for concern in the Pringle and Freedman (1985) study. Too many of their subjects, even at the Grade 12 academic level, were unable to write argumentative discourse which further led to mechanical and convention errors in writing as they struggled with the rhetorical demands of that mode. Freedman and Pringle recommended that teachers devote time and energy to developing students' abilities in this mode and that students at all levels be exposed to good argumentative models.

Perhaps a reasonable and potentially successful approach to teaching students argumentative and expository writing is to pursue a faculty agreement on guidelines. Such guidelines, approved by the faculty, might be distributed to all students each term.³ Along with the guidelines, it might be advisable to provide models of effective student writing in each mode. Faculty-wide agreement on writing guidelines would require a common approach to evaluation of student writing in each mode. I suggest using an analytic scale (see Cooper, 1977) which allows individual professors to differentially weight elements according to particular subject and topic requirements.

Conceptualization of Ideas

A recurring comment was that students developed a narrow perspective in their writing; they relied upon a central authority to carry their argu-

ments, and this reliance was often too narrow and restrictive. Moreover, the actual authority was often the professor who taught the course.

The predominance of this perception and comment leads me to conclude that students need to be encouraged to read widely and to develop a variety of perspectives for response to an issue or problem. They need to be made aware that a soundly developed and well reasoned argument is crafted by a writer who considers as many facets and perspectives as possible or as exist but who also weighs the evidence or judges the validity of competing argument and derives a well-founded summary conclusion. To develop such an approach, students need to be assured that the professor's evaluation of the essay will encourage such an undertaking. They should not fear that arriving at a conclusion contrary to the professor's stated or implied position could jeopardize grades. Well developed evaluation guidelines help to ensure fairness in grading a well written argumentative essay.

In my survey, confusion existed for some professors over grammar and usage. If professors are to assist students with their writing, they need to be clear as to what constitutes a syntactic difficulty or problem and what is a matter of poor choice or inappropriate language. Current handbooks on usage may be useful for professors. Students can also be directed to usage handbooks when they are unsure of a particular usage or aspect of grammar. There is limited value in a professor merely pointing out a perceived error or problem in a student's writing. The person evaluating a student paper needs to describe why a problem exists and to suggest alternatives, be they syntactic or semantic.

To a certain extent each subject area has its own way of employing language, be it manifest through vocabulary or sentence structure. Some subject areas use pronounced linguistic patterns: the language of educational law (in educational administration courses) uses structures that employ conditional clauses; *culture* has very different meanings in social studies and science education. Aspects of subject-specific language need to be discussed by professors and students in the subject area courses. It is not always possible for a professor to assume that, because a concept is basic to a particular discipline, students will come to the subject knowing the meaning of the word or comprehend the structure of concepts and propositions through the syntax employed.

Professors responding to this survey generally perceived student writing to be of an acceptable standard. There was certainly no perception that writing standards had declined over a decade or more. To what extent the situation created by the results of this survey describes the general university student population in North America is open to question. What seems clear – and personal experience corroborates this – is

that there are recurrent errors needing constant attention, and all faculty might assist students by responding to student writing rather than by merely assigning grades.

A second conclusion of this survey is that, while the writing process is understood neither by students nor by faculty as a whole, professors were clearly concerned about student writing and with what they could do to enhance student writing and thinking. It appears to me that the faculty responding to this survey constitute a captive audience for a faculty development program in writing in the specialized content areas.

NOTES

- ¹ A copy may be obtained from the author, Department of Curriculum Studies, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon S7N 0W0 Canada.
- ² Length dictates the omission of the list of items in each category. The full research report including all data is available from the author.
- ³ I have developed for students and faculty such guidelines which can be distributed on a voluntary basis.

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Universitätsprofessoren einer Vielzahl von Wissenszweigen auf dem Erziehungsgebiet äußern sich häufig zur Schreibunfähigkeit der Studenten und den Fehlern, die sich in ihrem Schreiben widerspiegeln. Ausgehend von der Prämisse, daß die Haltung der Lehrenden und ihre Auffassung vom Stil der Studenten wahrscheinlich ihr eigenes Wissen über den Prozeß des Schreibens und ihre eigenen Erwartungen von Studenten als Autoren reflektieren, wurden Professoren im Erziehungsbereich in einer Umfrage gebeten, die von ihnen wahrgenommenen Schreibfehler und Probleme der Studenten aufzuzählen und einzuordnen, die Arten von Anforderungen an Studenten für einen schriftlichen Kurs zu beschreiben und die Arten von schriftlichen Prüfungen aufzuführen.

Wir berichten über die Ergebnisse der Umfrage, führen Kommentare der Professoren

und Stilbeispiele der Studenten an und erklären einige der Schwierigkeiten der Studenten. Die Diskussion positiver Aspekte des Schreibens führt zu der Schlußfolgerung, daß im allgemeinen der Stil der Studenten als akzeptabel angesehen wird. Es bestehen jedoch wiederkehrende Schreibprobleme, die nicht entwicklungsbedingt scheinen und die die Hilfe der Professoren erfordern.

Nach der Analyse aller Ergebnisse schien es, daß Professoren nicht in erster Linie die Fehler der Studenten in Syntax und Technik identifizierten, sondern eher die Unfähigkeit der Studenten, erfolgreich mit einem argumentativen Modus umzugehen. Obwohl die Mehrzahl der Professoren die Studenten aufforderte, im argumentativen Modus zu schreiben, waren ihnen die rhetorischen Anforderungen dieses Redemodus unbekannt. Die Hauptschwierigkeit im Schreibprozeß der Studenten schien ihre Unfähigkeit, mit den rhetorischen Aspekten dieses Modus umzugehen.

Los profesores universitarios de una amplia variedad de disciplinas dentro de la educación a menudo comentan sobre las carencias de los estudiantes escritores y los errores en sus escritos. A base de la premisa de que las actitudes y las percepciones de los profesores hacia los escritos de los estudiantes probablemente reflejan sus propios conocimientos del proceso de escribir y sus propias expectativas de los estudiantes en tanto que escritores, se pidió en una encuesta a profesores de educación de que preparen una lista de los errores y problemas que percibían en los escritos de los estudiantes y de que los pongan en orden de importancia, de que describan los tipos de requerimientos de escritos del curso que se exige de los estudiantes, y de que anoten los tipos de exámenes escritos que se dan a los estudiantes.

Se dan los resultados de la encuesta conjuntamente con los comentarios de los profesores y ejemplos de escritos de los estudiantes, y se dan las razones de algunas de las dificultades de los estudiantes. La discusión de los aspectos positivos de los escritos de los estudiantes llevan uno a la conclusión de que en general los escritos de los estudiantes son aceptables. Sin embargo, existen problemas de escritura que recurren que no parecen ser de desarrollo, y los mismos necesitan atención regular de parte de profesores y estudiantes.

Una vez que todos los resultados fueron analizados pareció que, más bien que identificar errores mecánicos y de sintaxis de los estudiantes, los profesores identificaban la incapacidad de los estudiantes de tratar exitosamente con el modo argumentativo. Aunque la mayoría de los profesores exigían que los estudiantes escribieran en el modo argumentativo, no estaban al tanto de las exigencias retóricas de este modo, y las mayores dificultades en los escritos de los estudiantes parecían ser la incapacidad de estos últimos de controlar los aspectos retóricos del modo.

Trevor Gambell is an associate professor in the Department of Curriculum Studies at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 0W0.