



## Content matters: curriculum development challenges in academic writing programs

### Key Words

content, discipline, writing programs, composition, curriculum, transfer, WAW, threshold concepts.

### Abstract

While still relatively uncommon in the Australian HE context, a growing number of institutions are offering subjects or units for credit specifically focused on academic writing, or academic language and learning issues, outside of any specific disciplinary context or serving students from across various disciplines (Barthel, 2013; AALL, 2015). Given a general and longstanding consensus in the field that teaching ‘form’, ‘mechanics’ or ‘skills’ in isolation from specific disciplinary content and meaning is problematic, if not futile, the question of what content we ought to have students write and learn about in such units is a significant challenge. In the North American context where writing programs (courses, subjects, requirements) have been almost a standard feature of higher education at all levels for more than 50 years, the views and experience of practitioners and students provide a valuable resource and raise important questions for the Australian Language and Learning community as our professional identity changes from supporter/contributor of other’s curricula, toward being developers of our own ‘freestanding’ curriculum. Drawing primarily on qualitative data (interviews conducted by the author in the first half of 2017 with academics and students across a range of different programs in North America) this paper outlines different approaches to the content problem taken by various writing programs, but locates these in the context of recent debates over curriculum and content focus. In specific, the paper reviews discussions in the North American composition community prompted by the ‘writing about writing’ (WAW) movement (Downs and Wardle, 2007; Wardle, 2009) and Adler-Kassner and Wardle’s (2015) Naming what we Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing. A key point emerging from the research is that the question of ‘transfer of learning’, central to ALL practice, is as much an issue when teaching in a credit bearing program as in developing support, integrated or adjunct learning programs. As such the paper seeks to contribute more broadly to understanding about the linking of ‘disciplinary’ content and writing, and understanding of ‘our’ own discipline’s identity, goals and boundaries

### References

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