

Groundbreaking national study supports enhanced uses of writing

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A major study linking writing to undergraduate learning and development shows that three features of writing assignments—an interactive writing process, a meaning-making writing task and clear writing expectations—are each positively associated with students' engagement in deep approaches to learning and with their perceived gains in learning and development. What's more, the effects are consistently greater than for the number of pages written.

Published in *Research in the Teaching of English*, the flagship journal of the National Council of Teachers of English, "The Contributions of Writing to Learning and Development: Results from a Large-Scale Multi-institutional Study" is the fruit of a collaboration between the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). It details results from more than 70,000 first-year students and seniors attending 80 U.S. baccalaureate institutions. The statistical analyses controlled for a host of institutional and student characteristics, as well as other factors that might contribute to increased learning.

All the authors, including Professor Charles Paine, director of Rhetoric and Writing, and associate chair for Core Writing in the UNM English Department, hope the study will provide guidance to instructors and institutions because all three features of [writing](#) assignments can be incorporated into assignments in any discipline.

"The major implications for all instructors who include writing in their

courses, whether they are writing teachers or instructors in any other undergraduate course, is that they can help their students learn more by incorporating these features into the assignments they now give than by increasing the amount of writing they assign," Paine said.

He added that the finding is especially important for instructors in fields other than writing, many of whom feel that the more time they spend assigning and attending to their students' writing, the less time they will have to spend on the primary focus of their courses. "These results are especially useful to instructors in programs other than English because they provide specific guidance about how to gain the most learning from their [writing assignments](#), thereby allaying some their hesitation to assign writing because they haven't been taught how to teach writing."

According to Norbert Elliot, who worked with the authors as guest editor for RTE, the research demonstrates the importance of both cognitive and non-cognitive domains in education. "For far too long," Elliot noted, "education has neglected the importance of knowledge transfer. This new study demonstrates that shared [learning](#) and interactive processes are essential elements of 21st century knowledge and skills that students will need in both academic and workplace settings."

More information: "The Contributions of Writing to Learning and Development: Results from a Large-Scale Multi-institutional Study." [www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles ... 0502Contribution.pdf](http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles...0502Contribution.pdf)

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