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*STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF WRITING
SKILLS LEARNED FROM WRITING
A MARKETING RESEARCH PAPER*



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Peer Reviewed

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Abstract

Writing skills are essential for workplace success. In this article thematic analysis was used to describe the perceived writing skills learned by 19 undergraduate students taking a "Writing Across the Curriculum" marketing research course. The questions asked students in a small-sized class about the writing skills they acquired in this course that focused on sections of the marketing research report, global skills of learning an approach to writing, and the usefulness of writing skills learned for a future job. More than half of the students were unfamiliar with writing skills necessary to write a research paper, and 74 percent reported learning data organization and interpretation skills in the course. Overall, most reported benefiting from this course and believed that the skills they learned are relevant to possible future jobs.



Introduction

A college education should not only focus on developing literacy skills in specific disciplines, but it should also include a number of literacy-related skills, such as reading journals and documents of different styles, writing, and applying quantitative skills for different purposes (Scheehan-Holt & Smith, 2000). Excellent writing skills are essential to succeed in many professions other than disciplines that provide training to become professional writers. Unfortunately, many undergraduate students barely write at a high school level, let alone at a college level that is expected of undergraduate students (Jablon, 2004). These poor writing skills often begin in high school. For example, in one study about 80 percent of the high school students were evaluated as having a low or intermediate level of writing quality (Levine & Geldman-Caspar, 1996). In another study of professor's perceptions of both undergraduate and graduate student writing skills, the undergraduate level was considered poor, the MBA level as "okay," and only the PhD level as good (Epstein, 1999).

Many professors in undergraduate business programs want to increase students' writing standards, because they perceive their students as being unable to select and organize information, design written goals, and/or express their message clearly (Epstein, 1999). In one study of students taking a business communication course, only 45 percent of students rated "writing assignments" as a most valuable course component response. They rated "resumes/interviewing," "teamwork," "oral presentation," "memo," "negative newsletter or message," and "persuasive newsletter or message" as more important course components (Bayless & Johnson 2003). However, it is specifically "writing assignments" that can challenge students to recognize and learn the impact of clear and direct writing (Moore, 1994).

"Writing Across the Curriculum" (WAC) classes are often useful for students to transfer the knowledge and skills learned in their traditional writing courses to their specific discipline (Plutsky & Wilson, 2001). Business courses and business programs in many universities have already incorporated WAC into their curriculum. Successful results of this approach include both improved writing skills and enhanced awareness and understanding of business issues (Plutsky & Wilson, 2001). Schneider and Andre (2005) suggest that universities can prepare students for workplace writing by providing students with instruction and practice in common workplace fields, teaching relevant research and analytical skills, and offering experience in collaborative writing. They also write that, despite the differences between classroom and workplace writing, college education plays a very important role in preparing students for workplace writing.



Writing skills and class performance may be learned and approached differently depending upon gender. Men often do better on exams while women are more conscientious with regard to homework (Brooks, 1987). With regard to writing, gender differences exist. In one study of students, women were 16.9 percent better than men in providing detailed description of personal experiences (Levine & Goldman-Caspar, 1996). Also, in that same study, writing from women tended to be lengthier than that of the men. Specific to business writing, women are less likely than men to use quantitative approaches and more likely to use qualitative approaches in their reports (Grant, Ward, & Rong, 1987). Also, both women and men need more preparation for business style writing (Grant et al., 1987).

The primary objective of this study is to explore the student learning experience of a WAC course in the undergraduate college business curriculum. The secondary objective is to explore if there are any gender differences with regard to student beliefs about the writing skills learned. To our knowledge, there are no published studies on the potential impact of a WAC course in the undergraduate college business curriculum.

Method

Participants

Participants in the study were 19 undergraduate students from a public undergraduate college in New York City who took and completed a “Writing Across the Curriculum” (WAC) class titled, “Seminar in Marketing Research” in the Spring of 2005. This class is typically taken by Business students in their senior year of college. As part of taking this class, students were offered the opportunity to receive feedback without any grading on each of the sections of their research paper (See Procedures below.). This intensive feedback that is typical of WAC classes allows students to benefit in a step-by-step manner on improving their writing skills, as skills learned from writing the earlier section can be used to enhance later sections of a research paper.

Demographic characteristics of the sample are a mean age of 23.5 years (SD=3.0), gender: men (36.8 percent; n=7) and women (63.2 percent; n=12), and race/ethnicity: white (63.2 percent; n=12), African American (15.8 percent; n=3), Asian American (15.8 percent; n=3), and South Asian (5.3 percent; n=1). Majors include 18 (94.7 percent) in Business, Management, & Finance and 1 (5.3 percent) in Film (with a Business Minor)



Procedures

In this class, students created a survey, collected data, and wrote a research paper in the style that is typical of an academic research paper. In this research paper written as part of the class, the *Introduction* section reviewed the published relevant scientific literature. The *Method* section described the methods used to collect the data, along with the analytical approach used. The *Results* section reported the statistical analyses conducted with a specialized statistical package named SPSS. The *Discussion* section summarized the key points and compared and contrasted these points to the published scientific literature. References were reported using APA format. Tables were constructed to summarize and display the quantitative data analyzed. Feedback on writing skills for the specific sections were offered in the following order: 1) Introduction and References, 2) Method, 3) Results and Tables, and 4) Discussion.

During the last week of class, students were asked to respond to 8 open-ended questions inquiring about their perceptions of the writing skills learned in the class. These questions are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Open-ended Questions Assessing Student Perceptions of a Writing Across the Curriculum Course

Questions

1. How did this class change your approach to writing?
2. What new skills did you learn by writing the Introduction section?
3. What new skills did you learn by writing the Method section?
4. What new skills did you learn by writing the Results section?
5. What new skills did you learn by writing the Discussion section?
6. What new skills did you learn by writing the References section?
7. What new skills did you learn by writing the Tables section?
8. How do you think that the writing skills learned in this class will help you in your future job?



Data Analysis

The qualitative analytic approach used thematic analysis. This analytic approach includes creating codes for content, analyzing for semantic themes, and reviewing the obtained themes to ensure that they relate to the coded content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All written sentences were read, labeled, and independently coded using line-by-line coding by the two authors. Before analyzing all the data, the first question from three participants in the sample was independently analyzed by both coders. The two coders met together and noted that the content and themes were found to be identical. After that initial meeting, the coders met weekly to discuss their coded data for particular content and themes. Any interpretation of content or themes that differed was resolved to allow for 100 percent consensus on all the content and themes.

Results

Shown below are summaries for a number of different areas. This includes an overall question, questions by section of paper, and a question regarding relevance of the writing skills to a future job. Table 1 summarizes all the questions. In categories listed by alphabetical order, Table 2 describes and provides examples for the numerous categories coded for the overall question and the sections of the paper. In categories listed by alphabetical order, Table 3 describes and provides examples for the numerous categories coded for the question regarding relevance of the writing skills learned to a future job.

Table 2

Skills Learned By Writing a Marketing Research Paper

<u>Category</u>	<u>Category Description</u>	<u>Category Data Example</u>
Accurate question inclusion	inclusion of survey questions described in the Method section	How to put [together] examples of sample questions from the survey.
Alphabetize references	concept of alphabetizing references	The references section has taught me to alphabetize my references.
Analysis write-up	effectively describing the analyzed data with words	I learned how to relate to the [data shown in the] table and how to write in words what I



Analyze data	evaluating the data collected	have in the tables. I learned to take my data, analyze it then [...] in the results section.
Analyze tables	evaluating the data placed in the tables	New skills that I learned in the Results section is taking what I wrote and comparing it to different tables.
APA style	how to use the APA reference style	I learned about APA style.
Awareness of the challenge to summarize	difficulty of summarizing the data discovered with information from other sources	From the discussion section, I found that it's very difficult to summarize all the discoveries in one part. [E]specially when I have to compare and contrast my findings with what has been published elsewhere because my study is irrelevant to what has been studied.
Better writing awareness	better awareness when writing	This class made me become aware of everything I write about.
Compare and contrast data	analyzing the data found and comparing it to other relevant sources	I learned how to compare different sources to my own data.
Condensation	simplifying opening information	Skills of condensing opening information. On my paper in particular, you helped me reword, rephrase, and edit out redundant or useless information.
Data organization and interpretation	organizing and analyzing the data found	[...] it has helped me to be able to take my data and put it onto a table which makes it easier to pinpoint certain facts.
Describing data collection	specific wording and describing the methods of collecting the data	I learned how to explain to people the way which I obtained my data. This helps strengthen a person's argument.
Describing data process	describing the data and factors used in the Method Section	Skills I learned in this section were which parts belong in this section – such as participants



Describing statistical analysis	describing the statistical analysis conducted	[and] the different factors included in the data. In the method section, I learned how to describe the statistical analysis I was using.
Detailed step-by-step	reviewing in detail the methods utilized	I learned how to actually go back and review how I did things.
Determining scholarly article Did what the professor wanted	a journal article being deemed “scholarly” followed professor’s instructions and suggestions	[...] and also which ones are acceptable as scholarly. Knowing exactly what the professor wanted in the Introduction and how he wants it worded, makes my skills more knowledgeable and easier in writing the Introduction.
Different reference style	learning a different type of reference style	I learned that there are different styles [for references].
Discussion framework	components necessary for a Discussion section	I learned the elements necessary to be included in the Discussion section.
E-database use	use of e-databases when doing research	How to use e-databases, helped me “customize” my online research.
Find Tables section challenging Focused writing	difficulties with the Tables section clearly writing methods of getting results	I found that they [the Tables] are a pain in the rear end. The Method section has taught me to clearly state what exactly it is I have done and what I used to obtain my results.
General writing style	general writing skill capability	I also realized there is more to writing a paper than summarizing. This class showed me an entire new level of writing.
Grammar	pertaining to grammar style	It has helped me become more careful with my grammar and when writing a paper.
Including study limitations	including limitations of the study in the Discussion section	I learned that it is important to include limitations and implications of your study.



Incomplete	response that did not properly answer the question	-----
Incorporating own ideas	inputting own views on the outcome of the study	I learn[ed] how to input my own views as to why [the] result[s] might be the way they are.
Increased confidence	confidence in writing content and ability	This gave me great confidence in what I was writing about.
Interpret findings	analyzing and explaining data found	[T]his helped me to analyze my data and explain to people what I found. If data is collected and not interpreted properly, then it is useless. [The] Discussion helps me explain my findings properly.
Introduction composition	writing the Introduction and its content	I learned how to introduce what I am going to write about.
Issue clarification	elucidating the topic in question	I learned about [the] subtopic and scope of the issue, which I did not know specifically before.
Journal article use	the use of journal articles	I learned how to look for journal articles and use [them].
Journal citation	properly citing journals	How to cite journals when doing the Introductions, References [...].
Labeling paragraph subcategories	classifying sections and their content	Giving specific titles to each section and limiting the subject talked about to that section.
Make less mistakes	making fewer mistakes when writing the paper	I am less prone to making as many mistakes as I did in the past when writing papers.
Method section comprehension	understanding about how to read and understand the Method section	Well I never really wrote a methods section, maybe because I never administered a survey before. However, through writing my methods section, I've learned how to read and write a methods section.
No answer	no response	---
No change	no change	It didn't really change my approach to writing.
Not to capitalize entire	proper capitalization of the	I also learned not to capitalize



title of source ¹	title of the source	the entire title of the source.
One of first times referencing	first time writing or using references	This was one of the first times I did a reference.
Organization	organization of ideas and paragraph flow	Generally I have been more careful about how I put together sentences.
Paragraphing	organization of ideas into paragraphs	I learned how to put my ideas in paragraphs and that each paragraph should have something to do with the one before it.
Paragraph structure	paragraph make-up and composition.	When writing the method section, I learned paragraph structure.
Paraphrasing	properly quoting others	I learned how to quote others.
Professional writing style	writing a paper on a more professional/business level	It made me practice for factual papers without incorporating just opinions, which is used in the business environment.
Proper referencing	attaining a better understanding of how to properly reference	I knew how to write references but I wasn't exactly sure and thank[s] to Professor [...] showing me exactly how to write references [...]. I already used my "skill" in two other classes to write references.
Questionnaire creation	development of the questionnaire	I learned [...], how to create a questionnaire.
Quoting articles	the proper way to quote information found in articles	That it would also be inappropriate to quote the quoted in an article, [and] one should quote the accessible article.
Reference organization	properly organizing references	How to organize and categorize references.
Reference refresher	a review on how to write references	[...] brush-up on writing references.
Referencing ideas discovered	finding references that would agree or disagree with the analyzed data	This section was difficult. Finding references was a pain, but in the end I was able to back up the data I had found.
References	citation, finding and quoting references, and using	This class taught me how to correctly quote references,



	journal article format	whether I was paraphrasing or quoting.
Research paper style	style and quality of a research paper	It provided me with information on how to write a new type of work. I learned the fundamentals to writing a research paper.
Research skills	researching and applying information obtained	This class changed my approach to writing in a lot of ways. I learned to look for meaningful information and what to do with that information. I also, learned that it takes a long time to write a really good paper.
Scientific writing	scientific way of writing	Scientific Writing (I have no previous experience with scientific writing).
Selective writing	evaluating the data found and selecting the information that is necessary	I found out why researchers don't really include everything they find. I learned to only include stuff you want to pursue.
SPSS use	use of SPSS statistical program	How to use SPSS [for] statistical analyses.
SPSS comprehension	comprehension of SPSS	SPSS! How to read data output and results properly, using t-tests, ANOVA, etc.
Summary write-up	gathering all the information and organizing it as part of a Discussion section	The Discussion section has taught me how to gather all of the prior [information] and create a discussion out of all the components.
Survey analysis	evaluating the survey administered	I learned different methods to look at a survey.
Synthesizing data	combining the results of and information collected to write an organized research paper	How to compile all the information, data collected, [and] journal articles in order to create a cohesive research paper.
Table creation	creating tables and charts with the data	I've never created a table before. I learned how to resize, add, and remove



Usage of good reference	using a good reference	rows/columns. [...] and also what is a good reference to use and what is a bad reference to use.
Word usage	wording of sentences	Not to use extra fancy words just to make sections long, [rather than] wording sentences since it makes it much better to understand.
Writing framework	organization and presentation of ideas	I learned how to organize data in categories.

¹The writing style taught was APA style which does not capitalize the first letter of each word for the article title. The student was unaware of any particular reference style such as Chicago style which capitalizes the first letter of each word for the article title.

Table 3

Writing Skills Learned and Usefulness For A Future Job

<u>Category</u>	<u>Category Description</u>	<u>Category Data Example</u>
Capability to do research	capability of conducting research	I will be able to research what is asked of me.
Collect and interpret data	gathering and interpreting the relevant data	I learned how to collect data and interpret it.
Conduct marketing research	ability to conduct marketing research	I believe that if I need to conduct a similar marketing research [project], this course will [...] help me [...].
Create presentation	creating a presentation	The writing skills I learned in this class will help me in creating presentations.
Create survey	creation of a survey	I learned how to make a survey.
Higher writing skill level	level of writing learned in the class	For the most part, the writing skills learned in this class served to keep my writing more organized and detailed.
Interest in marketing research career	considering marketing research as a future career option	Well, this actually intrigued me to pursue a career in market research. I actually always



Not plagiarizing	the act of not plagiarizing	wanted to work in marketing, I just didn't know where and how. This is definitely an option I am willing to pursue. The one thing I learned about and is probably the most vital was [...] red flags for plagiarism.
Professional business writing Proper citation	learning to write in a more professional, business style properly citing references	I think it will help me write better business reports. The one thing I learned about and is probably the most vital was proper citation.
Research information	doing research on given topic	I think it has helped me [...] know how to research information.
SPSS use	knowledge of using SPSS	If I am looking for a computer based job, this SPSS is helpful.
Statement organization	organizing ideas into written statements	I believe that if I need to conduct a similar marketing research [study], this course will [...] help me in organizing my statements [...].
Statistical analysis	experience with statistical analysis	This paper has actually helped me tell my future employers that I conducted research, created a survey, and did a statistical analysis on a topic.
Summarizing data	summarizing the information found	Skills such as "cutting to the chase" [...] and summarizing the information will help me in my future career.
Translate thoughts into precise wording	clearly stating own ideas and thoughts on a topic	I will know how to structure my ideas and present them in a way that is easily understood.
Unclear answer Write reports	unable to clarify intent knowledge of writing reports in the future	---- I'm sure that I will have to write reports, so some things I've learned from this class will definitely help.
Write scientific research paper	writing scientific research papers in the future	[...] and also how to write a scientific research paper.



Writing analysis

writing analysis in the future career

[...] and writing analysis in my future job.

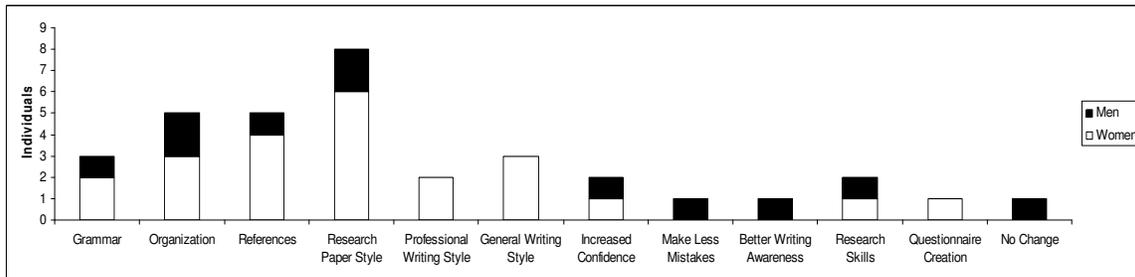
Approach to Writing

The question asked was, “How did this class change your approach to writing?” As shown in Figure 1 below, there were 12 categories of responses. The categories were grammar, organization, references, research paper style, professional writing style, general writing style, increased confidence, make less mistakes, better writing awareness, research skills, questionnaire creation, and no change.

“Research paper style” (n=8) was the most frequent response given. In addition, women were more likely to respond with an emphasis on the writing style of the paper. This is seen through the categories “research paper style,” “professional writing style,” and “general writing style.” Lastly, only one individual responded with “no change.”

Figure 1

Change in Approach to Writing



Introduction Section

The question asked was, “What new skill did you learn by writing the *Introduction* section?” As shown in Figure 2 below, there were 12 categories of responses. The categories were references, grammar, paragraphing, paraphrasing, writing framework, did what professor wanted, introduction composition, e-database use, word usage, condensation, scientific writing, and issue clarification.

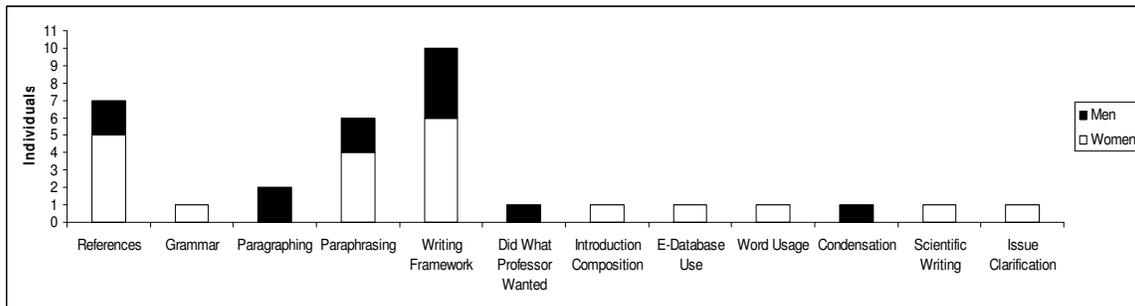
The majority of the responses were for the categories of “paraphrasing” (n=6), “references” (n=7), and “writing framework” (n=10). Also, 4 of the 7 men



responded with “writing framework” and the only response for “did what the professor wanted” was by 1 man.

Figure 2

Skills Learned From Writing the Introduction Section



Method Section

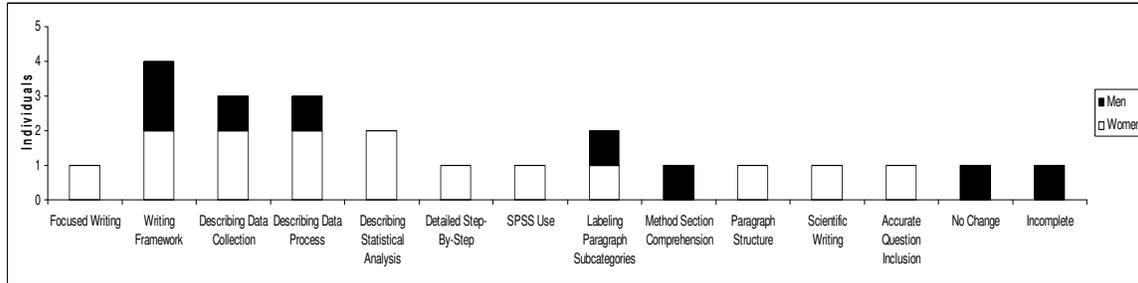
The question asked was, “What new skills did you learn by writing the *Method* section?” As shown in Figure 3 below, there were 14 categories of responses. The categories were focused writing, writing framework, describing data collection, describing data process, describing statistical analysis, detailed step-by-step, SPSS use, labeling paragraph subcategories, method section comprehension, paragraph structure, scientific writing, accurate question inclusion, no change, and incomplete.

“Writing framework” (n=4) was the most frequent response, followed equally by “describing data collection” (n=3) and “describing data process” (n=3).



Figure 3

Skills Learned From Writing the Method Section



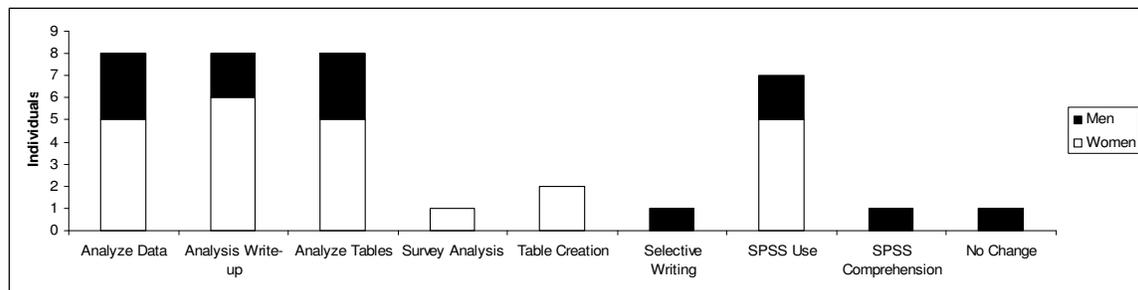
Results Section

The question asked was, “What new skills did you learn by writing the *Results* section?” As shown in Figure 4 below, there were 9 categories of responses. The categories were analyze data, analysis write-up, analyze tables, nothing new for writing, survey analysis, table creation, selective writing, SPSS use, and SPSS comprehension.

The majority of the responses were from the categories of “analyze data,” “analysis write-up,” and “analyze tables,” with each containing 8 responses. This was followed by “SPSS use” containing 7 responses. In addition, 5 of the 8 individuals who responded with “analyze tables,” also listed “analysis write-up” as a skill learned.

Figure 4

Skills Learned From Writing the Results Section





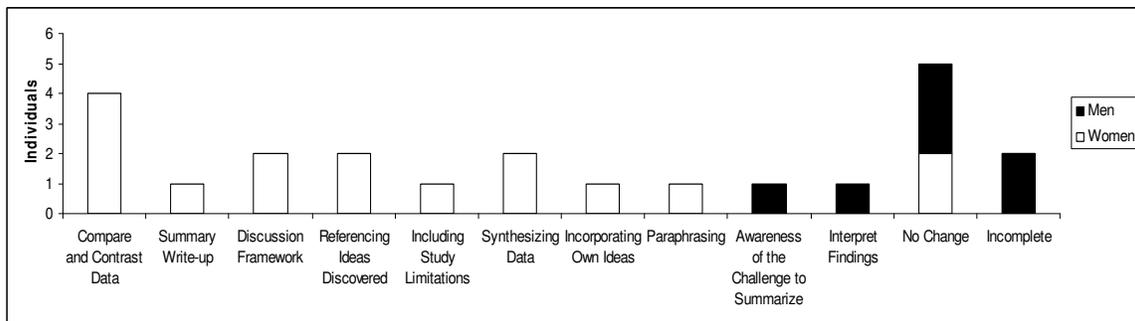
Discussion Section

The question asked was “What new skills did you learn by writing the *Discussion* section?” As shown in Figure 5 below, there were 12 categories of responses. The categories were compare and contrast data, summary write-up, discussion framework, referencing ideas discovered, including study limitations, synthesizing data, incorporating own ideas, paraphrasing, awareness of the challenge to summarize, interpret findings, no change, and incomplete.

Writing the *Discussion* section did not appear to influence the men, as 3 of 7 men responded with “no change” and 2 men with “incomplete.” Only 2 men responded with “awareness of challenge to summarize” and “interpret findings.” In contrast to the men, 4 women reported developing better “compare and contrast data” skills, in addition to a variety of other skills learned too.

Figure 5

Skills Learned From Writing the Discussion Section



References Section

The question asked was “What new skills did you learn by writing the *References* section?” As shown in Figure 6 below, there were 15 categories of responses. The categories were reference organization, reference refresher, quoting articles, journal citation, determining “scholarly” article, not to capitalize the entire title of source, journal article use, different reference style, APA style, proper referencing, usage of “good” reference, alphabetize references, one of first times referencing, no change, and no answer.

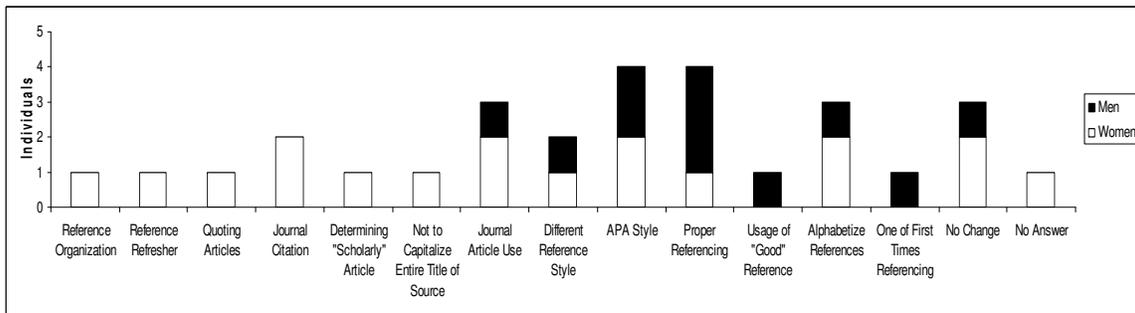
“Proper referencing” (n=4) and “APA style” (n=4) were the most frequent responses. This was followed by “journal article use” (n=3). Also, 3 individuals



responded with “no change” and 1 with “no answer.” A number of men endorsed “proper referencing,” with 3 of the 7 men mentioning learning this skill.

Figure 6

Skills Learned From Writing the References Section



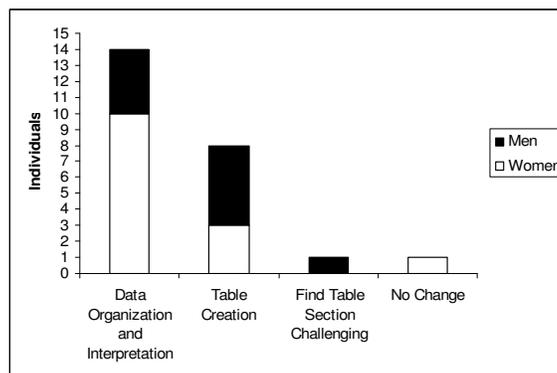
Tables Section

The question asked was “What new skills did you learn by writing the *Tables* section?” As shown in Figure 7 below, there were 4 categories of responses. The categories were data organization and interpretation, table creation, find table section challenging, and no change.

“Data organization and interpretation” (n=14) was the most frequent response given, followed by “table creation” (n=8). Only one individual responded with “no change.”

Figure 7

Skills Learned From Writing the Tables Section





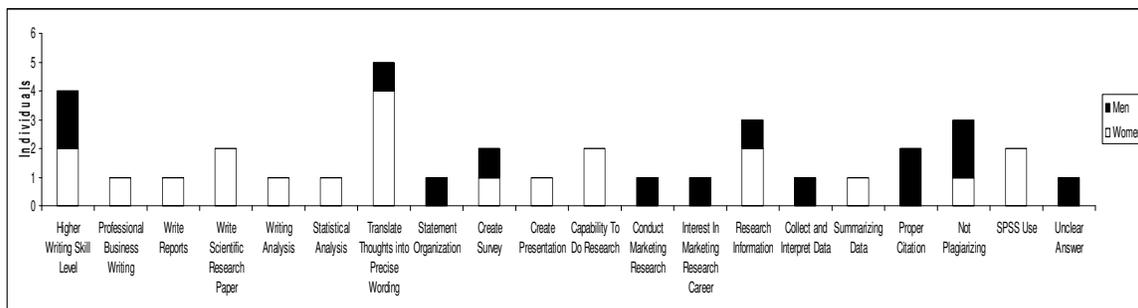
Writing Skills for Future Job

The question asked was “How do you think that the writing skills learned in this class will help you in your future job?” As shown in Figure 8 below, there were 20 categories of responses. The categories were higher writing skill level, professional business writing, write reports, write scientific research paper, writing analysis, statistical analysis, translate thoughts into precise wording, statement organization, create survey, create presentation, capability to do research, conduct marketing research, interest in marketing research career, research information, collect and interpret data, summarizing data, proper citation, not plagiarizing, SPSS use, and unclear answer.

The answers for this section were extremely varied. “Translate thoughts into precise wording” (n=5) was the most frequent response given with 4 of the 5 respondents being women. It was followed by “higher writing skill level” (n=4). In addition, all the responses for “professional business writing” (n=1), “write reports” (n=1), and “write scientific research paper” (n=2) were reported by women.

Figure 8

Writing Skills Learned and Usefulness for a Future Job



Discussion

In this study 42 percent (n=8) learned the approach to write a research paper (Figure 1). More than half (n=10) learned a concise and focused writing style applicable to the typical business setting (i.e., writing framework for the Introduction section). The category for analyses write-up of data was learned by 42 percent (n=8) (Figure 4).



Although all of the students were seniors who had taken at least two basic English writing courses, they believed that their research writing skills needed improvement. Also, almost half were not familiar with skills for writing a research paper (Figure 1). Similarly, almost all reported that one of the skills learned through this WAC course was “data organization and interpretation,” where 14 out of the 19 students reported it as a skill learned (Figure 7). In addition, more than 25 percent reported, “translate thoughts into precise wording” (n=5) as the most frequent response when asked how the writing skills learned in this class would help in their future job (Figure 8). These results are similar to another study showing that students are able to do college level work, but a third of the students are lost as far as writing organization. They are unable to present points logically, and there is no logical train of thought, with some students unable to write clearly at all (Plutsky & Wilson, 2001).

A number of studies emphasize that employers value writing skills in their newly hired college graduates (Kelley & Bridges, 2005). Also, one of the core competencies of undergraduate business students includes knowledge of written communication (Berman & Ritchie, 2006). Many of these students benefited from taking this applied marketing research class with a specific emphasis on learning writing skills as part of the class.

Students who listed “analyze tables” also listed “analysis write-up” as a skill learned (Figure 4), which demonstrates that analyzing skills can be learned through analytic writing. Analytical skills are often essential for success in the business workplace (Moore, 1994).

Writing instructors have all encountered plagiarism at some point in their careers and report that plagiarism is increasing (Bowden, 1996). As seen in Figure 8, “not plagiarizing” (n=3) was one of the major skills learned by some students. This skill is essential to any student’s future career. Plagiarism should be addressed and proper methods of incorporating views of other writers should be discussed with students (Welch, 1996). Besides quoting what one cites, it is also important to paraphrase this quoted content and/or write one’s own ideas. A reference from over 40 years ago reports that many students are unaware that a research paper that consists primarily of carefully cited quotations is an inadequate paper (Love & Payne, 1967). This concern is still quite true today. When asked, “What new skills did you learn by writing the *References* section?” (See Figure 6.), the most frequent response was “proper referencing” (n=4), showing that many of these students were not taught how to properly reference papers that they cite. Similarly, “paraphrasing” (n=6) was another frequent response for skills learned.



As suggested in the literature regarding gender differences in writing skills (Grant et al., 1987; Levine & Goldman-Caspar, 1996), there were gender patterns seen in this study. In this study, many women and only 2 men reported either “general writing style,” “professional writing style,” or “research paper style” as approaches to writing learned (Figure 1).

Also, more women (n=6) than men (n=4) reported learning a writing framework for the *Introduction* Section (Figure 2) but the opposite was seen for the *Method* section (Figure 3) where more men (n=3) than women (n=2) reported that skill. Most of the men reported that writing the *Discussion* section did not influence them, as 3 out of the 7 men responded with “no change” and 2 other men had incomplete responses (Figure 5). Our study showed that, in fact, many women reported learning and benefiting from many writing skills such as “higher writing skill level” (n=4), “write scientific research paper” (n=2), “professional business writing” (n=1), and “write reports” (n=1) since they reported these as useful skills when asked, “How do you think the writing skills in this class will help in your future job?” (Figure 8). We are unsure if these are deficiencies that women overcame by taking the class or perhaps due to a greater interest in writing overall than men. Typically, women outperform men in all areas of reading and writing and this literacy gap exists through all stages of educational development (Gambell & Hunter, 1999).

Typically, women are less likely than men to use quantitative methods and more likely to use qualitative approaches and also use qualitative analysis almost twice as often as men (Grant et al., 1987). In this study, many women reported learning skills of “analyze data,” “analysis write-up,” “analyze table,” and “SPSS use.” These analytical skills, as part of the writing class, stimulated women to become more receptive to and interested in learning these quantitative skills. Analytic skills are essential for a career in business.

In a financial accounting class, faculty found that written and oral communication skills were increased when a WAC course was incorporated into the curriculum (Stout, Wygal, & Hoff, 1990). Also, although utilizing both writing methods and writing categories is very time consuming for a professor, it promotes learning among students (Plutsky & Wilson, 2001). This suggests the importance of a writing intensive course for students.

This study has a number of limitations. First, the skills obtained from this marketing research intensive writing course are based upon respondents’ self-reports rather than some objective measure assessing these many areas. Second, a pre- and post-test design with actual grading on writing samples would be a more objective manner to measure the skills learned. Third, the woman to man ratio was high and could have affected the data with regard to gender



differences. Fourth, the sample is from only one college and may not be representative of all colleges. Fifth, as this was information obtained from one course, theoretical saturation for the topic may not be completely present. Sixth, replication of this study with larger samples and different business courses can provide data with greater generalizability.

In conclusion, these results provide valuable insights into the possible skills obtained by undergraduate students through participation in a writing intensive research course. Most students reported benefiting from this type of a course. They reported both current and future workplace benefits of taking such a course. These results can be useful for future research and for professors to understand the needs of college students taking similar WAC and other writing intensive programs that are implemented within undergraduate colleges.



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Note: Title graphic created by Carole E. Scott.

