Writing in Natural Resources

The ability to communicate is a fundamental quality employers look for in their employees. Communication takes place in many different forms. Two of the most effective forms of communication are oral communication and written communication. We see evidence of written and oral communication in most fields of natural resource study.

As rhetoric associates (peer writing tutors), pursuing degrees in natural resources, we explored the writing struggles many natural resources students face. Students aspiring to a degree in the field of natural resources typically see themselves working outdoors, away from the office, and more specifically, away from writing. The view that field work will take precedence over office work continues to exist in the minds of natural resource undergraduates. Many believe that when they enter the work force, the majority of their time will be spent away from the office and away from the computer. While this may be true, especially in entry level positions, our experiences reveal that written communication skills are absolutely necessary in any natural resource discipline.

Entry level positions (GS-5) are more outdoor-oriented, but office jobs provide an increase in salary. If natural resource graduates want to make decent money, they will have to sacrifice time spent in the field for time spent in the office. More time in the office includes more responsibilities that require oral and written communication skills. The bottom line is if natural resource students want more money, they must be capable of mature and effective communication.

We interviewed Lisa Church, a GS-11 Step 5 Wildlife Biologist working for the Bureau of Land Management. She explained that when she first started working for the Bureau of Land Management as a GS-5 she worked in the field (out of the office) a lot more than she does now. She stated that 85 to 90 percent of her career is spent writing technical papers and reports. She stated, “I wanted to be outside all the time but that quickly changed.” Church is often placed on job hiring boards expressed how solid written communication skills are sought after when hiring for any position. She clearly articulated the importance of good writing when she explained that bad grammar, even in emails and memos, will be put on evaluation reports. Church stated, “Good written skills are needed to be successful in this line of work and in [one’s] career.” Church’s comments support the absolute necessity of obtaining and honing professional communication skills.

Natural resource professionals from all different fields would likewise testify to the importance of having good writing skills in the workplace. In almost every career, the ability to write is crucial to success. A report from the National Commission on Writing entitled, “Writing: A ticket to Work...Or a Ticket Out, A Survey of Business Leaders,” states the significance of competent writing skills in professional employment. Bob Kerrey, president of New School University, asserts that “People unable to express themselves clearly in writing limit their opportunities for professional, salaried employment...writing is both a marker of high wage and high skill” (SITE).

Are natural resource students prepared for or even aware of such necessary communication requirements? In order to gain a better understanding of natural resource students’ feelings towards writing, we created a short survey for natural resources students to answer. This survey has helped us to assess their feelings towards writing, the problems they struggle with in writing, and most importantly, how they feel about writing in their future career.


The survey results show that the majority of students in the College of Natural Resources consider that they are fairly decent writers. The results also show a high percentage of students believing in the importance of writing in their future careers. Despite these high percentages, natural resource professors still question many of their students’ competencies in writing. Many, if not all, professors believe that natural resource students’ writing skills are not where they need to be. Professors see and understand that the ability to write well is an absolute imperative to succeeding in the real world.

Continued, on next page.
NR Writing survey results continued...

We interviewed one professor to better understand the views on the importance of writing in natural resources. Dr. Steve Burr, professor in Recreation Resource Management at Utah State University, provided responses asserting the significance of writing in natural resources. He confirmed that writing will be a significant component in any of the natural resource disciplines. He explained that while some disciplines will use writing more than others, everyone will be involved in writing within their field in some way or another. In the papers he assigns in classes, he notes that grammatical errors, sentence structuring, and formatting are common problems. Burr said writing is a great way to test critical thinking skills and comprehension of the material being covered. He believes that more writing assignments would benefit natural resource students and stated that natural resource students do not have the written communication skills they will need for professional careers. Burr confirmed that writing is very important in natural resource study.

Burr also reiterated that entry level positions in natural resource fields will see less writing, but employees will still be exposed to writing and will still need to have written communication skills. He made it clear that as one is promoted through an agency and gains more responsibility, she will find herself at the desk and in front of the computer more and more. He explained that writing is not only a reflection of the person, but it is also a reflection of the agency that one works for.

According to our survey results, most Natural Resource students recognize the importance of writing, yet indicate a desire for less writing assignments given in class. More meaningful writing assignments given in natural resource classes may be unpopular, but highly beneficial. The development of a scientific writing class for NR majors may prove to be of great value. Future research, assessing the perceived problems and benefits of such a class, should be conducted.

Depending on their profession, people in natural resources write proposals, technical reports, data summaries, research findings, progress reports, agendas, journal articles, educational messages, memos and e-mails to co-workers and managers, and the list goes on. Time spent in the field is inevitably followed by more than twice as much time spent in the office, organizing and communicating field data findings.

To effectively communicate findings, proposals, and various ideas, natural resource writing should be exceedingly clear and concise. Unnecessary and extravagant words should be avoided. Straightforward, easily understandable word usage and overall structure is desired. Content must present relevant and accurate information. Critical thinking should be manifest throughout the writing. Correct usage of citations is critical.

As rhetoric associates, we have noticed common problems in natural resource papers. One such problem is lack of clarity. Students tend to use wordy and vague phrases, taking ten lines to present a simple fact or finding. Concrete and concise words can easily replace such unclear phrases. Our job is to help them recognize clear versus unclear writing. Most students are surprised when we point out the large amount of unnecessary words in their papers. First, we bring their attention to the problem – awareness is the first step to progress. Second, we show them a better way by providing examples and explanations. Third, we hope they get the idea. Grammar and spelling is of course always a common problem. Content is critical. Often, students focus more on trivialities rather than the meat of the subject. They have a difficult time identifying the main points of a scientific process or subject.

In the end, it is absolutely critical that natural resource students learn how to communicate effectively through writing. Natural resource writers need to be encouraged to improve their writing so they can be competitive in the work force. Learning to write effectively now will be beneficial to all natural resources students as writing will be a requirement of any job. Rhetoric associates and peer writing tutors can play a key role in helping natural resource writers learn to communicate more effectively.

OTHER INTERESTING RESULTS:

- 61.1% of Environmental Studies majors want to do a lot of writing in their future career, as opposed to 17% of Recreation Resource majors.
- Out of the 90 survey respondents, 37 want to work for a government agency.
- 80.0% of those who want to work for an agency do not want to do much writing.
- Several students commented on how they think being strict on grammar/punctuation is unfair in non-English classes.
Meet a Professor

By Helena Torgerson-Hall

Name: Fred Provenza

Where did you grow up? Salida, Colorado, United States of America

Where did you get your degrees? B.S. at Colorado State University, M.S. and PhD here at Utah State University.

What are your degrees in? B.S. is in Wildlife Biology, M.S. and PhD in Range Science.

When did you decide and what inspired you to go into Wildlife Biology and Range Science? I have always loved wildlife and being outdoors. I thought that it would be neat to have a wildlife degree, and I loved going to Colorado State.

What classes do you normally teach? Managing Dynamic Ecosystems (FRWS 3900), a graduate class (FRWS 7030, Plant-Herbivore Interactions), and I teach many workshops through a consortium called BEHAVE (Behavioral Education for Human Animal Vegetation and Ecosystem Management).

What research are you currently involved in? The BEHAVE program, which looks at the influence of behavior on the ecological, economic, and social aspects of life, and how learning is involved with those same processes.

Have you had any interesting jobs before becoming a professor? I worked at a Greenhouse while going to High School, and on a Ranch for 7 years during and in between my college years.

Why did you decide to teach? At first, after receiving my B.S. I went back to work on a Ranch. Even though I loved working on the ranch, I decided there was no future on that ranch for me, and that research might be interesting. So, I came back to grad school and ended up here at USU, where I worked as a Technician in the Range Science Department up through my PhD. After I received my PhD, I had several job offerings, and I took the offer here at USU. The job ended up being part of the Faculty and as Faculty you have to teach something, besides doing research. I have found teaching to be a great thing. In fact, teaching is just as important as research, if not more so.

Hobbies and interests: All outdoor activities.

Philosophy on life: I think it is most important to learn compassion for one another - to love one another.

What do you hope people will remember you for? Remembered as being decent, open, compassionate, and learning to love one another.

What book would you recommend for someone to read? "Ethics for the New Millennium" by the Dalai Lama.

Thoughts on Logan: My wife and I have been in Logan for a long time now (29 years). We live on 2.5 acres, and we love to garden and work with plants and animals. We both love to be outside doing things and getting our hands dirty.

Future plans/dreams/wishes: This question deals with the evolution of the BEHAVE program and how Fred would like to see more coalitions come into effect to help learn to work together for the benefit of all, ecologically, economically, and socially.
The Quinneys

Seymour Joseph “Joe” Quinney was born May 12, 1893 in Logan. He graduated USU in 1916 and Harvard Law School in 1919. He married Jessie Eccles in 1917, had their first child, David, in 1919 and their second child, Janet, in 1922.

During his 60-year legal career, Quinney served as counsel to First Security Corporation, Amalgamated Sugar Company, Utah International, Anderson Lumber, and Pioneer Wholesale Company. He was a member of the Holy Cross Hospital advisory board and a director and officer of the Utah Symphony.

Joe Quinney is the “father of Utah’s ski industry,” being the original incorporator of the Salt Lake Winter Sports Association in 1938, which later became the Alta Ski Lifts Company. The ski area atop Little Cottonwood Canyon was Utah’s first to offer lift-served skiing. He was a modest man who shunned the spotlight, often claiming to be “a little frog in the big puddle of skiing”. History shows this community benefactor was quite the opposite. He was installed in the National Ski Hall of Fame in 1975.

In addition to his interests in Alta and in skiing, Quinney had a lifelong regard for natural resources and the environment. The Grand Canyon and the red rock country of southern Utah inspired him. His attachment to northern Utah, specially Logan Canyon and his summer home at Bear Lake, was a constant throughout his life. Joe Quinney joined forces with the College of Natural Resources’ Citizen’s Advisory Committee in 1979 and has been a major influence in the growth and direction of CNR since that time. Quinney died in 1983 at the age of 90.

Jessie Eccles Quinney was born on May 13, 1896 in Baker City, Oregon, but soon after, the family moved to Logan. David Eccles, Jessie’s father, immigrated to the United States in 1863. David Eccles, who grew up poor, was considered the richest man in Utah when he died in 1912. David founded First Security, the country’s first multi-bank holding company. The Eccles family remains prominent in Utah communities through generous contributions of their talents and gifts. Jessie Eccles graduated from USU in 1917 in general science, but her interests also included English, eugenics, and heredity. She later studied Russian drama, literature, and history at Radcliffe University of Boston. Jessie was said to be an avid outdoor person who enjoyed sailing, fishing, hunting, climbing, river running, and skiing with her family. With the quiet support of their parents, the Quinney children became excellent skiers and won many competitions.

In addition to her interests in science and literature, Jessie had a lifelong regard for the arts. She had a love of music and museums and spent many week-ends enjoying the Utah Symphony and Ballet West. She volunteered many hours and, through her legacy, continues to provide financial support. Jessie died at the age of 86 in 1982. David Quinney passed away in Salt Lake City in 1974 at the age of 55. Janet Quinney Lawson remains devoted to the College and USU.

Joe and Jessie, through the S.J. and Jessie E. Quinney Foundation, are invaluable to the College of Natural Resources. The foundation supported construction of the college’s Research Library, Remote Sensing/GIS Laboratory, Utah Geographic Alliance, and the Policy Analysis Program. In addition to other USU programs the foundation set up the Quinney Scholarship and Graduate Scholarships funds.

By: Patsy Palacios
Logger's Ball

Date: Feb. 11, 2005
Time: 6:30 PM
Place: Bullen Center, 43 S. Main, Logan
Cost: $7 person; $13 couple
(Free admission per person with meat or veggie dish for 12 people)

Bring your own alcohol if over 21. We will have a raffle with many prizes. There will be plenty of entertainment. Talent show: Please sign up at CNR 112 door. Tickets are on sale at CNR 112.
TWS

The USU student chapter of The Wildlife Society is dedicated to providing students with opportunities in wildlife biology and management. Some of the activities we do are assisting natural resource agencies, such as Utah DWR, with research on wildlife, doing service projects dealing with habitat management, listening to guest speakers, and going on field trips. Some of the places we go to are Yellowstone NP, Grand Canyon NP, and, if possible, professional conferences. We also participate in the western students' Wildlife Conclave each year. We meet every Wednesday at 6 PM in BNR 278.

Contact Garret Savory for information on upcoming activities: gasavory@cc.usu.edu.

SOSNR

The Student Organization for Society and Natural Resources is a club committed to the open discussion of local and global environmental and natural resources issues, bringing people and solutions together for healthy communities and enduring ecosystems. Our goal is to educate students about issues so that they can make their own decisions about their environment and their use of resources. We feel that the social aspect of Natural Resources is very important and want to bring it to the forefront for students to see the connection between people and the environment.

Contact Meghan Werely for information on meeting times and upcoming events: mlw@cc.usu.edu

FORESTRY CLUB

The Forestry Club is an organization proud in traditions. We hold fundraisers, go on hikes, and dabble in logging sports. Basically, we just have a good time through hard work and dedication.

Contact Dan Ott for information on meeting times and upcoming activities: dsott@cc.usu.edu.

RANGE

Contact James Stuart at jastuart@cc.usu.edu for information on meeting times and events. All are welcome.

AFS

(The American Fisheries Society) Contact Pauline Adams at padams@cc.usu.edu or Donnie Ratcliffe at drat@cc.usu.edu for information on meeting times and events. All are welcome.

If you would like something printed in the Almanac (story, poem, advertisement, etc.), contact Angie Cannon at angecan@cc.usu.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding student involvement in the College of Natural Resources, please feel free to contact Ashley Nielson, the CNR Student Advocate. You can e-mail her at ashleyn@cc.usu.edu.
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** Ninety surveys were collected from six classes: Human Dimensions of Natural Resource Management, Environmental Studies Professionalism, Natural Resource Interpretation, Wild Land Recreation Behavior, Geographic Information Systems, and Fundamentals of Recreation Resource Management. **
DO YOU WANT TO BECOME A PEER ADVISOR FOR THE 2005-2006 SCHOOL YEAR?
Must have minimum 3.3 GPA and a minimum of 30 credits total @ USU. Must be a CNR major. This is a paid position for 12 hours a week. To apply, please submit a letter of interest to Maureen or Kristy in NR 120 by Feb. 7, or until filled. For further details and a list of qualifications, check out the fliers around the CNR or stop by NR 120 to find out more.

NOMINATE YOUR TEACHER OF THE YEAR!
Nominations can be made on the south side of the CNR atrium.
All nominations are due Feb. 4, 2005.

Help for the upcoming Sustainable Landscapes Conference is needed.
Please check out the fliers posted on all of the CNR stairwell bulletin boards for complete details. If you have any questions, give Diana Glenn a call 7-3237.

FAMILY SNOWSHOE HIKE
Saturday, February 12, 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. All Ages
$8 for non-members, $6 for Stokes Nature Center members.
Family of four: $25 non-member, $20 SNC member. Enjoy a beautiful winter day snowshoeing up on SNC’s new property in Nibley! Join SNC staff and volunteer naturalists. Check out who inhabits this place, identify animal tracks in the snow, learn about snow crystals, and play snow games. Snowshoe rental is included in the program fee. If there is not enough snow, program location will change.

URCO Grants Due: Feb. 15, 2005
Round II of Undergraduate Research and Creative Opportunities (URCO) Grants are due at noon. Funded by the Vice President for Research Office. Workshops on writing grants occur Jan. 31 and Feb. 1 at 4 p.m. in Honors Lounge (ML 374). For information, contact Joyce Kinkead, 435-797-1706. http://www.usu.edu/undergradresearch