A Study of Self-Authoring Practices and Their Application to NOVA Students and Programs

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Preface

During the fall 2019 semester, I noticed a disturbing trend: an uptick in the number of students who were self-reporting anxiety and depression. Whether in their personal narrative essays, their emails, or during office hours, my students - especially young women of color - were trying to manage mental illness challenges that their parents wouldn't acknowledge. Some had the benefit of psychiatric help, but most did not.

Fast-forward to the spring 2021 semester, and I am having a Zoom conference with my student, whom I'll call K. K, who is from Eritrea, is worried that her personal essay is all wrong. "I don't think I did it right," she says. "You asked us to describe anything important or memorable about ourselves, and as I was writing, I realized that I don't know myself at all." I am elated, not because K is struggling, but because she acknowledges that confusion and asks (out loud!) for help with an unanswerable question: Who am I? I imagine that she is not the only NOVA student who can't yet answer that question.

Introduction

Dr. Marcia Baxter Magolda is a pioneer in the study of student development. Magolda is a Distinguished Professor in Educational Leadership at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. She earned her B.A. from Capitol University in Columbus, Ohio and her M.A. and Ph.D. from The Ohio State University. For decades, she has studied the development of young adults. Her current *curriculum vitae* lists her area of expertise this way: "Research in young adult self-evolution and epistemological development, assessing intellectual development, and constructive-developmental pedagogy."

Magolda's decades-long study of college student development traces the progression toward self-authorship, a term first coined by psychologist Robert Kegan. In her 2008 article, "Three Elements of Self-Authorship," Magolda defines self-authorship as shifting from:

> from uncritically accepting values, beliefs, interpersonal loyalties and intrapersonal states from external authorities to forming those elements internally. The person becomes the *coordinator* of defining her/his beliefs, identity and social relations while critically considering the perspectives of external others (270).

In other words, self-authored persons define their own beliefs not in a vacuum, but with careful consideration of other perspectives. The views of parents, friends, teachers, and advisers are just *one part* of their personal formulas for figuring out their identity, priorities, relationships, and goals. Self-authored individuals have the capacity to coordinate, but not give into, external, and perhaps competing, influences.

Thus, self-authorship doesn't require a student to keep a personal journal or meet other written requirements. Instead, it demands that a student become the author of her own ideas, that she treats outside influences not with blind allegiance but a critical eye, and that her value system is the product internal coordination instead of external pressure.

Other scholars have built on Magolda's work. Vasti Torres, Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department Chair, School of Education at Indiana University and Ebelia Hernandez, Associate Professor in Educational Psychology at Rutgers Graduate School of Education, mine the experiences of Latina/o students in their article "The Influence of Ethnic Identity on Self-Authorship." Jane Elizabeth Pizzolato, Assistant Professor in Psychology in Education at the University of Pittsburgh, used Magolda's foundational research to examine the self-authoring experiences of high-risk college students, and Angelo Letizia, Assistant Professor

of Graduate Education at Newman University, argues for a "writing framework" built upon the idea of self-authorship as a "democratic activity." "Through scholarly writing," he argues, "students can begin to formulate their internal voices and thus become more engaged citizens" (2016, p 219).

Furthermore, the scholarship described in the preceding paragraph relates directly to (1) NOVA's Core Learning Outcomes (CLOs); (2) NOVA's course content summaries for ENG 111 and ENG 112; (3) individual faculty teaching practices, (4) the Framework for Information Literacy as set forth by the American College of Reference Librarians (ACRL); and (5) the mechanisms and frameworks that NOVA has established to support holistic student development.

Theories of Self-Authorship

Magolda's Research

Marcia Baxter Magolda owes her scholarship, in part, to the pioneering work of Dr. Robert Kegan, a licensed psychologist and former Harvard professor. Whereas Kegan identified six orders of human development beginning at birth[1]Magolda fixes her research on the transition from late adolescence to early adulthood, or the period between Kegan's Stage 3 and Stage 4. As Richard Reis of Stanford University explains, Stage 3 is marked by seeking acceptance and "validation, orientation or authority" from others, whereas Stage 4 witnesses the shift from reliance on others to self-reliance and the early stages of developing internal authority. Magolda calls the transitional period between Stages 3 and 4 "the crossroads."

[1] Stage 0**:** Infant's Mind; Stage 1: Child's Mind, Stage 2: Instrumental Mind; Stage 3: Socialized Mind; Stage 4: Self-Authoring Mind; Stage 5: Self-Transforming Mind (Reis)

The crossroads usually occurs when college students are in their late teens or early 20s (Magolda 2008). Indeed, based on NOVA's 2019-2020 Fact Sheet, the majority of NOVA students fall into this stage of development[2].

During her 20-year investigation beginning in 1986, Magolda interviewed the same group of 101 university students in what became a seminal study in self-authorship. These 101 participants were "traditional-age students (51 women and 50 men) when they began college in 1986 at a Midwestern public university. Seventy percent of the entering class of which the participants were a part ranked in the top 20% of their high school class" (Magolda 2008 p.272). They represented majors from across all disciplines. 70 students continued to participate in the study after they graduated.

She returned to these same 70 students as they grew into adults. Her questions were ordinary. For example, she asked how they selected their college, their major, or their boyfriend. She then considered their answers in terms of three dimensions: (1) Cognition - (*How do I know?*); (2) Identity - (*Who am I?*); and (3) Relationships (*What relationships do I want?*) (Magolda, Creamer, Meszaros 2010 p. 18). Based on their answers to her questions, Magolda plotted each student's progress toward self-authorship the way you might track someone's hike along the Appalachian Trail: step by rocky step with setbacks along the way.

She constructed a two-pronged system of "phases" and "dimensions," as shown in the table on the following page. (Creamer, Magolda and Yu 2010, p. 550) (Magolda, Creamer, Meszaros 2010, p. 18).

[2] According to the NOVA Fact Sheet for 2019-2020, "the median age of students for Fall 2019 was 20.3 years and the mean age was 23.4 years. The student age distribution was as follows: 61% were 21 years or younger; 24% were 22 to 29 years."

Dimensions	**Phases**		
	Following External Formulas The absence of self-authorship	**Crossroads** Emerging self-authorship	**Becoming the Author of One's Own Life** Self-authorship
Cognitive - Knowing How do I know?	Students rely on outside influences to answer questions of knowing, identity, and relationships. They have not developed their internal voice to answer questions posed in the dimension column. Thus, self-authorship is absent.	Students begin to coordinate and manage opposing messages. They begin to realize that their own answers to questions of cognition, identity, and relationships may not meet others' expectations. This tension can cause confusion and guilt.	Students "live their convictions." They consider, but do not blindly accept, external ideas. As they consider questions of cognition, identity, and relationships, their answers are guided by the primacy of their personal goals and opinions.
Intrapersonal - Identity Who am I?			
Interpersonal - Relationships What relationships do I want?			

The first phase, "Following External Formulas," characterizes students who lack self-authorship and rely on external formulas to answer questions of knowing, identity, and relationships. As they enter the Crossroads phase, students begin to recognize that their own ideas may contradict those of trusted authorities, like parents or academic advisers. Although this dissonance, which Magolda calls "disequilibrium," can cause confusion and guilt, it is a necessary step in the self-authoring process (Pizzolato 2003). The final phase, "Becoming the Author of One's Own Life, sees personal convictions and desires move to the fore as students contemplate questions of knowing, identity, and relationships.

When applying Magolda's findings to NOVA students, it's important to acknowledge the stark differences between her largely White, college-bound population and NOVA's diversity.

The students in Magolda's study were high achievers. Many NOVA students struggle academically, not due to lack of ability but because of lack of preparedness, family obligations, financial barriers, systemic racism, immigration concerns, and other considerations.

Magolda's study focused largely on a White population. According to the NOVA Fact Book, only 36% of the student population identified as White in Fall 2019, down from 39% in 2015. During that same period, the Hispanic/Latino/a population increased from 22% to 25% (Fact Book 1-4).

Magolda's study followed traditional students, (those who became full-time college students immediately after high school) while NOVA educates a large percentage of non-traditional students. In fall 2019, about 61% of NOVA students were under 21 years old, although both the mean and median ages trended downward during the 4-year period ending in 2019 (Fact Book 1-3). Furthermore, NOVA enrolls more part-time (PT) students than full-time students (FTE) by a ratio of more than 2:1. For example, during the 2019-2020 academic year, the NOVA Fact Book reports that there were 30,479 FTE and 71,837 PT students (1-1).

Though these differences are significant, they do not render Magolda's study useless. In fact, her groundbreaking work became the foundation for other scholars, who, recognizing her work's value and lack of diversity, built upon her theories to study the self-authoring practices of Latino/a students, high-risk students, and low privilege students.

Latino/a Students

As previously reported, NOVA's Hispanic population increased from 22% to 25% during the five years ended 2019 (Fact Book 1-4). Thus, understanding Hispanic students' self-authoring acquisition is fundamental to serving NOVA students equitably.

Vasti Torres, a Professor at Indiana University and Ebelia Hernandez, a Professor at Rutgers Graduate School of Education, mine the experiences of Latina/o students in their article "The Influence of Ethnic Identity on Self-Authorship." Based on interviews with Latino/a college students, they identified additional challenges that these students face as they progress through the three phases of self-authorship. The following table compares the defining characteristics of the Magolda's largely White participants to those of Torres' and Hernandez' Latino/a as they move from Phases 1 to Phase 3 (Torres and Hernandez 2007, pgs. 562-571)

Phase 1: External Formulas Lacking Self-Authorship	
Magolda, Creamer, Meszaros (2010)	**Torres and Hernandez (2007)**
While in Phase 1, students rely on outside influences to answer questions of knowing, identity, and relationships. Therefore, responses to *How do I know? Who am I?* and *What relationships do I want?* rest with others.	Latino/a students in this phase defer to geography, family expectations, stereotypes about themselves and stereotypes about Anglos. They are not ready to leave their comfort zone and they are suspicious of people in authority, such as academic advisers and faculty.

Phase 1 illustrates the dependent relationships that each group has with external influences. The Magolda group *trusts* external influences to help answer questions about knowing, identity, and relationships. The Torres and Hernandez group relies on family and even stereotypes about themselves to answer such questions. Furthermore, this group *is suspicious* of unrelated authorities, such as academic advisers and faculty. Therefore, Latino/a students face the extra step of "undoing" suspicion before they can begin to develop their inner voices.

Phase 2: Crossroads. *Transitioning to self-authorship*	
Magolda, Creamer, Meszaros (2010)	**Torres and Hernandez (2007)**
Students begin to coordinate and manage opposing messages. They begin to realize that their own answers to questions of knowing, identity, and relationships may not meet others' expectations. This tension can cause confusion and guilt. They have not yet developed their internal voice to answer questions posed in the dimension column.	Latino/a students acknowledge diverse viewpoints and recognize stereotypes as racist. Usually such recognition stems from a disruptive racist experience. Although the influence of family is somewhat diminished, students still view identity. family, cultural expressions, and food as positive (p. 565) and changing lives (leave home or comfort zone) as negative (p. 565).

In Phase 2, both White and Latino/a students begin to recognize and manage opposing messages. This opposition is a necessary catalyst for growth. As in Phase 1, Latino/a students face an extra step: a shift in their thinking from accepting stereotypes to recognizing that stereotypes are built on racism. Family and cultural traditions continue to be positive external influences for this group.

Phase 3: Becoming the Author of One's Own Life *Securing Self-Authorship*	
Magolda, Creamer, Meszaros (2010)	**Torres and Hernandez (2007)**
Students "live their convictions." They consider, but do not blindly accept, external ideas. As they contemplate questions of cognition, identity, and relationships, their answers are guided by the primacy of their personal goals and opinions.	Students integrate their heritage into their lives so that ethnicity is *one* factor among many in decision-making. Torres and Hernandez call this balanced integration an "informed identity." "[Students] recognize their cultural reality and consider their own needs in creating new choices" (p. 563).

For both groups, Phase 3 is marked by a student's "internal authority mov[ing] to the foreground to mediate external influences" (Boes, Magolda, Buckley 2010, p.14). Students, now

on the cusp of adulthood, learn to treat external formulas as one factor among many in their decision-making process. As Torres and Hernandez report, the words "heritage," "ethnicity" and "cultural reality" illustrate the persistent, yet now slightly diminished, influence of Latino/a identity. The words remind college faculty and staff that, once again, Latino/a students must coordinate additional considerations along their path to self-authorship.

Authority

The acquisition of self-authorship in Magolda's students, Torres' and Hernandez' students, and indeed all students, is marked by a shift in authority. Students first defer to the authority of external formulas, and eventually trust their own authority as they become self-authoring. This emphasis on what constitutes "authority" is a subject of interest outside of self-authorship studies, and is therefore grounded in a larger community of scholars.

Specifically, the American College of Reference Librarians (ACRL) has set forth a Framework for Information Literacy that consists of six pillars. One pillar, "Authority is Constructed and Contextual," compares the ways in which experts and novices (students) understand authority. This pillar situates authority in communities and notes that authority may differ among communities. Experts approach authority with "informed skepticism" and accept the possibility of changing schools of thought. Students who are not self-authored do the opposite: they blindly and unquestioningly follow external formulas.

Just as scholars in self-authorship plot student progress on a timeline marked by phases, the ACRL framework acknowledges that notions of authority are developed over time. It states "Thus, novice learners *come to respect* the expertise that authority represents while remaining skeptical of the systems that have elevated that authority and the information created by it" (emphasis mine). The words "come to respect" indicate that developing respect for authority is a

process that happens over time as is the transition to self-authorship. Moreover, the idea of skepticism, explicitly stated in the ACRL framework, is also a factor in Magolda's Crossroads phase, during which students encounter conflicting messages and begin to evaluate external formulas with a critical eye.

High Risk Students

High-risk students - regardless of their race or ethnicity - progress through Magolda's three dimensions differently from majority White populations and Latino/a populations. Jane Pizzolato, Assistant Professor in Psychology in Education at the University of Pittsburgh, explains that, in this context, "high-risk" refers to students who are likely to withdraw from college for one or more of the following reasons: (1) they are underprepared; (2) their families cannot offer financial or practical support: (3) their interest in school makes them objects of ridicule; or (4) they "lack cultural capital valued in school (styles of discourse, cultural knowledge)" (2003 pg. 799). Therefore, high-risk students who commit themselves to college must sever ties early on with unsupportive people and institutions that put them at risk. These students encounter Magolda's "disequilibrium" at a younger age than students who face fewer challenges.

Ironically, Pizzolato found that the greater disequilibrium (a disruptive event, like incarceration or death in the family), the "greater [the] commitment to new goals." She writes "Through this internalization and commitment, [high-risk students] became *authors of their own lives* because they began to develop and commit to internally defined possible selves" (804).

Low Privilege Students

Pizzolato's scholarship also explores the effect of privilege on self-authorship. Her research divides students into two groups: High privilege and low privilege. In this context,

privilege refers to "the unsolicited benefit of not having to figure out how to apply to or pay for college. High privilege students possessed these benefits, while low privilege students did not" (2003, p. 804). While privilege is generally associated with the ability to pay, Pizzolato's definition includes access to knowledge, specifically knowing how to apply or having access to a trusted authority who knows how to apply. It suggests that students who need financial aid can still be considered "privileged" if they receive help from someone who understands the college admission process and/or the process of completing the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid).

Low privilege students, then, face two deficits: a lack of money and a lack of guidance. Because these deficits present problems that must be solved *prior* to entering college and without existing models, low privilege students begin the journey to self-authorship at an earlier age than their high privilege peers. The reason, as Pizzolato points out, is that "Even if [low privilege] students had encouraging family members or friends, they still often lacked models and procedural support in their college application and decision process" (2003, p. 807). In other words, they had to solve their own problems.

Direct Connections to NOVA

Self-Authorship and Alignment with NOVA's Critical Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

Through careful analysis of student responses to interview questions, Magolda discovered that as the students matured and gained confidence, their decision-making process relied more on their own judgment, desires, and beliefs and less on external influences. External advice and expectations informed, but did not overwhelm, their internal voices. This is the definition of self-authorship, which, according to Magolda, has three distinct phases.

Trusting the internal voice. In this phase, students understand that although they cannot control outside events, with a strong internal voice they can respond to, adjust to, and make meaning from these events in *their own way*. They begin to be the principle interpreters of their own experiences.

Building an internal foundation is characterized by developing a guiding philosophy based on "one's personal characteristics and sense of self." In this phase, students may consider the expectations of others in positions of authority (whether actual or perceived) but they will intentionally privilege their own priorities. They create a personal framework founded on their internal voice.

Securing internal commitments. In this final phase, the intentionality that characterized "Building an Internal Foundation" becomes firmly embedded in a student's nature, as if it were always present. Magolda describes this transition as moving from "holding convictions in [the students'] minds to holding them in their hearts" (Magolda, Creamer, Meszaros 2010 - 16-18).

This progression to self-authorship aligns with and complements NOVA's Core Learning Outcomes (CLOs), as illustrated below.

CLO	CLO Description	Alignment with Stages of Self-Authorship
Critical Thinking	"NOVA *encourages critical thinking and self-awareness*. Critical thinkers gather relevant information, ideas, and arguments in order to *make sense of complex issues and solve problems*" (emphasis mine).	**Trusting the Internal Voice** Students gather information in order to understand issues in their own way. They do not rely on others' interpretation of events. They form their own identity.
Professional Readiness	**"Teamwork:** *Maintaining constructive interpersonal relationships* is essential to working effectively in groups or teams. This entails *negotiating and managing*	**Building an Internal Foundation** Students negotiate, rather than bend to, the expectations of

	interpersonal conflict among team members with diverse perspectives" (emphasis mine). **"Ethical Reasoning:** Ethical reasoning requires *people to assess their own and others' values and behaviors inside a given social context,* think about how diverse perspectives may be applied to those settings, and consider the ramifications of alternative actions" (emphasis mine).	others. They negotiate conflicts. Students are guided by personal philosophies and a sense of self. They also accept that diverse perspectives may cause conflict and force a shift in direction.
Leadership	***"Effective interpersonal skills*** to coach and develop others' professional skills and *utilize the strengths of others to achieve common goals"* (emphasis mine).	**Building an Internal Foundation** Students negotiate and coordinate the expectations of others.
Leadership	***"Emotional intelligenc*e**, which is the ability to *assess and manage one's emotions* in order to guide and motivate others " (emphasis mine).	**Securing Internal Commitments** As students manage their own emotions, their personal philosophy becomes embedded and permanent. This confidence and strong sense of self helps students consider, even embrace, new ideas. Thus, students benefit from strength, not stasis.

Self-Authorship and Alignment with NOVA's Foundational Courses

Like the CLOs, the objectives of NOVA's foundational courses support the goal of self-authorship. For example, one objective of College Composition I (ENG 111) is "Knowledge of Discourse Conventions." This objective states that students will "Discuss and implement conventions of academic discourse, demonstrate knowledge of various genres and audiences, and use documentation formats." It defines "conventions" as "the formal rules and informal guidelines that define genres; they govern such things as mechanics, usage, spelling, and citation

practices. College-level writing often demands adherence to conventions of academic discourse communities. These communities shape readers' and writers' perceptions of correctness or appropriateness." This description echoes Pizzolato's definition of high risk students, those who "lack cultural capital valued in school (styles of discourse, cultural knowledge)" (2003 pg. 799). Both the Virginia Community College System (through their ENG 111 Course Objectives) and Pizzolato recognize the significant role of academic discourse in college communities, and by extension, the disadvantaged position of students not fluent in such discourse.

Similarly, College Composition II (ENG 112) requires that students "Analyze and investigate ideas from multiple perspectives and apply sound reasoning to arguments, their own and others, examine subjects from multiple perspectives, and recognize their own biases to formulate and express their own perspective." Recognizing multiple perspectives, acknowledging personal bias, and eventually forming a personal perspective trace the three phases of self-authorship described on pages 5- 8.

Self-Authorship and NOVA's Pedagogy Across the Disciplines

As previously mentioned, the participants in Magolda's study were mostly White. To understand how self-authorship might be developed in diverse populations, I surveyed NOVA faculty to learn how they encourage students to develop their internal voices. The survey had only one question: *In what ways do your specific classes or your discipline as a whole encourage students to develop their own voices? For example, is there space for students to predict, hypothesize, guess, forecast, react, respond to, collaborate or participate in any other activities that encourage them to think about a problem or question before they learn the right answers (if there are right answers) or before they learn what experts think (if the subject matter includes expert opinion)?*

Although I distributed the survey widely, I received only 19 responses. (I attribute this low rate to the time-consuming professional and personal readjustments necessitated by COVID-19.)

Faculty responses from across the disciplines show that NOVA classrooms invite students to exercise their internal voices and create opportunities for students to be experts. Here are some unedited sample responses (please see Appendix A for all responses organized by discipline):

Marketing. "[Students] use a computer simulation to predict, (hypothesize , forecast, react, and respond) as they individually establish a bike company and then compete against computer-generated competitors to achieve better and better business results through a series of decisions. They must analyze the marketing research data, create products, price them, promote them via advertising and personal selling and decide where to open stores around the world. They modify and improve their decisions in six decision rounds to achieve profits and build their brands."

Engineering. "In EGR 121 we do group activities each week where students collaborate and then present to the rest of the class. These activities do not usually have a right or wrong answer allowing students to discuss results with each other. We also have weekly discussion boards for each topic. In EGR 122 students work in teams throughout the semester to solve a problem. Again, there is no right or wrong answer, just a process they are supposed to follow."

Math. "Usually, although with zoom lectures it is more difficult to get the students to contribute. In the quantitative reasoning class students are given questions which should be completed on a spreadsheet and they must think about the problem before filling out the template. Generally since I teach math there is only one right answer. We often show a student

how to do a problem and then have them try to work a similar problem thinking through it on their own or in a group. So we are mostly not feeding answers to students, but require them to do their own thinking. That is probably why math is not so popular!"

Physics. "Physics labs often engage students in hypothesizing, predicting, and forecasting. Assignments I'm using this semester additionally encourage students to theorize, analyze, and discuss scenarios and topics without "right" answers -- the idea being they will formulate their own arguments based on their understanding and their research."

History. "In my classes (and the classes of my colleagues), students are encouraged to create their own interpretation of the past rather than memorize facts and dates. In assignments and class discussion, students may be asked questions like, 'Was Athenian democracy really democratic?' or, a question we covered today, "Even though classical Greece seemed to be an enlightened culture, it still supported slavery and the oppression of women. How should a historian (like yourself) reconcile this dichotomy?' There are many 'correct' answers to these questions. In my classes, student work is evaluated by staying on topic, creating an argument, and defending that argument with good and true evidence from history. The argument itself does not matter."

English. "In my prompts for ENG 111 & ENG112, there is at least one that focuses on students exploring the connections between what they learn and their future majors, career plan, and transfer university choice. Class discussions always provide students with opportunities to observe, to discover, and to respond to texts before my analysis of those texts. While imitation is used to teach skills and language use, I always encourage students to learn to do critical thinking by thinking outside the box and from their own perspectives."

English. "In ENG 111 classes, students write memoirs that encourage them to think back to an incident that changed their lives. In addition to the recall, students have to analyze the incident and determine its effects on their lives then and today."

Chemistry. "I offer several opportunities for students to work on example problems on their own during class, before we discuss the correct answer. When there are multiple ways to calculate an answer, I try to point that out. Students also have time to predict results in weekly labs, although it is more difficult to experience this with our remote versions during the pandemic."

ESL. "In several of my classes, I involve students in creating surveys, surveying each other and making a presentation or writing an essay based on the results. They are given topics to choose from and are grouped based on their choices. Together, they develop questions, interview other students (or are now distributing the survey through Google forms), analyze the results and outline a presentation or an essay. The presentation is given by the group; the essay is written individually."

Collectively and across the disciplines, these responses report opportunities for NOVA students to create something original, consider new information, adjust initial plans, collaborate, interpret historical events, solve problems, draw on personal experiences, and reconcile differences. These classroom activities are intentional, not fortuitous. They require carefully planned, student-centered classes (even on Zoom) and deference to students' views. These activities create an environment where young adults at the Crossroads (Magolda's term for the space between complete reliance on external factors and achieving self-authoring) can exercise their internal voice the way they would exercise any muscle that they want to strengthen.

Not all teaching methods work for all learners, despite the best efforts of faculty, and research presented herein shows that students of color encounter challenges on their path to self-authorship that their White peers do not. NOVA's diversity demands special focus on minority students. For the 2019-2020 academic year, for example, NOVA's Fact Book reports the following race/ethnicity distribution: White - 36%; Hispanic/Latino - 25%; Asian - 16.7%; Black/African American -14.5% During that same period, there were 1,379 international students. This substantial non-White population requires specific and intentional self-authoring guidance that respects its varied and perhaps non-traditional backgrounds.

Pizzolato advises college faculty and staff to discuss with high-risk students not only the path to success but also the long-term implications of that success. This, she argues, will help students visualize "their possible selves" (2003).

Although Pizzolato's research clearly identifies high risk and low privilege students, NOVA may not be able to count these students in the same way that it calculates demographic data, but I am confident that anecdotal evidence supports the claim that NOVA's high-risk and/or low privilege population is sizeable. Dr. Barbara Saperstone, the former Provost of the Annandale campus, once said that our students are "one flat tire away from never returning to school." Substitute "car repair," "sick day," "poor grade," "court date" or any other setback for "flat tire" and you have a snapshot of the hardships our students face. To this list, we can now add COVID-19. These setbacks are not captured in statistics.

However, because of careful planning and out of genuine concern, NOVA has in place experts, resources, and mechanisms designed to offset student deficits. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- ❑ A newly formed Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee led by Dr. Nathan Carter;
- ❑ An Office of Wellness and Mental Health (formerly NOVACares);
- ❑ Early alert systems built into Navigate to flag and support struggling students;
- ❑ A renewed focus on combating systemic racism;
- ❑ Efforts to decolonize syllabi;
- ❑ Efforts to revise syllabi so that the language is welcoming, positive, and clear;
- ❑ A committee dedicated to enhancing students' sense of belonging;
- ❑ Renewed efforts to create a welcoming environment;
- ❑ Well publicized access to CARE funds;
- ❑ A Single-Stop Office that connects students with local charitable organizations;
- ❑ A food pantry on every campus;
- ❑ Professional development opportunities that help faculty and staff practice anti-racist behaviors and recognize the deleterious effects of microaggressions;
- ❑ Faculty and staff that are dedicated to creating the most supportive environment possible for one of the most diverse student bodies in the country.

Best Practices

Best practices indicate that a robust writing program is a critical resource for encouraging self-authoring practices in students. By spanning across the disciplines, a comprehensive writing program would create an opportunity for faculty to share their expectations of student writing, their understanding of writing as a process, and their personal writing experiences. Equally as important, a writing program would also create space for more foundational discussions of what writing is. Rather than mere adherence to a set of grammatical and structural rules, writing is a

complex activity inextricably linked to identity, and as this paper shows, identity is a main pillar of self-authorship.

In his essay compiled in the book *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, Tony Scott posits that our ideologies shape everything in our lives, from our "proper social statuses" to "what it means to love." Scott, an Associate Professor of Writing Studies, Rhetoric, and Composition at Syracuse University, argues that writing cannot be divorced from ideology and culture. "To be immersed in any culture," he explains, "is to learn to see the world through the ideological lenses it validates and makes available to us in writing" (2016). Writing, then, is always ideological; it will necessarily include personal and cultural pieces of the writer and these pieces may not fit into traditional strictures of academic writing. In a writing program, faculty could collaborate about ways to maintain academic standards while welcoming various ideologies, for in welcoming ideologies, faculty welcome the writer. It is these ideologies that inform students responses to Magolda's questions of knowing, identity and relationships.

With a strong foundation built on shared information and values, faculty could work together to craft assignments that reward original thinking and embrace the experience of the writer. These may be low-stakes assignments that privilege creativity over correctness so that students can exercise their inner voice without worrying about their GPAs.

In addition, Magolda suggests other student-centered practices that guide students to becoming the author of their own lives. Specifically, she recommends providing opportunities, through conversations or journals, for students to reflect on making connections and meaning. Furthermore, she reports that examining the complexities and subtleties of their personal journeys helped students achieve self-authorship (2008. p.282-283).

Final Reflections

When I began this research, I thought that self-authorship could be achieved in the classroom: an assignment here, a discussion there, and students would soon recognize the value of their own ideas. If faculty simply made space for student voices, I thought, self-authorship would soon follow. I was naive. Certainly, a classroom that encourages and rewards original thinking is a key part of the self-authoring process, and the examples listed in Appendix 1 show how carefully NOVA faculty construct their assignments.

But the path to self-authorship is more like a rocky road where not all students start at the same place or march in lock-step as they answer the questions posed by Magolda's three dimensions (*How do I know? Who am I? What relationships do I want?).*

If we agree that the development of one's own sense of self is a laudable goal of a college education, then NOVA should continue to maintain and create programs, establish processes, and develop pedagogy that mitigate the effects of student deficits and encourage students to be coordinators of, and not servants to, external formulas. This commitment will require no less than all of NOVA's existing efforts and likely more than that.

With intentional behavior, thoughtful planning, and open hearts, NOVA faculty and staff have already created an environment that gently pushes students toward and supports them during their quest for self-authorship. Kindness is always a good first step, but kindness alone will not be enough. We must create a dedicated, supported, and sustainable framework by building on the exceptional support programs and mechanisms that are already in place and nimbly responding to new circumstances and needs.

Appendix A

Unedited faculty responses to survey question:

In what ways do your specific classes or your discipline as a whole encourage students to develop their own voices? For example, is there space for students to predict, hypothesize, guess, forecast, react, respond, collaborate or participate in any other activities that encourage them to think about a problem or question before they learn the right answers (if there are right answers) or before they learn what experts think (if the subject matter includes expert opinion)?

Chemistry

I offer several opportunities for students to work on example problems on their own during class, before we discuss the correct answer. When there are multiple ways to calculate an answer, I try to point that out. Students also have time to predict results in weekly labs, although it is more difficult to experience this with our remote versions during the pandemic.

Engineering

In EGR 121 we do group activities each week where students collaborate and then present to the rest of the class. These activities do not usually have a right or wrong answer allowing students to discuss results with each other. We also have weekly discussion boards for each topic. In EGR 122 students work in teams throughout the semester to solve a problem. Again, there is no right or wrong answer, just a process they are supposed to follow.

English

I have them do KWL sheets and study guides before we go over the chapters in class. They use the study guides in group discussions (to more or less good results -- some learn much from their classmates, some just coast). They also create a Google doc on the lesson of the day. And I have them do a weekly blog response to a video I've posted, and they respond to at least three of their classmates postings, thereby continuing the conversation about ideas.

* * *

In teaching Composition and Literature, I absolutely think there is space for students to engage in learning activities that promote critical thinking about issues and/or problems before they learn what "experts" have to say. In fact, I almost think that sums up Composition by itself. As for literature, I think it depends on teaching strategy. For faculty who engage with students using learner-centered and constructivist teaching practices, yes. There is so much room for inquiry!

For faculty who lecture and ask for students to take notes, and then synthesize the information for exams and essays, there may be less room for students to develop their voices. The idea of asking students to develop their voices speaks to the challenge of getting students to use their voices, and that is no easy trick. However, it can be done in any discipline, and I do it by asking students warm up questions that ask them to draw personal connections ("What does X remind you of in your own life?"). Then I usually ask them to work on paraphrasing, which challenges them to put the ideas they are reading into their own language. Then I ask them to compare and contrast different ideas, concepts, voices.... There are ways to scaffold inquiry so that the most well-read to the least well-read can all contribute to a discussion.

* * *

1. In my syllabus project, we suggested many ways to allow student voices in syllabus construction and teaching, such as question-driven statements, exploratory syllabus analysis, etc. 2. In my prompts for ENG 111 & ENG112, there is at least one that focuses on students exploring the connections between what they learn and their future majors, career plan, and transfer university choice. 3. Class discussions always provide students with opportunities to observe, to discover, and to respond to texts before my analysis of those texts. 4. While imitation is used to teach skills and language use, I always encourage students to learn to do critical thinking by thinking outside the box and from their own perspectives.

* * *

Since most of what I am teaching is writing I spend a great deal of time trying to have students read content to develop and express opinions about that content. I make sure if the conversations leans too far in one direction to add the other side of the conversation to the class conversation to even things out. For example, if we are reading about saving animals in Africa. I make sure to include some comments about poor people trying to live in Africa if the topic doesn't come out of the student discussion. Sometimes one student will be the only person representing their point of view and I will have to join in the conversation and support the voice of that one student. It is harder with young students. They sometimes just want to please the teacher so they want to find out what your point of view is and then support it rather than taking the time to read and develop their own ideas.

* * *

In ENG 111 classes, students write memoirs that encourages them to think back to an incident that changed their lives. In addition to the recall, students have to analyze the incident and determine its effects on their lives then and today.

* * *

I give my students a chance to keep a music literacy log where they write down all the music they listen to in a day. They then write a paper where they connect how their music listening practices can impact their success in college and what music can help them with their classes, social interactions in college, dealing with stress, etc. For this paper, students collaborate and share with each other in class about their favorite music choices and connections to college. Students also have to choose a specific audience for this paper and all their writing assignments which helps them further develop their voice.

ESL

In several of my classes, I involve students in creating surveys, surveying each other and making a presentation or writing an essay based on the results. They are given topics to choose from and are grouped based on their choices. Together, they develop questions, interview other students (or are now distributing the survey through Google forms), analyze the results and outline a presentation or an essay. The presentation is given by the group; the essay is written individually.

History

Survey level history courses focus on the development of critical thinking skills. In my classes (and the classes of my colleagues), students are encouraged to create their own interpretation of the past rather than memorize facts and dates. In assignments and class discussion, students may be asked questions like, 'Was Athenian democracy really democratic?' or, a question we covered today, "Even though classical Greece seemed to be an enlightened culture, it still supported slavery and the oppression of women. How should a historian (like yourself) reconcile this dichotomy?" There are many 'correct' answers to these questions. In my classes, student work is evaluated by staying on topic, creating an argument, and defending that argument with good and true evidence from history. The argument itself does not matter.

Mathematics

When I teach Precalculus, if there was too little time left in class for a new topic to be started that day, but too much time for me just let them go early (usually 10-15 minutes before class ended), I would give them one more example problem, but I would have them do it on their own or in a small group for 5 minutes to 10 minutes. If they got it correct, I let them go ahead and leave early. Then the last 5 minutes I would go ahead and guide the remaining students through the problem. While there were usually a handful that didn't even try or ask for help, and instead just waited for me to go over the problem, it really motivated most of the students to try and they usually got excited when they got it correct on their own.

* * *

Usually, although with zoom lectures it is more difficult to get the students to contribute. In the quantitative reasoning class students are given questions which should be completed on a spreadsheet and they must think about the problem before filling out the template. Generally since I teach math there is only one right answer. We often show a student how to do a problem and then have them try to work a similar problem thinking through it on their own or in a group. So we are mostly not feeding answers to students, but require them to do their own thinking. That is probably why math is not so popular!

* * *

I use different teaching tools to encourage students and participate in the activities that encourage them to think about a problem or question before they learn the right answers.

* * *

Both in pre-covid classrooms and in Zoom, I ask students questions throughout each class about how to proceed in a given math problem and about why a particular concept or technique is worth studying. I give group quizzes in which small groups of students collaborate on a given problem or set of problems and then submit a single quiz for each group.

* * *

MTSB

Students are using all communication tools to talk to Instructors and express their views. If it is in Zoom class, they are free to put their thinking in the Chat areas and Instructors read and respond to it right away. It can be of Subject matter and of general appropriate questions. Also they can use discussion board to post their questions. If the questions are not supporting the class to have positive motivation to encourage students to learn, Instructors discourage those kind of talking. Students are given course calendar with enough information on what to do prior to coming class and be prepared as well. To be more specific, in my class, I give warm up questions every day when they come to class and give time to think on their own before teaching and they put their answers in the Chat area and we discuss about it.

MTSB (Business)

Introducing themselves at the beginning of semester, Answering questions during the lecture, discussion board, Explain the topic.

* * *

Students in my Introduction to Marketing classes use a computer simulation(to predict, hypothesize , forecast, react, and respond)as they individually establish a bike company and then compete against computer-generated competitors to achieve better and better business results through a series of decisions. They must analyze the marketing research data, create products, price them, promote them via advertising and personal selling and decide where to open stores around the world. They modify and improve their decisions in six decision rounds to achieve profits and build their brands.

Physics

Physics labs often engage students in hypothesizing, predicting, and forecasting. Assignments I'm using this semester additionally encourage students to theorize, analyze, and discuss scenarios and topics without "right" answers -- the idea being they will formulate their own arguments based on their understanding and their research.

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