In *Reimagining Process: Online Writing Archives & the Future of Writing Studies*, I argue that writing and rhetoric courses are most successful when mutual recognition exists between students and professors. I draw the term *mutual recognition* from the work of Jessica Benjamin, who defines it as “the necessity of recognizing as well as being recognized by the other . . . as a like subject with a distinct, separate center of feeling and perception.” Rhetorical educators have done an extraordinary job of recognizing students and communicating that recognition to them. But there remains an opportunity to help students recognize professors as “independent subjects.” Seeking this form of recognition is not about asserting agency or securing professional egos; it is designed to renegotiate a conventional pedagogical arrangement that encourages professors to assume the responsibility for learning on their students’ behalf. I call this conventional arrangement *believing for* students and link it to the rhetoric of student empowerment.

**Believing for** students means securing evidence of student progress by implementing a *how*-centered instrumental process. The underlying logic goes something like this: if we can take students through the learning process quickly and efficiently, then they will see the value of our approach and invest in it more readily. Although believing for students can be exhilarating when it produces tangible results (it often does), it sacrifices long-term learning because it prevents them from determining the relevance of the work for themselves. Consciously or not, it communicates that a student’s primary task is to follow our instructions if they want to earn a higher grade. As a result, students have a hard time finding purpose in the work because the work is simulated for them.

I want to create a classroom where I *believe in* my students. Believing in students means asking them to bear the burden of responsibility for learning. Practically, this means (1) affirming that learning is a difficult, problem-solving activity for students and myself, (2) recognizing that we are capable of engaging this difficulty with purpose and according to terms that we find meaningful, and (3) accepting that not knowing how to proceed to the next step is discomforting. Of course, my courses are organized around topics, concepts, assignments, and assessment standards. But the inflection point is different. When I believe in students, I allow them the freedom to take risks, fail, and revise in light of what they have discovered. Just as they are struggling to learn difficult material, I am struggling to help them find the work meaningful. Being candid about my learning process allows me to model how genuine inquiry unfolds in real time. In order to make it through this process, we have to work together, listen together, and revise together. The work can be messy. But the outcome is a more serious commitment to learning on both of our parts.

To help my students believe in the work of learning, I often implement three pedagogical tactics. First, whenever we read materials in my class, I ask students to engage them as works of writing, not as works of authorship. This means shifting the focus from an interest in authorial accomplishment to a focus on the problem solving process that all writers experience. Students often assume that our course materials are self-contained objects; they are meant to be read as models of success. But I want students to imagine the materials as the product of a struggle that continues to evolve. This orientation helps humanize the the work of writing and, thus, humanize the process of criticism. To get started, I ask them to identify problems they believe the writer is trying to solve and to provide evidence for their observations. With these observations in hand, we can then assess, given the existing evidence,
why the writer believed that what they formulated was an adequate solution; we can explore what problems remain open in the argument. Whenever possible, I display archival materials that show writers in the process of problem solving. When I teach Kenneth Burke’s *A Rhetoric of Motives*, for example, I show them messy manuscript pages and outline sequences that show him struggling to make coherent sense of his ideas. When archival materials aren’t available, I ask students to track how a concept in the writer’s work evolves across different works, identifying where successive drafts lead to greater clarity (or not). By humanizing the writing process in this way, students learn to see the work for what it is: extremely difficult. This knowledge grants them the freedom to struggle, even fail, with their writing and underscores the value of sticking with the work.

Second, I create opportunities for students to explain and archive their problem-solving process in writing. Whenever I respond to student essays, for example, I ask a series of open ended questions that initiate a dialogue about what they have written. Rather than assume that a vague sentence needs to be corrected, I assume that students have something compelling to say but are still figuring out how best to say it. So, I ask them to elaborate on what they are trying to accomplish and give them the space to respond in a revision memo. Often, produce elaborate explanations of what they are trying to argue and why they think it is not working. We then engage in a textual conversation that works on the problem together. Because this is an archival process, students learn to watch the development of problems in their writing more precisely and, in turn, pursue their learning development with greater independence.

Third, in order to inspire ambitious research projects, I routinely invite nationally and internationally renowned specialists to meet with my students—either in-person or remotely. Visitors have included independent scholars and professors from the University of Oklahoma, Arizona State University, MIT, Penn State University, and Emory University. As Director of First-year writing, I adopted a similar approach by inviting writers of national and international reputation to speak to our first-year students. Our guests include Pulitzer Prize winner, Jeffrey Eugenides (2017), Man-Booker Prize winner, Paul Beatty (2018), and Pulitzer Prize and National Medal for the Arts winner, Marilynne Robinson (2019). Having the opportunity to interact with renowned specialists and writers helps students get excited about the course material. Students read the work more carefully and take the writing assignments more seriously. But more importantly, it communicates that I trust their ability to converse with scholars whom they read and admire. This trust is fundamental to their growth as writers because it allows them to take risks in their learning process with a greater sense of purpose and confidence.

Ultimately, I want students to understand that learning is a way of life that should continue after they graduate. University instructors can play a instrumental role in encouraging this process when they recognize how talented their students are and develop tactics that help transform their talent into accomplishment.

**General Teaching Experience**

*I have taught a number of graduate and undergraduate courses in rhetoric and writing studies. Topics have included: Teaching Composition from the perspective of Race and Racism; Archival methods in writing studies; Revision in writing studies research; Teaching composition; Writing for the web: The history of writing machines; The history of writing materials; Algorithmic criticism; Trauma rhetorics; Rhetorics of modernity; Rhetorics of the cold war; Posthuman rhetorics; Rhetorical listening as rhetorical historiography; and Theories of rhetorical energy. I have also taught seminars on the work of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Kenneth Burke.*