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Nomination Portfolio for the University System of Georgia Regents' Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Award Fall 2021

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October 4, 2021

RE: Regents' Scholarship of Teaching & Learning Award Nomination of Dr. Michael Rifenburg

Dear Regents' Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Award Selection Committee:

As Provost of the University of North Georgia, it is my distinct honor to write in support of the nomination of Dr. Michael Rifenburg for the Regents' Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Award. Dr. Rifenburg, Associate Professor of English, was the recipient of the University of North Georgia's Distinguished Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Award, the highest honor we bestow to recognize significant contributions in that area. His commitment to the continuous investigation of practice coupled with innovative approaches to teaching and transformational influence on the instruction of writing, as well as faculty development initiatives for scholarly writing, make Dr. Rifenburg the perfect candidate for this award.

Effective written communication is foundational to the success of every post-secondary education program and every career, which is why Complete College Georgia, the Momentum Year, and so many other USG initiatives include a strong focus on English education. Writing does not always come naturally to first-generation college students and others who may need innovative instructional approaches, however. As a university that serves a high number of first-generation and non-traditional students, Dr. Rifenburg's SoTL investigations in the English Department have been crucial to the success of many. He is frequently at the center of major course or programmatic revisions in English. For example, he collaborated in a university-wide SoTL study on the redesign of ENGL 1101, a course that 4,000 students take each year across five campuses. Through a focus on relationship building and breaking writing exercises down into attainable tasks, he lowered the ENGL 1101 DWFI rates among students in the pilot versions of the intervention across four of the five campuses.

Using innovative methodology, Dr. Rifenburg frequently recruits students as SoTL research partners, utilizing a blend of undergraduate research and SoTL during scholarly projects. By doing so, Dr. Rifenburg demonstrates that he values students' unique perspectives and contributions. Moreover, this practice improves student participation in his studies since many students are more comfortable talking to their peers instead of a professor. For example, Faith Green, a former student at UNG who helped Dr. Rifenburg redesign his English capstone course, said that she joined his research team because she wanted professors to understand learning from the students' perspectives. She emphasized that she hoped this would prevent others from struggling in the future and would help other professors to "recognize the humanity of their students." Dr. Rifenburg championed these efforts in multiple students-as-partners publications in the *Journal of University Learning & Teaching Practice*; *International Journal of Students as Partners*, and *Composition Studies*.

Dr. Rifenburg continually investigates best practices in English education from a variety of perspectives including those of cadets, first-year students and capstone students. In one notable example, he partnered with the UNG athletics director and spent countless hours in practice, on team buses, at games, and in the locker room to better understand how athletes learn. He then redesigned instruction based upon his findings to teach English in a manner similar to the way a head coach teaches athletes to remember plays. For example, in a special section

Cumming Dahlonega Gainesville Oconee

of ENGL 1102, Dr. Rifenburg made writing more "accessible" for students using athletic literacy and prior knowledge. This strategy helped student athletes think about when and why to deploy specific writing strategies based on past examples and in anticipation of future performance. This practice is similar to a coach anticipating plays and attempting to improve performance with X's and O's on a whiteboard. The result was Rifenburg's influential book, *The Embodied Playbook: Writing Practices of Student-Athletes*, which was reviewed in five higher education composition forums and is helping other English professors do the same internationally.

Similarly, Dr. Rifenburg is continuing student-focused SoTL work with UNG cadets. As a Senior Military College, about 12% of UNG students are cadets who plan to commission as officers upon graduation. Dr. Rifenburg partnered with a former instructor of political science at the United States Military Academy at West Point to survey 700 cadets about their unique perspectives in their first-year composition experiences. They found that cadets are largely influenced by their interest and immersion in the Army, which impacts moments of information transfer. Similar to his other work, Dr. Rifenburg advocates for the inclusion of these students in overall course design. He co-authored a piece about "First year cadets' conceptions of general education writing at a senior military college" in the premier SoTL journal, *Teaching @ Learning Inquiry*. He additionally has a book forthcoming in 2022 titled *Drilled to Write: Becoming a Cadet Writer at a Senior Military College*.

In addition to continual dissemination of his SoTL research, Dr. Rifenburg serves as a transformational leader for his peers and an advocate for professional development in SoTL. He continually shares best practices in writing with his colleagues and is a frequent guest in the USG summer webinar series. Dr. Rifenburg currently serves as a Senior Faculty Fellow with our Center for Teaching, Learning, and Leadership (CTLL) and has served as the Assistant Director of CTLL in the past. He is a writing champion for UNG, leading numerous faculty writing initiatives including Write@UNG, Friday Writing Sessions, "Shut Up & Write," and the Write Now Academy. For example, as part of Write@UNG, Dr. Rifenburg organized a half-day writing retreat featuring a guest speaker, Christine Tulley, author of *How Faculty Write*. More recently, he converted many of these offerings into a virtual format to continue faculty growth during the pandemic, and attendance in his sessions remained strong throughout the 2020-2021 academic year.

In short, Dr. Rifenburg's focus on students' unique needs embodies the UNG mission to create a "culture of academic excellence in a student-focused environment." His work has the potential to influence teaching and learning in many USG English composition courses while also advancing the Momentum Year initiative and helping more students to successfully complete college. Furthermore, his innovative methodologies raise new SoTL questions of how studies can combine undergraduate research with SoTL efforts. Such innovative studies can potentially expand the research influence on a variety of fronts to further "develop students into leaders for a diverse and global society" (UNG mission). The effect of his work will continue to impact classrooms and students around the world for many years to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chaudron Gille".

Chaudron Gille, Ph.D.
Provost & Senior VP for Academic Affairs

A teaching philosophy narrative that outlines how their research questions and the related goals, theories, and methods of their scholarship activities support their teaching philosophy

In *The Undergraduate Experience: Focusing Institutions on What Matters Most*, Felten et al. (2016) detail the importance of relationships to undergraduate learning. The co-authors point to high-impact practices, such as undergraduate research and senior capstone courses, effectively support student learning and engagement because high-impact practices are relationship rich (p. 52). I call attention to this book because it is where I locate the heart of my teaching and my commitment to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning—in relationships. My teaching philosophy is grounded in a social-constructivist view of knowledge. This view focuses on the primacy of relationships in knowledge building. In sum, we build knowledge through connecting with others and forming relationships with others. Since I advocate for this view of knowledge, I strive to create spaces for meaningful connections in my classroom and across campus. For me, these connections take the form of, for example, mentoring students in undergraduate research projects, undertaking curricular redesign and assessment with undergraduate students, and forming partnerships with local and international colleagues to study student writing development. In this letter, I articulate research questions and related goals of my scholarship that support my teaching philosophy. All references cited throughout this letter are found at the end of my complete application.

Forming relationships through undergraduate research

In my role as an associate professor in the University of North Georgia's (UNG) Department of English, I teach a range of writing classes—from general education writing courses to a senior capstone course for students with a Writing & Publication concentration. Undergraduate research is center to these classes. Through mentoring students and working with students across multiple semesters, I see many students present work at local and national conferences such as the National Council for Undergraduate Research conference, UNG's Annual Research Conference, and a conference affiliated with an honors society for English majors, the Sigma Tau Delta National Convention. I've proudly mentored undergraduate students through publishing in undergraduate research journals like *Queen City Writers* housed at the University of Cincinnati and proceedings of the National Council for Undergraduate Research conference. I call attention to some of these success stories in my condensed CV, but I give attention to one specific story here. In 2014, Cheyenne Franklin wrote a paper in a 3000-level writing class I regularly teach. Through working closely with me for the remainder of the semester, Cheyenne placed this essay in *Queen City Writers*. Fast forward to today, and I served as an external committee for Cheyenne's dissertation at Virginia Tech. She successfully defended her dissertation during the Fall 2021 semester. Her dissertation topic found its beginnings in the paper she wrote in our class, and the paper she eventually published. The meaningful relationships educators build with students bear fruit. I'm dedicated to supporting undergraduate research; it's part of my larger belief that relationships matter.

Forming relationships through researching with students

Not only do I mentor students through undergraduate research experiences, I co-research and co-author with undergraduate students on projects related to teaching and learning. In the inaugural issue of *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, Felten (2013) calls researchers to attend to a

“well-defined aspect of student learning,” to ensure that our research is grounded in our local context and a scholarly context, and that our research is methodologically sound. Taking up these principles, I developed two research projects in which I partnered with UNG undergraduate students. For the first project, I spent one year working with two students on assessing UNG’s redesigned English 1101 curriculum. The University System of Georgia asked all member schools to redesign select first-year courses to better support student learning and engagement. At UNG, a faculty-only committee, of which I was a part, redesigned English 1101 over the course of three years. Dr. Laura Ng, in her accompanying letter of recommendation written on my behalf, writes about my work on a co-chair on this redesign committee. Once our committee redesigned English 1101, I partnered with two undergraduate students to conduct an IRB-approved qualitative study into the effectiveness of these efforts. We presented our research at the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, authored a blog post about our work for the AAC&U, published a reflective essay about our work in the *International Journal of Students as Partners*, and received recognition for our work in a UNG University Relations news article.

I also worked with three different undergraduate students on assessing changes to a senior-level capstone course: English 4800. This work is currently ongoing. We began our partnership in August 2020. We redesigned elements of English 4800, a course that I teach, to help students undertake what the AAC&U calls a “signature experience” and to make this signature experience an important component of an ePortfolio due at the end of the semester. This signature experience serves as an opportunity for students to integrate their college-level learning experiences into a final project that prepares them for life after graduation. As we worked on this redesign efforts, we shared our progress with other three English faculty over Zoom to receive feedback; we meet with UNG’s Vice Provost to receive additional feedback, and we developed Spanish-language posters, infographics, and digital brochures to advertise our work and gain faculty buy-in for the changes we proposed. During the Spring 2021 semester, I taught this redesigned course. My co-researchers and I received IRB approval to interview students after the course to learn about their experience in this course. We recently presented our work at Kennesaw State’s SoTL Summit in October 2021. We have an article forthcoming in a special issue of the *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*.

Forming national and international relationships through research on students

When I am not writing with students, I focus my research attention on how students learn by examining unique student populations such as student-athletes and U.S. Army cadets. I investigate how writers learn to write and how best to teach writers. To undertake this investigative work, I primarily operate from Boyer’s (1990) model of the scholarship of discovery. Additionally, I research what Hutchings and colleagues (2000) define as *what is?* questions, namely descriptive inquiries into student learning. I adapt the *what is?* question in my research and ask: what is college writing development and how do college students describe it? I published *The Embodied Playbook: Writing Practices of Student-Athletes* in 2018 with the University Press of Colorado. In this single-authored book, I examine student-athletes and considers the reading and writing practices required for their sport and how student-athletes bring these practices into writing classes. For this book, I undertook archival and digital research, interviewed the athletics director at the University of Oklahoma, and dedicated a chapter to my year-long research project on the men’s basketball team at the UNG. For that chapter, I gained the support of UNG’s athletics director and the men’s basketball head coach to research the team

for an entire year. I gained attended practices and games. I rode on the team bus, sat on the team bench during games, and in the locker room with the players and coaches during halftime. Throughout my time with the team, I focused on how the head coach teaches plays and how the players learn plays and what these teaching practices might mean for how we teach student-athletes academic writing skills.

After I published my book on student-athlete writing practices, I turned my attention to another unique student population on UNG's campus: U.S. Army cadets. UNG is a federally designated senior military college tasked with training and commissioning Army officers. Through completing UNG's SoTL Academy, I gained a rich repertoire of SoTL theories and SoTL research methods and methodologies for studying cadets. I placed "First-year Cadets' Conceptions of General Education Writing at a Senior Military College" in the SoTL journal, *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*. I co-authored this piece with an Army lieutenant colonel who served as an instructor of political science at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Using a mixed methods research design, we surveyed over 700 cadets and conducted interviews with four cadets to understand the conception of academic writing UNG cadets bring with them into general education writing classes.

I continued my interest in cadets' writing development in my forthcoming book, *Drilled to Write: Becoming a Cadet Writer at a Senior Military College*. Research for this book brought me to Fort Eustis, Virginia where I interviewed a four-star U.S. Army general about the importance of writing and to General Tadeusz Kosciuszko Military University of Land Forces in Wrocław, Poland. In Poland, I delivered two workshops on writing instruction to Polish faculty and interviewed faculty who teach English writing, speaking, and reading skills to Polish cadets. While the global pandemic temporarily halted my follow-up travel to Poland, I hope to return to continue gaining a rich international picture of student writing instruction by focusing specifically on how Polish cadets are taught vital English language skills.

In Sum...

My teaching philosophy helps me keep the focus on forming meaningful relationships with students. I focus on mentoring students, helping form communities of student writers and researchers, and forming meaningful relationships with local and international partners that facilitate opportunities for student success. SoTL, as an international and interdisciplinary field, connects my teaching and research. I'm grateful for the relationships I built to investigate conditions supportive of student learning and engagement.

Data/evidence of the impact of their teaching techniques/pedagogies on student learning and its potential impact on teaching and learning in the discipline

In his afterword to *Higher Education in America*, Bok (2013), the former president of Harvard University, succinctly states two “problems facing colleges [that] overshadow all the others.” These are “stagnating graduation rates,” and “the effectiveness of undergraduate education” (p. 220). I fear that as U.S. higher education enters into a post-pandemic environment that these two problems will be even more pressing. But I also firmly believe that research into teaching and learning practices that supports all student learners can assist in raising graduation levels by first improving undergraduate education.

In this letter, I detail the evidence of the impact of my pedagogies on student learning and its potential impact on teaching and learning in the discipline. I start with classroom practices I implemented based on disciplinary and interdisciplinary research and then zoom out to highlight large-scale curricular changes I helped enacted with faculty colleagues and assessed with undergraduate co-researchers. No matter if I am conducting research *on* undergraduate students or conducting research *with* undergraduate students, I focus on designing and assessing equitable and accessible classroom practices for students to hone their academic writing skills. Doing so, I believe, is one important step toward strengthening undergraduate education in my local context. All references cited throughout this letter are found at the end of my complete application.

Impact of Individual Classroom Practices on Student Learning

I research and teach within the field of Rhetoric and Composition / Writing Studies, a disciplinary term I borrow from the Classification of Instructional Programs affiliated with the National Center for Education Statistics and the Department of Education. Within this discipline, I investigate how writers learn to write and how best to teach writers. To undertake this investigative work, I primarily operate from Boyer’s (1990) model of the scholarship of discovery. Additionally, I research what Hutchings and colleagues (2000) define as *what is?* questions, namely descriptive inquiries into student learning. I adapt the *what is?* question in my research and ask: what is college writing development and how do college students describe it? Coupling the scholarship of discovery with investigating *what is?* questions, I published *The Embodied Playbook: Writing Practices of Student-Athletes* in 2018 with the University Press of Colorado. In this single-authored book, I inquire into student writing development by focusing specifically on student-athletes, the reading and writing practices student-athlete use in their sport, and how student-athletes bring these practices into college-level writing classes. Based on the success of my book, I delivered invited lectures at Hofstra University, the University of Findlay, and New Mexico Military Institute.

I brought the expertise I honed through writing my book to bear on my teaching. With the support of UNG’s athletics director and faculty athletics representative, I designed and taught one section of a general education writing class populated by twenty-five student-athletes and one dual-enrolled student. I incorporated writing assignments that invited students to hone metacognitive strategies, or what educational psychologist Karlen (2017) refers to as *metacognitive strategy knowledge* (MSK). In brief, MSK details two cognitive activities associated with metacognition: conditional strategy knowledge and relational strategy knowledge. The first helps writers think about when and why to deploy specific writing strategies; the second, helps writers think how these strategies are alike or different and, therefore, used or not in specific writing contexts.

In my book, I argued student-athletes have a great deal of experience with metacognition. However, they often struggle to apply metacognitive practices developed for their sport to classroom-based learning. Therefore, I developed writing assignments that invited student-athletes to draw on their experience with metacognition in their sport and to refine their use of MSK. In one writing assignment, students performed a rhetorical analysis of a previous writing experience. In other words, students wrote about a previous paper, detailing their process of writing this paper and reflecting on what they did well and struggled with in terms of their writing process. I borrowed this assignment from our textbook *Writing About Writing*. The essay prompt in our textbook, invites students to explore two broad questions at the close of their essay: “What did you learn from [analyzing a previous writing experience]? What principles might you draw to help you in future writing situations” (p. 479). These questions connect with the MSK component of conditional strategy knowledge.

I included three activities to support students’ work on this assignment. First, I invited students to use a reading from our textbook to understand better how their rhetorical situation shaped a previous writing experience. Second, we worked through helpful key terms: *audience*, *genre*, *rhetorical situation*, and *exigence*. Third, and most unique, we spent time on a basketball court to visualize the importance of our key terms. In this physical activity, a student carries a basketball from one baseline to other (94 feet) without running with the ball or dribbling the ball. To cover this distance, the student needs to pass and receive the ball from classmates scattered around the court. These classmates represent different aspects of our key terms with a sign on the floor signifying what they represented. One student represented exigence, another audience, another genre, and another rhetorical situations. The student carrying the ball represented the writer and the journey across the court represented the writing process. To move from one end to the other, to move from brainstorming to publication, a writer needs help, needs to engage with audience, genre, and exigence. A writer needs to understand their rhetorical situation. Instead of only reading about these concepts, I aimed to give the students an opportunity to feel to visualize these concepts and use them physically.

Tyler Watkins (a pseudonym), a UNG baseball player and student in this class, wrote the following essay: “Room for Improvement: A Student’s Awakening to Writing in College.” I quote from his essay with IRB permission. He reflected on a paper he wrote last semester, specifically reflecting on the process of writing this paper. The paper he reflects on, which he refers to as a “research paper,” focused on the War on Terror. He wrote it “in the library one night ... with coffee by my side ... and [listening] to some country music.” According to Watkins, a baseball player at UNG, he spent most of his writing process focused on surface-level editing. In the second paragraph of his essay, he explains why:

In order to please my audience, [the instructor], I made it a priority to closely follow the rubric. When talking to one of my older teammates about my teachers, I was informed that [the instructor] was a stickler when it comes to grading. This led to me trying to precisely follow the instructions of the paper. I did not use the word ‘I’ or use contractions. I also made it a priority to make sure I maintained the same tense throughout the paper instead of being inconsistent with my use of tense.

Watkins’s paper, and all the papers from this assignment, displayed a strong understanding of metacognition and how to reflect back on a previous writing experience in hopes of stronger future writing experiences. I published the referred article “Student-Athletes’ Metacognitive Strategy Knowledge,” based on this class, for the open access journal

Composition Forum. In sum, my decade-long research on student-athletes led to concrete classroom practices, which, in turn, led to a referred journal article.

Impact of Curricular Redesign Efforts on Student Learning

In 2017, the UNG, under the direction of the USG, began a three-year process of redesigning select gateway courses (i.e., courses students often take in their first year). This redesign process was supported by USG's partnership with the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education. The three-year process is termed Gateways to Completion (G2C). I was selected to co-chair a UNG faculty committee tasked with redesigning English 1101. This course is the first step in a required two-step composition sequence student complete through their general education requirements. Each Fall, the Department of English offers roughly 200 sections of this course across our five campuses and teaches roughly 4,000 students. I worked with my co-chair and five English faculty committee members to, in the words of our charge, "develop and implement pedagogic intervention(s) in English 1101 during Fall 2019 to lower DFWI rates with an eye toward equity in student outcomes." DFWI rates refer to student grades of D, F, withdraw (W), or incomplete (I). These rates often correlate with low retention and low one-semester persistence rates.

In response to our charge, the English Committee designed a process orientated English 1101 course with macro- and micro-level interventions. In brief, a process approach is a composition pedagogy term that calls attention to writing as a process. Instead of a product approach to teaching writing, wherein the instructor places emphasis on the final written product and does not require drafts or provide structured feedback during drafting, a process approach sees an instructor requiring multiple drafts, grading multiple drafts, and providing feedback on multiple drafts. We coupled this process approach with ePortfolios that invited students to assemble a ePortfolio of their work over the course of the semester and include a written reflection in which they articulate how they have developed as a writer. These redesigned elements (i.e., a process approach to writing instruction and the use of ePortfolios) are in line with current composition pedagogy and theory and, in the case of ePortfolios, in line with the American Association of Colleges and Universities' (AAC&U) work on high-impact practices that point to the value of ePortfolio for supporting student learning and engagement.

During the Fall 2019 and Spring 2020 semester, we piloted roughly twenty sections of English 1101 with these interventions. During the upcoming Fall 2021 semester, we have received the support of our interim Department chair to scale-up our efforts and to offer roughly 100 pilot sections of this redesigned course. With the support of UNG's Office of Institutional Effectiveness (IE), we have gathered quantitative data pointing to the effectiveness of this redesigned course. I represent these data in a chart on the following page.

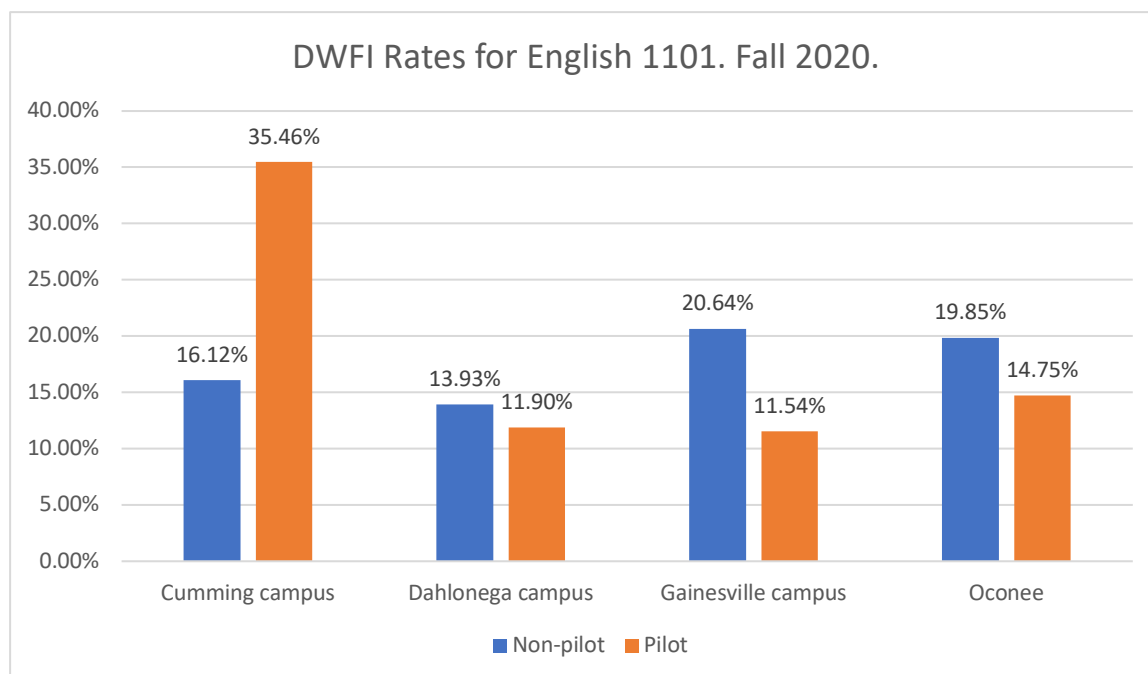


Figure 1: DWWI rates for English 1101 courses in Fall 2020. I only include the campuses in which pilot sections of English 1101 were offered.

The chart above represents the positive impact of our redesigned efforts on DWWI rates. Our pilot sections are performing well on three of the four campuses where we offered these pilot sections. As we look to scale-up our efforts, we have more work to do to learn about our students in Oconee, the campus where DWWI rates were higher in pilot sections than in non-pilot sections. We have additional data from IE that disaggregates DWWI rates across ethnicity. However, when I looked at these data, I did not believe we have a large enough sample size of students who self-identified as nontraditional or underserved to make statistically significant claims in this letter. Again, we, as a committee, have more work to do to scale-up our pilot sections to connect with our traditionally underserved student populations at UNG.

G2C is a strong example pedagogical practices I implemented to support student learning. Through this work, I grew to understand even more Fink's (2003) powerful argument that course design is the single most important activity in which faculty engage to improve the learning of our students.

Researching Student Learning with Students

I am proud that quantitative data largely points to the benefit of this redesigned course, but I find myself more at home with qualitative data. Therefore, with the help of two undergraduate co-researchers and with the guidance of Werder and Otis's (2010) edited collection *Engaging Student Voices in the Study of Teaching and Learning*, I designed a methodologically sound and IRB-approved qualitative research project to interview students enrolled in these redesigned English 1101 courses. The undergraduate co-researchers led the interviews and transcribed the interviews. We collaboratively coded the transcripts, looking for themes across the interview transcripts. In our interview transcripts, we read of students positively reflecting on this redesigned course. One student emphasized the benefit of the process

approach of English 1101: “we do drafts and we do like a level...like our first draft which is just like words and our second draft is pictures and stuff, and then our third draft is like a rhetorical rational. So, it’s nice to have like little pieces of work at a time.” Another student echoes this praise: “so by her [the instructor] editing it and looking over it and having a first draft and a final draft, I feel like that gives you a better chance to improve and progress.” One student spoke of how they even found this approach to writing instruction applicable to a wide-range of learners: “she [my instructor] realizes that some people think about writing differently. Some people can just jump right into it, but she gives us strategies on how to do it as a process.”

Our partnership yielded publications and presentations. We authored a blog post for the AAC&U about our work; we have an article under review with an academic journal about our work. Additionally, through our commitment to transparent and ethical methods and methodologies, one student co-researcher and I published a reflective essay titled “Negotiating Informed Consent: A Students as Partners Perspective.” We placed our essay in the *International Journal of Students as Partners*. Finally, one of the undergraduate co-researchers and I presented our research at the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

The three-year process of redesigning and assessing English 1101 kept the focus on student learning and investigating the conditions of student learning—all key elements of SoTL. This process also invited me to try something different and to bring undergraduate students into the assessment process. Here I think of a powerful quote from Hutchings and co-authors (2011). They wrote “Educational innovation today invites, even requires, levels of preparation, imagination, collaboration, and support that are not always a good fit (to say the least) with the inherited routines of academic life” (p. 6). Through this process, I found myself moving outside these inherited routines of academic life. I found myself working with colleagues across our five campuses to improve a class that 4,000 students take each fall, and I found myself laboring with undergraduate students to see if these changes worked. The qualitative and quantitative evidence above points to the benefits of the work we did. I look forward to striving with my colleagues and student-partners to continue improving learning conditions for all students. At the heart of SoTL is a commitment to investigating conditions that support student learning and engagement. This massive USG project of redesigning classes to better support student learning and engagement across our System is a premier example of SoTL in action. I am honored to play a key role in this work at UNG.

I carried the momentum I established through working with student partners to a new project: redesigning and assessing a senior-level English capstone course. At UNG, we call this course English 4800: Senior Seminar, Writing. This capstone course is completed by all English majors with a Writing & Publication concentration. I worked with three student partners to design and implement ePortfolios and what the AAC&U calls a “signature experience” into English 4800. This signature experience serves as an opportunity for students to integrate their college-level learning experiences into a final project that prepares them for life after graduation. To jumpstart our redesign process, we read portions of Fink’s (2003) *Creating Significant Learning Experiences* and jointly constructed the following course objectives with measurable verbs:

- Assemble a final e-portfolio in which you demonstrate your growth as a writer;
- Prepare a cover letter to your ePortfolio in which you interpret and reflection the culmination of knowledge gained in your undergraduate experience and how it pertains to your identity as a writer;

- Design a signature work, in which you integrate knowledge across your undergraduate education in meaningful ways to engage with a real-world issue that matters to society and you.

As we worked on this redesign efforts, we shared our progress with three English faculty members over Zoom; we meet with UNG's Vice Provost to receive additional feedback; we developed Spanish-language posters, infographics, and digital brochures to advertise our work and gain faculty buy-in for the changes we proposed. This Spanish-language poster is included in Appendix B affixed to this application. During the Spring 2021 semester, I taught this redesigned course. My co-researchers and I received IRB approval to interview students after the course to learn about their experience in this course. We recently presented our work at Kennesaw State's SoTL Summit in October 2021. We have an article forthcoming in a special issue of the *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*.

At the close, I want to highlight words Faith Green wrote. Faith, who recently graduated from UNG, helped redesign and assess English 4800. In her reflection, portions of which appear in a blog post for UNG's Center for Teaching, Learning, and Leadership, Faith highlights what inspired her to work on this project. I edit for length; otherwise, her original prose appears below:

When Dr. Rifenburg brought up the idea of pedagogical partnerships in spring 2020, I knew that this was something that I wanted to pursue. Two years ago, I had taken a class wherein both myself and many of my classmates were struggling to keep our heads above water...This reality was very difficult for me to comprehend because I was trying so hard. We were trying so hard ... I believe that part of the reason for why this class was so difficult was our Professor. She was exactly the right person to teach a class like this, but she had been teaching it for so long that I believe she had grown distant from what it was like approaching the material with fresh eyes and therefore developed unrealistic expectations for her students. Our research team has relied heavily on Pedagogical Partnerships by Cook-Sather et al., (2019) which notes that partnerships can assist faculty in "recognizing the humanity of their students" (p. 17). If I could somehow help introduce pedagogical partnerships to UNG, I feel that maybe I could help prevent so many others from struggling in certain classes like I did. I often look back and think that if my professor had help understanding what the learning situation was like from a student's point of view, then maybe things would have been a lot different. By joining this team, I hope that I can work towards making students and professors partners in academia so that both parties learn and grow from each other.

I'm grateful Faith joined our team, and I am committed to continuing the work of investigating student learning by undertaking this investigative work with student-partners.

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Dr. J. Michael Rifenburg (condensed CV)

Associate Professor Co-director of First-Year Composition, Department of English
Senior Faculty Fellow for Scholarly Writing, Center for Teaching, Learning, and Leadership
University of North Georgia

Education

Ph.D. University of Oklahoma, 2013

Academic Employment

Associate Professor, Department of English, University of North Georgia. Fall 2017-present

Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of North Georgia. Fall 2013-Spring 2017

Books

The Embodied Playbook: Writing Practices of Student-Athletes. Utah State University Press, an imprint of the University Press of Colorado. 2018. Reviewed in [*College Composition and Communication*](#), [*Reflective Teaching*](#), [*Composition Forum*](#), [*Teaching English in the Two-Year College*](#), and the [*Sports Literature Association*](#).

Drilled to Write: Becoming a Cadet Writer at a Senior Military College. Utah State University Press, an imprint of the University Press of Colorado. Forthcoming April 2022.

Articles

With Kristine Johnson. "Guest Editors' Introduction." Special issue: Undergraduate Research as a Future of English Studies. *Pedagogy: Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Language, Literature, Composition, and Culture* 22.1 (2022): 1-7. Forthcoming.

With undergraduate students Kellie Keeling and Zoë Phalen. "Redesigning a Sustainable English Capstone Course: A Students as Partners Perspective." *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*. Forthcoming November 2021.

With undergraduate student Emily Pridgen. "[Negotiating Informed Consent: A Students as Partners Perspective](#)." *International Journal of Students as Partners* 4.2 (2020).

With Kristine Johnson. "Theorizing with Undergraduate Researchers." *Composition Studies* 48.1 (2020): 119-120. Invited piece.

With Ian Afflerbach, Justin Barbaree, Matthew Boedy, Molly Daniel, Ann Marie Francis, and Laura Ng. "[English Composition 1 \(ENGL 1101\) Course Redesign at the University of North Georgia](#)." *Gateways to Completion (G2C) Case Study Anthology*, edited by Stephanie Foote, 23-26. John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education, 2020.

With Mary Carney, Rebecca Johnston, and Laura Ng. "Cultivating Teacher-Scholars at a Teaching-Intensive University" *Academic Labor beyond the College Classroom: Working for Our Values*, edited by Holly Hassel and Kirsti Cole, 19-33. Routledge, 2019.

With lieutenant colonel Brian Forester. "[First-year Cadets' Conceptions of General Education Writing at a Senior Military College](#)." *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* 6.1 (March 2018): 52-66.

Editing

Undergraduate Research as a Future of English Studies. Co-edited with Kristine Johnson. Special issue of *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Language, Literature, Composition, and Culture*. Duke University Press. Forthcoming January 2022.

Non-Juried Publications

With undergraduate students Kellie Keeling and Zoë Phalen. "[Implementing a Signature Experience and ePortfolios in an English Capstone Course](#)." *Teaching Academic: A CTLL Blog*. 26 October 2021.

With undergraduate students Faith Green, Kellie Keeling, and Zoë Phalen. "[Partnering with Students to Improve Teaching and Learning](#)." *Teaching Academic: A CTLL Blog*. 22 October 2020.

With undergraduate students Emily Pridgen and Samantha Velasquez. "[Thriving in Our Work: Student-Faculty Partnerships as a High-Impact Practice](#)." AAC&U's Liberal Education blog. 3 September 2020.

Media & Interviews

"[AAC&U Highlights Research by English Associate Professor and Students](#)." University Relations, University of North Georgia. September 2020.

Invited Lectures

"How Our Student-Athletes Write." New Mexico Military Institute. January 2020.

"Attending to the Writing of Student-Athletes." Davenport University. August 2019.

"Scholar-Athletes and Embodied Learning: Writing Themselves In." Hofstra University. April 2019.

"How Student-Athletes Learn Plays & What That Means for College Writing Instruction." University of Findlay. October 2018.

Awards

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Award. University of North Georgia. Fall 2015.

Distinguished Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Award. University of North Georgia. Fall 2021.

Presentations

With undergraduate student Zoë Phalen. “Redesigning an English Capstone Course: A Students as Partners Perspective.” Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Summit. Kennesaw State University. October 2021.

With C. Lindsay Linsky. “Designing ePortfolios to Support Student Learning: The Hows, Whys, and Some Stories.” University System of Georgia’s Office of Faculty Development’s Summer Webinar Series. June 2021.

“Looking for Students in Faculty Development Initiatives.” Southern Regional Faculty & Instructional Development Consortium 41st Annual Conference. University of South Carolina, Upstate. March 2020.

With Rebecca Johnston. “Facilitating Faculty Academies in the Midst of Institutional Change.” SoTL Commons. Savannah, GA. February 2020.

With undergraduate student Emily Pridgen. “Undergraduate Researchers as Partners in Large-Scale Curricular Change.” International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Atlanta, GA. October 2019.

Service

Member, Convenings Committee, International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. 2020-present.

Editorial Member, *Young Scholars in Writing*. The oldest journal for undergraduate research in writing studies. 2019-present.

Reviewer, *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* and *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*.

Chair, UNG’s Scholarship of Teaching & Learning Award Committee, Spring 2017, Spring 2020.

Mentoring

Franklin, Cheyenne. [“Quintilian Education and Additive Bilingualism.”](#) *Queen City Writers* 4.1 (2015).

Chamberlin, London. [“Creating a Lexical Universe: Redefining Burke’s Dramatic Pentad Through the Language of Finnegans Wake.”](#) *Papers and Publications: A Southeastern Interdisciplinary Journal of Undergraduate Research* 3 (2014).



October 25, 2021

Dear Sir or Madam:

It is my pleasure to write this letter in support of Dr. Michael Rifenburg. He is an excellent candidate for the Regents' Scholarship of Teaching & Learning Award. I have worked with him in many different capacities over the years. I have written and published works with him, served on committees with him, and coordinated faculty professional development opportunities with him. His dedication to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is evidence in his sustained commitment to providing professional development opportunities to his colleagues, his service, and his scholarship.

Dr. Rifenburg has a long history of promoting the examination of pedagogy and student learning in the classroom. His approach builds upon the work of established scholars. As co-chair of the English Department's First-Year Composition Committee, he has brought in speakers to hold workshops and sought different ways to support faculty in adopting and adapting best practices to the classroom. He has hosted noted speakers such as, Asao Inoue on campus to discuss writing assessment and racism. The workshops were thought-provoking sessions that encouraged faculty to reflect on their practices for inherent obstacles that could hamper student success. He has built upon his interest in pedagogy and professional development by serving as co-chair of the English department's Gateway to Completion Committee.

In leading the English Department's review of the ENGL 1101: Composition I class for effectiveness, Dr. Rifenburg guided the committee through impressive collections of data to investigate and evaluate the impact of current teaching practices on student learning. Focusing on Drop, Withdraw, Fail, and Incomplete (DWF) rates, Dr. Rifenburg led the committee through an analysis of student performance at UNG overall and campus-by-campus. What emerged was a DWF rate of over 20%. Working with the committee, Dr. Rifenburg helped develop a series of pedagogical interventions designed to increase student engagement, focus on process, and help students make the adjustment to college writing. In piloting these interventions, Dr. Rifenburg assisted in creating professional development workshops designed to train colleagues in the new techniques and gathered faculty input about the effectiveness of the interventions, the ease of application, and the impacts of the pedagogical changes in terms of student performance and faculty time and workload. To try and uncover a fuller picture of the impact of the changes, Dr. Rifenburg trained students to help interview students from the pilot classes about their experiences with the new interventions. His work with data collection helped the English department create a more robust picture of what occurred in the classroom and beyond when the pedagogy changed. The department will be expanding the pilot sections in the upcoming semesters. Dr. Rifenburg is lead author on an article the committee produced about their efforts and results thus far in the process.

The cooperative elements and professional development aspects of Dr. Rifenburg's work with the English department is built upon a foundation of scholarships that is peer-reviewed and collaborative in nature. I was fortunate enough to be a co-author with Dr. Rifenburg on an article that examined the need for professional development in fields like SoTL to support faculty change. Dr. Rifenburg has worked with students in his SoTL research on many different levels. He has conducted mixed methods studies of the writing process of military cadets in his article, "First-Year Cadets' Conception of General Education Writing at a Senior Military College," which raised many good points about how students mold the classroom experience. His work openly embraces and explores Hutchings's idea of "what is" in terms of what students bring to the

classroom experience. Additionally, he has worked with students as co-researchers. His article with Emily Pridgen, "Negotiation Informed Consent: A Students as Partners Perspective" was published in the *International Journal of Students as Partners*. The work uncovers the messiness of the idea of microwithdrawals, as explained by Bivens in "Rhetorically Listening for Microwithdrawals of Consent in Research Practice." What Dr. Rifenburg and Ms. Pridgen argue is that consent is a fluid process that stretches past the signing of waivers and can be communicated in myriad ways by students, even by body language. Their thesis suggests that student researchers may be better positioned than faculty to read these signs in fellow students, which opens up an exploration of the role and importance of having student research partners in SoTL. Dr. Rifenburg has built upon his research by publishing subsequent pieces with students on this topic, including a blog post for the American Association of Colleges & Universities with Ms. Emily Pridgen and Ms. Samantha Velasquez entitled "Thriving in Our Work: Student-Faculty Partnerships as a High-Impact Practice." His work with students as partners in research is exemplary.

Dr. Rifenburg has served in leadership roles with the University of North Georgia's Center for Teaching, Learning, and Leadership. His work in faculty learning communities to support UNG faculty resulted in the Write Now Academy, which has become a staple of support on different UNG campuses to assist faculty in transforming their research and conference papers into articles for publication. The academy was first designed to help faculty who have completed SoTL projects translate their work into appropriate professional products. It has grown since then. His efforts in this area can also be seen in his participation with professional organizations. He is a reviewer for the *Writing Center Journal*, *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, and *Composition Studies*. In his position as a reviewer, Dr. Rifenburg has the opportunity to help SoTL scholars by offering his feedback and guidance on their articles. He further supports the dissemination of SoTL scholarship by his efforts on the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Convening Committee, which selects the programming of the annual conference. This conference is an important venue for many SoTL scholars to exchange information and refine their ideas.

What I hope has emerged from my letter is the portrait of Dr. Rifenburg as an engaged SoTL scholar and mentor. His SoTL publications are impressive. It is the scope of his SoTL work at UNG, his professional research, and his work with the USG that shows the depth of his professional legacy. I fully support Dr. Rifenburg's nomination for the Regents' Scholarship of Teaching & learning Award. It is an honor to have him represent our Department of English and institution.

Sincerely,



Dr. Laura Ng

Assistant Dean, College of Arts & Letters

Interim Head, Department of English



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25 October 2021

Regents SoTL Award Committee
University System of Georgia
270 Washington Street, S.W.
Atlanta, GA 30334

Regents SoTL Award Committee:

I am writing to enthusiastically recommend Dr. Michael Rifenburg for the Regents SoTL Award. I have worked with a number of emerging and established SoTL scholars as co-director of the University System of Georgia (USG) Scholarship of Teaching & Learning (SoTL) Fellows program (2015-2019) and the University of North Georgia SoTL Fellows program (2014-2019). Dr. Rifenburg stands out because of his partnership with students, a hallmark of excellence in this research field. I worked with him from 2013 to 2019 at University of North Georgia and co-authored “Cultivating Teacher-Scholars at a Teaching-Intensive University,” a chapter in *Academic Labor beyond the College Classroom: Working for Our Values* (2019), which analyzed the impact of cohort programs on faculty success.

Dr. Rifenburg is an established researcher in composition and rhetoric, writing centers, and the scholarship of teaching and learning. Rifenburg’s *The Embodied Playbook: Writing Practices of Student-Athletes* (2018, Utah State UP) uses embodiment theory to uncover learning processes among student athletes. His innovative work explores multimodal approaches to literacy and shows pedagogical efficacy in coaching and improvisation, tools common in student athletics and writing centers. His forthcoming *Drilled to Write: A Longitudinal Study of a Cadet Writer at a Senior Military College* (UP of Colorado) delves into a specific location and context to draw from it the lessons valuable to all professors who seek to advance composition skills. This deep attention to specific student cognitive work and writing processes aligns with the theoretical underpinnings of SoTL, articulated by Peter Felton, Nancy Chick, and others who have highlighted the crucial role of a nuanced understanding of local contexts in educational environments. Rifenburg is co-editor of two books: *Pedagogical Perspectives on Cognition and Writing* (forthcoming) and *Contemporary Perspectives on Cognition and Writing* (2017). Further, he is co-editing a special issue for a premier journal *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Language, Literature, Composition, and Culture* on the topic “Undergraduate Research as a Future of English Studies.” He is also distinguishing himself at an international level in the SoTL field more broadly. Specifically, he is publishing in *TLI: Teaching and Learning Inquiry*, the journal for the ISSOTL: International Society for Study of Teaching and Learning. He co-authors with MAJ. Brian Forester “First-year Cadets’ Conceptions of General Education Writing at a Senior Military College” in the 2018 issue of *TLI*. He is a reviewer for this journal and a member of the Convenings Committee of ISSOTL. His contributions extend to serving as a Steering Group Member for the International Research Consortium, Conference on College



Composition and Communication Standing Group. His work in SoTL is advancing the field and bringing to life the “Principles of Good Practice in SoTL” that Peter Felton articulates. Rifenburg pursues innovative research questions and articulates important findings across disciplinary boundaries and into topics that are relevant for the university as a whole, including curriculum design and student cognitive processes. This multifaceted approach makes his work more original and worthwhile to a wider audience.

Rifenburg devotes himself to student learning both in and out of the classroom. He makes the additional effort of teaching and training students beyond the usual professorial commitment. He invites students to consider how their learning takes place and how course design shapes this experience. In two research projects, he collaborates with students to examine the impact of a curricular redesign of English 1101. Such an immersive experience invites students into the continuous inquiry that underpins higher education in both research and practice. This kind of experiential learning may result in a student’s enrichment in critical thinking, ethical interaction with human subjects, research methodologies, and much more. Rifenburg and his students presented their work at an ISSSOTL conference, co-authored a blog post for the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), and published a reflective essay in the *International Journal of Students as Partners*. Remarkably, they have submitted a 7500-word research article to an academic journal. All of these stages of research and writing advance student knowledge. Part of Rifenburg’s focus is the impact of the English G2C committee redesign, a process approach that incorporates portfolios. He contributed with his departmental colleagues “English Composition I (ENGL 1101) Course Redesign at the University of North Georgia” to a Case Study Anthology with the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education. Rifenburg is also engaged in a project that assesses changes to the capstone English 4800. The input of students can shape the learning experiences of all those English majors who will benefit from this collaborative research that informs curricular changes. The integration of curricular advancement and SoTL research investigates and expands learning for all students, not just those who partner with Rifenburg.

Rifenburg produces rich, well-founded SoTL research on student learning processes, composition studies, and curricular reform. His dedication and skill in partnering with students and advancing SoTL research marks him as someone to watch and someone who has widened the path for all of us devoted to student learning and engagement. I offer my strongest recommendation for Dr. Rifenburg.

Sincerely,

Mary Carney

Mary Carney
Director of Programming
Office of Faculty Affairs

Appendix A

Aligning my SoTL praxis with Felten's five principles of practice for SoTL

Felten (2013) articulated listed five "principles of good practice" for SoTL research: inquiry focused on student learning, grounded in context, methodologically sound, conducted in partnership with students, and appropriately public. In this appendix, I align my publications with these principles.

Inquiry focused on student learning

- *The Embodied Playbook: Writing Practices of Student-Athletes*. Utah State University Press, an imprint of the University Press of Colorado, 2018.
- With undergraduate students Zoë Phalen and Kellie Keeling. "Redesigning a Sustainable English Capstone through a Virtual Student-Faculty Partnership." *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*. Forthcoming November 2021.
- With Kristine Johnson. "Theorizing with Undergraduate Researchers." *Composition Studies* 48.1 (2020): 119-120. Invited piece.
- "Student-Athletes' Metacognitive Strategy Knowledge." *Composition Forum* 43 (Spring 2020).

Grounded in context

- *Drilled to Write: Becoming a Cadet Writer at a Senior Military College*. Utah State University Press, an imprint of the University Press of Colorado. Forthcoming April 2022.
- With lieutenant colonel Brian Forester. "First-year Cadets' Conceptions of General Education Writing at a Senior Military College." *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* 6.1 (March 2018): 52-66.

Methodologically sound

- With Emily Pridgen. "Negotiating Informed Consent: A Students as Partners Perspective." *International Journal of Students as Partners* 4.2 (2020).

Conducted in partnership with students

- With undergraduate students Kellie Keeling and Zoë Phalen. "Implementing a Signature Experience and ePortfolios in an English Capstone Course." *Teaching Academic: A CTLL Blog*. 26 October 2021.
- With Emily Pridgen and Samantha Velasquez. "Thriving in Our Work: Student-Faculty Partnerships as a High-Impact Practice." AAC&U's Liberal Education blog. 3 September 2020.
- With Emily Pridgen. "Undergraduate Researchers as Partners in Large-Scale Curricular Change." Poster presentation. International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Atlanta, GA. October 2019.

Appropriately public

- "Let's All Help UNG Students Learn to Become Better Writers." *Gainesville Times*. 20 August 2017.
- "Web List Aiming to Expose 'Radical' Professors Raises Familiar Red Flags." *Gainesville Times*. 24 December 2016.

Appendix B

Image of SoTL work

Throughout this application, I have written about my sustained engagement with SoTL. I conclude with an images about my sustained engagement with SoTL.



Figure 1: Undergraduate student Emily Pridgen and I present a poster of our research at the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.