

Dr. Mya Poe, Penn State University

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McBryde 655

Learning to Communicate in Biomedical Engineering: The Role of Mentoring and Internationalization in Graduate Student Writing Development



In *Learning to Communicate in Science and Engineering: Case Studies from MIT*, (Poe, Lerner, & Craig, 2010) we studied 17 students in seven science and engineering courses at MIT to understand the development of student writing abilities in technical contexts. Our research confirmed many of the findings of other longitudinal writing research—that writing development is uneven, that the university context provided students exposure to new genres and rhetorical demands, and that students' identity development was critical for the development of writing abilities. One particularly important finding in our original study was the role of mentors in providing students models for professional practice, access to professional activities, and guided participation in communities of practice (For similar research, see Blakeslee, 2001). Another important finding was the place of the transnational lab environment in which our students were working and writing. Contemporary scientific lab spaces are not just international as Latour and Woolgar described in their seminal ethnography *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (1979); contemporary lab spaces are transnational with actors back and forth across national borders, sharing resources across contexts. In fact, we found that many scientific labs today are dependent on the movement of individuals back and forth across national borders. Such professional contexts deeply shape students' possibilities for writing development. In the three years since we conducted our research for *Learning to Communicate in Science and Engineering*, we have continued to follow our former students as they progress through graduate programs and into the professional world. In this talk, I share some of the insights we have gained from our follow-up study that have provided additional insights on student writing in current scientific contexts.

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