

Kinhead, Joyce. *Researching Writing: An Introduction to Research Methods*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2016. 338 pages. \$34.95. 978-1-60732-478-2. Print

Reviewed by Nathalie Singh-Corcoran

Undergraduate research has become a mainstay on college and university campuses, and while there may be several arguments for including undergraduate research in the overall college experience, George D. Kuh's is perhaps the most persuasive to multiple stakeholders (e.g., students, parents, faculty, and administrators). In his 2008 analysis of the *National Survey of Student Engagement*, he defines undergraduate research as a high-impact educational practice (HIP) or a teaching and learning approach that benefits students from a variety of backgrounds. Much evidence suggests that HIPs such as undergraduate research positively impact student retention and engagement (Brownwell and Swaner, Kilgo et al., Stanford et al.). Consequently, such data have led a number of institutions to devote significant resources to the undergraduate research experience. For example, at my home institution, a relatively new Office of Undergraduate Research provides students with opportunities to design their own research projects, connect with faculty mentors, and present and publish their research. In addition to the institutional support devoted to undergraduate research, a number of journals publish undergraduate research exclusively (*International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities*, the *Journal of Student Research*, and *Young Scholars in Writing*).

Chief among writing studies scholars on the cutting edge of undergraduate research is Joyce Kinhead. Her new book, *Researching Writing: An Introduction to Research Methods*, is a natural complement to the body of her scholarly and administrative work. Kinhead is both a longtime WPA and university administrator. For over twenty years, she served in writing program and writing center director roles. She is a founding member of the National Writing Center's Association (now the International Writing Centers Association), and at Utah State University, Kinhead served as a dean of humanities and the

Associate Vice President of Research and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Research Studies. She has been publishing on the value of undergraduate research for well over a decade.

Kinkead classifies *Researching Writing* as a textbook for students, particularly those who are majoring in English literature, writing studies, or creative writing. She also sees the book as applicable to any student in any major who is, in her words, “investigating writing in the disciplines” (xvii). The textbook is divided into two parts. Part 1 outlines the process of research, and part 2 discusses research methods. Student activities are woven throughout each chapter. Key words are italicized and glossed at the end of the book. Many of the chapters include references for future reading, and each chapter has its own works cited.

Kinkead spends her first chapter, “The Research Process,” explaining the importance of research to her student audience. Embedded in the chapter’s first two headings “Why do Research?” and “Why do Research in Writing?” are reasonable, clear, and well-researched responses to anticipated audience questions such as: How will this book (and course attached to the book) help me reach my end goal (career, graduate school, etc.)? In those first few pages, she helps her target audience see that through research, we identify solutions to the problems of our time. In addition, she explains that when students engage in research projects, they become more critical and independent thinkers; they further strengthen their reading, writing, and speaking skills; they become better prepared for graduate or professional school; and they become more appealing candidates on the job market.

“The Research Process” is the longest chapter in the book, totaling 65 pages. It is also the one that reads most like a textbook. In keeping with the genre, instruction is scaffolded. Kinkead helps students identify a research area, formulate a research question, find resources, conduct primary research, and then write everything up. As a teacher of a junior-level course where this book would best fit, I found this chapter to be the most immediately applicable. Students often have little experience with research beyond their first-year composition courses, and those courses don’t require them to do disciplinary research. Students don’t quite have the sense of what it means to ask and investigate a focused

research question, and many of us teachers don't quite know how to articulate and instruct students in the research process because we weren't taught how to research. We were left to *figure it out on our own*.

In many ways, *Researching Writing*—but especially this first chapter—is an extension of Kinkead and Grobman's work. In "Expanding Opportunities for Undergraduate Research in English Studies," they lobby for genuine undergraduate research opportunities for students in the English major. They argue that English Studies, particularly Literature, has been "slow to embrace the undergraduate research movement" (218) in part because assignments in literature classes lean toward close reading. In addition, it bears repeating that research has been excluded because many teachers of English are not quite sure how to teach the research process. Chapter 1 not only gives students a guide, it gives teachers one as well.

Chapters 3 and 4 seem an extension of Chapter 1 in that they both speak to significant components of research. Chapter 3, "Considering the Ethics and Responsible Conduct of Research," outlines how researchers are accountable for upholding a code of conduct. The chapter also explains IRB approval. Having worked with undergraduate researchers, I can say that the process of IRB approval is often a mystery to students. Chapter 3 will prove helpful for readers because it clearly explains why a college's or university's Institutional Review Board is necessary and important and how students can navigate the IRB process.

Chapter 4, "Sharing Research Through Oral Presentation, Poster Presentation, and Publication" offers a guide for the presentation of original research. Kinkead explains the poster, an old genre for researchers in the sciences and social sciences but a relatively new feature at professional conferences in writing studies. She also offers advice on how to deliver a conference presentation. This chapter implicitly nods to the value of undergraduate scholarship and the students' potential contributions to the field. It signals to teachers and students that undergraduates are makers of knowledge whose research projects do not have to end once the semester is over.

There are a few chapters whose placement disrupted my reading experience. Chapter 2, "Writing Studies," was one of those chapters.

As I stated above, Chapters 3 and 4 seemed natural extensions of Chapter 1. But Chapter 2 is not a directive chapter in the same way as the others in Part 1. Chapter 2 provides a brief explanation of Writing Studies: what it is and its history. The content itself is useful, especially for students who have not been exposed to the field before. Students will gain a general sense of the importance of writing throughout time and the role of writing at the college level. The chapter also has several student activities designed to get students reflecting on their writing experiences in college, exploring Writing Studies degree programs, and learning some of the key terms in the field. Because this chapter addresses a different kind of content than the preceding and following chapters, I initially questioned its placement. However, upon my second reading of *Researching Writing*, I concluded that the audience of this chapter is narrower than the others in Part 1. This chapter, while introductory, seems to be one that's mostly for students who are writing studies majors and minors (or who want to learn more about Writing Studies as a field) while the other chapters in Part 1 speak to a broader audience.

Part 2, "Approaches to Research," is largely devoted to research methods in writing studies. It is divided into four chapters and covers text and discourse analysis (chapter 5), case study (chapter 6), ethnography (chapter 7), historical (chapter 8), and mix-methods research (chapter 9). Each of these individual chapters provides a brief description of the method and an example of a professional scholar and a student scholar employing each method in their individual research. At the end of each chapter, Kinkead also provides article-length, published examples of student work. For example, chapter 6, "Conducting a Case Study," begins with a student-friendly definition of a case study: "The case study is a qualitative approach used to look at a single case; a small group of participants, a class, or a program. It involves description and analysis and is often used to make recommendations" (172). Kinkead then goes on to show readers how Janet Emig employed case study research in "The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders." Once she has provided additional professional-scholar examples, she turns to a student-scholar example. She describes how one student used the case study method to investigate how

users interacted with a website belonging to Global Village Gifts, an all-volunteer fair trade store. The student's aim was to make the site work better for the organization and expand the website's reach (181). In the last section of the chapter, Kinkead offers an exemplary student essay originally published in the journal *Young Scholars in Writing*: Sara Mulcahy's "I Realize Writing Is a Part of My Daily Life Now: A Case Study of Writing Knowledge Transfer in One Section of ESL Writing."

Of recently published textbooks, *Researching Writing* reminds me most of Melissa Ianetta and Lauren Fitzgerald's *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors*. Ianetta and Fitzgerald also encourage students to undertake research. They describe research methods at length, and they offer published student examples (note: both books also use Brown et al., "Taking on Turnitin: Tutors Advocating Change" as exemplary student research essays). However, Ianetta and Fitzgerald's audience (the peer tutor) and the site of research (the writing center) are more targeted whereas *Researching Writing* is meant for a wider range of students. There is much productive overlap between the books, and I could see using *Researching Writing* as a companion to the *Oxford Guide* in any writing center practicum or in other staff development efforts.

Researching Writing could also easily be employed in a writing about writing course. Pieces could be used in first-year writing classes. The book is also appropriate for graduate students who are new to writing studies research, and because the first section of the book is especially versatile, it could be adapted in undergraduate courses outside of English or writing studies.

In the next iteration of *Researching Writing*, I can imagine Kinkead expanding on existing sections. For example, early on in the book, she suggests that students seek a faculty mentor who can help serve as a steward of the discipline, someone who, "teaches by example and can model how to read scholarly literature, critique it, write and revise it" (99). The need for a mentor might be especially acute for underrepresented students, and there may be other, additional factors a student considers in her search to find one. Is the faculty mentor a person of color or the first to go to college? Can the faculty

member help the student navigate her concerns or answer her questions related to identity and the acquisition of a new discourse?

Second additions aside, Kinkead makes several important points in *Researching Writing*. First, we should engage students in research early and often. Research, as we teach it, is often bookended in a student's college career: experienced in first-year writing and then again in a senior capstone. If other undergraduate research opportunities exist, they are often only available to honors students. Kinkead shows us how to engage students in meaningful research beyond current models. As Kinkead states at the start of her book, when students participate in meaningful research, they become more engaged in their learning. More engagement translates to better outcomes for students. They see the value in what they are learning. They become better critical thinkers, stronger communicators in writing and speaking, and more confident independent learners. They are more likely to be retained, and they are more likely to graduate in four years.

Secondly, undergraduates have the capacity to contribute significantly to scholarship, particularly in writing studies. For far too long, undergraduate writers have been the subject of our research. But, as Lori Grobman argues, through participation in writing studies research, undergraduates have the opportunity to "write themselves into disciplinary conversations and challenge faculty/scholar-constructed representations of them" (177). Our students deserve a voice in the conversations about them, and they, like all scholars, have the potential to make significant contributions to the field. Through *Researching Writing*, Kinkead gives students and us the tools to ensure their voices are heard.

Works Cited

- Brownell, Jayne E., and Lynne El. Swaner. *Five High-Impact Practices: Research on Learning Outcomes, Completion, and Quality*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2010.
- Grobman, Laurie. "The Student Scholar: (Re)Negotiating Authorship and Authority." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 61, no. 1, 2009, pp. 175-96.

- Kuh, George D. *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008. ERIC.
- Kilgo, Cindy A., Jessica K. Ezell Sheets, and Ernest T. Pascarella. "The Link Between High-Impact Practices and Student Learning: Some Longitudinal Evidence." *Higher Education*, vol. 69, no. 4, 2015, pp. 509-25. ERIC.
- Kinkead, Joyce, and Laurie Grobman. "Expanding Opportunities for Undergraduate Research in English Studies." *Profession*, 2011, pp. 218-30.
- Stanford, Jennifer S., Suzanne E. Rocheleau, Kevin P.W. Smith, and Jaya Mohan. "Early Undergraduate Research Experiences Lead to Similar Gains for STEM and Non-STEM Undergraduates." *Studies in Higher Education*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2017, pp. 115-29. ERIC.