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TEACHING, LEADERSHIP
AND CURRICULUM STUDIES

“I FEEL SMARTER WHEN I WRITE”: THE ACADEMIC WRITING EXPERIENCES
OF FIVE COLLEGE WOMEN (168 pp.)

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As a way of examining how writing helps college students balance an understanding of subject matter with self and social understanding as well as develop their abilities to participate in the public realm, this qualitative study focused on the writing experiences of five college students, with particular attention paid to the assignments that allowed them to assert their ideas in response to the ideas of others. Women were selected for this study because members of traditionally marginalized or silenced populations stand to gain a great deal if their writing gives them the opportunity to experiment with dialogic argument. The five participants were interviewed over the course of two years about their college writing. The study also involved analyzing the participants' papers, interviewing their professors, and examining the assignments that prompted the papers.

The study revealed that all five participants engaged in dialectical argumentation to some degree, but they were rarely required by the assignment to marshal evidence to support their views. The amount of page space devoted to their own convictions and ideas indicated that the vast majority of their writing was devoted to the subject matter and/or others' ideas. If the assignments did not demand that the participants put forth their ideas assertively and construct personally meaningful positions, they avoided doing

so. It is important for educators to consider that students who are reticent to speak in class and/or socialized to avoid conflict can gain through their writing invaluable experience and confidence in articulating their views and putting forth their ideas assertively.