# What Makes Writing Meaningful

n their book *The Meaningful Writing Project: Learning, Teaching, and Writing in Higher Education* (Utah State University Press, 2016), co-authors Michele Eodice, Anne Ellen Geller, and Neal Lerner surveyed over 700 seniors at three universities. The researchers asked students about writing projects they'd done that they found meaningful, while letting students define for themselves what they meant by that term. Students identified projects in and out of their major, in required courses, general education courses, and electives, as meaningful for various reasons. Students found writing meaningful overall if they could:

- Tap into the power of personal connection

- Immerse themselves in what they are thinking, writing, and researching

- Experience what they are writing as applicable and relevant to the real world, and

- Imagine their future selves

The researchers also surveyed 160 faculty who had given assignments students identified as meaningful. Through this they learned that assignment design was important in opening opportunities to students to engage. Thoughtful professors often deliberately stressed aspects of their writing assignments that let students access one or all of the bullet points above. However, *The Meaningful Writing Project* makes clear that the assignment itself is not magic.

**The authors say that "meaningful writing happens for a reason, with intentions toward learning coming from both students and faculty."**

Many of the narratives of the students interviewed for the project tell of surprising connections students made to their writing, which were often invisible to their instructors.

The well-designed assignment is an opportunity that invites students into meaningful work. Students may or may not take up the chance. This research invites us at Edgewood College to consider how our writing assignments align with our learning goals for our courses, and to our own passion for our subjects.

--Angela Woodward, Writing Center Director