

2014

# Ready to Write: Exploring the Student Perspective on the Transition to College

Julie Sullivan

University of San Francisco, [jasullivan@usfca.edu](mailto:jasullivan@usfca.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.usfca.edu/diss>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Sullivan, Julie, "Ready to Write: Exploring the Student Perspective on the Transition to College" (2014). *Doctoral Dissertations*. 109.  
<https://repository.usfca.edu/diss/109>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, Capstones and Projects at USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized administrator of USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. For more information, please contact [repository@usfca.edu](mailto:repository@usfca.edu).

The University of San Francisco

READY TO WRITE:  
EXPLORING THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE ON  
THE TRANSITION TO COLLEGE

A Dissertation Presented  
to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
Department of International and Multicultural Education

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

By  
Julie Sullivan  
San Francisco, CA  
December 2014

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO  
Dissertation Abstract

Ready to Write:  
Exploring the Student Perspective on  
the Transition to College

Written communication is a cornerstone of college and career success, yet many students arrive at college underprepared for the writing demands of the academic discourse community. The potential reasons for the perceived gap in writing ability point to the ongoing challenges of education in the United States. As the population pursuing college degrees becomes more diverse, expectations differ between high school and college, equity in education issues persist and standardization focuses on academic skills, overlooking the potential role that nonacademic or “soft” skills play in student success. When decisions are made to address these concerns, the student perspective is frequently left out of the discussion.

By taking a Participatory Action Research approach, this study explored the skills, habits, and behaviors used in the transition to college and college writing from the student perspective. The research team included 20 first-time freshmen college students and one instructor/university researcher in a first semester Written Communication I course. Research data consisted of a survey, journals, discussion board posts, partner dialogues, final research papers and presentations, and reflections on the process. Emergent themes included the need for students to take responsibility and manage themselves, to adjust their attitudes and expectations, and to recognize the role of writing and reading in academic success. The results validated the intricate link between writing and college success and the role that nonacademic skills play in fulfilling academic goals.

In addition, the team found value in conducting this type of study during the college transition process.

This PAR study emphasized that college students can and should take control of their education and highlighted how colleges and high schools could support students in the preparation and transition stages. The co-researchers made many specific suggestions for future development and further research. However, the research team realized the most immediate benefits by seeing how they were able to use what they observed and researched to improve their own experience and the experiences of future freshmen. By aligning the study with the course goals and learning outcomes, the research team witnessed firsthand the power that can come from writing and having their voices heard.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Julie Sullivan

December 8, 2014

Candidate

Date

Dissertation Committee

Dr. Susan R. Katz

December 8, 2014

Chairperson

Dr. Helen Maniates

October 28, 2014

Dr. Mark Meritt

October 28, 2014

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, thank you to an incredible group of co-researchers, the students in Fall 2013 Written Communication I, Section 16. Aedan, Ariana, Blaze, Brian, Brittany, Cody, Danielle, Diego, Feneida, Grant, Harry, Jordan, Kynan, Natalie, Neil, Pete, Sonia, Shader, Shannon, Thai—without the knowledge and insight provided by each of you, this dissertation would not have been possible. It was my honor to be your professor, coach, confidant and teammate. I hope this report does your brilliance justice.

Thank you to the International and Multicultural Department at the University of San Francisco for recognizing the importance of education as a human right and providing the opportunity to explore a topic I have long held dear. Also to the Department of Rhetoric and Language, in particular Freddie Wiant, for providing the space and support in which to conduct this study.

A special thank you to my dissertation committee. To my chair, Dr. Susan Katz, for your support, enthusiasm, occasional tough love and frequent editing prowess. To Helen Maniates, for your challenging questions, which pushed my thinking to deeper depths, and Mark Meritt, for summing up what mattered most. You all generated such stimulating conversation, which showed my topic held merit, and were willing to point me in the right direction or provide that article that would help tie pieces together. Most of all, you helped me balance the discussion among disciplines and subject areas that have been occasionally at odds with one another.

To Dr. Shabnam Koirala-Azad, for her PAR support; Dr. Benjamin Baab, for asking tough questions with a sense of humor; Dr. Onllwyn Dixon, for telling it like it is; Dr. Emma Fuentes, for inspiring this project in her class; Dr. Betty Taylor, for

cheerleading and pointing out what could not be avoided; and Fr. Denis Collins, for providing pedagogical and philosophical perspective as only a dry-witted Jesuit can.

To Leslie and Cynthia, for going above and beyond the call of friendship and colleague duty in reading and validating this research. And to Freddie, for making all of this possible.

To all of my classmates, who supported and challenged me, in particular: Nicole, Lindsay, Ana Maria, Zoe, Jordan, Micaella, Kirsten (Yi) and Violette. To Juliet and Allison, for providing guidance and models to follow. And especially Page, for being my personal PAR success coach.

Most of all, to my family, who was new and still forming as this process began. To Dan, my partner, who did more reading about topics he cared only vaguely about than anyone ever should, all while getting kids fed, bathed and to school or bed. Our house will be clean again soon (maybe). To Declan and Keegan, who may someday understand the hours I spent doing “homework,” for the comic relief and for giving me hugs and kisses when I needed them more than they did. To Katherine Moloney and Jane Rising, for content, venting, and childcare support, and Deanna Lucas, for being our go-to in all kid-related situations. To my parents, for encouraging me to read, write and ask questions throughout my life. To my brother, for the sports talk and validation of our experiences.

To the Red Sox, for winning the World Series (again) in the midst of this study.

And to the friends who held a seat at the table/bar for me while I was gone.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
TABLE OF FIGURES AND TABLES .....	x
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Background and Need.....	5
Conceptual Framework.....	10
Purpose of the Study/Research Questions .....	11
Limitations/Delimitations .....	12
Significance of the Study .....	13
Definition of Terms.....	14
CHAPTER II: THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	17
Evolution of College Writing.....	17
How Composition is Viewed and the Universal Writing Requirement.....	18
Discourse Communities .....	25
Writing Across Curriculum/Writing in Disciplines/Write to Learn .....	29
The Perceived Gap in Writing Ability between High School and College .....	32
Difference in Expectations.....	33
Equity in Education Issues.....	48
Tendency to Focus on Academic Skills.....	66
Relevant Studies and the Call for the Student Perspective .....	83
The Call for Student Participation .....	84
Empirical Research and the Student Perspective.....	87
Summary .....	101
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY .....	102
Research Design: Participatory Action Research .....	102
Research Setting.....	106
Written Communication I .....	108
Research Population/Co-Researchers .....	109
Student Co-Researcher Profiles .....	112
Data Collection Procedures.....	120
Integration of PAR into Class Structure .....	127
Data Analysis Procedures .....	130
Validity/Reliability .....	134
Ethical Considerations and Protection of Human Subjects .....	134
Background of the University Researcher .....	135
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS .....	142
The Importance of Nonacademic or Soft Skills to College and Future Success .....	144
Students Must Take Responsibility/Control/Action Toward Self-Management .....	147
Time Management .....	148
Sleep Management.....	152
Stress/Anxiety Management .....	154
Job/Finances or Sport Management.....	157
Additional Support.....	159
Expectations May Not Match the Reality of College .....	161

Social Expectations.....	161
Academic Expectations.....	165
The Perception that High School Did Not Fully Prepare for College .....	168
Perception Gap.....	169
Culture of Leniency .....	169
Standardized Schooling .....	171
Writing and Reading Practice.....	173
Emotional Preparation .....	174
High School Mentality Versus College Mentality.....	176
The “High School Mentality” .....	177
Adapting to the College Mentality.....	179
The Role of Writing and Reading in College Success.....	181
The Link Between Reading and Writing .....	183
The Changing Role of Research in Their Academic Work .....	185
The Need to Seek Support and Tendency to Use Their Networks .....	187
The Value of Peer Review .....	188
How Being Self-Sufficient Can Make a Difference .....	189
How Being Part of this Study Helped the Co-Researchers in the College Transition	190
Academic and Time Management Changes .....	192
Social Aspect Changes.....	194
Writing-Related Changes.....	195
How They Contributed to the Learning of Others .....	198
Recommendations from the Co-Researchers for Future Action.....	199
To High Schools .....	200
To the College/University.....	201
To Future First-Time Freshmen.....	209
Reflections on the Process from the Instructor/University Researcher Perspective...	212
Attendance and Participation .....	212
Focus and Development.....	213
Missed Opportunities .....	215
CHAPTER V: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS .....	217
Summary of Findings.....	218
Discussion .....	219
Research Question #1: What Challenges Do First-Time College Students Encounter as They Enter the College Discourse Community? .....	220
Research Question #2: What Skills, Habits And Behaviors Do First-Time College Students Employ as They Settle into Their New Discourse Community and Tackle the Writing Demands of Their First Semester of College?.....	226
Research Question #3: What Role Do Nonacademic Skills Play in the Transition to the College Discourse Community? .....	239
Research Question #4: What Action(s) Could Be Taken in the Future to Support First-Time College Students in the Transition to the College Discourse Community? .....	240
Recommendations (from the University Researcher Perspective) .....	246
Learning and Development.....	246

Future Research .....	248
Conclusion .....	251
REFERENCES .....	253
APPENDICES .....	276
Appendix A: IRBPHS Approval.....	277
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form .....	278
Appendix C: Permission to Adapt Survey .....	281
Appendix D: Student Survey .....	282
Appendix E: Essay Assignment: People Who Tell the Truth Assignment.....	287
Appendix F: Sample Essay: People Who Tell The Truth.....	289
Appendix G: Essay Assignment: Policy Letter .....	294
Appendix H: Sample Essay: Policy Letter.....	296
Appendix I: Essay Assignment: Research Essay.....	302
Appendix J: Sample Essay: Research Essay (Proposal).....	303
Appendix K: Essay Assignment: Final Presentation .....	311
Appendix L: Sample Essay: Presentation (Sonia) .....	312
Appendix M: Sample Essay: Presentation (Harry).....	314
Appendix N: Sample Final Reflection (Kynan).....	316
Appendix O: Sample Final Reflection (Sonia).....	318

TABLE OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Table 1: *Information About Student Co-Researchers* ..... 110  
Table 2: *Research and Course Timeline*..... 128

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Education may well be, as of right, the instrument whereby every individual, in a society like our own, can gain access to any kind of discourse. But we well know that in its distribution, in what it permits and in what it prevents, it follows the well-trodden battle-lines of social conflict. Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it. (Foucault, 1972, p. 226)

Many young people come to university able to summarize the events in a news story or write a personal response to a play...But they have considerable trouble with what has come to be called critical literacy: framing an argument or taking someone else's argument apart [and] synthesizing different points of view... traditionally, such abilities have only been developed in an elite: in priests, scholars, or a leisure class. Ours is the first society in history to expect so many of its people to be able to perform these very sophisticated literacy activities. (Rose, 1989, p. 18)

Academic writing is a key component to college and career success, yet more than half of high school graduates are underprepared for college-level writing (Achieve, Inc., 2005). Results of the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) revealed only 27 percent of students in Grades 8 and 12 scored at the *proficient* level for writing, with the bulk of high school writers ranking at the *basic* level or below (NAEP, 2011). In addition, expectations differ significantly between high school and college-level work. As the words of Mike Rose explain above, writing requirements have changed both in and out of school, and these changes have only increased since these words were published. The standards for “literate writing” have evolved and writing has become “a gateway for success in academia, the new workplace, and the global economy, as well as for our collective success as a participatory democracy” (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006, p. 2). Yet, a survey on high school writing practices showed that students

were seldom asked to write more than one paragraph for assignments, and analysis and interpretation were rarely required in the writing process (Kiuahara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009). This perceived gap in ability between high school and college level writing leaves students and instructors struggling to adapt (Costino, 2008; Dana, Hancock & Philips, 2011).

As educators, policymakers and business leaders work to increase college and career readiness, much of the research has centered on academic skill development (ACT, 2012; Lubienski & Lubienski, 2006; NAEP, 2011; The College Board, 2012). Less research has focused on the *nonacademic skills, behaviors and attitudes*, which are found to be equally important in college success (Bartholomae, 1985; Karp & Bork, 2012; Tough, 2012). What is also lacking in this discussion is the student perspective on what skills and resources best prepare them for college level writing and the transition to college discourse community (Astin, 1984; Bizzell, 1992; Cook-Sather, 2006; Crowley, 1995; Wymer et al., 2012). While some studies include a component of student voice or a call for students to be involved in the education process (Astin, 1984; Karp & Bork, 2012), few have taken the steps to value the student perspective and include student voices on the topic of college-level writing (Adler-Kassner, 1999; Emig, 1971; O'Brien-Moran & Soirferman, 2010; Paulson & Armstrong, 2011; Todd & Hudson, 2008; Wymer et al., 2012). Exploring student perceptions, as they tap into their arsenal of training and experience—academic, personal and cultural—to tackle the transition to college and writing-centered assignments throughout their first semester, allows educators to highlight how both academic and nonacademic skills can be utilized for college writing success and encourages students to become active participants in their academic progress.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Debate surrounding the quality of education is not a new feature in the United States school system. Throughout the country, “rich and poor alike” express a “fundamental disappointment with public education and a pervasive belief that schools are not doing what they should to educate the population of the future” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 158). School choice and privatization movements tout the advantages of private schools over public or charter options, but research comparing performance in private, public or charter schools shows mixed results, with some studies finding no significant difference and others finding considerable benefits in private school education (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2006). Lubienski and Lubienski (2006) found that variations among private, public and charter schools could be attributed to demographics; after controlling the data for these differences, the “private school effect” disappeared, and “even reverse(d) in most cases” (p. 3).

These results hint at a host of other potential challenges hidden with those demographics differences, including equity in education issues and disparities among the literacies that students bring with them to college. As the population attending college diversifies, adjustments have been required to support first generation to college students, students from underrepresented or marginalized populations and nontraditional students.

In addition, the expectations for writing have shifted over time with a higher level of literacy being required for even entry-level positions. According to the National Writing Project & Nagin (2006), “The benchmark for what counts as literate writing, what good writing requires, and how many people need to be literate in our society has moved dramatically since the nineteenth century” (p. 2). Efforts to get “back-to-basics”

repeatedly fall short of academic writing goals, leaving an ongoing need to improve student writing in their wake (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006). The lack of proficiency, alongside the increasing expectations, translates into college-level instructors teaching writing skills that should have been acquired in secondary education while pushing for higher levels of conceptual thinking. The reciprocal relationship between reading and writing adds to the challenges faced by writing instructors who encounter students with reading hurdles alongside writing ones (Heller 1999; Kaufer & Waller, 1985; Morrow, 1997; Salvatori & Donahue, 2012). In response, students increase their academic and financial load by adding supplementary courses to address reading and writing challenges (Bettinger & Long, 2006).

Research also shows that the existing placement and assessment models of the test-based culture in education tend to value official or academic literacies, those that tend to be taught in school, over unofficial or nonacademic literacies, or those attributed to cultural upbringing or personality traits that fall outside the scope of academic curriculum, testing and assessment (Bloome, 2008; Heath, 1982; Karp & Bork, 2012; Schultz & Hull, 2008; Zhao, 2009). Calls for ongoing assessment have gained momentum, and protocols for placing students in college-level courses have undergone multiple revisions; however, absent during these assessments are ways to tap the *funds of knowledge* that students bring with them to college. Students utilize both academic (formal) and nonacademic (informal) literacies as they navigate the discourse community of post-secondary academia (Bloome, 2008; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Karp & Bork, 2012; Lee, 1997; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994). Academic writing classes can serve as a gatekeeper within this discourse community, not only by creating a foundation with

which to facilitate the various disciplines and genres, but also by placing students into different academic tiers. For many students, the required writing class is not only an extension to college orientation, but also the class in which they are likely to make long-standing connections, since it is one of the few classes in which they sit with predominantly other first-time freshmen. In this context, the nonacademic skills that students bring with them to college may play a significant role in their college success (Bloome, 2008; Heath, 1982; Karp & Bork, 2012; Schultz & Hull, 2008; Zhao, 2009).

What is lacking in this discussion is the student perspective on what skills and resources best prepare them for college level writing and the transition to college (Astin, 1984; Cook-Sather, 2006; Crowley, 1995). As decisions are made for them, students have “no authorized discourse within the academy” through which to share their voice regarding curricula (Crowley, 1995, p. 236). In this era of increased writing and literacy demands, first-time college students, especially ethnic minority, international and non-traditional students, need to recognize the literacies they possess and be valued for the insights they can contribute to the ongoing conversation surrounding transitioning to and succeeding in college level writing efforts.

### **Background and Need**

The tradition of *eloquentia perfecta*, or speaking and writing effectively with stylistic excellence, remains a cornerstone of Jesuit education today (Mailloux, 2013; O'Malley, 2013). A similar approach to written and oral communication skills provides a foundation for education at colleges and universities throughout the United States. Many schools still uphold the universal writing requirement created in response to a perceived lack of literacy skills in the face of increasing literacy demands of the workforce

(Brereton, 1995; Crowley, 1995; National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006; North, 2011). As the demands surrounding writing continue to evolve at a rapid pace (Brandt, 2009), many careers require strong written and oral communication skills to an extent never before demanded of so much of the population (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006; Rose, 1989). In response, colleges and universities have made efforts to extend writing practice across the curriculum and in the disciplines, as well as to merge required writing with first-year experience classes designed to retain highly effective students (Costino, 2008; Fanetti, Bushrow, & DeWeese, 2010; Hesse, 2005; Todd & Hudson, 2008). To meet all of these demands, college writing instructors are engulfed by a service ethic, in which students, administrators, and faculty in other departments depend on their writing departments to fix student-writing issues (Costino, 2008; Crowley, 1995).

These challenges are exacerbated by the increasing number of people pursuing college and a perceived downward trend in writing ability. The potential causes for this downward trend vary among the sources. Some point to a disconnect in expectations between high school and college level writing, which leaves many college instructors reviewing basic writing skills alongside pushing for higher levels of conceptual thinking (Costino, 2008; Dana, Hancock & Philips, 2011; Jameson, 2007). Others note that efforts to standardize education, like the Common Core State standards, may distort the purpose of writing in education and limit the writing opportunities that students are exposed to prior to college (Bloome, 2008; Chaffee, 2012; Fanetti, Bushrow, & DeWeese, 2010; Salem & Jones, 2010; Schultz & Hull, 2008; Zhao, 2009). In the public education system, efforts to Leave No Child Behind may follow a deficit model of teaching or limit creativity, critical thinking, or diversity of talents—skills that can assist students in their

college writing transition. Such issues surrounding education equity and equality persist, particularly in urban and rural environments, and continue to marginalize populations (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Harris, 2006; Kincheloe, 2006).

At the high school level, these issues translate into test scores reported by various testing organizations and categorized by state, ethnicity, and exposure to the core curriculum. Scores from 2011-2012 show gaps in benchmark achievements on both the SAT and ACT exams, with white and Asian students scoring higher than African American, American Indian and Hispanic students, and those who met the core curriculum requirements scoring higher than students who did not take the core curriculum (ACT, 2012; The College Board, 2012). At the college/university-level, these issues translate into a discourse of needs, in which *at-risk* students are equated with minority and marginalized populations, furthering the deficit model and arguments surrounding the exclusion created by placement systems and the universal writing requirement (Aronowitz, 2000; Brodkey, 1995; Costino, 2008; Crowley, 1995; Fraser, 1989; Leung & Safford, 2005). Students, meanwhile, supplement the requisite writing classes with courses providing additional editing, grammar, or reading support in order to fulfill the requirement (Bettinger & Long, 2006).

In 1977, Shaughnessy wrote that she saw the pedagogies of literacy as “in a puzzling state of discord, with theorists and practitioners and taxpayers all arguing about how people become literate or why they don’t” (p. 98). She adds that the reasons underlying these literacy challenges are complex and call for ambitious research—“so ambitious that I have not been able to suggest its boundaries” (p. 99). To isolate areas of concern, Shaughnessy asked:

1. “What are the signs of growth in writing among adults whose development as writers has been delayed by inferior preparation but who are then exposed to intensive instruction in writing?”
2. “What sub-skills of writing, heretofore absorbed by students over time in a variety of situations, can be effectively developed through direct and systematic instruction at the freshman level?”
3. “What skills have we failed to take note of in our analysis of academic tasks?”
4. "What goes on and what ought to go on in the composition classroom?" (p. 103).

Today, many voices continue to debate the state of literacy and education. As the societal demand for written communication skills increases, research that focuses on the aspects of education that lead to writing success has become ever more essential. While researchers have taken on aspects of the questions posed by Shaughnessy (1977), none have been answered in full.

Researchers continue to push the boundaries of educational research, even as the boundaries surrounding composition and writing continue to evolve. Research has focused on the writing process and the student experience during composing (Emig, 1971; Voss, 1983), the success of Writing Across the Curriculum, Writing to Learn, and Writing in the Disciplines movements (Dana, Hancock, & Phillips, 2011; Salem & Jones, 2010; Todd & Hudson, 2008), and the transition to college, or between discourse communities (Bartholomae, 1985; Beaufort, 1997). But much of the current published empirical research on college preparation focuses on test scores, with even the test makers demonstrating how students fall short of benchmarks for college and career

success (Achieve, Inc., 2005; ACT, 2012; Aldeman, 2010; The College Board, 2012).

Although the term “student voice” entered the realm of educational research during the 1990s (Cook-Sather, 2006), few researchers have moved beyond including the student perspective via surveys or focus groups to include the *voices* of students (Karp & Bork, 2012; Nieto, 1994). Students remain an untapped resource, despite the potential insight they could provide on the transition from high school to college level writing. Student action projects are one way of involving students in enacting change (Morrell, 2008; Wright & Mahiri, 2012). Another is to team with students as co-researchers (Wymer et al., 2012).

Participatory Action Research (PAR) positions the academic researcher within the classroom and provides the opportunity to “see how knowledge is actually created and used in school settings” (Apple, 2004, p. 17). In addition, as “a self-conscious way of empowering people to take effective action toward improving the conditions of their lives” (Park, 1993, p. 1), PAR encourages agency in students, as they learn and develop in the transformative research process.

Another important area of inquiry surrounds the nonacademic skills and funds of knowledge in research around student success in college (Karp & Bork, 2012; Lee, 1997; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994; Morrell, 2004). Much research relies upon the existing assessment processes; however, success involves many factors not considered by current academic standards. A rich opportunity exists to utilize student voices in identifying the skills, habits, and behaviors that enable students to transition to college and meet the writing requirements of the academic discourse community within the Participatory Action Research model.

## Conceptual Framework

While the conceptual framework for this study evolved with data analysis, the initial viewpoint combined concepts from critical pedagogy, *cariño*, New Literacy Studies, and student voice. These themes informed the research and pedagogical design, in particular the position of university researcher and participants/co-researchers, as well as provided a lens through which to consider the findings of this study.

Within the existing paradigm of language as a social practice, and learning as a social act (Vygotsky, 1978), critical pedagogy calls for knowledge co-creation via dialogue, with the teacher valuing and incorporating the students' inherent skills and experiences in the learning process (Freire, 1974; Macedo, 2006). These efforts involve questioning the relationship of student to educator and the concept of schooling. Authentic caring in education, or *cariño*, creates a reciprocal relationship between student and school, in which students feel cared for, and in exchange care more about school (Duncan-Andrade, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999). Igniting student empowerment through keeping academic expectations high while creating a sense of agency and recognition of funds of knowledge are key tenets of critical care, a facet of *cariño* (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006).

Developing a critical pedagogy also involves acknowledging various forms of literacy. New Literacy Studies links language with social justice in a manner that challenges and extends what is recognized as literacy beyond school-based learning to include personal and cultural experiences and practices. College is only one example of a discourse community in which students may participate. Forums for literacy continue to evolve along with technological developments, providing additional demand and

opportunity for writing development. However, power holders control which voices are heard and what is considered “academic” discourse (Costino, 2008; Schultz & Hull, 2008; Street, 2003).

The concept of student voice is inherent in the philosophies of critical pedagogy, *cariño* and New Literacy Studies, although it appears in many forms throughout writing-focused literature. The term *voice* holds many meanings with both positive and negative aspects. As writers, students develop a voice to express themselves and name their experiences. Voice also denotes a sense of “presence, power, and agency” (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 5), and the ability to play an active role in life decisions within the existing power structures (Holdsworth, 2000; Nagle, 2001). By fostering an environment in which individual voices of students can be shared and heard, this study aimed to counter discriminatory and exclusionary practices in the university and greater educational system (Banks, 1996; Cook-Sather, 2006; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2000), while recognizing the importance of both academic/official literacy and nonacademic/unofficial literacies to student success (Bloome, 2008; Karp & Bork, 2012), and how student funds of knowledge, or “accumulated bodies of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 133), can be better utilized in the transition to the academic discourse community.

### **Purpose of the Study/Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of first-time freshman college students regarding preparedness for college-level coursework in the required writing courses at one private four-year university in Northern California. The overarching research question was: What do students believe prepares them for college-

level writing and being successful in the transition to college?

More specific secondary questions included:

- (1) What challenges do first-time college students encounter as they enter the college discourse community?
- (2) What skills, habits and behaviors do first-time college students employ as they settle into their new discourse community and tackle the writing demands of their first semester of college?
- (3) What role do nonacademic skills play in the transition to the college discourse community?
- (4) What action(s) could be taken in the future to support first-time college students in the transition to the college discourse community?

Because preparedness or being ready for something can be subjective—one can be fully trained but not feel ready, and vice versa—this study allowed students to describe their feelings and perceptions as they tapped into their arsenal of training and past experiences to work on writing-centered assignments and meet the challenges related to entering a new discourse community throughout their first college semester.

### **Limitations/Delimitations**

Certain limitations and delimitations for this study related to the selection of the research site and participants, as well as the timeline for the study. First, the research site of a private, four-year university in Northern California was chosen because of convenience and the ongoing relationship the researcher has as an adjunct employee of the university. The study was also limited to students enrolled in a course taught by the researcher during the chosen timeframe.

In a recent self-evaluation, the department in which this course was located made a point to emphasize that it cannot be compared directly with other university writing programs due to the “unique structure and departmental interrelationships” (USF Dept. of Rhetoric and Language, 2013, p. 7). This distinction means the results of this study are not likely to be generalizable to larger populations or other writing programs.

In addition, the participants/co-researchers for this study included only a few English Language Learners (ELLs), and one of the students who identified as an international student attended high school in the United States prior to college, while the other attended high school abroad with predominantly American students, which may have affected their overall transition to college.

The study timeframe was also limited to one semester. The findings for this study reflected the experiences and insights of the co-researchers during this timeframe.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research adds to the growing body of knowledge that explores student beliefs and the role of nonacademic skills in academic success. Whereas the primary audience for this study consists of educators who work with this student population prior to and during the college transition, exploring the student perspective of college-writing preparedness could reap rewards throughout the university system. The findings and subsequent discussion points could help future incoming students recognize and employ the skills they already possess toward transitioning into the college discourse community, tackling college-level work and achieving future success. They may also encourage educators to set realistic, culturally sensitive expectations and seek opportunities to utilize students’ existing funds of knowledge, as well as highlight skills and provide appropriate

scaffolding to improve student performance. Student services and support systems, including tutors and writing centers, could utilize the actions proposed within to better support students in their college-transition and writing efforts. Similarly, administrators and staff could create more effective standards for admission, better diagnostic assessments of student skills and needs, and more appropriate course placement systems.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)*—a college readiness program offered in high school that “targets students in the academic middle—B, C and even D students—who have the desire to go to college” and places them advanced classes while providing an “elective class that prepares them to succeed in rigorous curricula, enter mainstream activities in school, and increase their opportunities to enroll in four-year colleges” (California Dept. of Education, 2013).

*Basic*—one of the three NAEP achievement levels, denoting partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade assessed. NAEP also reports the proportion of students whose scores place them below the *Basic* achievement level. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011)

*Cariño*—“authentic caring,” which focuses on creating a relationship between school and student in which students, in particular students from marginalized populations, “are authentically cared for and, in turn, open themselves up to care about school” (Duncan-Andrade, 2006, p. 451).

*Discourse community*—credit for coining this phrase has been attributed to Martin Nystrand and to Patricia Bizzell, both in 1982. In her later book, Bizzell (1992) defines this term as “a group of people who share certain language-using practices” (p. 222), but a more fleshed out definition comes from linguist John Swales, who explained the term as a group of individuals with the following six characteristics: (1) a set of common public goals, (2) mechanisms of intercommunication among members, (3) use of its mechanisms to provide information and feedback, (4) expectations created by genres of communication that express the operations of the group, (5) the acquisition of specific lexis—its own terminology, and (6) a threshold for group membership establishing a base level of expertise about a subject and a “reasonable ratio between novices and experts” (Swales, 1990, p. 471-473).

*Eloquentia perfecta*—“Excellence in the expressive skills of writing and speaking with logical clarity” (Fordham University, 2008) (\*translations provided by other Jesuit colleges differ in wording but remain similar in spirit).

*Emotional intelligence (EQ)*—“the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions” (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

*Ethic of Service*—coined by Crowley (1995) as the argument that required writing instructors and instruction serves “the needs of the academic community, as well as students and the community at large, by teaching students to write error-free expository prose” (p. 227).

*First generation students*—students who are first generation in their family to attend college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). For this report, this includes students who had a sibling or cousin who attended or is currently attending, but whose parents or guardians did not attend college.

*First-time freshman*—a student who has no prior postsecondary experience...attending any institution for the first time at the undergraduate level. This includes students enrolled in the fall term who attended college for the first time in the prior summer term, and students who entered with advanced standing (college credits earned before graduation from high school). (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011)

*First Year Experience seminars*—courses offered to incoming college students which may fulfill a required core area (such as writing) and focus on topics aimed to generate student interest in assist in attrition rates (Barefoot, 2000; USF Dept. of Rhetoric and Language, 2013).

*Funds of knowledge*—an “accumulated bodies of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 133), including but not limited to academic, personal, social and cultural skills, behaviors, and attitudes.

*High school mentality*—coined by the student co-researchers in this study to represent the habits and behaviors that students bring to college that may have worked in high school but fail to serve them well in the college transition and discourse community.

*Nonacademic skills, habits, behaviors, and attitudes*—used throughout this report to refer to those literacies that are not sanctioned in formal school settings or part of standardized assessments, which appear in the literature also as skills, knowledge, intelligences or literacies categorized as informal, soft, intangible, tacit, practical, unofficial or noncognitive.

(\*Exception: When Elbow refers to nonacademic writing, he is referring to non-school based writing practice or activities being done as part of learning academic discourse.)

*Nontraditional student*—used to define undergraduate students who are over the age of 24, work full time alongside attending to school, live off-campus, delayed applying to college post high school graduation, have dependents other than a spouse, received a GED, or characterized by other variables related to their background (including race or gender) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

*Proficient*—one of the three NAEP achievement levels, representing solid academic performance for each grade assessed. Students reaching this level have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real-world situations, and analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

*Two hours per class rule*—students are expected to spend 2 hours outside of class in study and preparation for each hour they spend in class. In a 4-unit class, students will engage in approximately 8 hours of out-of-class work per week (USF Dept. of Rhetoric and Language, 2013).

*Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)*—a movement that implements writing into coursework in all departments across the curriculum, such as requiring papers in mathematics and sciences, as well as in literature and rhetoric (Dana, Hancock & Phillips, 2011; Thaiss & Porter, 2010).

*Writing in the Disciplines (WID)*—a variation on the WAC movement which implements writing-specific courses on the techniques and requirements of the genre of that discipline, such as Writing for Business or Writing for Sociology (Thaiss & Porter, 2010; Todd & Hudson, 2008; USF Dept. of Rhetoric and Language, 2013).

*Write to Learn (WTL)*— concepts that use writing as a method of interpreting and instilling factual information, in place of the traditional lecture/memorize teaching model (Todd & Hudson, 2008).

## **CHAPTER II: THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Experts in the fields of education, psychology, human rights, and politics frequently debate the skills required for, and how to assess, college preparedness. This review of literature explores: (1) The developmental history of college-level writing, (2) The debate surrounding the perceived gap in writing ability between high school and college level writing, including the different expectations between high school and college level writing, the increased diversity of the student population, issues surrounding equity in education, and the tendency of assessment efforts to focus on academic skills only, and (3) The call for research and existing empirical research incorporating the student voice or perspective in studies on this topic.

### **Evolution of College Writing**

Developing the art of *eloquentia perfecta*, or speaking and writing effectively with stylistic excellence, has a rich tradition in Jesuit education. Stemming from the study of rhetoric in ancient Greece, the Jesuits codified this concept in their official plan of studies for teaching institutions in 1599 (Mailloux, 2013; O'Malley, 2013; *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum*, 1599/1970). The ideals behind this concept can be seen as a goal at nearly all colleges and universities in the United States, and through efforts such as the creation of the universal writing requirement and the Writing Across the Curriculum movement. Models for defining and acquiring academic literacy also aimed to realize aspects of this tradition (Bloome, 2008; Street, 2003).

In the process of meeting this promise of eloquence in written communication, college writing programs are stretched thin by the increasing demands of the

administration, student body and faculty from other departments. They are often run on tight budgets, administered by non-tenured faculty, staffed by adjuncts or graduate students, and aiming to increase the range of their course offerings (North, 2011). In addition, they continue to establish a solid position and definition for who they are and what they do within the university system (Costino, 2008; Crowley, 1995; Lunsford, 1990; North, 2011). Throughout this process, Composition as a discipline has struggled to free itself from the stigma of existing solely to fix the writing issues students bring with them to college.

In order to understand the student transition into college and college writing, we must consider the position of composition courses and Composition as a discipline at the college-level. This section explores how Composition as a field is viewed within the Academy alongside the role of the universal writing requirement, the concept of the academic discourse communities, and the movement toward Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), Writing in the Disciplines (WID) and Writing to Learn (WTL).

### **How Composition is Viewed and the Universal Writing Requirement**

From inception, composition courses were created to address a perceived gap in student writing abilities. *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum* (1599/1970) provides a foundation for a course in “eloquence” with three requirements: (1) knowledge of language (both acquiring vocabulary and “correctness of expression”), (2) erudition (or instruction to stimulate intellectual interest, in balance with a concentrated study of language), and (3) basic principles of rhetoric (the fundamentals of which were modeled by the works of Greek writers) (pp. 79-80). Although the required readings may have changed, alongside debates about what type of reading should be done in composition versus literature

classes (Lindemann, 1993; Salvatori & Donahue, 2012; Tate, 1993), the goal of building upon a student's base knowledge of grammar to develop facility and effectiveness of written and oral communication remains a priority at most colleges throughout the United States (Mailloux, 2013; O'Malley, 2013; USF Dept. of Rhetoric and Language, 2013).

Whether students are prepared to meet these requirements of eloquence is another matter.

Harvard University is credited with adopting the first formal Introduction to Composition course in response to a "perceived literacy crisis" in the late 19th Century (Crowley, 1995, p. 235). As the doors the higher education opened wider, even some of the freshmen coming from the elite private schools struggled with college-level writing demands (Brereton, 1995; Crowley, 1995). This course aimed to close the gap between those who arrived at the university prepared and those who were deemed less-than-equipped, while insuring traditional class boundaries. In the process, writing done by the "unentitled" was "put under continued surveillance," until they met the standards deemed "suitable for admission to the discourses of the academy" (Crowley, 1995, pp. 228-229). This deficit model-based concept extended throughout the university system, with additional remedial or basic writing sections being offered by the 1920s (Crowley, 1995).

The universal requirement of taking composition courses in the process of pursuing a college degree became a mainstay following the introduction of the GI Bill (Brereton, 1995; Crowley, 1995; National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006; North, 2011), and was deemed increasingly necessary after the Civil Right Movement. Open admissions policies allowed even more students to cross the threshold of post-secondary education, the majority of whom arrived in college writing classes of the 1970s unable to compose a thesis, form an argument or edit standard written English in an essay at the

college level (Bizzell, 1982; Lunsford & Garnes, 1979; Shaughnessy, 1977). The lack of preparation among the diverse student body pointed to a disconnect between the expectations of high school teachers and college faculty. The number of students taking remedial courses increased—with recent research pointing to some 20 percent of students still being placed into remedial or basic courses upon enrollment (Dana, Hancock and Philips, 2011, p. 52).

**Gatekeeper effect.** By default, college-level writing programs became gatekeepers to the Ivory Tower (Crowley, 1995; Shor, 1997). In some respects, the role of these classes, especially those that lacked academic discourse, theory or an organized teaching approach, was to cull “those students who had not already begun their initiation into the discourse community” or flunk out “a certain percentage of each entering class” (Bizzell, 1982, p. 192). The fact that some students ended up repeating the remedial course multiple times before matriculating to the standard freshman required class called into question what “remedial” meant and whether students were being served by these writing programs (Bizzell, 1982, 1992; Lunsford, 1990). This also led to some universities drawing a line for how many times a student could take these courses and remain enrolled in the school (McCormick et al, 2013).

This gatekeeper effect of the universal requirement led the reasons stated for abolishing the requirement as a whole. The requirement is believed to prevent both students and writing instructors from achieving their potential (Crowley, 1995; Elbow, 1991; North, 2011; Shor, 1997). Much of the debate has centered on the needs of students, with discussions increasingly involving whether these classes may be hurting rather than helping (Costino, 2008; Crowley, 1995; McAlexander, 2006).

**Discourse of need.** Crowley (1995) noted that talk of “basic,” “remedial” or even “universal requirement” points to an ongoing “discourse of need” throughout the academy, which serves to perpetuate stereotypes and contributes to practices of exclusion. Included in this argument is the practice of equating “at risk” with minority students (p. 233). As a result, students are frequently asked to “enroll in classes that carry ‘additive’ value,” (Adler-Kassner, 1999, pp. 84-85), which may not add so much as hold them back until they have proven themselves ready. Political action on campuses, such as City University of New York in 1999, aimed to dismantle the basic writing programs and eradicate the universal writing requirement due to the lack of success in liberating basic writers from that label and the inequity built into the system by focusing on a deficit model of education (Adler-Kassner, 1999; Costino, 2008; Crowley, 1995). But opposition to the universal requirement “from below” has had only moderate success, with the requirement being removed in response to student protests in the 1960s, and being reinstated in response to another “literary crisis” in the 1970s (Crowley, 1995). Those who would like to see it retired believe that the entire freshman class is marginalized in this process of universal requirement. The requirement “tends toward standardization and away from the recognition of students’ diverse abilities and desires” (p. 233), while “it supplements or erases students’ home languages” (Crowley, 1995, p. 233). They argue that required composition has nothing to do with student needs and everything to do maintaining the elite image of academia (Crowley, 1995; Elbow, 1991).

Supporters of the basic writing courses, and the universal requirement, believe these classes destigmatize students as being deficient. They are categorized as newcomers to academic discourse, which is unfamiliar due to lack of exposure, not deficiency

(Adler-Kassner, 1999; Bizzell, 1992; Shaughnessy, 1977). Through the process of these courses, students are able to practice claiming “academic authority” (Bizzell, 1992, p. 7), while being initiated into the academic discourse community. They are also more likely to persist in college and obtain a bachelor’s degree (Bettinger & Long, 2009). In addition, many basic writing instructors have worked against the deficit model of instruction to develop ways of talking about literacy “so that students don't feel they are failures, don't see their experiences as isolated, and don't feel that the literacies that they bring to the academy are “bad” (Adler-Kassner, 1999, p. 76).

**Composition as a course/discipline.** For instructors, the existence of composition classes, and the universal requirement, helped to professionalize Composition as a field (North, 2011). This step was essential as other disciplines founded around the same time, and others developed since, became more firmly established in the academy than Composition. But the more Composition pulled away from Literature to establish itself as a separate discipline, the more challenge the field has faced in defining itself within the university system (Costino, 2008). Composition continues to work toward being seen as “truly academic” by faculty in other disciplines (Crowley, 1995, p. 231). Given its “ethics of service” (as coined by Crowley, 1995), and the anomalous position it holds as a mode of instruction, Composition is often said to not “emanate from some subject matter, discipline, or field of study” (Crowley, 1998, p. 6). Experienced and published professors often do not see teaching writing as a “worthy endeavor” (Bizzell, 1992, p. 11), and administrators have described writing teachers as “the floating bottom” or “soft underbelly” of academia, and not “central to the mission of the academy and accorded its highest priorities and rewards” (Lunsford, 1990, p. 75). Contributing to this

impression is the reliance on part-time faculty who often juggle multiple course sections for substandard salaries, without benefits, and without private offices or campus phone numbers, as well as the perception that universities "require courses only when they think that students will not elect them" (Crowley, 1995, p. 231).

In addition, the "promise of composition" (North, 2011, p. 203) sets a false expectation that students can be transformed from lacking writing facility to capable of upper-division work in a single semester. Professors in other disciplines frequently grade students negatively for their writing efforts, then "lambast the English department for not solving" writing issues during the first year (Bizzell, 1992, p. 12), and writing instructors are often chastised for not doing their jobs (Crowley, 1995). Lunsford (1990) pointed to a decade of writing instructors defending and defining themselves, in opposition to critics who categorized them as "technocrats" or "drill and skill captains" (p. 75).

Similar categorizations continue today, and this institutionalized impression of composition classes and instructors transfers to the students. Whereas some students recognize the need for the required writing cognate, others see the course(s) as a hoop to jump through to get to their real coursework in their major field of study. Movements toward WAC/WID/WTL aim to impress the importance of writing in all aspects of academia, but the role of the writing class (and the writing instructor) remains undefined. Added to this dilemma are the debates surrounding writing within the academy, including: "Who owns writing?" or more specifically, "Who owns the content and pedagogy of composition?" (Hesse, 2005, p. 337), the correlation or reciprocal relationship between reading and writing (Heller 1999; Kaufer & Waller, 1985; Morrow, 1997; Salvatori & Donahue, 2012), and which texts belong within each field (Lindemann,

1993; Salvatori & Donahue, 2012; Tate, 1993).

**Rethinking the requirement.** North (2011) advocated for removing the universally required writing classes and positioning writing instruction in departments of writing studies, in which courses would grow out of the research and knowledge of the faculty, students would have the option of self-selecting to be in courses, and the coursework would have “explicit connection to a longer curricular and developmental trajectory” (North, 2011, p. 208). As some universities make moves in this direction (Bazerman, 2002; North, 2011; USF Dept. of Rhetoric and Language, 2013), other universities reportedly plan to eliminate required writing and reading courses and instead funnel less prepared or at-risk students through community, junior and vocational schools before transferring to four year colleges (McAlexander, 2000). Still other institutions continue to add to their remedial and developmental course offerings alongside moving toward Writing Across the Curriculum or Writing in the Disciplines approaches (Bettinger & Long, 2006; USF Dept. of Rhetoric and Language, 2013).

In addition, new models for defining and acquiring literacy have expanded beyond official literacies, or those sanctioned by schools, to incorporate unofficial literacies, or literacy practices evolving from students’ personal and cultural experiences (Bloome, 2008; Street, 2003). This development holds promise for more transformative teaching and learning practices to be implemented (Freire, 1974; Greene, 1978; Lee, 1997; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994; Morrell, 2004). The *Common Core State Standards Initiative* (2014) claim to meet this promise by ensuring “all students have the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life upon graduation from high school, regardless of where they live” (Why are the Common Core State Standards

important section, para. 1), and preparing students to “read, write, and research across the curriculum” (What types of texts are recommended for the English language arts standards section, para. 1). However, early reports on implementation of these standards find that sample exemplars, which could in effect close the gap for writers making the leap from high school to college level writing, seem to limit discussion about the chosen texts and fail to use the students’ lived experiences in the learning process (Chaffee, 2012). These findings seem contrary to the interdisciplinary push occurring in the university system. In addition, the importance and potential value of utilizing a student’s lived experience and inherent literacies in academic discourse are well documented in the literature (Freire, 1974; Gee, 1989; Greene, 1978; Lee, 1997; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994; Morrell, 2004; Tough, 2012).

As writing requirements prior to and upon entrance to college continue to evolve, questions remain about the fate of students arriving underprepared for college-level writing and making the transition to the academic discourse community. In the meantime, the universal writing requirement still stands in some form at many institutions today. Although the explicit goal may no longer be to weed out students who are underprepared to succeed at the college-level, the requirement creates a hierarchy of course study in which students must complete some form of college writing class, or multiple classes, prior to pursuing their degree courses or graduating.

### **Discourse Communities**

As writing instruction became a central component of a liberal arts education, college writing courses played a key role in the process of socialization into the academic community (Bizzell, 1982; Morrow, 1997; Shaughnessy, 1977). The concept of *discourse*

*community* grew out of education research of the 1980s that examined the social contexts of writing in relation to genre, rhetorical theory and pedagogy (Beaufort, 1997). Stemming from the notions of *speech community* in sociolinguistics (Hymes, 1974) and *interpretive community* in literary discussions (Fish, 1980), *discourse community* captured the same sense of aesthetic and physical grouping for composition studies (Beaufort, 1997; Bizzell, 1982). Swales (1990) refined the characteristics that make up a discourse community to include the following six characteristics: (1) a set of common public goals, (2) mechanisms of intercommunication among members, (3) use of its mechanisms to provide information and feedback, (4) expectations created by genres of communication that express the operations of the group, (5) the acquisition of specific lexis—its own terminology, and (6) a threshold for group membership establishing a base level of expertise about a subject and a “reasonable ratio between novices and experts” (pp. 471-473).

The challenge in creating a working definition of this concept is separating the aspects of a group that speak directly to writing, and determining how one discourse community differs from another in terms of writing constraints and practices (Beaufort, 1997; Elbow, 1991; Harris, 1989). The lines between discourse communities can blur, and some are even nested within another discourse community, such as the discourse community of one academic writing class falling under the umbrella of a college writing program and within the university as a whole (Beaufort, 1997).

In addition, the practices within both academic and professional discourse communities can vary, even within the same discipline or genre. Therefore, the idea that only one discourse exists within academia is faulty (Elbow, 1991). In fact, the blurring of

lines between discourse communities aligns with the call for interdisciplinary work, in particular classes involving academic writing in the disciplines for various fields of study. As a result, Elbow (1991), for example, restricted his definition of the term *academic discourse* to the language that academics use when publishing for others in the academy, rather than the language that should be used in the process of acquiring knowledge.

**Initiation into the academic discourse community.** Although many sources recognized the importance of learning and utilizing academic discourse for student success in a college setting, especially for students considered poorly prepared, from marginalized populations or first in their family to attend college, they did not agree on how students best achieve this goal. Entering the academic discourse community involves both a social and cognitive initiation (Bizzell, 1982). One step toward creating awareness of the existence of academic discourse is to clarify the conventions of this discourse community. Bartholomae (1985) noted that new students “invent the university” every time they sit down to write, especially as they learn the conventions of different genres and fields of study, and they are often required to do this “comfortably...as though they were members of the academy” (p. 456). In effect, they “try on a variety of voices and interpretive schemes” by mimicking academic language, even before they understand the concepts (Bartholomae, 1985, p. 456).

In contrast, Elbow (1991) argued that students should be allowed to use their own language as they learn the intellectual concepts of academia, because the “use of academic discourse often masks a lack of genuine understanding” and prevents students from internalizing these concepts or applying the principles behind them (p. 137). He also highlighted a shift from academic discourse that focused outward on issues or data to a

more inward examination of the nature of discourse or thinking itself, which further blurred the boundaries between genres and problematized the idea of privileging any set of stylistic conventions as being the best for scholarship.

Elbow (1993) added that students “need to trust language and one’s experience” and to connect these to the texts they read and write (p. 9). He saw this as true for inexperienced and professional writers alike. Most significantly, Elbow (1991) wondered what distinguished academic discourse from nonacademic discourse, which students are more likely to use after they leave college. He felt nonacademic writing, or writing that is not sanctioned by school, was equally important to foster in freshmen writers and useful in helping students produce higher quality academic discourse—a notion still being realized, despite the existence of many proponents (Bloome, 2008; Greene, 1978; Heath, 1982; Karp & Bork, 2012; Lee, 1997; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994; Morrell, 2004; Schultz & Hull, 2008; Zhao, 2009).

As debates around how to initiate new members into the academic discourse community continue more than twenty years after the term was coined, many of the arguments center on the issues penned by Bartholomae (1985) and Elbow (1991, 1993). Much of the discussion focuses on the role students play in this process—are they receivers of information who should “fake it ‘til they make it” or participants in this process who will eventually speak our language as they learn to use the terminology? The study in this project aimed to make students active participants in their own initiation process and to build awareness of the concepts and language used in academia while they negotiated the academic writing discourse community among all the other discourse communities that make up the university system.

### **Writing Across Curriculum/Writing in Disciplines/Write to Learn**

Moving toward interdisciplinary course study is seen as a natural progression or solution to the writing instruction challenges faced by universities. The demands surrounding writing have changed from the days of the Industrial Revolution to the Information Economy era, with many careers requiring strong written and oral communication skills to an extent never before demanded of so much of the population (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006; Rose, 1989). In a report of a two-phase study on perspectives toward writing in U.S. schools, 80 percent of participants claimed that knowing how to write well should be required for high school graduation. Many saw writing as essential to all careers, and that writing well improved many other skills (Belden, Russonello & Stewart, 2005). Bernasconi (2008) added that reading, writing and thinking critically are such necessities that many institutions—throughout the government, private and public sectors—put funds toward improving the writing skills of their employees. This connection of writing ability and employment opportunities further emphasized the link between writing success to college and career success (Condon, 2004; Dana, Hancock & Phillips, 2011).

In response to the increasing demand for writing competence, colleges and universities have extended writing practice across the curriculum (WAC) and in the disciplines (WID), as well as implemented Write to Learn (WTL) methods and merged core writing requirements with first-year experience (FYE) classes designed to retain highly-effective students (Costino, 2008; Fanetti, Bushrow, & DeWeese, 2010; Hesse, 2005; Todd & Hudson, 2008; USF Dept. of Rhetoric and Language, 2013). These approaches are not new, in fact, the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement

dates back over 40 years, but implementation is still rolling out in its various forms (Russell, 2002; Thaiss & Porter, 2010; Todd & Hudson, 2008). In effect, “a major focus of writing-across-the-curriculum programs is to demystify the conventions of the academic discourse community” (Bizzell, 1992, p. 81), by providing a steppingstone between disciplinary studies, or perhaps to even assist in blurring the boundaries.

**Evolution of WAC/WID.** In a recent survey, part of the International WAC/WID Mapping Project, nearly 47 percent of the 1330 responding institutions had a WAC program or initiative in place, and nearly 40 percent had a program that was at least ten years old, showing that WAC/WID has been well established in the university systems of the US and Canada. However, 36 percent of respondents had newer programs, in place for five years or less, demonstrating the WAC/WID movement is still in-progress (Thaiss & Porter, 2010).

The ongoing adoption of WAC shows that teachers have come to realize that knowledge acquisition does not occur separately from expression of knowledge in a certain field (Aronowitz, 2000). However, those who create the undergraduate core still tend to see writing as a skill, while other disciplines are treated as specialized bodies of knowledge, creating a stigma around teachers in specific disciplines teaching writing in their courses, or an attitude that students should arrive in their classes already bearing this skill. North (2011) pointed out that WAC approaches evolved out of the expectation that composition courses would “deliver students who could produce texts acceptable by faculty standards” (p. 204). When this standard was not met, WAC aimed to “alter the standard” by having one group of faculty actively seek to “alter the teaching of all the rest,” which gave writing instruction “an anomalous presence” in US higher education

(North, 2011, p. 204), and created tensions around who was prepared to teach writing in which discipline (USF Dept. of Rhetoric and Language, 2013).

**Success of WAC/WID/WTL.** Studies showed that faculty and students alike see value in WAC/WID/WTL approaches when they are implemented. Todd and Hudson (2008) conducted research on the student assessment of WAC, WID and WTL and found that “a large majority of students” agreed they learned course material more thoroughly and performed better on exams by using these approaches (p. 21). Dana, Hancock and Philips (2011) discovered that WAC courses also improved student-writing skills. But the success of WAC/WID methods depends largely on the roles played by the program director and faculty. In their research, Salem and Jones (2010) noted that faculty attitudes toward writing instruction are interwoven with what it means to be a faculty member and beliefs about how responsibilities should be distributed. As a result, buy-in for WAC/WID/WTL approaches can vary by department within a university and affect the overall success of the program as well as the transition of students into college and college writing.

Despite efforts to instill writing practice into every level of the academic ladder, Composition, as a subject and discipline, continues to hold a unique position in the university system. Perhaps due to its beginnings as a course to address the perceived gap in student writing abilities, and the remnants of the universal writing requirement, nearly every freshman entering the academy will encounter a required writing course. This positioning of the writing departments opens opportunities to work with and assess students in their most fecund state and prime them for taking an active role in their own education process. While this positioning could be seen as dangerously on par with

courses in student success, the potential remains to “claim writing” in the face of new technologies and pressure from others throughout the university, and own a role in supporting the student transition into the academic discourse community.

### **The Perceived Gap in Writing Ability between High School and College**

As universities report an increase in diversity across their student population, including international and domestic students from a variety of cultural, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, many schools also point to a perceived downward trend in student writing ability (Costino, 2008; Dana, Hancock & Philips, 2011; Jameson, 2007). The potential causes for this downward trend varied among the sources.

Some pointed to a disconnect in expectations between high school and college level writing, which leaves many college instructors reviewing basic writing skills alongside pushing for higher levels of conceptual thinking (Costino, 2008; Dana, Hancock and Philips, 2011; Jameson, 2007). Some cited the increasing number of people pursuing college as exacerbating the challenges faced in transitioning to the academic discourse community (Bizzell, 1982, 1992; Jameson, 2007). Some highlighted the persistence of education equity and equality issues, particularly in urban and rural environments, which continue to marginalize populations (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Harris, 2006; Kincheloe, 2006; Macedo, 2006; Morrell, 2008). Some noted that efforts to standardize education, like the *Common Core State Standards*, may distort the purpose of writing in education and limit the writing opportunities that students are exposed to prior to college (Bloome, 2008; Chaffee, 2012; Fanetti, Bushrow, & DeWeese, 2010; Salem & Jones, 2010; Schultz & Hull, 2008; Zhao, 2009). In addition, the concentration on academic literacy is apparent throughout these efforts, while

nonacademic literacies are rarely measured or assessed (Bloome, 2008; Heath, 1982; Schultz & Hull, 2008; Zhao, 2009).

To further explore the issues surrounding the perceived gap in writing ability, this section highlights: the difference in expectations in the transition to the college discourse community, the increasing diversity on college campuses, the issues of equity and equality in education that may affect this transition to college writing, and the tendency for standards and assessment to focus on academic skills.

### **Difference in Expectations**

Most students come to higher education with a “vague sense” or expectation that college will differ from high school, but are unsure or unaware of the specific differences they will encounter (Collier & Morgan, 2008; Cox, 2009; Karp & Bork, 2012). Multiple studies show how the reading and writing practices of high school students fall short of the skills expected in college (Balfanz, 2009; Jolliffe & Harl, 2008; Kiuahara, Graham, and Hawken, 2009). This shift in expectations leaves students and instructors struggling to adapt (Costino, 2008; Dana, Hancock & Philips, 2011; Learner & Brand, 2006) and can be explored by considering the purpose of high school in the development of education, compared to the expectations expressed at the college level, and the expectations which are specific to writing.

**Purpose of high school.** From its inception in the middle of the nineteenth century, secondary education aimed to provide upward mobility, boost economic growth and promote socialization. While initially meant to prepare a small fraction of the upper class for college enrollment, high schools in the United States expanded their mission to include preparation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century workforce. By the end of the 1970s, attending high

school had become the norm, and schools aimed to meet the various needs of society by offering course tracks that prepared some students toward college and others toward the work world (Balfanz, 2009).

Despite the claimed multi-purpose focus, high school today is frequently perceived as primarily the place to prepare for college (Balfanz, 2009; Ingels, Planty, & Bozick, 2005; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). Through his research, Balfanz (2009) found that, regardless of school size, location, or student demographics, preparing students for college was listed as the primary purpose of high school and students shared this sentiment. According to a study conducted for the United States Department of Education, 87 percent of high school seniors expected to attend college (Ingels, Planty and Bozick, 2005). In Balfanz's survey of 90,000 high school students nationwide, 73 percent intended to go to college, and 75 percent of high school graduates enrolled in some type of college within two years of graduating (Balfanz, 2009).

While students at most secondary schools aimed to complete a college preparatory curriculum, either based on credits or a particular sequence of courses, not all students completed these requirements with the same level of rigor. The core requirements for college prep have undergone multiple iterations over the years in response to calls for reform such as *A Nation at Risk*, the 1983 report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, *No Child Left Behind* (2001), and the *Common Core State Standards* (2014). Some students increase the complexity of their schooling through Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses, aimed at modeling the college environment and course demands; however, enrollment in such courses does not guarantee an increase in student preparedness, as individual curriculums can vary by

student choice or course availability per school (Aud et al, 2011; Balfanz, 2009).

Roderick, Nagaoka, and Coca (2006) argued that what makes a difference in student preparation is not the decision to follow a particular course sequence, but participation in coursework that develops the knowledge, skills and habits required for college success. Balfanz (2009) found that first-year college students spent twice as much time on their coursework, with more than half putting in at least ten hours per week, in comparison to 8 percent of high school students. Yet, two-thirds of high schoolers who reported spending three or less hours on their studies per week received grades in the A or B-range, and a great majority believed their education was preparing them for college.

Throughout its evolution, secondary education has repeatedly been accused of falling short of its goals to prepare students/workers, while perpetuating inequality and fostering stereotypes around who should follow which track (Balfanz, 2009; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Kincheloe, 2006; Macedo, 2006). In response, numerous organizations have focused on addressing the needs of students with disabilities, underrepresented minorities, and low-income, low-performing, or first-generation-to-college students (Bernasconi, 2008; Lerner & Brand, 2006; National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006; Nieto, 1994; The National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges, 2003, 2004; Tough, 2012; Yamamura, Martinez & Saenz, 2010). Ultimately, attempts at education reform cannot succeed without keeping the full range of issues, requirements and needs in perspective. In the meantime, students are arriving at college with a mismatch of expectations and these are hampering their ability to thrive.

**Expectations and college.** According to Karp and Bork (2012), college students are held to certain standards of behavior by both peers and professors, and college

success is intricately tied to meeting these expectations; however, most students are unaware of these expectations or how fundamental they are to academic success. This lack of knowledge and clarity around expectations “disadvantages students,” particularly those “from families that do not have college-going backgrounds,” and “is detrimental to the nation’s goal of increasing postsecondary attainment” (p. 2). As students learn to manage themselves around the bureaucracy of higher education, alongside developing new study habits, time management strategies, and social relationships, those who fail to demonstrate these “college readiness” behaviors, habits or skills “are unlikely to be successful in college, even if they have the required academic skills” (p. 6).

To shed light on these “unwritten rules” of college education, “practitioners and policymakers must first come to consensus about what, exactly, they expect,” not only to clarify expectations, but to provide “guideposts for performing the nonacademic tasks and activities of collegiate life appropriately and successfully” (Karp & Bork, 2012, p. 2). For example, across the board, students and faculty noted that self-reflection and meta-cognition were key elements to student academic success, yet these are rarely explicitly stated (Karp & Bork, 2012).

In addition to the lack of explicit expectations, multiple researchers, instructors and education experts categorized the transition to higher education as entry into a new environment, with potentially different rules or modes of interaction and communication. Bizzell’s (1982, 1992) reference to “discourse communities,” between high school and college or among different disciplines within academia, reflected Gee’s (2002) discussion of “semiotic domains,” of which the academic discourse community could be one domain, or different disciplines or genres of writing could be many domains. Preparation

for discourse communities or semiotic domains depends on access to individuals with affinities to these spaces, and experience with the language or other modes of communication used by members of these groups. Gee (2002) noted that this creates a continuum of advantaged to disadvantaged students, based on the affiliations they experienced in the domains they mastered (or did not) prior to coming to college, and perpetuates the challenges faced by students from marginalized populations as they encounter the expectations of college.

**Expectations in writing.** In terms of writing, readiness for college expectations becomes visibly apparent as students produce written coursework throughout their first semester. Even students who opt to put off taking the required writing course often find they are inundated with written work requests across the curriculum, in part due to movements in this area, such as Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), Writing in the Disciplines (WID) and Write to Learn (WTL). They may also encounter a variety of approaches to teaching writing, some of which may differ greatly from their high school English experiences (Emig, 1971, 1977; North, 2011).

Emig (1971) explained how, in her time, the curriculum in high schools required writing in almost every class, and students were reminded how essential writing skills were for both college admission and increasing their range of career choices. Despite this explicit link between writing and future success, the college students of the late 1970s reported feeling “ill prepared and insecure” about their writing skills (Lunsford & Garnes, 1979, p. 41). Lunsford and Garnes (1979) found that the majority of students who completed their questionnaire had not taken an English class during their senior year of high school. In addition, their courses often covered only literature, and involved little

writing or writing instruction. The exception being instruction in grammar, which a majority of students stated was covered “a great deal” and weighed heavily in grading (Lunsford & Garnes, 1979, p. 44).

This apparent shift in emphasis on writing set the tone for writing preparation in the decades to follow, and the effects of this shift are apparent in the obstacles faced by students today. The writing challenges listed by students in the 70s, including formulating thesis statements, choosing a topic, organizing, mechanics, grammar and “writing enough” (Lunsford & Garnes, 1979, p. 41), reflect many of those expressed more recently by incoming college freshmen and attributed to a lack of writing practice in high school (Balfanz, 2009; Kiuahara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009). Balfanz (2009) pointed out that high school curriculum requirements, aimed at preparing students for college, involved no explicit requirements in writing. Although students worked on projects that involved some written components, only eight percent of high schools seniors reported composing the same number of papers (of the same length) as college freshmen, demonstrating a potential gap in writing expectations between high school and college.

Among the expectations that students have for college are the expectations they hold for themselves. Adler-Kassner (1999) found that students often expect that writing should come more easily, and ideas that generate in their heads should transfer wholly formed onto the page. This belief in writing as “information transfer” (p. 80) was fostered by teaching approaches that treat writing as a “product of ideas that are already in the mind” (p. 80), rather than an ongoing process and “medium for developing ideas and thinking through issues over a period of time” (Adler-Kassner, 1999, p. 81). This concept of writing being a skill or tool, rather than a mode of learning, has a history of being

taught in high schools across the U.S. (Adler-Kassner, 1999; Aronowitz, 2000; Bartholomae, 1985; Berlin, 1988; Conners, 1997; Crowley, 1995). Students who view writing as about performing a skill or using a tool may also see themselves as “having a deficit” when struggling to produce on demand (Adler-Kassner, 1999, p. 80).

Through exploring the writing and reading expectations that students faced as they moved through college, Adler-Kassner (1999) also found students believed “writing and reading happens only in writing courses” (p. 78). They did not expect to encounter writing assignments after they completed the required writing class(es). This lack of connection between the work done in writing classes to the writing skills needed for all disciplines and the rest of their academic careers not only spoke to the composition research arguing students cannot develop all the appropriate skills in the few courses they take as part of the universal writing requirement, but made teaching these classes “all the more difficult” (p. 78).

*Expectations of the academic discourse community.* Students also face the expectations of the academic discourse community. Bartholomae (1985) analyzed 500 placement exam essays to determine which “stylistic resources” student writers utilized for the “*various* discourses” of the university (p. 456). Because students are expected to participate in speaking and writing before they have learned that particular discipline, they mimic the language or codes of that discipline, which can come across as false, based on faulty ground, or like the student is imparting wisdom or life lessons to the more experienced instructor through word choice or tone. Bartholomae (1985) cautioned that when students say, “I don’t know,” they are not saying they have nothing to say. They are flagging their “lack of confidence and preparation” (p. 459).

Bizzell (1992) argued that student writers encounter “not just a new language or new genres” but “a whole new world view” as they enter the academic discourse community (p. 22). She believed that students can adopt the “academic world voice” without sacrificing their identities, “abandoning home perspectives or becoming deracinated” (p. 22), because academic discourse communities are not “a totally unified entity with impermeable boundaries” (p. 27), they are “dynamic” and “discursive”, and open to “new voices joining the conversation” (p. 28).

However, discourse communities do have expectations of their members, and these are embodied in the conventions used by that community. Bizzell called for a critical examination of the “hidden curriculum” or “the project of initiating students into a particular world view that gives rise to the daily classroom tasks without being consciously examined by teacher or students” (p. 99). The teaching of so-called “universal structures” can bury this hidden curriculum within a plan for teaching based on a history of schools as agents of cultural hegemony, in which those who do not share the preferred views of the world either fail or are forced to choose between their culture and that of the school.

*Effect on basic writers.* This issue is most pronounced for students categorized as “basic writers” or under prepared for college. This population may experience a “clash of dialects”—as their home dialects are seen as distanced from Standard English, and they are pigeonholed as needing to learn to write “grammatically” to be ready for college-level work. Bizzell (1992) added that this issue is “institutionalized in the composition course requirements at most colleges” (p. 164), and leads to arguments in the academy around requiring all work to be done in Standard English, risking that students “will learn very

little while concentrating on the language problem” (p. 165), or allowing students to “express” themselves in their home dialect (p. 165). This dialectic clash is further complicated on campuses today as some basic writing classes reflect the increase of students who categorized are first generation to college, international, and 1.5 generation English language learners, as well as students from traditionally underserved populations.

Basic writers may also encounter a “clash of discourse forms” or verbal devices and ways to organize texts to make arguments—the genres of academic writing (Bizzell, 1992, p. 165). Elbow (1991) noted that it is faulty to convey that one set discourse covers all of academia, as different communities of discourse write differently. North (2011) listed seven discourse communities within composition alone, with different jargon and ideologies. Students who are new to the academy may write “according to the discourse conventions more familiar to them from other sources,” such as pop culture, and may be “puzzled at the unenthusiastic reception afforded by such papers,” especially if the essay is written in Standard English (Bizzell, 1992, pp. 165-166). While some in academia continue to argue that knowledge of academic genres is necessary for student success in college, others counter that this criteria must change, leading to questions around whether “the ‘same’ intellectual work is not possible in different genres” (p. 166), and leaving students wondering “what the teacher wants” (Bizzell, 1992, p. 166).

Basic writers may also confront a “clash in ways of thinking” that leaves them feeling they are “too dumb for college, or that they just can’t think the way the teacher wants” (Bizzell, 1992, p. 167). This conflict has led to multiple studies on the cognitive development of basic writers or creation of rank-order development schemes (Lunsford, 1990; Perry, 1970; Piaget, 1950), and the call for writing teachers to “fix” the cognitive

dysfunctions of their students. These approaches stigmatize basic writers and ignore “the cultural bases of differences in thinking” (Bizzell, 1992, p. 167).

*Rethinking schooling.* In their essay on closing the gap between high school and college level writing expectations, Fanetti et al. (2010) found that shifting the rate of success and level of preparation for college begins with a change of attitude. We need to think of college education as part of the same continuum that currently encompasses primary, middle and high school, with each level preparing students for the one that follows. In this way, secondary education will be a natural precursor to postsecondary education. This attitude shift would include changing the current writing focus away from only crafting five paragraph essays and other modal writing skills toward a variety of writing projects involving group work, presentations, and rhetorical tools (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Fanetti et al., 2010).

Bloome (2008) qualified this as a shift from traditional schooling toward a cultural process tailored for the literacy and learning practices of each discipline. He saw classrooms as cultural communities, in which students and teachers “continuously negotiate a set of shared expectations and standards” for how literacy events are organized, “how people will relate to each other, how meaning and significance are assigned to actions and materials, and how spoken and written language is to be used within and across classroom events” (p. 252). These shifts in attitudes would not only change requirements and expectations, but clarify and facilitate development of the skills, habits and behaviors needed in the transition from high school to college-level writing.

### **Increase in Diversity**

The challenges stated in relation to diversity pointed to both the growth and

different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds of the student population. Between 1999 and 2009, enrollment in post-secondary education increased 38 percent, and projections show another ten percent increase for the following decade (Elliot et al., 2011). Aud, KewalRamani, and Frohlich (2011) found that 69 percent of young adults between the ages of 18- and 19-year-olds enrolled in college in 2009, compared with 46 percent in 1980. In addition, a greater percentage of females enrolled than males. Despite this increase in enrollment, national assessments showed that the percentage of students with the ability to succeed in college level writing remained steady for more than two decades. While more than 60 percent of high school graduates were choosing to pursue college degrees, only 25 percent of high school seniors demonstrated the skills to succeed (Jameson, 2007).

As the student population has evolved, the needs of students who are not white, male, and middle or upper-class are frequently treated as extra to the already existing challenges of the student population and requiring the instructor to go above and beyond the call of duty. In some extreme cases, professors and administrators have questioned whether the diverse population, in particular due to the increase in English language learners and international students, dilutes the educational experience for all. They wonder whether their role has changed so greatly along with the changing faces of higher education that they are no longer educating at the college level (Matier & Ross, 2012).

In terms of college writing, an increase in diversity creates the potential for myriad perspectives during course discussions. But this is accomplished alongside balancing a variety of student skill-levels and needs (Dana et al., 2011). As writing programs continue to expand to address the growing number and needs of students,

researchers assess the reasons behind these differences in skill levels—including socio-economic class, target language, cognitive ability and differences in funds of knowledge.

**Socio-economic class.** Some experts in the field pointed to socioeconomic class as a potential difference, with middle and upper-class students arriving at college better socialized in the language used in academic discourse than working-class students (Bernstein, 1975; Bizzell, 1982). Schultz and Hull (2008) illustrated that “the persisting challenge in an age of accountability and testing, narrowing conceptions of literacy, and growing socioeconomic disparities, is how to bridge out-of-school and in-school worlds in ways that make discernible, positive differences in youth’s present circumstances and social future” (p. 239).

**Target language.** Target language was also seen as a factor, with students whose home language differed from Standard English facing even greater challenges in the college transition (Shaughnessy, 1977). Writing teachers increasingly encounter second language writers in their classrooms due to aggressive recruiting practices by colleges and universities. In some cases, second language writers make up the majority of students in the class (Matier & Ross, 2012; Matsuda, 2012). Whereas this diverse population brings an abundance of linguistic and cultural resources to the class dynamic, the students also face unique challenges because of their limited English language proficiency.

The responsibility then falls to the individual instructors to make course adjustments to accommodate the needs of the students in his/her classroom (Leung & Safford, 2005; Matsuda, 2012). Leung and Safford (2005) noted that, “when teachers and educators adopt classroom and curriculum practices which do not accommodate nontraditional students’ language and literacy needs, some sort of coercive power, in all

likelihood unwittingly, is being exercised” (p. 322). This issue has led to the call for transforming the expectations put forth by the dominant culture via approaches such as culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Matsuda (2012) pointed to the concept of *instructional alignment*, in which the intended course outcomes, instruction processes (or the skills, strategies and knowledge needed to reach the outcomes), and instructional assessment of whether students are achieving the outcomes link with one another. Students who arrive at college with a different level of prior learning than the traditional student population may require additional or “differentiated” instruction, achieved by making adjustments in the learning outcomes or assessment. These needs can be wide-ranging and, at times, daunting to resolve in the limited time the course provides.

**Cognitive ability.** Potential differences in cognitive ability have also been explored by many in education research. Bizzell (1982) pointed out that, early on in her teaching, all differences between students were attributed to innate and individual abilities. Thought processes and social circumstances were ignored, and “intelligent” writing was defined by how well it followed the standards of correctness and style established in the academic discourse community. Students who arrived unequally prepared were categorized as unequal in mental development, as the writing process was “understood in terms of a universalized model” (p. 205).

This concept of variances in ability stemming from differences in cognitive abilities—between races, ethnicities or genders—has largely been discredited (Nygreen, 2006). However, cognitive psychologists claim to have isolated the characteristics that make some children destined to excel, in school and career, and middle-class parents

cultivate these cognitive skills in their children at an early age, with the aid of expert-designed tools and education packages (Berlin, 1988; Tough, 2008, 2012). The idea that these cognitive skills, which are supposed to lead to success, “may be the product of the experiences of a particular social class rather than the perfecting of inherent mental structures, skills encouraged because they serve the interests of a ruling economic elite, is never considered in the ‘scientific’ investigation of the mind” (Berlin, 1988, p. 483).

Such thinking continues to fuel research and support concepts of disparity in educational success as attributed to cultural differences. In their research, Heckman and Masterov (2007) called the disparity in cognitive ability between children of different races and socioeconomic classes an “accident of birth” (p. 2) that needs to be addressed at a young age or remediation challenges will increase. Whereas cognitive abilities were relatively equal for newborns (and throughout the first year of life), by age two the lack of exposure to a variety of vocabulary became apparent (Tough, 2008). These differences followed students throughout schooling, and were seen as a source of the education gap.

Scholars who situated their research within a cultural framework, however, saw “an internally consistent ‘logic’” (Adler-Kassner, 1999, p. 78) in the texts of students that demonstrated the cognitive processes at work (Adler-Kassner, 1999; Shaughnessy, 1977). The errors in student work, therefore, were attributed to “the interaction between writer and institutional contexts” (Adler-Kassner, 1999, p. 79). Writers who did not negotiate the transition to academia smoothly produced writing that reflected this experience and fell short of what was deemed to be “correct” or “good” (p. 79).

Adler-Kassner (1999) noted that some cognitively-based studies suggest that the cognitive deficits or issues of basic writers are apparent in the production errors of their

prose. The true causes may be readily explained in terms that are less stigmatized today. Lunsford and Garnes (1979) and Shaughnessy (1977) explored delayed cognitive development in at-risk students, but many of the academic issues highlighted in their work have since been attributed to learning disabilities that were once dismissed by these and other scholars (McAlexander, 2000). Bizzell (1992) noted that limitations in the prose of students could be “traced to their social and political circumstances, ...rather than to biologically hard-wired cognitive deficiencies” (p. 18). Studies also suggested that the errors found in written communication could be a result of anxiety or low self-esteem (Adler-Kassner, 1999).

Students, especially those categorized as basic writers, are aware that the standards they experience at home differ from the experiences of more traditional college students, and they may feel they are being asked by those in the privileged position of academia “to abandon their less prestigious, less socially powerful world views in favor of the academic” (Bizzell, 1992, p. 171). This self-awareness could be an advantage because of the inherent potential of combining the home worldview with the academic worldview to make persuasive arguments and preserve language and culture.

**Funds of knowledge.** Bloome (2008) touched on the concept of *funds of knowledge* (Moll et al., 1992), which emphasizes that students from cultural and linguistic minority communities are “not deficit in social, linguistic and cultural capital” (p. 255). By developing curriculum with “pedagogies for literacy learning that incorporate the students' language and experiences in bridging to academic literacy” (p. 255), teachers can create a *third space* for learning that combines the dominant culture with the students' home cultures and reinforces that students can participate in class

without having to choose between the dominant culture and their own cultural community or identity. This concept of combining literacies toward academic success is expressed throughout the literature as an opportunity for embracing the diversity of college-level writers (Bizzell, 1992; Bloome, 2008; Gee, 2002; Leung & Safford, 2005; Schultz and Hull, 2008).

In addition, the cognitive studies above did not consider the role of noncognitive (or nonacademic) skills that help students succeed in school (Heckman & Masterov, 2007), including “patience, persistence, self confidence, the ability to follow instructions, (and) the ability to delay gratification for future reward” (Tough, 2008, p. 191). Tough (2012) expressed a similar relationship between particular character traits, such as grit and resilience, and future success, as well as a need to include the effects of these skills or traits in future studies.

### **Equity in Education Issues**

Many issues surrounding the diversification of the student population are indicative of the persisting equity issues in the US education system. The belief that “Education is never neutral” is shared by many (Apple, 2004; Berlin, 1982; Freire, 1974; Macedo, 2006; Morrell, 2008). Education affects political, economic and social involvement, and like wealth, education has accumulative effects that resonate across generations (Brandt, 2009; Freire, 1974). A reality of the current society is that a college education is required for most careers in the United States. Many employers list a college degree as a minimum qualification, even for entry-level positions. Therefore, all students should be considered college track, as most will pursue some level of higher education—junior college, community college, or four-year university (Fanetti et al., 2010).

However, the recommendation to place college education on the same continuum as primary, middle and high school (Fanetti et al, 2010) relies upon a fairness or equality that does not exist in the current education system. While total undergraduate enrollment in degree-granting institutions continues to increase for each racial/ethnic group, high school completion rates vary greatly, especially among marginalized populations. Aud, KewalRamani, and Frohlich (2011) noted that educational attainment in the United States varies by nativity, citizenship status, and other demographic characteristics. Young adults born in the US are more likely to complete high school than those born outside the US, and citizens achieve higher education levels than non US-citizens. While the gaps between the scores of White students and Black students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) have decreased, White and Asian students continue to score higher than their Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native counterparts. These findings display that equity in the US education system continues to be an issue.

How the issues inherent in an unequal educational system play out at the college level, and in particular for the transition to college-level writing, invites exploring the presence of a dominant/hegemonic culture in the academic discourse community—and the need to teach in a manner that recognizes this discourse; the disparity in resources of urban and rural public schools versus suburban schools; and potential issues surrounding motivation and access to technology.

**Dominant culture of college.** hooks (1988) argued that the language of education is the language of those in control, the oppressor or dominant culture. Karp and Bork (2012) also discussed how the forms of discourse, types of language and ways of interacting that are seen as “normal” or “accepted” in academia “tend to be rooted in

middle-class norms” (p. 20). Much of the college faculty have been educated in this culture, so these cultural expectations dominate higher education and create a disadvantage for minority, first-generation, or even some international students, solely because they have less familiarity with or access to people who can assist in learning about these norms. Such students are “not so much trapped in a private language as they are shut out from one of the privileged languages of public life, a language they are aware of but cannot control” (Bartholomae, 1985, p. 460).

Although not all in education agree that the academic community is “coterminous with any social class” (Bizzell, 1992, p. 167), there is consensus that the academic community uses “a preferred dialect (so-called “Standard English”) in a convention-bound discourse (academic discourse)” (p. 168). Bizzell (1992) argued that this situation is no different from other language communities. The “dialect and discourse generate thoughts” (p. 168) to form a worldview, not to convey preexisting thoughts. She acknowledged the potential political interests of discourse communities and how the socially-privileged position tends to win conflicts, but she believed instructors could use their roles “to create circumstances in which the whole structure of privilege could be challenged by those most oppressed by it” (Bizzell, 1992, p. 24).

Like education, rhetoric (which many writing programs now claim as part of their discipline) can also never be neutral (Berlin, 1988). The discursive structure of this subject favors one version of economic, social and political arrangements, and serves particular ideological claims, such as how power “should be distributed in society” (p. 479). Because these power relationships “are inscribed in the discursive practices of daily experience,” the “overall effect of these permutations tends to support the hegemony of

the dominant class” (Berlin, 1988, p. 479).

Bartholomae (1985) noted that writing, in particular, is a “‘privileged discourse’ that includes and excludes” (p. 460). By entering the university system, students have been granted the right to speak and to practice using the language of academic discourse to make their own statements (Bartholomae, 1985, p. 456). However, in the process of mimicking the language, students again may feel that they have to choose between a professional, academic voice and their own, relinquishing their cultural identity for an academic one (Bartholomae, 1985; Bizzell, 1992; Gee, 2002). Bizzell (1992) noted that the question of what worldviews basic writers bring to college has not yet been answered—which could speak to the funds of knowledge they bring to school in relation to the dominant discourse, as well as the need for further exploration involving the insight from the students themselves.

**Teaching the dominant discourse.** In light of the issues surrounding the dominant culture apparent throughout the U.S. Education system, and how it is nearly a requirement for success in postsecondary institutions, debate continues to surround the value of teaching the dominant discourse. Ladson-Billings (1995) periodically argued both for and against the teaching of middle class norms, but overall believed that a culturally relevant pedagogy could transform the expectations rooted in these norms. Apple (2004) called the knowledge promoted in schools “a form of cultural capital,” or symbolic property, that “reflects the perspectives and beliefs of powerful segments of our social collectivity,” and whose “values now work through us, often unconsciously” (p. 8). Shor (1980, 1997) believed students need to recognize how they have been denied control over their own lives and taught to penalize themselves for their lack of power, and how

they can develop a sense of agency for themselves and others.

Overall, the debate hinged on whether teaching this discourse would serve to perpetuate the dominance, or provide opportunity to challenge dominant structures by building awareness of their existence. Apple (2004) noted that we tend to think of knowledge as neutral, but this attitude fails to politicize how knowledge is controlled by those who wield cultural and economic capital. hooks (1994) stated that “systems of domination” (p. 27) tend to teach us “that domination is ‘natural,’ that it is right for the strong to rule over the weak, the powerful over the powerless” (pp. 27-28). Equality of power means both equality of impact, or the difference an individual can make by voting or decision making, and equality of influence, or the difference that an individual can make on his own and by “inducing others to believe or vote or choose as he does” (Dworkin, 1988, p. 9). We do not currently have equality of either in this country.

Education, in particular, is “a system based on unequal resources and, therefore, unequal capabilities” (Verba, 1996, p. 2). Although voices may be raised to counter the inequality inherent in the system, not all voices are heard or valued. Verba (1996) added, “If some citizens are invisible, one cannot respond to them” (p. 1). Macedo (2006) took this sentiment even further in noting Freire as saying, “The intellectual activity of those without power is always characterized as nonintellectual” (pp. 102-103). When voices get raised in dissent of the dominant norms, they are often dismissed by those with privilege and power as not worthy. Macedo (2006) argued this tactic is part of a system that rewards the reproduction, rather than questions, the “dominant mechanisms designed to produce power asymmetries along the lines of race, gender, class, culture, and ethnicity” (p. 12), or what hooks (1994) called the “growing social and economic apartheid that

separates white and black, the haves and the have-nots, men and women” (pp. 26-27).

Schooling is one such dominant mechanism, as it does not “encourage independent thought and critical thinking,” but rather “domesticates” as part of a “colonial literacy model” that enables the “manufacture of consent” (Macedo, 2006, p. 36). Within this system, students are not encouraged to speak up, to share concerns or offer ideas for reform. Instead, going with the flow, not rocking the boat, and deferring to authority are part and parcel of this model of literacy. Greene (1986) argued that removing the controlling forces alone will not ensure the “the emergence of free and creative human beings” (Greene, 1986, p. 440). A sense of student agency is lacking, “even among the brightly successful; there is little capacity to look at things as if they could be otherwise” (Greene, 1986, p. 438.) Efforts toward the “open and progressive” education promoted by some groups as “student-empowering” only result in students of color falling further behind counterparts from predominantly white and wealthy suburbs (Delpit, 1988, 1995). With more clarity about the “kind of society in which we live,” however, students can learn to question what is accepted as “given” or considered commonsense and more clearly understand the ways in which “schools act as agents of cultural and ideological hegemony” (Apple, 2004, p. 6) by reproducing the class relations in this stratified society.

***Role of academic discourse.*** Some experts argued that academic discourse can be an obstacle in achieving this level of understanding. Academia is not known for creating a safe space for the oppressed to discuss liberation. Instead, students are trapped in “a cultural context that defines freedom solely in terms of learning the oppressor’s language” (hooks, 1988, p. 29). hooks (1988) argued that the work of liberation demands

a new language, through which voice will emerge as the oppressed experience self-recovery. In fact, the dominance of academic literacy has been challenged by those “whose native tongues are at a relatively greater remove from the academic dialect, whose preferred modes of developing ideas conflict with the linear logic and impersonal posture of academic debate, and whose cultural treasures are not included in the academic canon” (Bizzell, 1992, p. 238), including female, ethnic minority, foreign born, and lower socioeconomic class students.

In contrast, many in academia noted the importance of teaching students the dominant discourse in order to succeed. Delpit (1988, 1995) called for focus on reading, writing and speaking Standard English in order to navigate the culture of power, and expressed that not teaching students of color the skills they need to be successful is a form of racism. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) called Standard English the Language of Wider Communication (LWC) and emphasized the need “to develop linguistic competencies and literacy skills for academic advancement, professional employment (and) civic preparation” (pp. 50-51). Academic writing and the need to be able to express oneself across multiple genres was a focal point of their research project.

Whereas Elbow (1991) generally eschewed the use of academic discourse, in particular that which is used simply to impress others in the field or to alienate ordinary readers, he felt other instructors would expect students to write “in the language of the academy” (p. 135); therefore, he believed the process of learning this discourse to be especially important for “students from poorer classes or those who are first in their families to come to college” because “discourse carries power” (p. 135). Nygreen (2006) also noted the power inherent in learning academic discourse, as well as the importance

of students having access to education that provides a foundation for this learning.

Developing the writing skills of students from marginalized populations was seen as one way to even the playing field in Education. Gloria Anzaldua (1984) expressed that writing provided her a means to grasp the world and to compensate for what the real world did not provide. Lunsford (1990) highlighted the juxtaposition of existing narratives to more expansive narratives created by marginalized populations, and how marginalized voices have successfully written themselves into being, as subjects of their own histories. In the process, these writers have *claimed* writing, as well as taught others, while facing the political realities of their circumstances (Lunsford, 1990).

Brandt (2009) added that current reading and writing problems in academia are not about a lack of literacy, but a surplus. Because so many forms of literacy surround students in their daily lives, literacy is in flux, and moving forward at a rapid pace (Brandt, 2009). In an effort to identify the “major effects of ‘accumulating literacy’” that matter most to writing/reading teachers (p. 70), Brandt (2009) found a complicated picture of overlapping influences as people encounter various literacy-based institutions and resources, and “how both ‘school-based’ and ‘home-based’ literacies form and function within larger historical currents” (p. 88).

In the process of learning academic discourse, students are balancing their home-based and school-based literacies, alongside literacy found in the materials and tools they encounter and their personal relationships. Therefore, Brandt (2009) recommended a reconceptualization of the role of school, in which students would identify the “residual, emergent, and often conflicted contexts of literacy that form their world” (p. 88), in particular the intersections of individual literacy experience and the ongoing, official

history of mass literacy, and the institutions that control it. This type of culturally relevant pedagogy could incorporate the language and cultural experiences that students bring with them to college, and recognize how these practices may affect or influence the use of language in classroom literacy practices (Bloome, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lee, 1997; Richardson, 2003). This pedagogy could also include critical literacy practices to unearth power relations, make students aware of the “material conditions” of their lives, and empower them to take action (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 1974; Macedo, 2006).

Although students are still required to master academic literacy to succeed in college, ample opportunity exists to develop a critical pedagogy that encourages those whose voices remain unheard to discover their position and potential for success within existing academic structures. Greene (1986) added that, while the fact of power may not be negated, “we can undertake a resistance, a reaching out towards becoming persons among other persons” (p. 440)—echoing Freire’s (1974) call for oppressed persons to transform from objects to Subjects with agency to speak and act for themselves.

**Disparity in resources or requirements.** Disparity can be seen throughout the research on urban and rural schooling environments, both in the access to resources and the rigor required to meet graduation standards. Apple (2004) pointed to existing gaps in the distribution and control of resources between the rich and poor, not only for education, but also for health and nutrition services. Efforts such as No Child Left Behind (2001) and the Common Core State Standards (2014) claim to address equity issues throughout the education system, yet differences remain readily apparent when comparing urban and rural to suburban schools, and attending a school located in a

suburban setting does not automatically solve equity issues, as demonstrated by the limited success of bussing and lottery programs across the United States (Massachusetts Dept. of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2010).

Balfanz (2009) surveyed the structure and demographics of high schools to assess differences in school experience and academic outcomes. Factors that played a distinct role in student outcomes included school location, size, student-teacher ratio, and resource availability. Sixty percent of students attended a school with 500-1000 students—a size suggested by research as optimum for balancing personalization and learning opportunity with the greatest achievement gains (Lee & Smith, 1997). Most of these schools were located in suburban or rural areas (Balfanz, 2009).

A link was also found between areas of predominantly minority student populations and poverty. In the 50 poorest communities, 90 percent of the students were minority status, and nearly 75 percent of African American and Latino students were enrolled in schools with predominantly minority students. In addition, African American and Latino students were three times more likely than white students (and twice as likely as Asian American students) to be enrolled in a school in which at least 40 percent of the student population qualified for free or reduced lunch programs. Balfanz (2009) attributed these statistics to the abandonment of the public school system, particularly at the secondary level, by middle and higher income families. Even in areas where affluent families, middle-class and low-income families make up the same district, some of the more affluent families opt out of the neighborhood high school.

High schools also differed greatly in their available resources: Half of U.S. high schools lack the preferred student-teacher ration of 15:1 (or fewer), and per-student

spending can vary so greatly that one school may spend \$15,000 per pupil, while less than ten miles away another school is spending only \$5000 per pupil. As a result, fewer than two-thirds of students from the poorest communities matriculate in a timely fashion and graduate high school, leading to the conclusion that “the high school experiences of many U.S. students continue to be separate and unequal” (Balfanz, 2009, p. 21).

*Literacy-rich resources.* Gee (2002) noted that, when we look at why certain minorities or socioeconomic groups tend to fall behind in school, we tend to make “very general comparisons and contrasts between ‘home culture’ and ‘school culture’” (p. 29). Instead, we need to look at differences in access to literacy-rich resources, including people and spaces that foster literacy development, and how these resources form the foundation that students work from as they encounter academic discourse (Brandt, 2009; Gee, 2002). Because academia favors certain language skills, language skills learned at home can privilege some students over others. Middle class families, even those in urban areas, instinctively train their children in skills sought by teachers, while children from other classes and backgrounds who exhibit different home language skills may be categorized by teachers as lacking skills (Heath, 1982).

Brandt (2009) called this “accumulating literacy” or practices that have been acquired through access to people who demonstrate the socially or politically accepted way of speaking and writing. These “sponsors of literacy” can “enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy” (Brandt, 2009, p. 25). Similarly, Gee (2002) pointed to domains or spaces in which literacy events occur. When entering a new domain, like college, having access to a “precursor” to that domain allows students to rehearse the “group’s values, norms, goals, and/or practices” (p. 28). Those

who are affluent have “multiple and redundant contacts with powerful literacy sponsors” (Brandt, 2009, p. 29) or access to precursor domains (Gee, 2002) as part of economic and political privilege. People from lower socioeconomic groups and marginalized populations “have less consistent, less politically secured access to literacy sponsors,” who can facilitate the path to academic and economic success (Brandt, 2009, p. 29), and less immersion in precursor domains (Gee, 2002). These students may eventually master the new semiotic domain, but this acquisition is likely to be slower and more challenging, and lead to judgments about cognitive ability, motivation, or lack of effort.

The concept of access to networks again speaks to social and political capital, particularly in institutional systems like schools. Literacy learning requires “permission, sanction, assistance, coercion, or, at minimum, contact with existing trade routes” (Brandt, 2009, p. 25). National test results demonstrated a statistical correlation between high literacy achievement and high socioeconomic, majority-race status. Brandt (2009) called for more analysis of the systems of literacy sponsorship and the effects of economic and political changes on particular regions, not only in how literacy practices differ between social groups, but how literacy can be sustained and passed along and who is underwriting the occasions of literacy and to what benefit or advantage.

***Lack of written work.*** For writing requirements specifically, many students fall short of developing strong writing abilities despite the claims of school reform efforts (including No Child Left Behind and the *Common Core State Standards*) to improve these skills. Kihara et al. (2009) focused their research on the specific writing required of high school students, because of the essentialness of writing as tool for success in education, employment and society. They found that nearly 50 percent of the

participating teachers did not assign multi-paragraph writing projects on a regular basis and most assignments did not require analysis or interpretation. This lack of writing and critical thinking work leaves student potentially unprepared for nearly every assignment they may encounter in college.

*Poverty curriculum.* Shaughnessy (1977) added that who gets categorized as “basic writers” at the college level is significant. She found that most of the students in her basic writing sections at City College of New York were raised in the ethnic or racial enclaves of New York, spoke other languages or dialects in their homes, and seemed like they came from another country even when they were raised in the U.S. She blamed the academic challenges faced by basic writers on the failures of the schooling the students received, due to the racial and class prejudice of the US public education system that penalizes more than it praises. She explained, “No one saw the intelligence of their mistakes or thought to harness that intelligence in the service of learning” (p. 11).

The poverty curriculum, most likely experienced by Shaughnessy’s students, emphasizes discipline, rote memorization and one right answer over connecting education or learning with the student’s lived experience (Kincheloe, 2006). Schools that continue to practice this model of learning hinder the personal and cognitive development of their student body, and these approaches are more often found in urban and rural regions, in which the business for “kid fixing” (Kincheloe, 2006) is booming. The form that intervention takes is, again, not equal. While the children of the middle class are given academic support services and counseling, the poor and minority children get little to no academic support. When facing disciplinary measures, the middle class students may encounter potential suspension or expulsion from school, while the poor and

minority children may face a choice between the military or prison.

Such extremes are not new, but there is an undeniable link between the undermotivated in school and the presence of police and military recruitment officers on high school campuses (Furumoto, 2005; Hayes, 2006). Hayes (2006) added that schools and prisons are “parallel systems with the common goal of socializing individuals for particular forms of participation within the racialized and classed hegemony of America” (p. 115). In school, students are disciplined according to the habits and behaviors sanctioned by the dominant culture, through pedagogical policies that follow the canon of Western knowledge and exclude other knowledges, so that students from poor, immigrant and racialized communities learn to be docile participants in the existing social order. Those who resist conforming are seen as hindrances in the attempt to maintain order and control and often excluded from “regular classes through assignment to special education classes” or “from schooling altogether through voluntary (drop-out) or involuntary (push-out) practices” (Hayes, 2006, pp. 116-117).

Rhetoric surrounding the failure of urban schools, and the persistence of poverty, frequently blames the victim. The prevailing belief is that failure is localized, organizational or pedagogical, rather than political or tied to power and privilege (Nygreen, 2006). Although cognitive and cultural deficiency models have been largely discredited, urban education researchers sometimes foster or perpetuate the theories that peg the failure of schools on the incapacity of the students (Anyon, 2005; Apple, 2004; Giroux, 1983; Nygreen, 2006; Payne, 1984; Vareene & McDermott, 1999). Despite ongoing rhetoric espousing education as the great equalizer, “predictable (and racialized) patterns of school success and failure persist year after year” (Nygreen, 2006, p. 3-4).

We also need to consider what is left out of the conversation due to “our incessant focus on the achievement gap and the behaviors of underachieving youth” (Nygreen, 2006, p. 4). Although some studies consider the circumstances that impact learning for urban youth—poverty, unemployment, and institutionalized racism—others fail to account for the link between politically sustained urban poverty and the persistent lack of resources and subsequent poor academic performance of urban schools (Anyon, 1997). References to “urban education” or “urban schools” are often euphemisms for areas of high-poverty, segregated, and low-achieving public schools (Kozol, 1991; Nygreen, 2006). The focus on failure in these regions keeps the spotlight off the privileged and powerful. Consequently, reforms aim to help students produce better outcomes within the existing education and social systems (Duncan-Andrade, 2006; Nygreen, 2006).

*Rethinking achievement gaps.* A conceptual shift is needed to step away from “thinking about school failure, achievement gaps, and educational inequality as ‘things’ to be fixed, and toward a view of these as social relations” (Nygreen, 2006, p.7), and to highlight the political context surrounding academic failure and education inequality (p. 3). Large-scale changes to institutional organization must be made in order to dismantle systems that centralize power in corporate entities that ignore social needs (Apple, 2004). Education cannot be understood within the confines of the categories passed off as “commonsense” under the current dominant educational system (Apple, 2004; Vareene & McDermott, 1999). Nygreen (2006) pointed to research that has contextualized and politicized urban education by covering how racialized poverty relates to “political maneuvering, policymaking and corporate practices,” and a lack of “technical knowledge” or “political will to equalize education” (p. 5). Such research also illustrates

resistance to equity reforms put forth by the privileged parents (Kozol, 1991; Noguera, 2001; Nygreen, 2006). Anyon (2005) argued that urban schools would not see significant improvements without consideration of these policies as related issues. She called for changes around minimum wage, residential desegregation, public transportation, job creation programs and federal tax policy as part of her “new paradigm of education policy” (p. 13).

Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) found that it was also important to incorporate “non school practices” into classroom practices in order to engage students in “authentic dialogue about inequity and advocacy for justice” (p. 51). This approach showed how pairing traditional educative texts, like Shakespeare, with areas of common interest for the students, such as popular cultural references from music, movies, mass media and sports, can offset the evils of the poverty curriculum and better prepare students for college or the workplace. This approach also involved students being active participants, which speaks to them being motivated enough to join the conversation.

**Issues of motivation and technology.** Studies show a lack of interest or motivation can also play a key role in student achievement (McAlexander, 2000), yet efforts to inspire nontraditional students or students from marginalized populations often backfire. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) reported that “after years of being told what they cannot do and years of attending oppressive schools, many students quite unsurprisingly decide not to continue to engage in school” (p. 127).

Attempts to lower the bar to make achievement attainable are apt to do the opposite. Students who experience grade inflation or similar evidence that their education program lacks rigor tend to find less cause to push themselves in the pursuit of

knowledge. In their research, Lavin and Hyllegard (1996) found minority high school students were frequently placed into tracks that were not academic or diluted academically. In fact, less than 20 percent of the high school graduates had completed a “full-fledged academic program” (p. 242). This lack of rigor fails to challenge or prepare students who choose to continue with their studies. However, with some understanding of their “disinvestment,” students can develop and compete at the same level as students from elite schools (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 127).

***What motivates education.*** Proponents of standardized testing hope that test scores will motivate both students and teachers to push for better results—one group in hopes of graduating, the other in pursuit of tenure (Harris, 2006). But such negative reinforcement assumes a lack of motivation and provides little incentive for success, other than the fear of failure, which may be a motivator, but not necessarily a solution. This concept also connects to the use of money as a motivator.

Harlem Children’s Zone creator Geoffrey Canada actively promoted the exchange of cash or gift cards for good attendance, but he discovered that money as a reward was not always successful. As students burned out, tardiness or truancy increased. While some continued to reap the benefits of this arrangement, others students eventually found the financial incentive not enough of a draw and stopped attending (Tough, 2008). A similar financial reward carrot was dangled for school districts. Aldeman (2010) pointed out that No Child Left Behind set benchmarks for testing and attendance that all schools accessing the federal Title I money needed to meet, but with only 25 percent of high schools taking this money, the majority were not held to these requirements. Promising money for test scores could also be seen as negative rather than positive

reinforcement, as the schools most in need of funds may fear losing them and opt to cut corners on curriculum to teach to the test—which does not benefit the students or increase student motivation.

What may be a true motivator is what Tough (2008) called “the X Factor.” While Harlem’s Promise Academy spent many hours developing cognitive skills, what seemed to make a significant difference in student success was the personal connection formed between the students and staff, and the fact that someone genuinely cared about each student’s success. Linked to this concept are the efforts to tailor curriculum to be more relevant to students’ lives. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) found that students were more likely to engage in reading and research when conducting research that was connected to their own lives; in fact they strove to make their work “solid, rigorous, and valuable” (p. 128). Payne (1984) highlighted that when teaching is connected to students, a *quid pro quo* exists, in which students give something for something in exchange, which reflects a sense of “authentic care” (Duncan-Andrade, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999).

This connection aimed to counter the banking metaphor of education (Freire, 1974), in which students are passive receptacles into which teachers deposit information. By following the pedagogical practices that Freire advocated—inquiry, dialogue, real exchanges of ideas between students and teachers—students “envision themselves as having academic potential” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). In addition, students should have opportunities to present and share their work beyond the classroom; motivation and self-confidence increased when the finished product was going to be seen by school and education decision makers, like administrators and district level officials.

***Potential of technology.*** Technology has also played an important role in bridging and creating divides in education. Schultz and Hull (2008) pointed to “the explosion of new technologies and the attendant new media” as pushing theory and conceptions of literary practices in directions that reconceptualize schooling (p. 242). Technology can enable students to continue conversations about texts and writing with peers outside the classroom, bringing knowledge learned at school to out-of-school contexts. But not all members of the student population have the same level of access or experience with these technologies. As a result, some students demonstrate high-levels of tech literacy while others may exhibit low levels of technical savvy. Educators looking to tap into blogs, texts, social networking or even online research need to assess the range of student experience and comfort-level with technology. When all students have access to the same technology, overall participation and motivation increase.

### **Tendency to Focus on Academic Skills**

Students encounter standardization in nearly every stage of their education. From kindergarten, with formative reading assessments like the Fountas and Pinnell Text Level Gradient™ (Heinemann, 2012), throughout high school, with exams like California’s STAR, students are measured against standards set by teams of educators, administrators and politicians. In preparation for and during the transition to college, students encounter multiple measures of performance used to promote and place them. Formalized assessments determine high school graduation (via state-approved exit exams), college acceptance (with tests like the SAT or ACT), and placement within college writing programs (again using scores from the SAT, ACT, state-level assessments, or programs like ACCUPLACER) (Armstrong, 2000; Condon, 2009; Elliot et al., 2011; Mattern &

Packman, 2009; Matzen & Hoyt, 2004; Morante, 1987). In addition, colleges and universities continually implement assessments to measure learning outcomes and achievement, as well as to improve student success and retention (Aldeman, 2010; Brunk-Chavez & Fredricksen, 2008; Chow, 2003).

These assessments are most often found in the form of standardized tests, which primarily measure academic skills and literacies (Bloome, 2008; Fanetti et al., 2010; Harris, 2006; Hillocks, 2002; Salem & Jones, 2010; Schultz & Hull, 2008; Zhao, 2009). Bloome (2008) defines academic literacies as “ways of using written language in academic disciplines,” with official literacy being those competencies sanctioned by schools and unofficial being skills not directly rewarded in school (p. 251). Leaving the nonacademic/unofficial literacies out of the testing processes—for graduation, acceptance and placement—limits assessment quality. Not only do such decisions lead to increased challenges for instructors and misrepresentations of student abilities, but overlooking the opportunity to tap into *funds of knowledge* that students bring with them to college may serve to perpetuate inequities in the educational system (Apple, 2004; Bizzell, 1982, 1992; Bloome, 2008; Greene, 1978; Heath, 1982; Morrell, 2004; Schultz & Hull, 2008; Zhao, 2009).

To further explore the issues surrounding standardization of student preparedness for college-level work, we must consider the prevalence and quality of assessment measures, the lack of focus on the writing needed for college-level work, the use of assessment for college writing placement, the missed opportunity to include non-academic skills and literacies in this process, and the call for improving assessment frameworks to better meet the needs of students, colleges, and future employers.

**Prevalence and quality of assessment measures.** In the U.S., test scores equate intellect. Amidst the flurry of activity that defined the “literacy crisis” of the 1970s and early 1980s, including the reinstatement of the universal writing requirement at colleges that had relented to student and political pressure, the Reagan Administration appointed a National Commission on Excellence in Education. The resulting report, *A Nation at Risk*, criticized educators and the education system for the “rising tide of mediocrity” that would be deemed “an act of war” if it were imposed on the U.S. by an “unfriendly foreign power” (Gardner, 1983, p. 5). The report outlined recommendations about “content, standards, time, teaching, and leadership and fiscal support” (Hillocks, 2002, p. 2); however, some of these suggestions proved easier to implement than others.

***Aligning standards and assessments.*** Hillocks (2002) noted, “The easiest goal of all to implement is that of standards” (p. 4). Therefore, standards change while other needs remain unaddressed. Since the 1980s, testing and requirements have become the mostly highly contested and most frequently implemented “solution” to the woes of the American education system. Despite research to the contrary, Americans continue to “believe that tests indicate achievement, intelligence, or aptitude, or all of these” and that distinctions can be made among people based on who passes and who fails (p. 14). The general assumption is: If test scores go up, students must be learning more and schools must be improving; therefore, people continue to accept that standardized tests are needed to determine whether students are achieving educational goals (Apple, 2004; Hillocks, 2002). Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) pointed out that the call for standards and tests comes from a dissatisfied and concerned public, as a way to hold educators accountable in what is deemed a dysfunctional system. However, “regardless

of how we feel about current standards,” we need to respect that students do not have luxury of resisting them—they act as “gatekeeper” between students and the future (p. 159).

Two-thirds of the U.S. had formal assessment programs at the start of this century (Hillocks, 2002); this number will likely grow under the new *Common Core*. Each state believes that their tests provide meaningful measures of achievement by telling how well students read and write, and how well they apply what they have learned to everyday situations. However, Hillocks (2002) found the standards required in some states were not part of the assessments, in fact “only 9 or 10 states have well-aligned systems” (The National Commission on Writing, 2003, p. 29), making the alignment of standards and assessments an ongoing concern.

***Low-barring education.*** Assessments also influence what is taught, and many teachers express pressure to “teach to the test” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Fanetti et al., 2010; Hillocks, 2002). Although they may not directly oppose standards and assessment procedures, teachers noted issues with different portions of the process, including frequency of testing and limits on teaching. These limits left less time for “higher-level thinking,” which raised questions around the quality of the assessments, and whether they “test the knowledge most worth having” (Hillocks, 2002, p. 5). In addition, teachers were encountering students who lacked the background needed to learn the material covered in their courses (i.e., students were underprepared).

Prior to the implementation of the *Common Core*, George W. Bush’s *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) established the criteria for success as achieving particular scores on standardized tests. Tests were typically multiple-choice format and involved no

student voice (Cook-Sather, 2006), and the preparation for the recurring test period limited opportunity for students to use creativity, critical thinking, or cultural or individual knowledge (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Such protocols force students to adopt the dominant ideology, by establishing a paradigm in which those who acquire such knowledge succeed, and perpetuate existing inequalities in schooling and society at large. In this context, assessment forms become a “potential mechanisms of socio-economic selection and control” (Apple, 2004, p. 155).

This format also saps students of intelligence and the ability to critically reflect or act for themselves, creating a “stupidification” of the younger generation (Cook-Sather, 2006; Kincheloe, 2011). *No Child Left Behind* promised to reward success and penalize failure, yet Hillocks (2002) found the standards for passing in most states to be “fairly low” (p. 204). He noted concern that setting the bar too high could result in most students not passing, and embarrassment for related school and political officials. Delpit (1988) also noted this sense of dumbing down of curriculum, while many others pointed to deficit models of teaching that support “low barring” of education for schools serving predominantly marginalized populations (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Hillocks, 2002; Morrell, 2008; National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006).

Another issue with using standardized tests as the primary source of assessment is that high school education becomes quantifiable, while college education remains theoretical. The university system is touted as the place “for abstract analysis and critical thinking—skills resistant to large-scale, objective standardization” (Fanetti et al., 2010, p. 78). Harris (2006) added that focus on state testing creates a tunnel vision approach toward passing, potentially leaving broader teaching goals and academic opportunity by

the wayside. In this way, “standardized testing is antithetical to real learning, lifelong or otherwise” (Fanetti et al., 2010, p. 81), and runs “counter to our goals of providing access to an authentic citizenship education” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 158).

***Implementation and use.*** Aldeman (2010) noted that in 2002, when NCLB was signed, most states were not yet collecting information on whether high school graduates were ready for college or the workplace. By the end of that decade, twenty-one states were tracking the number of students headed for college. Some states have also begun to track the college retention and academic success of public high school graduates, including the percentage of students from specific high schools who drop out of college, need remediation, or finish freshman year in good academic standing. But states are not using this information to assess or improve preparation of high school students for college or career success. The *Common Core State Standards* (2014) aim to change this, but results remain to be seen.

Some argued that it is not the standards, but how individual schools or administrators implement them. In fact, the argument can be made that cross-disciplinary skills, including critical thinking and collaboration, are built into the standards, and that instructors can personalize the lessons for diverse learners (Hill, Stumbo, Paliokas, Hansen, & McWalters, 2010). But others note that the tests themselves have inherent bias. Debate around the racial bias of the SAT has haunted the College Board, creators of the test, for decades. In 1999, a Philadelphia federal district court ruled the SAT, the test most frequently used by colleges to rate academic preparation, was culturally biased against African Americans (McAlexander, 2000). In 2003, a study found “differential item functioning,” or questions on which students who were matched by proficiency

showed variable scores, in the SAT verbal sections of white and African American test-takers who shared enough similarities in educational background and skill sets to achieve the same score. These findings, hotly contested by the College Board, the Educational Testing Service (ETS), and other test advocates, were recently corroborated by another study, confirming that items on the verbal test did function differently for these subgroups (Santelices & Wilson, 2010).

Defenders of such tests point to inequities apparent in American society as the cause for gaps in scoring (Jaschik, 2010), in some ways validating arguments surrounding the concept of tests being “standardized” in the first place. Cook-Sather (2006) noted that this disconnect “between federal law that is not accountable and local conditions that render success virtually impossible,” alongside goals that claim to support student learning while “ignoring” their reality, “points to a profoundly disabling and potentially very dangerous discrepancy between the claims behind federal legislation and the policies and practices that result from it” (p. 16).

Balfanz (2009) acknowledged the negatives of standardized tests as they currently exist, but sees the trajectory of reforms as promising. He noted that *A Nation at Risk* (1983) strengthened academics by recognizing the role of high school in developing “human capital for the information age” (p 27). In response, 75 percent of states raised the number of credits required for graduation, and nearly half of all states required exit exams. But increases were also found in grade-to-grade promotion requirements and zero-tolerance discipline policies, which resulted in lower graduation rates, and “more suspensions, expulsions and involvement with the juvenile justice system,” particularly in areas “with a large high-poverty and minority population” (p. 29).

As it stands, test preparation has become “commonplace and often time-consuming,” while producing “homogenized instruction” (p. 29); however, Balfanz (2009) argued that reformers over the past decade have aimed to improve performance at “high schools that serve low-income and minority students” (p. 17). By promoting “evidence-based” reform and improving high school attendance, grade promotion, and graduation rates, these changes, in conjunction with investments by the federal government and other foundations, have raised “hopes that the nation’s lowest-performing high schools can better serve their students” (p. 17). But without appropriate assessment mechanisms, measuring the appropriate skills for college readiness, the success of these efforts will continue to be debatable.

**Lack of focus on writing needed for college and careers.** While the concept of *eloquentia perfecta* dates back to the 1500s, and a required writing course has inhabited the halls of Harvard since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, standardized tests have only in the last decade expanded to include written components. As tests like the SAT began to incorporate writing sections, Belden, Russonello and Stewart (2005) found only 56% of the public considered including writing in state assessments to be “essential” (p. 45).

The National Commission on Writing for America’s Families, Schools and Colleges, established by the College Board in 2002, made recommendations for “how students, their families, schools, colleges, and universities could improve writing quality in the United States” (The National Commission, 2003, p. 7). Their recommendations, framed as a “writing revolution,” launched a five-year challenge for the nation, involving support from education, government, business and philanthropic leaders. Assessment was an important part of this revolution by placing writing “in the center of the school

agenda” and garnering the necessary resources required from state and local policymakers. The commission believed assessment of writing competence should be “fair and authentic,” and tests should “go beyond multiple-choice” to provide enough time to “actually create a piece of prose” (p. 4).

***One assessment not enough.*** Multiple sources noted that a single assessment would probably not “show the range of a student’s abilities” (The National Commission, 2003, p. 21). Therefore, writing assessment should involve several written pieces, on multiple, complex topics, for a variety of audiences and different occasions, and synthesis of material from many sources (Belden, Russonello and Stewart (2005); Hillocks, 2002; The National Commission, 2003). They should also assess the student’s ability to organize thoughts, include grammar and sentence structure evaluation, and be scored by teachers, not machines (Belden, Russonello and Stewart, 2005).

When Hillocks (2002) began his research, 37 of 50 states had some kind of student writing assessment, which were developed independently and varied by state. However, some states were “investing millions of dollars, thousands of teacher hours, and hundreds of thousands of student classroom hours in mandatory writing assessments” (p. 17). Hillocks (2002) chose to focus on the writing assessments of five states, including Illinois, Kentucky, New York, Oregon, and Texas, with a variety of assessment types—writing on demand (Texas, Illinois, New York), portfolio (Oregon), and a combination of writing on demand and portfolio (Kentucky). Hillocks also interviewed an average of 78 state officials, teachers and administrators per state, but did not include students. Through his research, he found that state mandates for writing assessment not only influenced “the kinds of writing taught in school,” but provided a “gold mine for

small publishers” who contracted to produce materials which “focus on the types of writing to be assessed while ignoring other types” (p. 19).

***Effect on teaching writing.*** In the process, many states rewarded “banal writing,” including the five-paragraph format and essays lacking evidence or analysis to support claims (Hillocks, 2002, p. 189). Even states that allowed for more time to research information and make strong arguments did not necessarily call for evidence among the criteria (Hillocks, 2002). In addition, some prompts calling for “expository writing” were really requiring an argument, resulting in confusion for test takers. Overall, although writing is being taught more extensively across the nation, “what they are teaching appears to have a negative effect on the students in states with poorly thought out assessments” (Hillocks, 2002, p. 205-206).

Fanetti et al. (2010) found that some teachers focused only on the modal writing favored by standardized tests and used test diagnostics, like those for the ACT, to develop curriculum. One instructor utilized group workshopping and conferences, but only as a way to guide students individually toward test taking success. Despite a twenty-year time gap, these findings reflect Bartholomae’s (1985) analysis of student written work. He found that most student writing centered around test-taking, reporting or summarizing, which he categorized as “work that places them outside the working discourse of the academic community” (pp. 461-462).

***Reimagining assessment methods.*** In terms of assessment types, the portfolio system yielded the most promising results, by allowing time for students to develop “a large enough sample to prove a reliable estimate” of writing ability without having “to revert to the formulaic” (Hillocks, 2002, pp. 205-206). In addition, this system worked

best when accompanied by “strong professional development initiatives...and enough writing consultants to work with individual teachers in schools” (Hillocks, 2002, p. 206). Hillocks (2002) pointed to the fact that few, if any, instructors are trained to teach writing. He stated, “Writing is simply not a linear process. But traditionally schools have treated it as though it were” (p. 29).

The National Commission on Writing reported that new rubrics and evaluation guides showed progress in improving evaluation practices in the classroom and pointed to effective writing assessments that could be replicated. However, most current assessments, and reform efforts, do not focus on the specific writing skills needed to transition from high school to college. By focusing on churning out timed-writing essays that follow a five-paragraph format, students arrive at college unprepared for the variety of writing assignments they will encounter. As standardization proliferates, college-level instructors find they have to lower their expectations for incoming students and undo some of the damage caused by teaching to the test. But encouraging students to unlearn rules and skills that enabled them to succeed in high school or on exit exams is challenging and sometimes resulted in mistrust; surprisingly, some students felt that college instructors were tricking them into breaking rules (Fanetti et al., 2010).

With an increasing number of colleges moving toward Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and other interdisciplinary writing programs, the gap widens between college writing requirements and the assessment model of high school exams. However, the level of interest that a state is focusing on high-level thinking “is more likely to be reflected in writing assessments” than in other subject areas (Hillocks, 2002, p. 17). Matsuda (2012) argued that assessment mechanisms should also account for incidental

learning. He pointed to Emig (1983) as stating that “to believe that children learn because teachers teach and only what teachers explicitly teach is to engage in magical thinking” (p. 135), and such cases of magical thinking are rampant in the back-to-basics movement, which espouses a particular way for writing to be taught. Matsuda (2012) noted that the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) claims assessment is informed by pedagogy and curriculum, which in turn inform changes in assessment and practice. Because aligning standards with assessment continues to be a challenge, especially for writing, broadening the spectrum of what is measured could better account for individual differences among students.

**Use of assessment systems for college writing placement.** As noted above, nearly all assessment measures have limitations and challenges that make them imperfect measurements of student ability. These issues continue to be problematic when such measures—SAT, ACT, state exit exams or assessments—are utilized by colleges and universities to place incoming freshmen into college writing courses. Many post-secondary institutions have multi-tiered writing programs (USF Dept. of Rhetoric and Language, 2013). As the population of the incoming classes increases and diversifies, placement systems become essential for managing student and university needs. Yet, most of the issues found in the use of assessment at the high school-level carry over into the college arena. Elliot et al. (2011) noted that, due to the many challenges inherent in the transition from high school to college, debate surrounds the efficacy of using standardized tests to assess writing. Both for-profit and non-profit organizations have capitalized on these debates by developing placement tests that categorize students according to ability, focusing in particular on students who seem least prepared, but none

seem to hit the mark of achieving consistent and accurate placement.

While the SAT displayed a racial bias in the verbal section (Santelices & Wilson, 2010), the ACT also falls short as a placement tool. Lunsford and Garnes (1979) found that the ACT could only “provide a general guideline for placement” because the test “failed to correlate with student writing ability” (p. 47). In fact, their evaluations of student essays revealed 31 percent of students were placed in a different level course than what had been indicated by the ACT English scores (Lunsford & Garnes, 1979).

Adler-Kassner (1999) noted that the first writing-related assignment that students face at many schools is the placement exam. Those students in her study who demonstrated some level of fluency with language and “understanding of structure and surface conventions” (p. 82), even if the result was a “relatively superficial” essay, were placed in first year composition, rather than “basic” writing. Adler-Kassner admitted this process reflected a performance model that privileged one conception of writing and did not mirror the writing that students encounter in class. It represented “the best we can do with what we have,” and seemed to yield better results than the 70 question Scantron form, with a short essay question, that it replaced (p. 82).

Elliot et al. (2011) conducted a study comparing placement scores acquired via ACCUPLACER, a placement-test system purchased by some universities to place freshman into first-year writing courses, to scores from the SAT writing section and the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test (NJCBSPT). Because The College Board, creators of ACCUPLACER, and then vendor Vantage Learning refused to furnish evidence on test validity and other supporting documentation, the researchers opted to scaffold a qualitative solution to establish a benchmark for validity with the help of five

experienced instructors who each took the test multiple times, aiming to score similarly to an honors student, a traditional student, and a basic writing student.

They found that “ACCUPLACER failed to achieve statistically significant prediction rates for student performance” (Elliot et al., 2011, p. 2) when analyzing impact by gender and ethnicity and recommended using the SAT writing section for future placement purposes. Elliot et al. (2011) added that “tests that fail to capture complexities attendant to discourse features in essays submitted by diverse student writers” (p. 27) could lead to low scores being awarded for less traditional approaches to writing tasks. The researchers contended that “while there can be no one handbook for how students should be placed into writing courses, there can be systematic, innovative approaches” that can “attend to the complexities of how writing assessment is used to support distinct institutional missions” (p. 32).

**Missed opportunity of non-academic skills and literacies.** The tendency to focus on academic skills in assessment processes overlooks the potential nonacademic skills, or unofficial literacies (Bloome, 2008), that may be equally essential in the transition from high school to college and translate into greater academic success. Karp and Bork (2012) pointed to “the fact that even academically proficient students have trouble continuing in college suggests that college readiness encompasses more than just academic skills” (p. 1). Beyond academic preparation, certain behaviors, skills and attitudes are “fundamental to student success” and meeting the expectations set by both professors and other students (p. 2). College students must “navigate a complex system of bureaucratic requirements, learn new study habits and time management strategies, and engage in new kinds of social relationships,” and those who do not demonstrate these

readiness skills are likely to struggle in the transition process (p. 6).

Bartholomae (1985) stated that a “significant number of college freshmen” not only “require a course to introduce them to the kinds of writing that are required for a university education,” but “they lack the facility other freshmen possess when they are faced with an academic writing task” (p. 467). This “facility” could be a byproduct of academic preparation, or it could speak to non-academic skills that contribute to succeeding in higher education. Apple (2004) pointed to the hidden curriculum in schools, or the “the tacit teaching to students of norms, values, and dispositions that goes on simply by their living in and coping with the institutional expectations and routines of schools day in and day out for a number of years” (p. 14). Managing oneself within the hidden curriculum also extends beyond academic skills. Bizzell (1982) saw this form of self-management as part of the “restricted codes” (as coined by Bernstein, 1975) that we all use “as a function of social context rather than cognitive development” (p. 196). She added that middle-class students may have an advantage in this area over students from lower socio-economic or marginalized groups because they have practice with the range of codes that are “most appropriate to school usage” (p. 196); however, more research can be done in this area to see how current student populations reflect or differ from this statement and how nonacademic skills and unofficial literacies affect academic pursuits.

References to the literacies that extend beyond traditional schooling were apparent throughout the literature. Elbow (1991) noted the importance of recognizing the potential of teaching nonacademic discourse skills alongside teaching the conventions of academic discourse. Gee’s (2002) precursors included a range of elements that make up a semiotic domain. Recognizing which skills, habits and behaviors link domains within the

network of semiotic domains speaks to more than academic literacies. Tough (2012) isolated these qualities of “character”—perseverance, curiosity, conscientiousness, optimism, and self-control—as the true secret to how people who faced adversity in childhood go on to succeed in life. Heckman (2006) called them noncognitive abilities.

In addition, Bloome (2008) viewed classrooms as cultural communities that constantly negotiate shared expectations and standards. School literacy practices, as described by Street and Street (1991), do not necessarily make up all of the literacy practices happening in the classroom. Because the literary practices and associated cultural themes students develop in their homes and communities affect the way they use language (Heath, 1982), and students bring these cultural models to the classroom (Bloome, 2008), each student “embodies a unique collection of interests, the product of his or her unique combination of life experiences” (Bizzell, 1992, p. 235). Instructors can tap into these “funds of knowledge” to create bridges to required content (Moll & Gonzalez, 1994). In fact, many experts argue for pedagogy that incorporates student language and experiences into academic literacy learning (Lee, 1997; Richardson, 2003). Such pedagogy requires breaking the mold of the traditional learner/lecturer dynamic, but the efforts can reap great rewards and provide new opportunities for assessment.

**Improving assessment frameworks.** Setting standards or goals and assessing the outcomes of those goals are a necessary part of most systems in order to ensure quality and promote ongoing development of process, but assessment of student writing presents a particular set of challenges, and a need to adjust the rubric or measurement methods (Elliot et al, 2011; Hillocks, 2002; USF Dept. of Rhetoric and Language, 2013), as well as *what* is being measured.

The National Commission on Writing (2003) noted that “When education was a private good, available to only a small elite in the United States, grammar, rhetoric, and logic were considered to be the foundation on which real learning and self-knowledge were built,” and “policy and pedagogy united” around these principles (p. 9). They believed “these three elements should still be pillars of learning” (p. 9). But to assess these concepts would involve considering the “forms which dominate schools” alongside the hidden curriculum and the other aspects of students’ lives that influence their literacies skills, habits, and behaviors, including mass media and pop culture (Apple, 2004, p. 158). What is valued in schooling may not include all that should be valued, and assessments should reflect the diversity of the population, and the possibility that there could be multiple solutions or approaches to address an issue.

Assessment should also move beyond rewarding prescribed responses to encourage creative approaches. Hillocks (2002) found the portfolio formats of assessment, used by Kentucky and Oregon, to be steps in the right direction, but only when students had time to produce a variety of writing and clear requirements involving the use of elements like evidence. Ayers (2011, January 5) agreed assessments should broaden “to understand what students know and are able to do — looking at qualitative evaluations, performance and portfolio and project based assessments, and learning in multiple modes that include creative and arts fields” (para. 4).

Because states are able to track graduates as they move into the college system (or work world), the information garnered from this process could be applied toward “more accurate, more multi-dimensional measures of high school success” (Aldeman, 2010, p.1), as well as specific changes in individual schools based on experiences of students

from that district. Congress has already invested millions, including \$245 million from the 2009 economic stimulus package, toward state data systems for this purpose. This investment coincides with the push toward the *Common Core State Standards* (2014), which could offer an opportunity to develop new approaches in assessing these standards.

To assess more effectively, we would need to isolate the skills required to succeed not only in school, but also in today's work force, such as creativity, independent thinking, adaptability, and teamwork. In real world situations, most adults never again encounter a paper and pencil test to demonstrate competency (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008); therefore our current assessments may not align with how success is measured after schooling is completed. Such an approach would not only reward skills, habits and behaviors that will continue to be rewarding to students long after graduating, but could address the call for soft skills from employers (Condon, 2004; Dana et al., 2011;) and further tie writing success to college and career success.

### **Relevant Studies and the Call for the Student Perspective**

Discussing the need for equality in education can be complicated given the "complex and multidimensional" nature of equality (Verba, 1996, p. 1), but key to achieving equality is the ability to share one's voice. hooks (1994) stated, "To hear each other (the sound of different voices), to listen to one another, is an exercise in recognition" (p. 41). Having a voice is more than "a mere exchanging of experience" (Macedo, 2006, p. 184), it is a human right that is not "given by those in power," but achieved through struggle (p. 4). Sharing one's voice is "a process that turns experience into critical reflection and political action" (p. 182).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Children Act of

1989, and other frameworks provide rights for children and teens to express views and be heard. Yet, throughout educational research, those who hold the least power and voice in the discussions are those who stand to be most affected by changes or reforms: the students (Nieto, 1994). Cook-Sather (2006) added that “educational research that does not elicit or respond to students’ ideas violates students’ rights” (p. 16). This call, and the need, for students to be involved in the research is apparent in many contexts, but the presence of student voice or perspective in empirical research, especially work revolving around preparation for college-level writing, remains a work-in-progress.

### **The Call for Student Participation**

Since the early 1900s, educators and social critics have noted the way student voices are excluded “from conversations about learning, teaching and schooling” (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 3). Berlin (1988) documented in his overview of writing classrooms practices where dominant structures weighed heavily or even controlled what was being taught, and how students are manipulated within the system, denied voice, or conditioned not to expect circumstances to change. He argued that students in the U.S. are repeatedly told that they live in a free and democratic society, while systematically being denied opportunities for self-expression and subjected to arbitrary authority at every turn.

By the late 1990s, the entry of the term “student voice” into educational research and reform discourse pointed toward a potential cultural shift, one that “opens up spaces and minds not only to the sound but also to the presence and power of students” (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 5) Despite the attitude by government officials that student voice lacks vote-winning potential, some recent U.S. school reforms have aimed to honor the voices of students, and even to have students act as translators to help adults better understand

the struggles students face in school (Cook-Sather, 2006; Mitra, 2008).

**Authentic inclusion of student voice.** Including students in the conversation yields positive results, by making students feel “respected and engaged in the classroom” and promoting “constructive participation” (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 9), in which teachers and students communicate and learn from each other. This approach is a core component of constructivist, critical, multicultural, and anti-racist pedagogies, all of which emphasize the importance of listening to students to improve teacher practice, build learning around relevant themes from student experiences, and counter the hegemonic forces inherent in the education system (Banks, 1996; Cook-Sather, 2006; Freire, 1974; hooks; 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2000).

Cook-Sather (2006) argued that not all efforts to include students reflect positively. In some cases, the call for student participation expresses the idea that all students share one single voice, or that the ideas of students should be devalued due to lack of experience. Students may be added to committees or invited to meetings more to provide the appearance of inclusion rather than to realize equal voice in the conversation, or have their voices weighed against each other, reinforcing hierarchies of power and privilege. In addition, some criticize the position students hold as naïve or uninformed. This lack of expertise or reliability in the ideas of students was inherent even in the comments of those aiming to improve schooling for students (Balfanz, 2009) or initiate students into the academic discourse community (Bartholomae, 1985; Bloom, 1987). Orner (1992) questioned *why* students are asked to share their voice, to whose benefit, and at what risk, and cautioned against framing “students and youth as the Other” (p. 76).

While advocates agree on the importance of including the student perspective,

how to achieve that in an authentic way has been debated. Fielding (2004) stated that currently “there are no spaces, physical or metaphorical, where staff and students meet one another as equals, as genuine partners in the shared undertaking of making meaning of their work together” (p. 309). Through her experience of including the student perspective in her research, as well as throughout the student voice literature, Cook-Sather (2006) found “the call for respect from students is loud and clear” (p.18). However, there remains a need for teachers and students, or researchers and students, to “effect cultural shifts that support a repositioning of students” (p. 3) and liberates them from the position of “recipient or victim of teachers’ (and administrators’ and policymakers’) decision-making processes” (pp. 8-9). Because schools rely upon control and management, setting up spaces that test those premises is an ongoing challenge (Cook-Sather, 2006).

**Moving from data sources to researchers.** Nearly three decades after Astin (1984) offered a development theory on student involvement in higher education, Bovill, Cook-Sather, and Felten (2011) argued that “academic staff should not only consult students but also explore ways for students to become full participants in the design of teaching approaches, courses and curricula” (p. 133). In this spirit, Holdsworth (2000) presented a “student participation ladder” that moves the voices of students from “speaking out” to “being heard,” to “being listened to,” to “being listened to seriously and with respect,” to incorporating “views into actions taken by others,” to “sharing decision-making, implementation of action, and reflection on action” (p. 358). The evolution in this ladder demonstrates the transformative power that recognizing and valuing the student perspective can hold. Similarly, Fielding (2004) offered a four part typology,

which moves from students as data sources (and teachers listen to agree on learning targets), to students as active respondents (moving beyond passive data to sharing experiences with teachers), to students as co-researchers (which is not quite equal in role with the teacher, but more egalitarian than the previous steps), to students as researchers (in which students are not just responsive, but partners with teachers).

The call to involve students in policy and pedagogy reform is particularly significant in light of the implementation of the new *Common Core State Standards* (2014). Despite the enduring presence of some champions of the voice-centered expressionistic teaching approach (Elbow, 1991; Harris, 1989), researchers of writing and composition have noted a shift away from student writing in recent scholarship, and a need to renew focus on the student (Salvatori & Donahue, 2009). Inviting students into the conversation provides a counter narrative to the ongoing discourse of need and potential solutions posed (Cook-Sather, 2006; Costino, 2008; Karp & Bork, 2012; Street, 2003). Although a truly balanced relationship may not be possible given the current practices, assumptions and structures of formal education, efforts can be made to create opportunities for exploration of the student experience from the student perspective with the students driving the study. To this point, the empirical research shows efforts to incorporate the student perspective with mixed results based on the methods used.

### **Empirical Research and the Student Perspective**

Empirical studies involving the student perspective appear throughout educational research; however, many fall short of including the students' actual voices. This section focuses on studies that incorporate the student perspective and are directly relevant to preparation for college and college-level writing. Some focus on policy and pedagogical

development, others on the implementation of Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing in Disciplines movements, and many demonstrate the added value of including the student perspective, as well as acknowledging the skills that students bring with them to college—both academic and nonacademic.

**Disconnect between high school and college.** Research which speaks to the disconnect between high school and college expectations is especially relevant to the position of first-time freshmen when they enter the academy. In this respect, Venezia, Kirst and Antonio (2003) included students in their study aiming to address the development of K-16 reforms (Kindergarten through four year university) and improve postsecondary opportunities for all. In particular, they examined whether current college admissions standards and placement policies support, assist or confuse students, parents or educators, and how these policies and reforms were communicated to and interpreted by K-12 stakeholders. The study focused on the presence of these issues in California, Illinois, Georgia, Maryland, Oregon and Texas, and involved interviews with state agency, university, and community college staff and faculty, as well as high school teachers, counselors, and administrators. The research team also surveyed high school students and their parents, and organized focus groups of high school and community college students.

Venezia et al. (2003) found “profound disjunctures between secondary and postsecondary education in the United States” (p. 35). Most significant for this report, they noted differences in knowledge and understanding around “what it takes to succeed in college, among students within schools by academic tracks and between schools by socioeconomic status” (Venezia et al, 2003, p. 36). They argued students, parents and

educators need accurate information on college academic standards and a universal policy communication program—in several languages—to clarify information throughout the system. They also called for K-12 content, placement and exit exams to better align with college readiness without remediation, for more than one measurement in assessment, and for assessments to be scrutinized for “reliability, validity, efficacy and the extent to which they promote teaching for understanding” (p. 38). They added that course sequences should line up to college, successful dual or concurrent enrollment programs should be expanded, and a system of “common identifier numbers” should be created to track students, as well as one to track teachers in practice and professional development, and these should be tied to an accountability system for curricular and instruction policy and practice reforms (Venezia et al, 2003).

This study by Venezia et al. (2003) pointed to a vital need to better link high school curriculum and assessment with college success. The design of the study also shows a broad range of voices being called upon for input in the findings; however, the student input, for the most part, was lumped with parental and educator input. We hear little voice or specifics from the discussions with students, at the high school and college level, and the recommendations for further action do not include outlets for student input, only methods for tracking students as numbers.

**Students and the writing process.** By focusing more directly on the student experience, educational researchers can inform not only policy but pedagogical shifts, as well as inform educators on the skills used and challenges inherent in the transition into college and college-level writing. Focusing entirely on the student perspective, Emig (1971) centered her seminal “compose aloud” study within the writing classroom of

twelfth graders to reveal the resources they utilized while writing. Unlike most composition researchers at that time, Emig (1971) delved into new territory with this study by focusing on the writing process rather than the written product. Her goal was to investigate students as they wrote in order to identify the “feelings, attitudes, and self concepts which form the invisible component of the ‘composition’” (p. v). She compared her findings to insights on the writing process from established writers, such as time spent on preparing to write or revising, and found contradictions between what good students do, what established writers do, and what the textbooks advise to do during the composition process. This focus on the aspects of student skills, habits, and behaviors that speak to the hidden curriculum of writing and composition is particularly relevant to future study in college writing success.

Emig (1971) acknowledged that this study was limited by the size of the group and number of writing pieces, as well as the presence of the researcher in the writing sessions, and all but two of 16-17 year old participants were categorized as “above average intelligence.” In addition, the students expressed that the process of composing aloud was “difficult, artificial, and at times distracting” (p. 5); however, these limitations speak to opportunities to revamp this approach for future studies, something that those who followed Emig’s model frequently fell short of doing (Voss, 1983). Voss (1983) added that few researchers have chosen to “observe students in the act of composing in classrooms, to interview students while they are dealing or immediately after they have dealt with assignments generated by their teachers, or to observe interactions between students and teachers within classrooms” (p. 282).

In a similar effort toward acquiring the student perspective on the writing process,

Adler-Kassner (1999) interviewed basic writing students at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, but with a different end goal. This study aimed to learn “how basic writers (or, more appropriately, students labeled basic writers within particular institutions) defined themselves” (p. 70). To answer this, she and a colleague interviewed 16 randomly chosen students of the 80 who were placed into a basic writing course in Fall 1998. The interview questions reflected both a cognitively-based studies approach (concerned with the writers’ individual writing/reading processes) and a culturally-based studies approach (aimed at examining the writer in relationship to larger cultures, like the academy). Adler-Kassner outlined the interview protocol as divided into three basic areas; however, the report seemed to list four: existing writing, experiences with and ideas about writing and reading, expectations for college, and conceptualizations of and expectations for writing. The intersection of student experiences (in their own words), writing expectations and college expectations is important to establishing the arena for further study in this field.

Adler-Kassner added that she and her colleague “were interested in learning about what features of their writing *they* thought marked them as not ready for first-year composition” (p. 79). The researchers hoped that, if basic writing students could identify what categorized them as basic writers, they could contest this positioning. Most pointed to, what Adler-Kassner called, “unsuccessful information transfer” (p. 79), or not being able to get down on paper the ideas that are in one’s head. The idea that such transmission should be possible, and eventually effortless, “is a tenet of current-traditional approaches to writing” (p. 80). This notion, garnered through listening to the student perspective, opened an avenue for these students to build strategies toward

developing as writers and moving beyond the classification of basic writers.

**Students in WAC/WID research.** More recent college-writing research often focuses on the implementation of Writing across the Curriculum (WAC), Writing in the Disciplines (WID), and Writing to Learn (WTL) approaches. Salem and Jones (2010) found that the success of WAC/WID implementation depends on the persistence of writing program directors and the attitudes of the faculty involved. Dana, Hancock, and Phillips (2011) compared test scores surrounding the implementation of WAC at an online university to assess whether students were mastering the skills needed for workplace writing demands. The results of the study indicated a variety of writing skills among students upon enrollment at the university, as well as a statistically significant difference in writing abilities in relation to the implementation of the WAC project.

While the findings from both WAC studies above provide insight into the potential obstacles and benefits of WAC/WID implementation, the limited scope of these studies becomes evident when compared to the approach taken by Todd and Hudson (2008). Todd and Hudson (2008) weighed the WAC, WTL and WID approach against traditional lecture-based teaching techniques from the student perspective. They found a large majority of students felt “using WAC, WTL and WID components helped them to learn and absorb course material more thoroughly than listening to lectures, memorizing facts or definitions for an exam, and regurgitating facts on an exam” (p. 21). The students also felt that this method of learning course material through writing helped them perform better on exams. This preference reflects a key objective of WAC movement over the past 40 years—to use “writing assignments as a tool for encouraging students to become involved in active learning, problem solving, and higher-level critical thinking

skills while participating in student-centered instruction activities” (p. 19). The students also commented on how teachers should set expectations, as well as grading criteria. While the methodology in this study (syllabus analysis) seemed to rely more upon speculation rather than experience, and the researchers opted to paraphrase the student responses rather than use direct quotes, the study demonstrates the value in student opinions and insights, if not specific student voices.

**Students and course development.** Using the insight of students in course development has become a common practice among individual instructors, who frequently ask for student feedback on their courses in order to make changes or improvements. Lunsford and Garnes (1979) formalized this process by drawing upon insight from students currently enrolled in the Freshman English course to create a Writing Workshop program aimed at preparing future students. The study showed that those students who enrolled in the Workshop were more likely to complete the subsequent Freshman English course with a passing grade. While the report did not go into specifics about the student insight, this study showed the direct value of including students who are in the process of the transition to college in the design of more relevant curriculum and support programs for incoming students.

**Limitations of data collection methods.** Simply asking the students for insight does not equate implementing the students’ voices. Many studies elicit input from students but are limited in depth of student insight due to the method of data collection. O’Brien-Moran and Soirferman (2010) addressed expectations of a required writing course in their survey of first year college students at the University of Manitoba, but found their results lacking in scope. Unlike the U.S., Canada does not have a universally

required writing class, but the University of Manitoba is unique in that they require undergraduates to complete a writing intensive course in order to graduate. The featured course, Introduction to University, was designed to assist in the transition from high school to college by focusing on academic research, writing, and critical thinking. However, rather than eliciting responses from the students directly about their expectations in this course, the researchers employed a 5-point Likert scale, so student insight was limited to the familiar range of strongly agree to strongly disagree (with three options in the middle). The scale did not illuminate the extent to which students believed what the results showed, or whether the questions themselves “suggested expectations to the students that they might not have already had” (p. 20). As a result, “it appeared that students expected to learn everything about the writing process, and did not distinguish between the importance of any of the topics identified on the survey” (p. 22).

Because the survey provided no opportunity for unique ideas or aspects to be included, these limitations raised questions around the authenticity or individuality of the thoughts expressed. While the results appeared to show that students shared similar expectations, we cannot be sure whose expectations they shared—the researchers’ or the students’. The researchers expressed that a pre-test/post-test format or a rank-order format rather than a Likert scale may better determine “the relative importance” the students assigned to each aspect of the writing process (O’Brien-Moran & Soirferman, 2010, p. 22); however, both of these options would maintain the lack of opportunity to share the “voice” unique to the student perspective.

In contrast, Paulson and Armstrong (2011) utilized open-ended statements to invite students to share metaphors reflecting their experiences with transitional reading

and writing courses in first year undergraduate programs. This approach allowed students to insert their own words to complete sentence fragments, and to expand upon their reasoning by explaining how/why after each metaphor. These conceptualizations were coded into themes to create awareness around student expectations for these courses and how well they aligned with the expectations of teachers. Analyzing the student metaphors for themes “provide(d) insight into participants’ belief systems about a given topic” (p. 495). The findings displayed a total of 218 metaphorical linguistic expressions (MLEs), ranging in emotion and complexity of comparison. The researchers were not entirely surprised by the variety of answers given the diversity of the participant group, but added that “assumptions of student uniformity are widespread... not just among practitioners and administrative and political stakeholders, but among students as well” (p. 499), which leads to “the potential for students’ diverse understandings to be overlooked or disregarded” (p. 500).

Paulson and Armstrong (2011) believed that instructors, and students, need to keep this wide range of beliefs in mind, especially when they run counter to instructor expectations, as this may be “central to the issue of what is generally thought of as preparedness for college-level academic literacy demands” (p. 500). They also emphasized the need for research on “students in transitional literacy contexts in higher education...because these students are already positioned by social, cultural, and institutional forces at the margins of academe” (p. 502). This call to action is commendable, and this study provides a framework via the prompts. While this framework may be seen as limiting or pushing concepts that students might not have come up with on their own, students may benefit from the structure, and this format

allows students to convey their thoughts in their own words (versus the Likert scale).

**Role of nonacademic skills in student success.** In terms of being successful in school, in particular in transitioning from high school to college effectively, some studies utilized the student perspective to highlight the role that nonacademic skills and practices play in academic success. Especially important in these discussions was insight from students characterized as nontraditional or from marginalized populations. Nieto (1994) noted the absence of input from students in discussions on education issues and “debates about school failure and success,” primarily students from “disempowered and dominated communities” (p. 396). In response, Nieto explored what students thought about the “school policies and practices that place roadblocks in the way of academic achievement for too many young people” (p. 393), in particular “the effects of racism and other forms of discrimination on their education” (p. 392). She aimed to pinpoint characteristics of the students’ experiences that helped them stay and succeed in school, despite the obstacles inherent in “traditional educational structures and procedures” (p. 392). She drew upon interviews of junior and senior high school students from a variety of ethnic, racial, linguistic, and social-class backgrounds gathered in a previous study (Nieto, 1992) to create case studies.

One characteristic that stood out was that “the students saw themselves as successful” (Nieto, 1994, p. 397). This *confidence* could be attributed to the different outlets students reported utilizing for support. Alongside family and community support, extracurricular activities provided outlets for energy/stress, while teaching leadership skills, including religion-based activities, specific hobbies, or playing sports. Nieto pointed to an aspect of *resilience* seen in these students that more privileged students may

not need to the same extent as schools “generally reflect their backgrounds, experiences, language, and culture” (p. 423). In addition, *optimism*—seen in their upbeat attitudes “about their future and their lives” (p. 423) was an important characteristic, which Nieto said could be attributed in part to “caring teachers, affirming school climates, and loving families have helped them face such odds” (p. 423). *Determination* to push forward, as well as a sense of *self-reliance* or *self-respect*, was also noted in this study. These characteristics point to the need to acknowledge the funds of knowledge students bring with them to school and the importance of non-academic skills to student success.

Karp and Bork (2012) also highlighted specific nonacademic skills that were important for academic success. Their study aimed to clarify the components that make up the role of community college student, in particular the “unspoken behaviors, attitudes, and expectations to which students must adhere if they are to be successful” (p. 2). The findings showed four specific areas of knowledge and behavior that form the community college student role: engaging in new *academic habits*, exhibiting *cultural know-how*, balancing *multiple roles*, and engaging in self-directed and timely *help-seeking* behavior (p. 10). In addition, students needed to be *self-aware* and *fluid*.

According to Karp and Bork (2012), students must “develop the ability to reflect upon and become aware of not only their academic learning but of their behavior as well” (p. 14). To be successful, students need to take responsibility, demonstrate metacognitive skills, reflect on their experiences, and exhibit flexibility as they seek a variety of ways to accomplish tasks, while receiving less feedback in and on the process. Rather than giving up their home culture entirely, students also need to be “codeswitchers” and adhere to institutional norm while in the college environment, or run the risk of negative feedback

or poor performance/academic outcomes.

While this study focused on community college students, many of the findings can be compared to skills needed for success at the college-level, regardless of the type of institution. However, Karp and Bork (2012) found that community college students defined their college experiences differently from the traditional image of college, as portrayed in popular culture. Most expressed little interest in a college-based social life; instead, they viewed college as instrumental to acquiring a job or higher wage. These impressions aligned student expectations with instructor expectations, but Karp and Bork (2012) added that perspectives may differ for students at four-year universities, which points to the need for further research exploring the skills, habits and behaviors needed for college success, especially during the high school to college transition period.

**Increasing the student role in research.** The college transition, and what contributes to students arriving in college unprepared, has been discussed throughout this literature review. However, much of the insight came from so-called education experts, none of which were current students enrolled in high school or college. Addressing the disconnect between writing done in high school and the work required in college has resulted in many programs and teaching approaches which were beyond the scope of this report. However, in a recent study, McCormick, Hafner and Saint Germain (2013) examined the impact of the Expository Reading and Writing Course (ERWC) training on teaching practices and student college readiness. In addition to the teacher's perspective, the researchers incorporated some direct quotes from student focus groups and from a student letter about how class skills prepared her for college. Although both students and teachers found the ERWC training to be useful, the amount of writing required by

different teachers varied, which continues to be an area pointed to as contributing to the gap in ability between high school and college. McCormick et al. (2013) added that “a broad consensus on what exactly readiness entails remains hard to pin down. Many states have not yet come up with definitions or benchmarks of college readiness” (p. 32), but “teachers continued to recognize the mismatch between what students can do at the end of high school and what is expected of them when they reach college” (p. 42).

Taking the research role of students even further, Wymer, Fulford, Baskerville and Washington (2012) not only incorporated student insight on the high school to college transition, but they included students in the research process. The research team comprised of two composition instructors and two undergraduate students, with multiple responsibilities shared by all. The project stemmed from the recognition that faculty “were primarily working with anecdotal lore about our students’ literacy experiences” (p. 1). In a sense, rumor had it that “students were sometimes not asked to write an essay during their entire senior year of high school” (p. 3), which pointed to a “steep learning curve as they entered” college classes (p. 3). The study aimed to help faculty members better understand student experiences by gathering data on the factors that helped them thrive and those that contributed to attrition—“the successes and difficulties” in the high school to college writing transition (p. 1).

The study lasted three months, required training of the student researchers, who received certifications in Social and Behavior Research, and adapted a survey instrument to gather basic demographic information and ask questions focused on the student’s experiences. The survey included both a Likert scale and open-ended questions suggested by the student researchers. In addition, the student co-researchers conducted a student

focus group to add “qualitative texture” to the quantitative findings (p. 4) and garner more “frank responses from their peers if faculty were not present” (p. 4).

Wymer et al. (2012) found “students from literacy-rich backgrounds” not only succeed in the composition classes, but may have found them easier than their writing requirements in high school. Juxtaposed, the less-experienced readers and writers struggled “to make sense of unfamiliar college workloads and expectations” (p. 5). These findings reflect literacy research that connects privilege and literacy access (Brandt, 2009; Gee, 2002). In addition, just over half (55%) of the students surveyed believed that their high school had prepared them to do well in college; however, half of the students also reported they did not always turn in assignments, and “one third of respondents reported spending less than 6 hours per week on reading and writing assignments for all their college classes,” which surprised department faculty (Wymer et al., 2012, p. 6).

Similarly, Jolliffe and Harl (2008) found in their research on the reading practices that first year composition students spent fewer than 16 hours preparing for class per week, when the prep time should have been about 24 hours based on the *two hours per class rule*. These findings were consistent with findings from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in 2005. This study report also included a few quotes from students based on the student journals entries kept in the course of the study.

Wymer et al. (2012) noted the value of collaborating with students in research. In particular, the faculty felt they were more diligent due to the sense of accountability they felt toward the student researchers. They were also inspired to continue this work, and appeared to inspire others, as student interest in research mentoring increased, alongside the number of students interested in joining future projects. In addition, some faculty

adapted the study survey for use in class, to gather information from students at the start of the semester. These efforts demonstrate the benefits of incorporating students in the research process as well as sparking interest in keeping the research going.

### **Summary**

This review of the literature covers a wide berth of theories and challenges throughout the U.S. education system. The picture painted displays a long history of disparity in access to equal education resources and a system that perpetuates inequity while favoring the dominant discourse over all others. This dominance is reflected in the focus on academic skills, or formal literacies, in assessment, and the missed opportunity surrounding the importance of nonacademic skills to overall student success. As colleges and universities have bent and twisted to accommodate the challenges of diverse student bodies and increasing demands on literacy, writing and composition instructors have stretched to meet the needs of students, faculty and staff alike. The result has stagnated the growth of this discipline, locking instructors in a service or “fix it” role. Meanwhile, students continue to face challenges in the transition to the academic discourse community. Despite these hurdles, the research keeps pointing to similar needs: getting to know students lived experiences, valuing the knowledge they bring with them to schooling, utilizing that knowledge and experience in the process of shaping policy, pedagogy, curriculum and practice, aligning assessment and standards (while revisiting which skills should be measured and how), and recognizing the benefits garnered from including students in the discussion. Participatory action research could be a natural progression for further exploration in this area.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### Research Design: Participatory Action Research

Across the spectrum of scientific research, certain voices are systematically silenced. While the viewpoints of the majority or those who hold decision-making power are deemed valid, those of stakeholders who hold less power are devalued or ignored (Maguire, 1987; Nygreen, 2006), resulting in study findings that reproduce the dominant frameworks and perpetuate inequities in society (Apple, 1994; Nygreen, 2006). In educational research, the student voice is frequently absent from the conversation. Students are often mentioned, and occasionally consulted, but rarely is the student voice provided space for expression and reflection in the research process. Even at the post-secondary level, where the majority of students are considered legal adults, the population is frequently discussed as merely objects of study, in Freire's (1974) terms, rather than recognized as subjects with valuable insight and experience that could inform many academic processes.

Cook-Sather (2006) defines *voice* as "having presence, power, and agency...the opportunity to speak one's mind, be heard and counted by others, and, perhaps, to have an influence on outcomes" (p. 5). Incorporating the student voice in research and discussions about policy and curriculum can counter the tendency toward discrimination and exclusion in education (Banks, 1996; Cook-Sather, 2006; hooks; 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2000). Yet, spaces where students and staff meet "as genuine partners in the shared undertaking of making meaning of their work together" (Fielding, 2004, p. 309)

are rare to nonexistent in academia, as are opportunities for “authorized discourse” of the student perspective (Crowley, 1995, p. 236).

As a university researcher, the challenge becomes selecting a methodology that reflects the established theoretical framework, specifically the concepts of problem-posing and knowledge co-creation (Freire, 1974; Macedo, 2006), funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and welcoming student voices to the discussion (Nieto, 1994, 2000). Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a model of inquiry that aims to reframe all participants as co-investigators in a process of collective inquiry and action (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Maguire, 1987; Nygreen, 2006). As a research design, PAR provides the greatest opportunity for allowing the students not only to participate, but also to drive the research process. The democratic and collaborative nature of PAR promotes reflection, problem posing, group collection and analysis of data, and implementation of an action component. PAR also allows the university-researcher to “see how knowledge is actually created and used in school settings” by positioning the researcher within the classroom “to see complex forms of interaction that occur” (Apple, 2004, p. 17).

This study used a Participatory Action Research approach with first-time freshmen enrolled in a core requirement writing courses at the San Francisco campus of the University of San Francisco. The methodology aligned with the research problem—the lack of student perspective. In content and method, the students took ownership of the study to share their voices, experiences, challenges, insights, and suggestions via a weekly journal, discussion board, one-on-one interviews and action project throughout their first semester (approximately three months) of college. A Participatory Action Research approach was chosen to give voice to the student perspective and insight, which

could be unique for each participant. The research was conducted throughout the students' first semester at the university to explore how they perceive their own preparedness for the obstacles and assignments they encountered as they adjusted to their new discourse community.

The study followed the distinct three phases of PAR (Maguire, 1987). As the university researcher/course instructor, I provided some degree of structure throughout the process, specifically around collecting data and sharing ideas, as well as support and academic coaching; however, democratic decision-making was utilized in each phase for determining interview questions, identifying themes, and informing action plans. Each phase was integrated into the coursework for the academic writing course taught by the university-researcher.

At the end of the study period, the co-researchers had completed two mini-rounds of the PAR phases. The first phase, at the start of the semester, involved establishing the research environment and building relationships. As co-researchers, students worked together to establish the process for data collection and research responsibilities based on a short-list of options presented by the university-researcher. They also became familiar with the Participatory Action Research process. The team explored individual and observed challenges in relation to the transition to college and college level writing and the academic discourse community to narrow the research focus.

As the first phase approached again mid-semester, the co-researchers reflected upon the findings and proposed actions suggested to this point. This created a foundation for a deeper level of questions and self-analysis as the students considered which issues they would like to research further.

The second phase involved collecting data, analyzing data, and identifying themes. In addition to participating in all aspects of this phase, student co-researchers had the opportunity to immediately apply insight from their findings to their coursework and transition to college, and to report results from these attempts. The data collection involved a combination of student-to-student interviews, a survey, a group discussion board, and individual journals for each of the co-researchers. In addition, I, as the university researcher/instructor, also kept a journal of the experience, and any relevant email correspondence between the instructor and student/co-researchers to be included in the data collection process. This process continued in the second round of PAR as the researchers used data from each other's discussion board posts, letter (action) assignments, and library research to consider a final action recommendation in their Research papers.

Reflection upon the first two phases provided a foundation for the third phase, in which co-researchers developed ideas for action components—a letter in the first round, a research paper in the second round. Based on the input from the student perspective, the university researcher composed this report for submission in pursuit of a doctoral degree, and will create a product for submission to the department responsible for overseeing the core writing cognate in the university—in effort to demonstrate the power that students hold and have the ability to harness when given the opportunity. In this final report, co-researchers will be referred to by their first names, as none of the students requested a pseudonym to provide anonymity. All expressed wanting their insight and voices to be shared.

### Research Setting

The site for this study was a four-year private university in Northern California. This setting was chosen due to the researcher's familiarity with the institution, campus and student body. The university was established in 1855 in the Jesuit educational tradition. According to the university website, "USF was listed as a Tier One National University in the 2013 *U.S. News & World Report*, was tied for 8th place in undergraduate student ethnic diversity, 6th for success in graduating low-income (Pell-Grant) students, and 10th for the percentage of international students" (USF, 2013). The university enrolled approximately 1,148 first-time freshmen in the Fall 2013 and offers degrees in more than 100 undergraduate and graduate programs.

At the time of this study, the university researcher had instructed in Rhetoric and Composition at this university for more than ten years. The courses in Rhetoric and Composition fall under the umbrella of the Rhetoric and Language Department, which also oversees Public Speaking and English as a Second Language (ESL). This department was formed in 2009, the most recent incarnation of an evolution that began more than a decade ago. As the university raised its bar for writing expectations, the core expository writing classes broke from the literature and creative writing departments to join ESL and other programs focused on literacy and communication skills under the heading of Communication Studies. This effort to increase focus on academic writing provided an academic home for Rhetoric and Composition. This home changed again in 2009, when the Department of Media studies grew in one direction, and Rhetoric and Composition and ESL joined forces with Public Speaking to form the current Rhetoric and Language Department. The department employs 18 full-time and 84 adjunct faculty, offers 20

composition courses (with 144 sections), and interacts with almost every new and transfer student, most often in their first or second semester (USF Dept. of Rhetoric and Language, 2013).

The mission of Rhetoric and Language is situated in the University's Jesuit Catholic tradition, specifically the foundation of *eloquentia perfecta*, through teaching "excellence in speaking and writing through learning outcomes that emphasize rhetoric and argumentation and literacy" (USF Dept. of Rhetoric and Language, 2013, p. 2).

While academic success is the primary goal, students are also expected "to learn how to read rhetorical situations, to develop the skills to grasp complex social and cultural discourses, and contribute to the ongoing conversations that constitute our civic lives" (p. 1). The literacy and rhetoric goals combine to include "the ability to participate in conversations and operate competently in a linguistic community," the ability to interpret "world-making conversations in all their complexity," and the skills of argument, persuasion, and understanding of "all the processes we use to make and interpret meanings socially" (p. 2).

In response to demands from across the university, the department extended its course offerings to include more Writing in the Discipline, advanced Rhetoric, and writing-focused First-Year Experience seminar options, as well as a combination speech and composition course for advanced placement students and multiple one-two credit courses for further editing and proofreading development. A recent survey showed that 89.6 percent of the university's faculty rate the Rhetoric and Language program as excellent or very good. Maintaining high standards and consistency can be difficult in

such a large department, especially alongside managing expectations and demands placed on the predominance of “service” courses the department houses, but the bar for writing at this university reflects the highest standards and serves as the potential model for other four-year universities.

### **Written Communication I**

Similar to most universities and colleges in the US, the University of San Francisco requires students to take two semesters of first-year composition. Central to the focus of this study is the course into which the bulk of incoming students are first placed, Written Communication I (or RHET 110). According to the USF Department of Rhetoric and Language (2013), the first-year courses “aim at helping students reach the following five outcomes: critical analysis of academic discourse, integration of multiple academic sources, academic research, style, and revision” (p. 18). The first year courses at USF differ from those at other universities because the school requires a separate literature Core from the English Department, leaving Rhetoric and Composition to focus on reading and writing academic non-fiction, while emphasizing the foundations of rhetoric as a discipline. Enrollment for Written Communication I is capped at 20 students, but the department would like to reduce that number in the future.

To achieve the learning outcomes for the course, students write 4-5 essays that make or analyze arguments; at least 3 papers must incorporate sources from assigned reading or research, and at least 1 paper must involve library research. In addition to class time, students are expected to study or prepare work for a minimum of 2 hours outside of class per hour in class. As a 4-unit class, Written Communication I requires approximately 8 hours of out-of-class work per week (USF Dept. of Rhetoric and

Language, 2013).

Placement into Written Communication I is based predominantly on SAT and ACT scores. Students need to achieve a grade of C- or above to continue on to the next course in the sequence, which can be Written Communication II or a Writing in Discipline (WID) course in their major.

### **Research Population/Co-Researchers**

The co-researchers for this study were incoming students who fit the criteria of *first-time freshman* (according to the National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). This definition included not having attended a four-year university prior to enrollment at USF (attendance at a community, city or junior college was considered acceptable, as long as the student was categorized as a first-time freshman by NCES.) Information about the study was shared with some of the students participating in the Forward/Bridge program offered at the university prior to the start of the semester and with all of the students enrolled in the university researcher's Written Communication I course for the Fall 2013 semester. The students who remained in the course after being notified about the integration of the study into course formed the research team. The findings of this study include the voices of students from marginalized populations, including students of color, international students, and first generation to college students. This report represents the variety of viewpoints and experiences among the co-researchers.

The students enrolled at USF in 2013 came from "48 states and 70 other countries" (USF, 2013). In fact, the university recently experienced a rise in enrollment of international students, primarily from China; however, most of these students enter the writing sequence via the English as a Second Language courses rather than placing

directly into the Written Communication I/Written Communication II core. The diversity of freshmen in Fall 2013 was as follows (using the categorizations provided by the university): Caucasian (26%), Asian-American (23%), Latino/Hispanic (21%), International (20%), African-American (4%), Native American (2%), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (1%)(USF, 2013).

Students who chose to participate completed a survey/questionnaire to acquire more specific demographic information and education experience. All of the 20 student co-researchers were first-time college freshmen between ages of 17-19. The majority identified as Latino/Hispanic (eight students) or Caucasian (eight students). Seven were among the first generation in their family to attend college. The ratio of men to women was 11:9, which differed from the university for first-time freshmen (64% females)(Ziajka, 2014). All but one reported taking four years of high school English courses, all but six reported being Christian or Catholic (although one claimed to be “lapsed”), fourteen went to public high schools (but one spent two years in private, and two years in public), fifteen were from California, two were from other states (Pennsylvania and Idaho), two were international (Korea and Malaysia), and one was from a US territory (Puerto Rico).

Table 1:

*Information About Student Co-Researchers*

Name	Gender	Age	Diversity*	Hometown	High school	First Gen to College
Aedan	M	19	NA	Manhattan Beach, CA	Public	Yes
Ariana	F	18	Latino/Hispanic	Downey, CA	Public	Yes

Blaze	M	18	Caucasian	Santa Cruz, CA	Public	No
Brian	M	18	Latino/Hispanic	San Juan, Puerto Rico	Private	No
Brittany	F	18	Latino/Hispanic	Berwyn, PA	Public	No
Cody	M	18	Caucasian	Coeur D'Alene, ID	Public	No
Danielle	F	18	Latino/Hispanic	Granada Hills, CA	Public, 2 Yrs; Private 2 Yrs	No
Diego	M	18	Latino/Hispanic	Hayward, CA	Public	Yes
Feneyda	F	18	Latino/Hispanic	Glendale, CA	Public	No
Grant	M	18	Caucasian	Burlingame, CA	Public	No
Harry	M	18	International/ Caucasian	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	Private (Singapore)	No
Jordan	M	18	Asian American	Roseville, CA	Public	No
Kynan	M	18	Caucasian	Studio City, CA	Private	No
Natalie	F	18	Caucasian	Orangevale, CA	Public	No
Neil	M	19	Pacific Islander	South San Francisco, CA	Private	No
Pete	M	18	Latino/Hispanic	Sacramento, CA	Public	Yes
Shadera	F	17	Caucasian	Newcastle, CA	Public	Yes
Shannon	F	18	Caucasian	San Mateo, CA	Private	Yes

Sonia	F	18	Latino/Hispanic	Fremont, CA	Public	Yes
Thai	F	18	International/ Asian	Seoul, Korea	Private (Vallejo, CA)	No

*\*'Diversity' is the university's term for race/ethnicity identification and these responses were based on the categories provided by the university. More detail regarding self-identification is provided in the profiles (below).*

### **Student Co-Researcher Profiles**

**Aedan.** Although Aedan stated in the survey that he is an international student, this turned out to be an error in filling out the survey. His hometown is Manhattan Beach, CA. He is first generation to college, came in with some AP courses, but fell behind in class due to sleep loss. Aedan attributed the loss of sleep to socializing and juggling some personal identity issues. His falling asleep (and behind) in class came to a head mid-semester, with Aedan exhibiting symptoms of breaking down (tears, shaky hands, trouble forming thoughts). This experience prompted Aedan to gain control of his schedule and take better care of himself, which was a work-in-progress as the semester closed. Final research topic: Sleep deprivation awareness for students.

**Ariana.** Soft spoken, first generation to college, Mexican-American, and a volunteer in her first semester for America Reads, Ariana expressed that she felt underprepared by her high school for the demands of college. Ariana regularly acknowledged the importance of nonacademic or soft skills to be successful and hoped that high schools would emphasize these more in the future. Final research topic: Addressing the expectation gap between high school and college (including development of soft skills and setting clear expectations).

**Blaze.** White, male, and from Santa Cruz, CA, Blaze expressed that writing was a challenge for him, as was living with his international student roommate (who came from China). He pointed out that he had reached out to his roommate prior to coming to campus, but when he arrived at USF, his roommate had already been on campus for a week and formed a clique with other international students. This experience flavored Blaze's letter and final essay assignments. Blaze's strength was in-class participation and asking questions of others, especially when earning extra credit was involved. Final research topic: Limiting international student enrollment to better support the international student population and build community among the entire student body.

**Brian.** Latino, male, and from Puerto Rico, Brian was initially hesitant when coming to campus, due to how he felt the US mainland students might perceive students from US territories. He also considered whether a school like UC Berkeley, which had more typical US college activities like football games, was what he wanted in a college, but decided to stay at USF for the small size of classes and closer connection with professors. He shared his interest in film/media with at least two professors and took on two production roles in his first semester as a result. Brian was active in the journaling part of the study, and occasionally brought his journal topics to the discussion board. Final research topic: Adjusting attitude to manage expectations and change; not letting either become an obstacle.

**Brittany.** Brittany was a great participant, a diligent student, and supportive of peers. She hailed from suburban Pennsylvania and was proud of her multiracial heritage as it gave her insight into many perspectives. She learned in high school how to balance schoolwork with a job and to keep a schedule for time management. These skills

provided a foundation for her college transition and enabled her to help others in the process. As her writing developed, she was willing to keep revising and was the only student to send the letter assignment to the department that could address the issue (better support for international students; since her roommate was from China, she witnessed the challenges firsthand). Final research topic: Students taking an active role in the transition to college writing (including time management, reading and writing more, and avoiding the five-paragraph format and procrastinating).

**Cody.** White, male, and baseball player from Idaho, with a great sense of humor. Despite having to attend early morning practice before 8 a.m. class, Cody was a good class participant and kept discussions light. Cody participated in Project Success, a program that supported student-athletes in managing their academic responsibilities, and his letter asked for this program to be available to all students. He stealthily kept a folder of pictures of classmates, primarily his teammates, who fell asleep in class, which contributed to his final project presentation. Final research topic: Sleep deprivation awareness and the role that sleep plays in student success.

**Danielle.** Self-identified as an “Americanized” Latina from Granada Hills, CA, Danielle experienced homesickness and considered transferring schools as the semester began, but changed her mind as she formed a close bond with her roommate (Shadera). She utilized her Mom as a proofreader for her papers before submitting in classes. Danielle did not speak up often in class or participate regularly on the discussion board, but after asking if she could research homesickness for her final project, she participated more. Her final reflection showed she gained a lot from being part of the study by finding that others were also reaching out to family and friends for academic support. Final

research topic: Homesickness support for students.

**Diego.** Big thinker, Latino, male from Hayward, CA. Diego was first generation to college and participated in the Muscat Scholars Program (a forward/bridge program offered the week prior to classes starting). He thought deeply about every topic on his plate and sometimes had to scale back his project ideas to fit the timeframe provided. Diego could be counted on to participate, but he fell off his course a bit mid-semester when he recognized he was experiencing the time management challenges we were researching. Final research topic: College success course to promote critical thinking, creativity and curiosity among students.

**Feneyda.** Self-identified as Latina and Asian American from Glendale, CA, who felt reasonably prepared for college-level writing despite stating on the survey that she “rarely” had writing assignments and “never” had class discussion around writing assignments in high school. While usually quiet in class, Feneyda was a steady participant on the journal and discussion board and provided many quotable gems from her posts and her papers for this report, demonstrating that her enjoyment of writing for personal goals (again from the survey) translated to a strong writer’s voice in an academic context. Final research topic: College students taking charge and meeting expectations of college (including mentality, reading and writing, study habits and social aspects).

**Grant.** White, male, baseball player from Burlingame, CA, who declared in the survey that he did not like to write. Grant was a regular participant on the journal and discussion board. Baseball was priority for him and his journal entries often updated his progress in practice and making the team, including the week the coaches gave him a glove (a sign of respect and confidence in his ability). Grant was often sleepy from early

morning practice and sometimes has to be stirred mid-class. Final research topic:

Providing all students with the academic support currently available to student athletes.

**Harry.** White, male from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, who attended high school in Singapore with predominantly American classmates. Harry was quiet in class but a regular contributor to the journal and discussion board. He also provided the first “ah ha” moment of the semester by linking his time management challenges to his familiarity with writing (and planning time around) the five-paragraph format. Harry’s writing personality was infused with a light-hearted tone, and he showed a lot of insight into how this study was helping him personally. His presentation was a rap performed by a friend and fellow first-time freshman. Final research topic: Managing stress through exercise.

**Jordan.** Male, Asian American (Filipino) from Roseville, CA, who participated in an Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) college readiness program in high school. When declaring on the survey that he did not like to write, he added, “I was never very good.” Yet he felt pretty prepared for college writing assignments. Jordan was one of the youngest in the class. His participation on the discussion board and journals was spotty at first but grew steadily as semester progressed (in part due to a technology issue). However, he willingly spoke up in class and demonstrated a good sense of humor, especially in his final presentation, in which he had a discussion with himself (in video form) around time management. Final research topic: Time management.

**Kynan.** White, male, baseball player from Studio City, CA., who attended high school in Sherman Oaks at what he called “the classic movie high school.” Kynan talked more to his potential teammates at the back of the room than to the class as a whole, but had a good sense of humor and upbeat demeanor despite attending morning practices

before class. He stated that writing assignments were rare in high school but he did have some Advanced Placement (AP) courses and felt well-prepared for college-level writing. He liked to write for personal goals, but not academically. Kynan surprised me by praising the peer workshopping we did in class and choosing a writing-related topic for his research project. Final research topic: Implementing peer review in all courses across the curriculum.

**Natalie.** Female, self-identified as white and Hispanic. From Orangevale, CA, and attended a small public high school in Sacramento. Natalie's greatest challenge of the semester was balancing her job at the nearby City Target with her college workload (and having some fun in the process). Although she asked her employer to schedule her for about 15 hours per week, she was often scheduled to work double that, and the strain was apparent. She found writing about this topic challenging alongside living it. For her project, she conducted a survey and found that all 46 freshmen who responded were either working or looking for work, showing that the population at this private university may not be as affluent as some may assume. Final research topic: Support for students around finding and balancing a job with school.

**Neil.** Male, Pacific Islander from South San Francisco, CA. Neil attended high school in Pacifica, CA., came to college with some AP courses and felt pretty prepared for college-level writing, though he preferred if writing wasn't a big part of his future career. Neil focused a great deal on environment for studying and how to be efficient in getting work done. After trying multiple locations, he chose the library as his favorite work spot, where he could spread all of his books across an entire table. Although his journal and discussion board participation were spotty, Neil did speak up in class

regularly, despite appearing like this was not his comfort zone. Final research topic: Tips on managing workload (including study habits, distractions and sleep deprivation issues).

**Pete.** Male, self identified “Mexipino” from Sacramento, CA., who was in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program in his high school. Pete believed that IB helped prepare him for the writing workload of college, but not necessarily the self-management aspects and attitude needed. Although he enjoyed and looked forward to writing tasks, he saw writing as only “somewhat important” for his future and gave it a 2 out of 5 on the survey in importance. Pete was out for part of the semester due to illness, and participation on the discussion board and journals dropped during this time. Final research topic: Whether IB/AP programs help prepare students for college (including benefits of seminar style courses).

**Shadera.** White, female, from Newcastle, CA., who was first generation in her family to attend college. Although one of the youngest among the co-researchers, Shadera was a solid participant in class and on the discussion board/journals. She came to college with some AP courses under her belt and seemed to enjoy writing more often than not in most contexts. She quickly recognized the stress she and other freshmen were experiencing in this transition to college period and made it her mission to research the effects and management of this stress. Final research topic: Stress awareness and management for students.

**Shannon.** White, female from San Mateo, CA, who attended an all-girls Catholic high school and was first generation in her family to attend college (but had an older sister who attended college before her). Shannon came into college with some AP courses, wrote often in high school and enjoyed writing overall, rating herself a 4 out of 5

in preparation for college-level writing. Shannon was aware, alert, and quiet in class, but did not miss a week in posting on the journals and provided many great quotes for this report. Final research topic: Students taking responsibility to change mentality to meet college expectations (including time management, stress management, and forming better habits).

**Sonia.** Female, Latina, from Fremont, CA, who was first generation to college and came in with some AP courses and participation in the AVID College Readiness System. Sonia expressed that she wrote often in high school and enjoyed writing, but believed that her peers wrote better than she did. She also did not use technology as regularly in high school as required in college. She experienced a personal challenge that nearly derailed her this semester when her AVID mentor was arrested for sexual assault of students, including a close friend. This event caused her to question her emotional capacity, which led to her final project. Final research topic: Role of Emotional Intelligence (EQ) in college success.

**Thai.** Female, who identified as an international student from Korea, and completed high school in Vallejo, CA. Thai did not participate often in class discussion, or in the journal or discussion board; however, she spoke up in workshop groups and volunteered to take notes whenever we had in-class discussions about the study logistics. Notetaking was her primary contribution. She also expressed in the survey that she wrote occasionally in high school and enjoyed writing for personal goals, but she felt “not so much prepared” for college writing, rating herself a 2 out of 5 in preparedness. Final research topic: Reading and writing connection and importance of practicing both for college success.

The student co-researchers were involved in decision making for every phase of the PAR process. In this study, they are referenced by first name only (as no one requested a pseudonym) to provide anonymity. However, the students recognized the name of the university would appear in this report, so true anonymity was unfeasible and not requested by the co-researchers.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

A combination of data collection sources were used in this study, including a survey, ongoing journal entries for both the student co-researchers and the university researcher, a group discussion board, paired interviews, and multiple course assignments, including an action plan project. In addition, every major assignment aimed to build community and further discussion or exploration of the challenges the students encountered in their transition into the college discourse community.

The data collection period took place over one college semester (the students' first at USF): from August to December 2013. As the university researcher, I announced during the first and second class meetings that the course would be integrated with the study and explained the unique opportunity to be part of the research process in their first semester of college. The students who decided to continue in this class, rather than transfer to another section, formed the research team. Although the research team met twice per week in a classroom setting, the bulk of the data collection was done in written form in order to promote the ongoing writing development of the student co-researchers and achieve the learning outcomes for the course. Through the PAR process, the research team worked together to determine how to best utilize the data source options to explore the identified challenges faced by first-time freshmen in their transition to college and

college-level writing. The components of this study and data collection methods were utilized as follows.

**Informed consent.** Prior to the start of data collection, written permission for participation was obtained from each student co-researcher who was 18 years or older. For the two researchers who were 17 years at the start of the study, parental consent was obtained in addition to the student's consent using an online signature process. While participation in the study had no bearing on final grading for the course, all of the course assignments were interlinked with the study, so completing the class meant completing the study requirements. The students were notified both verbally and through the consent form that they could opt out of their work being included in the study at any time during the semester.

**Survey.** The survey (adapted from Addison & McGee, 2010) obtained demographic information and educational background information from the co-researchers, as well as determined that *all* of the student research team members met the definition of *first-time freshman*. This information also showed the diverse population the research team represented, including many of the target populations for university outreach and forward/bridge programs, such as first-generation to college and students from marginalized populations. These details helped the team reflect on who was included and who was missing in the research process.

**Journals.** The research team committed to posting an individual journal entry once per week. These entries were shared in a format that I could see, but the other student co-researchers could not. As instructor and co-researcher, I commented on every journal entry to acknowledge the student's contribution and foster further development of

ideas. The level to which I encouraged the students to share their thoughts or observations on the discussion board shifted throughout the semester. At the onset, I was reserved in my approach and suggested when an idea may be something others are also observing. As the semester progressed, the journal interactions became more individualized with some having multiple back and forth messages. In these exchanges, I moved toward supporting/academic coaching rather than just questioning for deeper exploration of an idea. I also reached out via email to students who tended not to post frequently in the journals. In addition, I kept my own journal for field notes and reflections on the research process. When relevant, I shared these ideas with the rest of the research team to promote further discussion or clarify an assignment.

**Discussion board.** This online forum in Blackboard was the primary source of class discussions around the research topics. The research team decided to post once or twice per week in response to questions or comments posed by discussion leaders for that week. Initially, the discussion lead role was filled by teams of four to five students, who also worked together as workshop groups for the in-class peer review process. After each of the four class workshop groups had a turn to lead discussion, this process was revised by the research team.

The discussion was then led by teams of two, who worked together in the paired interviews, with each team posing a question or comment. This change increased ownership on the part of the student co-researchers in facilitating discussion around the skills, habits and behaviors they were exploring each week. This also created more discussion on the discussion board as at least two questions were being posted weekly and many co-researchers responded to both questions. In addition, this space allowed the

research team to make requests for insight on the specific topic of their final research projects and led to more interconnection among findings. We also posted the final drafts of the letter assignments and final reflections for reference on this discussion board.

**Interviews/Dialogues.** To deepen understanding of the student perspective, the student co-researchers conducted, digitally recorded and transcribed one-on-one interviews with each other. These interviews were conducted as student-to-student dialogues to foster the PAR approach of the study. As part of the course, the student co-researchers were assigned a workshop group of approximately four to five members. To provide an opportunity to experience a different viewpoint, the co-researchers chose a partner from a different workshop group. These interviews became formalized dialogues about the research questions, observations, and themes found up to this point, as well as how suggestions may have been applied in the student's own transition process. These conversations occurred on-campus at a designated date, lasted approximately one hour, and provided insight into each co-researcher's individual impressions and experiences.

The interviewing process involved some training for the student co-researchers on creating, recording and transcribing the dialogues. These efforts were supported by readings assigned in class to create a shared knowledge base among co-researchers and efforts to establish an environment of comfort and trust, as well a sense of respect for each other's work and perspective. Although the actual questions asked during the dialogues were prepared by the individual co-researchers in accordance with the ongoing conversation on the course discussion board, I provided a list of potential interview questions to spur thinking around discussion topics. This question list included:

- What makes students feel prepared for college-level writing?

- What skills, behaviors and habits do first-time college students feel make up the college writing discourse community?
- What skills, behaviors and habits do first-time college students employ as they settle into their new discourse community and tackle the writing demands of their first semester of college?
- Which of these skills, behaviors and habits do first-time college students perceive as academic and/or non-academic?
- What action(s) could be taken in the future to support first-time college students in the transition to the college discourse community?
- In what ways did your high school experience prepare you for college writing success? Were some activities more helpful than others? What was missing?
- How have resources such as teachers/tutors/peers supported you in your writing efforts? What do you wish you had access to prior to college, or even in college?
- What challenges have you seen other first-time freshman encounter in tackling writing and reading assignments? What strategies seem to work toward addressing these issues?
- What activities do you like to participate in outside of school? How do these contribute to your school experience? How do they help you approach your work or “read” situations?

After the interviews, the dialogue partners shared responsibility in transcribing the dialogue. They also identified themes in the transcripts of their dialogues, which were used in triangulating data and choosing a final research topic. Although I received copies of all dialogue recordings and transcripts, the co-researchers decided not to share the full

transcripts among the research team. Instead, they opted to reference the transcripts and provide specific quotes or findings when they facilitated the discussion board conversation or as other co-researchers sought support in their individual research topics.

**Research essay.** This assignment became the primary action-based project for the semester. Based on the interview dialogues, and other data produced up to this stage in the semester, the research team members identified themes and chose topics to explore in depth. Each co-researcher produced his/her own report with research from existing literature found in the library databases, interviews with other first-time freshmen, and in some cases, polls/surveys conducted on their topic. They then made recommendations for improving the transition to college and college writing with supporting evidence from their own research and experiences. These findings were shared with the rest of the research team through the Research Presentation assignment and reflected upon in the Final Reflection assignment.

**Research presentation.** Each research team member summed up the key findings from the research essays into a five-minute presentation for sharing during class time. As part of the assignment, the students produced complete manuscripts of their planned speeches. The co-researchers chose to present in a variety of creative ways—including use of PowerPoint, songs, humor and videos—to connect their topic with the audience of co-researchers.

**Other relevant assignments.** In preparation for selecting topics to explore in depth and as part of the requirements of the course, the student co-researchers prepared two other major essay assignments, including a profile of an individual they deemed to be a truth-teller and a letter challenging an existing policy or procedure on campus. The truth-

teller assignment served to build relationships among the co-researchers, as our meeting times were limited, the choice of person to highlight and the reasons provided helped us get to know each other. We also conducted small group workshops to discuss these papers (as well as the other major essay assignments) in a more intimate setting. The letter assignment allowed students to explore an issue and suggest an action. This served both as practice for their final research essays and an opportunity to reflect upon the potential action suggested. These letters were posted to the class discussion board, referenced in discussions throughout the semester, and used for triangulating data in choosing their individual research essay topics.

**Final reflection.** This brief paper allowed the student co-researchers to reflect on the PAR process and conducting this study in their first semester of college.

**In-class work.** Class time was primarily devoted to setting expectations, establishing the parameters of PAR, selecting how each component of the data collection process would be used, addressing questions about the process, and training for the interview/dialogues, as well as covering the aspects of writing required in the Core Curriculum. These skills included: critical reading, notetaking, summarizing, providing feedback, revising, library research, integrating quotes/paraphrases, citing sources, punctuation, style and argumentation.

**In-class points.** Points raised during class time that were relevant to the data collection process were noted and revisited via the discussion board. In addition, for in-class discussions regarding the research study, a co-researcher assumed the role of notetaker and provided the university researcher with the notes taken.

**Email correspondence.** Any relevant email correspondence between the

instructor/university-researcher and student co-researchers was included in the data collection process. However, most study-related correspondence occurred via the discussion board, journals or in-class discussions.

### **Integration of PAR into Class Structure**

Because this study was woven into an existing class structure, each assignment and interaction aimed to serve the purposes of the Participatory Action Research approach. PAR is a cyclical research practice that allows the researchers to identify issues (Phase 1), explore potential causes and research options for a solution (Phase 2), suggest an action (Phase 3), then reflect upon that action to once again identify changes to be made (repeating each Phase as appropriate). To model this in the class structure, the research team exercised two mini-cycles of the PAR approach. Typically PAR would be practiced over a longer period of time and allow for more depth at each stage of development.

What follows is a timeline of how the research team executed two rounds of the three phases PAR alongside the course requirements.

Table 2:

*Research and Course Timeline*

Month	Phase of PAR	Study-related	Writing course-related*
August	1	Introduced study, convened research team, initiated conversation around research problem, defined as a team what “success” in college means, settled on exploring the transition to college and the role that writing plays in the process.	Conducted a writing diagnostic, defined academic terms (including concept of “voice”), practiced summarizing and assigned first major essay: Truth-teller assignment.
September	1	Obtained consent, conducted survey, organized survey results, introduced phases of PAR, established protocol for journal/discussion board posts, set schedule for discussion leading, began group facilitation of discussion board, and initiated commenting on challenges experienced by first-time freshmen as observed by research team.	Small group workshop of Truth-teller essay assignment, revision, reviewed reading critically, audience/intention, formulating thesis statements and using rhetorical appeals.
September	2	Continued conversation of research problems and collecting data (journals/discussion board), chose research questions for letter assignment, managed stress about topic ideas via email. Introduced interview/dialoguing preparation.	Assigned second essay: Policy letter. Encouraged students to look to discussion board for topic ideas. Reviewed supporting and countering claims, researching information on campus, argument strategy, appropriate tone, faulty logic, citation format.

October	3	Proposed action/suggestion in letter assignment. Final drafts of the letters posted to discussion board. Dialogues conducted and recorded.	Small group workshop of letter assignment, revised letter for potential submission to person or group who can make suggested change. (*Note: Only one student chose to send this letter.)
October	1	Reflected on letter action ideas, identified connection with ongoing conversation/observations on discussion board, and with dialogues. Consider role of writing in transition to college.	Assigned Research Essay, provided transcribing hints, discussed library research basics, quoting vs. paraphrasing, responding vs. reflecting, formulating a proposal, and annotated bibliographies. Read John Taylor Gatto's "Against School" and related to experience.
October	2	Discussed triangulating data, identified emerging themes from dialogues and other data collection methods, chose research topic to explore in-depth.	Discussed transferrable skills, providing relevant evidence (from library research, interviews, polls/surveys, etc.), arranging arguments, addressing opposing viewpoints, conclusions. Also visited library for research day.
November	3	Proposed action and plan to execute action proposed in Research essay as result of individual research, with support from co-researchers via class discussion board and workshopping. Also considered role of academic and non-academic skills. Presented findings/suggestions to rest of research team.	Small group workshop for Research essay, included editing/revising and addressing audience who can make change for suggested action. Assigned Final Presentation of research essay. Discussed options for presenting to co-researchers, using multiple literacies. Assigned article about Karp & Bork (2012) study. Workshopped presentation plans.

December	3/1	Final Reflections on research topics and process, shared with research team via discussion board.	Assigned Final Reflections papers and posted final discussion board post.
----------	-----	---	---

*\*Additional reading and writing was assigned, but not listed here. These assignments served to scaffold toward the major essays and support the study procedures.*

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Data analysis played an essential role in the PAR process and the ongoing development of the students as writers and co-researchers. Throughout the semester, the research team reflected on their definition of college success as sustainable and identified themes in the journal and discussion board entries, the dialogue transcripts, and the letter writing assignment. In this process, the research questions evolved from a basic level of college transition challenges, such as long lines in the cafeteria, to questions that reflected the transition into the academic discourse community, such as the role of nonacademic skills and writing in college success. The student co-researchers applied their metacognitive skills to assist in theme identification and naming to encourage praxis throughout the process. In addition, I reflected on the process throughout to maintain an approach to PAR that aligned with the theoretical framework concepts of critical pedagogy, *cariño*, New Literacy studies and student voice.

In creating a course that would encourage a PAR approach to meeting the learning outcomes and university requirements for Written Communication I, I aimed to embed the concepts from the theoretical framework into both the research and pedagogical designs. Each theoretical concept represented an aspect of what I wanted to make sure I kept in mind as the study progressed—a built-in reminder of what truly

mattered. This infusion of theory with practice allowed me to maintain a lens that reflected the theoretical framework as the students “lived” the process. For example, the students built upon their knowledge, while recognizing the value they offered each other in the study (critical pedagogy). We formed relationships that fostered an environment of trust and support (*cariño*) and honored each others’ voices (student voice), while I reached out individually to each student to provide customized support based on their personal challenges (*cariño*). Throughout the study, we also valued how the many different ideas around skills, habits and behaviors offered opportunities to share personal, cultural and other literacies that students developed in their home communities and in their pursuit of college, while identifying which skills, habits and behaviors helped students be successful in the transition to the academic discourse community (New Literacy studies).

Throughout the semester, the conceptual framework evolved as the co-researchers developed their research and analysis skills. In PAR, the data collection and analysis go hand-in-hand throughout the process. As the co-researchers questioned and investigated issues, they analyzed the research findings and considered options for addressing the issues. They then reflected on these suggested solutions to inform further investigation. In this process, the co-researchers recognized the wealth of knowledge they held in their experiences, both those funds of knowledge they brought with them to college and those they observed in fellow freshmen. Much like the *campesinos* who worked with Freire (1974) saw they too created culture, the co-researchers saw they created knowledge in the process of questioning the concept of schooling and “taking their education” (reading John Taylor Gatto’s “Against School,” 2003, for foundation). They recognized each other

as valuable resources and utilized these resources through dialoguing with each other, surveying/polling other freshmen, requesting insight on personal experiences on the discussion board, and then reflecting on this information in relation to their experiences and those of other first-time freshmen. They became observers of behavior, and reflective of how the existing structure of schooling may support these behaviors and how they fit into this structure as a student body and as individuals.

I supported these efforts by keeping the academic expectations high while recognizing the power dynamic inherent in the classroom structure, and the students' past experiences of working for the teacher in pursuit of a grade, rather than with the instructor and each other in the pursuit of knowledge. I aimed to foster an environment of inquiry, similar to the dialectic approach championed by Freire, throughout the study in which all ideas and analyses were valued in the process of finding potential solutions.

One key aspect of achieving this goal came in responding to student journal entries and commenting on the course discussion board. While honoring the knowledge the co-researchers brought to college, and supporting their efforts to adjust to the academic discourse community, I aimed to balance my role as instructor/co-researcher by not dominating conversations, encouraging student efforts to lead the discussions, and responding to requests for support. In a few cases, I reached out to students who appeared to be struggling with personal issues to demonstrate the caring community and relationship building between student and school, and pulled back as the student re-entered the ongoing class conversation. In addition, I encouraged students to consider their own positionality in the research process as well as their cultural experiences and their relationship with schooling prior to coming to college.

Through this lens of valuing experience, co-creation and team analysis, the co-researchers triangulated the data sources in the process of selecting a topic for further research, leading to the action suggested in their Research essays and shared in their Presentations. The presentations offered an opportunity for the students to use multiple literacies within an academic context to share their recommendations in the manner they felt would best connect with their audience. This approach further fostered student co-ownership of the research process and created a forum to share their recommendations for future action in their own voice and style. For the purposes of reporting these findings, I followed up the data collection process by analyzing and coding all of the final forms of the data sources for themes (Creswell, 2009), including the Research Essays and Presentations, Final Discussion Board posts, and Final Reflection papers.

In analyzing the student's findings, I again used the theoretical framework as a lens to summarize and isolate concepts identified by the students in their own words. I was fortunate that my efforts to embed these concepts throughout the research process made them inherent in the students' findings and reflections, making my job more about summarizing their ideas and noting the connections between themes they identified. The concepts of critical pedagogy, *cariño*, New Literacy studies and student voice are apparent in the co-researcher recommendations as the students used their inherent knowledge to reach beyond their own needs and use their experiences to teach others and call for action. The students also explicitly noted their own growth in this process in wording that reflected the theory behind the study, such as seeing their experiences as valid sources of data and providing value for future students, for example. The results of this analysis were thematically organized by me—the university researcher—and

presented under the categorizations using the students' terminology, which appear as headings and subheadings in Chapter IV (Findings) of this report.

### **Validity/Reliability**

Although I organized the Findings section of this report, I made a draft of the findings and chosen quotes available in read-only electronic format versions to all co-researchers via the discussion board for further input and fine-tuning. In addition, co-researchers were encouraged to ask questions at any stage of the study. The ultimate goal was that the student participants felt well represented and that educators who read the study would be able to apply the insights gained from hearing the student perspective. Educators across the curriculum will recognize the challenges and skills demonstrated by the study co-researchers in students with whom they work, and see ways to encourage their students to share their experience or increase their ability to adapt to college-level work. In addition, a third-party reader, who is an experienced researcher and a fellow composition instructor, assisted in validity checking and analyzing for researcher bias.

### **Ethical Considerations and Protection of Human Subjects**

While no study is risk-free, this study aimed to be consistently sensitive to the experience, perspective and protection of participants. Permission for this study was obtained from the University of San Francisco's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects prior to conducting data collection. The participant/co-researchers signed consent forms and are referenced by their first names only (as no pseudonyms were requested) to protect their anonymity. In addition, they were responsible for conducting their own interviews/dialogues, recording and transcribing

these conversations, and deciding which portions would be shared with the rest of the research team. While demographic information was included in the participant descriptions, the university chosen for the study has a diverse student body, so individual identities should be well concealed, but true anonymity was not feasible. After much consideration, it was decided that attempts to use an alias for the private university could be futile, given that the researcher has taught at this location for over ten years and any publication of this study would likely include the university in the byline.

Although the study was integrated into a course taught by the university researcher, students were given the option to participate in the class but not the study without penalty—all of the students chose to participate in the study. As a result, they enjoyed the benefits of support and the opportunity to share ideas and insights, as well as take ownership in part of the course.

### **Background of the University Researcher**

Conducting a study with first-time college freshmen involved recognizing not only what they brought to the research process, but also what I brought as the instructor and university researcher, as well as an educator and academic. Hailing from the Boston area in the height of busing, I developed a strong base of questioning race relations, socio-economic differences and the education systems to which I was exposed. Located 20 miles from downtown Boston, my hometown of Swampscott was a town of buses. From kindergarten through high school, the local school system participated in the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (Metco) program, which allowed parents from inner-city Boston to enter their child in a lottery for attending a suburban public school. The program was funded by the state and predated mandatory busing

(Massachusetts Dept. of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2010). The idea was to provide inner city kids an opportunity for better schooling, but the success of the program was debatable. For one, integration rarely extended beyond the classroom. Friends in Metco seldom came over to play or attended birthday parties—they were shipped in for school and shipped out to the rest of their lives.

In junior high, the Metco buses were joined by the buses from the other side of the tracks (literally, the commuter rail tracks cut through the southwest portion of town, and students who lived on the side further from school were offered busing.) Buses also came from nearby Nahant (a one mile square island connected to mainland Massachusetts by a sandbar), which combined junior and senior high programs with ours in response to Proposition 2½ (the Massachusetts equivalent to California's Prop 13).

As I adapted to junior high school, my awareness of disparate groups being thrown together came further into focus, along with the discrepancies in the tracking system, the frustration and subsequent failure of some teachers, and the ongoing fiscal issues of the local school system. These perceptions formed a foundation for my approach to education, as well as an appreciation for the people and programs that aimed to counter the status quo or found small successes along the way.

In high school, we were all told by the principal that we were starting “with a clean slate.” This wasn't exactly true. The expectation was that some of us would go to college and others would not, and many found that the decision of who fell into which category had already been made. Favoritism was blatant and rampant, as was sexism and a racial divide. Cliques aligned with the neighborhood where you lived, partially out of convenience and access, and partially around the expectation of where you would end up.

The Metco kids pretty much stuck together by high school. I rarely had classes with them, which could mean they had been tracked in a direction away from the top-tier colleges, or they had made choices to stay with peers—my suspicion was the former. In the process of surviving junior and senior high school, I witnessed the tracking protocol firsthand. For me, this manifested in being moved from the high honors level class (ranked “0”) to the second tier (“1”) in math and being told that it would have no effect on my other classes. I was assured that if the 1-level was not a good fit, I could move back to the 0-level. This proved not to be true. I was stuck in 1-level math, moved to 1-level science, despite excelling in that subject, and bored. So I began reading or writing stories during classes to keep myself entertained. After testing once or twice to see if I was paying attention to the Algebra lesson with *Siddhartha* open on my desk, and finding I answered correctly, the teachers left me alone. This also gave me time to watch what was going on around me.

I saw a flawed system. Even the privileged white middle class kids were tripping their way through the courses. Teachers were struggling under a faulty contract and some were long ago burned out and going through the motions. Some started the class by going over homework, then assigning new homework to be worked on for the rest of the period. My younger brother failed class after class in math, until in his senior year of high school he passed a basic math class to graduate. The structure of tracking and testing served its purpose of weeding us into categories: vocational and technical bound, community college bound, four-year college bound. Some students pushed against the grain and found their way into a different category, but this was rare. My experience with the tracking system imbedded a fear of what *could* happen if I wasn't careful and vigilant. I

knew we were a microcosm of the rest of the country's issues, but I needed to get out of the bubble of Swampscott, MA. I earned 13 varsity letters, joined numerous clubs, and held tight to a decent, but not great, academic record, and hoped that college would be different.

During my undergraduate years at New York University, I became acutely aware of race and privilege on a much larger scale, and how people could despise me for both. The realization that I was a walking statistic hit me hard on the first day I arrived in New York, so I aimed to push aside some of my shyer tendencies and make sure someone knew who I was and where I was last seen heading, just in case.

In college, I also encountered Jonathan Kozol (1991) while doing research for a children's television course. His reports on the *Savage Inequalities* experienced by underserved and marginalized students echoed what I was seeing as an intern for a live radio show geared toward 8-12 year olds. Part of my role involved visiting schools in all five boroughs of NYC. In the same week, I would meet one teacher, who struggled under a lack of supplies, resources or support to get her students to stand near their desks (because sitting at them was too monstrous of a goal to reach in one school year), then watch another teacher, along with her teaching assistant, paraprofessional staff, and parent volunteers, shuffle a class of the same aged students from the in-class computers to the in-room AV set up, with shelves of books and learning materials lining every wall of the classroom. The disparity between these two classrooms located only blocks from each other was shocking and infuriating. In our brief visits, we witnessed incredibly creative children at great risk of falling through the cracks of the perpetually challenged urban education system, and the best we could do, at that time in our limited role, was to

record their ideas and broadcast their voices on the local NPR carrier.

My interest in education issues was fully ignited by these experiences - so much so that I convinced a small team of fellow film students to create a documentary on the state of education in the United States. I wanted physical evidence to show then President Clinton. In my naiveté, I believed someone would listen. The people in power could not possibly be aware of the depths of disparity that existed. They just hadn't paid close enough attention to how bad the situation had gotten. But the plan to drive around the country to document the run down buildings, underserved students, devoted teachers, long walks, lack of resources, and overall disrepair in schools fell apart when the director (a recent graduate) had to file for bankruptcy. So I stayed at the radio station and doubled my Film/TV and Radio degree with Print Journalism. In my research for my J-school classes, I slowly realized those in power did know about the flaws in the system. This was a conscious choice to invest in some, and not in others—the cream would rise to top.

Moving to San Francisco, I aimed to work at *Mother Jones* and join the journalistic fight to shed light on the inequities and injustices in the world. I wanted to be an investigative reporter, but failed to secure the internship, and landed at a tech magazine instead. My eclectic resume unfolds from here. I went to graduate school for creative writing. I have researched, written and edited for print and online publications and advertisers, taught SAT prep, worked as an Academic Success Coach, and for the past decade have taught academic writing at the university-level. My desire to *do something* about all that I've witnessed has never subsided, but life kept getting in the way—dot com bubble bursting, terrorist attack, struggling to pay bills, accruing debt, paying down debt, buying home, having kids, all served to hold that push to get into the

fray at arm's length.

Entering the International and Multicultural Education (with a Human Rights Education Concentration) degree seemed like it would be that step, finally. I came into the program welcoming ideas and debate, and I had extensive experience playing devil's advocate and challenging why people say what they say. I had been asking since elementary school: why? I am a representative of those for whom the system was supposedly working—white, middle class, former suburbanite—and I could see holes and gaps in what I obtained from that system. I wasn't the only one compensating for these educational shortcomings, but I benefitted from access to resources to survive the system.

Today, I tend to read books about writing and education for fun, and for professional development. I try ideas out on the students who happen to enroll in my classes, just to see what they do or say. As a college professor, I feel that it is my duty to hold the bar high and to remind the students that it's within their reach. I believe they have capabilities that neither they nor I have begun to realize, and that they can use these capabilities (literacies) to succeed in college. Even more, I believe they should have a say in what they are going through.

Throughout my professional and personal experience, I have developed the belief that success in college is intricately tied to success in college-level writing. As an editor, I edited some atrocious articles written by truly brilliant web developers and graphic designers. Being able to write and communicate well is not a new goal for colleges, but the bar for writing has been raised in response to increasing demands for literacy in both written and oral communication in society—especially on the job front.

While Kozol (1991) has his critics, his book values the student perspective. He

frequently quotes the students who feel powerless and forgotten, and who know what is needed in their communities for them to succeed. Thinking back to my own schooling, even my experience straight through my doctoral program, I can taste the frustration of not being heard or having my insight or experience valued. Research shows that even elementary school children have potentially valuable insight that could inform education policy, pedagogy and curriculum, if only we choose to hear them. I witnessed this wisdom and creativity when I toured schools throughout New York City, and I see this in my own kindergartener today.

I recognize that conducting this study at a university where I work is not an ideal situation, given the power differential inherent in the student/professor relationship. To address this issue, I did my best to establish trust among study co-researchers and to create an environment that demonstrates authentic care and welcomes the student voice. As a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing, I recognize the importance of honing one's voice, which involves learning to unearth and share that voice with others. As an Academic Success coach, I worked in the trenches to bridge the student/professor gap and assist students in finding ways to communicate their needs with instructors and administrators at a for-profit art college. I have worked with students in the classroom and online for more than 15 years, as well as been a professional journalist and researcher. I take a lot of pride in getting the story "right" and in representing the individuals with whom I work in a sensitive and genuine manner. When the individual recognizes his or herself and feels I recorded the quotes accurately, I know I've succeeded at my job. In this study, I made every effort to attain the same level of participant/co-researcher satisfaction—and to finally *do something*.

## **CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS**

Throughout the research process, the student co-researchers identified many areas to explore. Due to the cyclical nature of Participatory Action Research, the students periodically revisited similar topics throughout the semester. Students began by observing their own habits and behaviors, as well as those of other first-time freshmen, identifying the challenges they encountered, and noting these in their journals. They took the same approach to identifying the skills and habits that seemed to make students successful in their transition to college and college-level writing. These journal entries provided a foundation for conversations on the discussion board, which led to selecting topics for further investigation in the letter assignment.

The letters had an action component by making a suggestion for change, but they were not mailed. Instead, the letters were shared with the co-researchers—both to show the research and to reflect upon the actions suggested. This data, along with more observations, initiated more journal entries and discussion board posts. The students also dialogued with a partner to further discuss the various challenges and successful techniques they encountered or observed.

At the midpoint of the semester, the students identified one topic area on which to deepen their research and compose their final essays and final presentation manuscripts, which contained their recommendations for further action to be shared with the university. These topics were selected by identifying and triangulating themes in the various data collection streams (i.e., the letters, journals, discussion board posts, and dialogues). Some students chose to research the same topic (or an aspect that evolved

from the topic) that they pursued for their letter assignments, while other students chose to pursue a topic that was new to them but had surfaced in their dialogues, the discussion board posts, or another student's letter project. Because the goal was to research topics that were relevant to their experience, some leeway was given to those who expressed a desire to investigate topics that were personally pressing to their transition into college and college-level writing, even if triangulation was not complete. The result was that these topics were found to connect to the other themes and topics being explored.

In this chapter, I include all the major themes that arose in the research that the students felt contributed to a successful transition to college and the role that writing played in this success. Because there were 21 co-researchers, including me, these findings are a compilation of the themes in the final versions of the student research. The findings reflect the insights expressed by the students during the limited timeframe of this study. To organize these themes, I created headings using the students' terminology to describe these concepts and chose relevant quotes from the student co-researchers to illustrate the subpoints. Some of the themes were featured topics for the final essays and presentations, such as time management and sleep deprivation; others appeared as supporting topics or issues in the final essays or presentations, such as the high school mentality; and still others appeared in their final discussion board posts or final reflections on the research process, such as how being a part of this study helped the students in their college transition. Where relevant, I also incorporated information from discussion board posts or journal entries to demonstrate the evolution of these themes in the spirit of Participatory Action Research.

These themes include:

- The importance of nonacademic or soft skills to college and future success;
- The concept that students must take responsibility/control/action toward Self Management (including managing time, sleep, stress and a job or sport);
- The fact that student-held expectations may not match the reality of college;
- The perception on the part of the students that high school did not fully prepare them for college;
- The concept of a high school versus a college mentality;
- The role of writing, reading and researching in college success;
- How being part of this study helped the co-researchers transition to the college academic discourse community (and achieve course goals).

This chapter also presents the recommendations for future action from the co-researchers and some reflections on this process from the instructor and university researcher perspective.

### **The Importance of Nonacademic or Soft Skills to College and Future Success**

A good GPA isn't the only thing you need in order to get a job, according to a number of studies, researchers believe that critical thinking, self-awareness, communication, diversity, citizenship, relationships and leadership are more important to future success in the real world than GPA's and graduation rates. (Grant, Presentation, 21 Nov 2013)

When discussing what makes students successful, the student co-researchers recognized early in the research process that *success* can be defined in many ways depending on who is doing the defining. For them, a successful transition into college meant more than merely surviving the first year. Being successful also did not mean maintaining a straight-A grade point average. Transitioning successfully meant having

the skills, habits, and behaviors to sustain in college throughout the first year and into the future. Aedan noted that the transition to college really takes two years, and the other co-researchers agreed that students are not considered successful if the methods they used to make it through the first year were not sustainable in the years to follow.

The particular skills, habits, and behaviors they highlighted as essential to a successful college transition spoke directly to the challenges they identified for first-time freshmen. They were also presented alongside the students' recommendations or suggestions for further action. In her final essay, Ariana called for more research around "soft skills" (Essay, 10 Nov 2013). Diego and Shannon both noted the need to foster critical thinking, creativity and curiosity in the typical high school experience, and Sonia added that many first-time freshmen needed more experience in "managing interpersonal relationships, setbacks, anxiety, impulses, homesickness, and other aspects of emotional intelligence" (Essay, 12 Nov 2013). These were among many other references in the discussion board, journals, essays and presentations to the types of skills characterized in the literature as non-academic, soft, intangible or non-cognitive and identified as valuable for college and career success.

While the co-researchers explored, identified and referenced the importance of non-academic skills throughout the research, dedicated discussion about which skills they characterized as academic, non-academic or both did not occur organically. To generate discussion directly around this topic, I, as the instructor and university researcher, assigned an online article about Karp and Bork's (2012) research with community college faculty, staff and students regarding "college readiness," in which they found that "certain

non-academic skills, behaviors and attitudes are equally germane to college success” (para. 2). The article served to initiate and focus discussion around which skills, habits and behaviors the students considered to be academic and/or non-academic, in comparison to Karp and Bork’s findings.

I then utilized the class discussion board and posed the final discussion board questions of the semester on November 25, 2013, which read:

1. What advice would you give to an incoming freshman about the skills, habits, behaviors (mentality/attitude) that will help them the most in the transition to college and college writing?

2. Of the skills, habits, behaviors, etc. that you listed--which could be considered academic, nonacademic, or both (be sure to explain)?

Linking these two questions together allowed the students to reflect immediately upon their advice and categorize the skills, habits and behaviors listed, rather than refer back to or be constrained by the topics they had chosen for the final projects, presentations or letters to make suggestions. These comments were combined with the suggestions posed in the final research essays and presentations in identifying this theme.

Many of the co-researchers saw their recommendations for future action as both academic and non-academic; however, some took the terms very literally (e.g., this involves homework, so it is academic, or this is social, so it is non-academic). For example, Blaze characterized having the attitude of “treating school as your job” as an academic skill because “you should be focusing on your academics as seriously as your job” (Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013). In addition, Aedan saw having an attitude of

“rolling with it” as non-academic, while Natalie categorized having an optimistic attitude as important to both academic and non-academic situations.

While some of the co-researchers did not ascertain a link between the academic work done in school and the skills needed for life after school, others recognized these skills as essential to future success. Neil, for example, did not see a place for the freewriting exercise done in class in his future career, so he categorized freewriting as “academic” (Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013), perhaps missing the point or potential value of freewriting as part of an ongoing writing process. In contrast, Cody expressed that attitude and being organized are both academic and non-academic and “easily transferable to real life” (Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013).

Despite the mixed interpretations of the terminology, the co-researchers frequently referenced these topics in their projects throughout the semester, demonstrating that the students recognized the role that all of these skills can play in the potential success of a first-time college freshmen. Ariana stated: “I now understand the importance of the non-academic skills and factors that can affect academic work” (Ariana). She added: “I think the fact that multiple people researched this topic and brought it up on the discussion board makes it a valid point that should be emphasized more.” Therefore, all of these skills could be considered valuable to support, encourage, foster, and perhaps even assess.

### **Students Must Take Responsibility/Control/Action Toward Self-Management**

There is a need for change when transitioning from the high school to collegiate level discourse community, and *students must take responsibility* for their own education to do so. (Shannon, Presentation, 19 Nov 2013)

This concept of self-management was also recurring and essential in the student transition to college and the academic discourse community. For first-time freshmen, self-management issues included organizing their time, need for sleep, and anxiety caused by both short and long term stressors, and expectations—both those brought with them to college and those placed upon them by peers, family, school faculty or staff, and society. What became apparent throughout the semester was the interrelatedness of these challenges. For example, “When combined with *procrastination* and/or *part-time jobs*, students often *study late at night*, causing them to suffer from *sleep deprivation* the next day” (Neil, Essay, 9 Nov 2013). The flow of these issues was not always so linear; however, students often mentioned issues involving workload, sleep and stress in conjunction with one another.

To demonstrate the student perspective on these areas, I have isolated these issues into subthemes, while showing how the student co-researchers acknowledged where they intersect. About half of the co-researchers spoke directly to methods they observed or applied for balancing college life in their final research projects, presentations and discussion board posts. These skills, habits and behaviors broke down into ways to manage their time, sleep, stress/anxiety, and job/finances or sport obligations.

### **Time Management**

From the first discussion board post question: “Do you find that you, or other freshmen you are observing, procrastinate writing paper and essays more than any other homework?” (Blaze, Discussion Board, 3 September 2013), time management became a regularly featured issue throughout the semester. The challenges included planning or

scheduling tasks, being organized, and finding an effective work environment. These issues were not exclusive to students who came in with writing or other academic challenges. In fact, Jordan (Essay, 12 Nov 2013) noted that “freshmen, especially those who were successful in high school with little effort, are susceptible to poor time management. Students who did not have to try very hard in high school to be high achieving were never taught how to deal with the challenging assignments and situations of college” (cited Balduf, 2009). Fenyda added: “High school students can procrastinate and put off studying until the last minute and still perform well on the test because all of the information on the test was explained in class” (Essay, 12 Nov 2013), but “procrastination is not your best friend in college” (Presentation, 19 Nov 2013).

Demonstrating or practicing good time management topped the list of necessary skills for nine of twenty co-researchers. Grant called time management: “The biggest skill an incoming freshman needs to succeed” (Grant, Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013). To manage tasks (such as assignments or other obligations), students saw being organized, having a planner/schedule/routine, breaking big tasks into manageable parts, taking breaks and avoiding procrastination as facets of good time management.

Forming a plan for task management was also seen as a key component to writing success. Both Diego and Brittany noted that making outlines and breaking projects into manageable chunks were the best approach to achieving good grades on written assignments. Brittany explained:

If students hope to write well, they should prepare in advance. They should make an outline so their assignment follows an easy-to-follow structure, fulfills the

requirements of the assignment, and gives them an opportunity to brainstorm ideas. ...Students should then spend some time each day working on the assignment. Sticking to a work schedule like this would be beneficial in the long run for students. Not only would they not have to worry about getting the assignment done on time, but allowing such time to write an essay will also lead to better grades. (Essay, 12 Nov 2013; cited Fritzsche et al, 2003)

While some students saw the root of time and task management issues as a lack of prioritizing work over other activities, others noted challenges in finding appropriate and effective spaces in which to work without distractions, such as dealing with roommates, socializing with friends, moderating noise, surfing the internet, playing online games, or even cleaning their rooms. Neil noted that the habits he developed in high school, where he studied in his room while “listening to music or watching television,” were no longer working for him “because college has much higher expectations” and required more time to get “quality work done” (Essay, 9 November 2013). Meeting the academic demands of college meant changing his habits and finding the right workspace for him.

The co-researchers lacked consensus on the optimum work environment. While some needed to work in silent spaces, others noted that many students listen to music or study in small groups. Multiple specific locations were considered, with the library being deemed better than the Student Center. Dorm rooms were predominantly not recommended, but some students tended to work there anyway out of convenience—not having to carry all work materials from one location to another. Others felt that designated quiet areas could also be distracting. Feneida shared that “normal study

environments such as the library are too quiet” (Discussion Board, 11 Nov 2013). This topic was one of many in which the students noted a need for trial-and-error or finding the method that works best for the individual.

In addition, while some of the co-researchers saw taking time to have fun as an important part of making school life sustainable, others noted how easily students became swayed toward choosing fun over getting work done. Jordan pointed out that “managing your time in college is hard. Especially at a school like USF, where there is so much to do on and off campus, it’s not very hard to understand why a lot of us would rather put off our schoolwork to do something more fun instead” (Presentation, 21 Nov 2013). Part of this debate covered differing views around procrastination. The majority of the co-researchers expressed that procrastination should be avoided; however, Shannon observed many students who chose to procrastinate and Brian stated that procrastination was not a “sin” in moderation.

Brian shared:

Even though I would like to study and complete my assignments sooner rather than later, there are people who can do these things better when they face that pressure of the incoming deadline; I’m one of them. (Discussion Board, 26 Sept 2013)

In order to manage their time and tasks, the co-researchers also recognized the importance of choosing their class schedule wisely. While “there is no one-size fits-all schedule” (Diego, Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013), students identified a need to be realistic in selecting course days/times that would support their endeavors. This

discussion also pointed to the importance of attending classes—to grasp course material, develop personal skills and build relationships with peers and professors (Grant, Essay, 12 Nov 2013).

Despite recognizing the risks inherent in procrastinating and the importance of time management, many of the co-researchers struggled throughout the semester with balancing their workload with the social aspects of school, as well as with other obligations such as a job. One concept they agreed upon was that, ultimately, managing their time was up to them: “Students cannot blame anyone but themselves for missing work, missing class and procrastination” (Feneyda, Presentation, 19 Nov 2013).

### **Sleep Management**

“The first thing likely to change is a student’s sleep schedule,” Cody reported. “Many of my classmates and I experience a lack of sleep through out the school week. We begin to nod off in class, leave homework unfinished and become distraught from our everyday actions” (Essay, 20 Oct 2013). The link between sleep and time management, as well as the potential stress and effect on health and academic progress, was apparent in the students’ conclusions. Jordan noted: “Two of the main causes of sleep deprivation are a result of poor time management: all-night studying (cramming) and interrupted eating and sleeping patterns” (Essay, 12 Nov 2013). Other factors the co-researchers found as leading to a loss of sleep included: academic, emotional, job and financial stress, as well as having a social life and alcohol use.

Aedan stated:

From personal observation and student interaction, just thinking about one’s sleep

loss is enough to trigger a downward spiral of wellness. And with only 4.4% of students (SIC) needs being fully met financially here at USF, many students working part time find themselves meeting the threshold for an undiagnosed sleep disorder. (Essay, 13 Nov 2013)

Although activities such as all-nighters were deemed “not sustainable” (Ariana, Discussion Board, 2 December 2013), many found themselves doing them and realizing the consequences later: “I pulled two all nighters studying for my bio midterm and I ended up being so tired that I made a lot of mistakes that I wouldn’t have made if I had a decent (SIC) amount of sleep” (Shadera, Discussion Board, 29 Sept 2013).

Aedan added that loss of sleep links to many health and cognitive issues, which he experienced firsthand. He stated:

Sleep deprivation simply isn’t sustainable behavior. I tried my hardest to prove this wrong my first semester, spending all nighters working on essays, assignments, and speeches. I simply cannot think effectively when operating sleep deprived. Both experts and my peers have carefully observed these associations, and acknowledge the links between sleep deprivation and mental health difficulties over time. (Essay, 13 Nov 2013)

Ariana, Aedan, Cody, Diego, Feneida, Jordan, Neil and Shadera all pointed to a lack of awareness among first-time freshmen and the negative effects of sleep deprivation. They observed this lack of awareness and the effects in themselves, their classmates, their roommates and their friends. Cody even used images of fellow classmates sleeping in various classes as a backdrop to his final presentation. The co-researchers also noted that efforts toward managing sleep were somewhat thwarted by the

many social avenues and exciting events offered across the campus and around the city. This challenge was closely linked to time management skills and to stress management, so many of the skills, habits and behaviors needed to address this issue were the same. Students who recognized the need for sleep tended to manage all other areas of their lives better than those who opted to skip sleep for doing work or being social. Jordan summed it up with: “Basically not getting enough sleep is really bad and super unhealthy, so you should try to manage your time better in order to get more sleep!” (Jordan, Presentation, 21 Nov 2013).

### **Stress/Anxiety Management**

The need to manage the causes and effects of stress and anxiety were also observed by the research team across the board. The co-researchers again linked this issue to time and sleep management: “Dealing with long nights, busy schedules, and trying to balance a social life in the midst of it all can lead to a lot of unwelcomed stress” (Harry, Essay, 12 Nov 2013). However, stress management encompassed challenges in balancing the academic workload with all others aspects of college life, including social life, job/finances, sports/club activities and personal challenges.

As Shadera explained:

The transition to college can be extremely stressful. Students have to undergo an incredible change in lifestyle and this change can have either a negative or positive impact on their overall health. ...Keeping the stressors under control can enhance a student’s college experience; however, many students find it difficult to cope with stress. (Essay, 11 Nov 2013)

Harry, Jordan and Shadera noted that stress can be healthy in moderation, but that the bulk of stress in college was not in moderation. Stressors could be short term, such as particular “assignments/papers,” or long term, like “pressure to do well in school” (Shadera, Essay, 11 Nov 2013).

Coping with personal challenges was an important area of focus for the co-researchers. This involved not only balancing stressful activities with “time to enjoy” (Aedan, Discussion Board, 2 December 2013), but also encountering unexpected hurdles in their transitions (such as identity issues, long distance relationships or break ups, the death or serious illness of a family member/friend, or arrest of a family member/friend).

Sonia shared:

After being informed that my AVID mentor was arrested for sexual assault my first semester as a freshman, I failed to turn in two written assignments in my rhetoric and anthropology class(es). After multiple attempts of completing my homework, I gave up. I wasn’t motivated and didn’t have the willingness or the adequate mental state to stay focused. (Essay, 10 Nov 2013)

She added that many freshmen have low emotional intelligence (EQ), which makes them less equipped to deal with the stress of personal challenges. This link to Emotional Intelligence (EQ) was also reflected in student emotional state, self-awareness, academic success, health and dropout rate (Sonia, Essay, 10 Nov 2013).

Danielle noted that homesickness could also lead to dropping out or at least transferring schools to be closer to home. She stated, “The majority of first time college students are susceptible to this due to leaving their familiar lifestyles and entering a new environment” (Danielle, Essay, 12 Nov 2013).

Aedan, Cody, Danielle, Harry, and Shadera all noted that students looking to manage stress or cope with challenging situations may self-medicate by using or abusing drugs or alcohol. The social aspect of substance abuse was also a factor in this choice, but the negative consequences, such as loss of sleep or drop in class attendance, were also apparent: “My peers and I have noticed when students abuse substances, they’re more likely to skip a few classes” (Aedan, Essay, 13 Nov 2013).

In contrast, successful stress management involved skills and habits that allowed students to balance their academic workload with their social lives, jobs requirements, obligations to others, and personal challenges. The co-researchers noted many methods for reducing stress that were supported by the university, including physical activities, social activities and meditation. Harry offered that “students often forget one of the best—and most physically and mentally beneficial—methods to eliminating stress: exercise,” which improves overall performance, as well providing a “natural high” (Essay, 12 Nov 2013).

Similar to the habit of taking breaks for time management, making time for social activities was seen as an important part of being successful academically and reducing stress. Natalie, who balanced a job alongside school, saw having fun as “in part also academic in that it will affect how you can cope with all the studying you have to do and not get overwhelmed” (Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013).

However, when addressing personal challenges, such as homesickness, the co-researchers noted a need for coping mechanisms.

Shadera explained the following:

Learning these coping mechanisms can be crucial for freshmen in their transition to college. Not only does it benefit them for their overall stress, but it can also provide them with an opportunity to excel in their classes and perform at their very best. (Essay, 11 Nov 2013)

In her essay, Shadera listed potential coping mechanisms as including listening to music, sleeping, social interaction, relaxing, getting support from friends/faculty/family, web surfing, social networking, exercising, and other leisure activities and programs offered by the university (Essay, 11 Nov 2013; cited Bland et al., 2012).

For homesickness, in particular, the potential solution lay entirely in the student's ability to branch out and meet others. Danielle interviewed a freshman nursing major, Jen, who experienced a rough start to her semester due to homesickness and considered transferring schools. This sentiment changed when she made some friends. Jen said, "It made me not miss home anymore or the friends I left behind. Just being a part of a community and having their support really helped me" (cited in Danielle, Essay, 12 Nov 2013). Danielle also expressed she experienced homesickness at the start of the semester and, despite seeing a flyer for a homesickness support group, opted not to attend this campus event for help. She noted that her turning point came as she befriended her roommate, and her own desire to transfer schools to be closer to home waned.

### **Job/Finances or Sport Management**

Financial stressors were shared by both native US and international students. Natalie was one of the co-researchers who focused on the challenge of juggling academics, social life and money issues. She reported that, "even with all the [financial] aid students receive, there may still be a gap that needs to be filled by students" (Essay,

30 Oct 2013). To make ends meet or stave off future debt, many students seek work; however, finding a job was also a challenge. Natalie asked 46 freshmen “to place themselves into one of four categories...23.9% of the students said they have jobs on campus and 30.4% said they work off campus. The remaining 45.7% said they are not working but they would like to. None of the students said they do not want to work” (Essay, 30 Oct 2013). Her survey showed that many of the students who seek employment either “can’t get it or possibly don’t know how to get it” (Natalie, Presentation, 19 Nov 2013). On-campus jobs, via federal work-study, had limitations that prevented freshmen from finding work. The university also limited the hours that students can work to 20 hours per week, but these restrictions did not apply to jobs found off campus. Many of the students who worked off campus were being over-scheduled at their jobs, increasing stress as they balanced work and school.

Natalie experienced this issue firsthand. She shared:

When I applied (to an off-campus job) I requested to work 15 hours a week with a maximum of 20 hours. So far I have been given as few as 24 hours and as much as 34 hours of work a week. ...While I enjoy earning more money than I would otherwise, working more hours then (SIC) I am going to class has been hard to manage. (Natalie, Essay, 30 Oct 2013)

Similar to holding a job were the students who balanced school with the responsibilities of representing a university sports team (or other club activity). In particular, student-athletes were highlighted, as their commitment to their team involved long hours and was tied to their financial scholarships. Cody, Grant and Kynan represented the student-athlete perspective. Grant noted that, although NCAA rules held a

time requirement for student-athletes of 20 hours per week, the actual time spent on and off the field (including practices, games, and required study halls and academic advising) was closer to 35 hours per week (Essay, 12 Nov 2013). These scheduling demands affected class attendance, in fact, “A survey showed that only 5% of the [baseball] team (40 players) attended every class in the month of October and only 45% of the team attended all of their classes in the week of 10/21” (Grant, Essay, 12 Nov 2013).

Surprisingly, these athletes saw little effect to their grades due to multi-level accountability to the school, the team and themselves, and support systems such as study halls, progress reports, academic advisors, tutoring and grade requirements to play their sport (Grant, Essay, 12 Nov 2013). Unlike the average first-time freshmen, some of the student-athletes did “have someone on their backs making sure they succeed” (Grant, Essay, 12 Nov 2013). However, this constant structure of “extra help” enabled student-athletes “to miss a few extra classes without falling behind” (Grant, Presentation, 21 Nov 2013), which could lead to the belief that attending class may not be necessary for success in college. (Note: Grant recognized this distinction between the support he was receiving as an athlete and the experiences of what he called “normal college students” and applied this realization to his final project, in which he called for all students to receive these support systems.)

### **Additional Support**

Aedan, Brian, Neil, Shadera, Shannon and Sonia all pointed to a willingness to seek support from on-campus resources as being an important step in the transition to college. Sonia stated that the university “offers programs to help students cope with their

emotional problems” (Essay, 10 Nov 2013). She encouraged students to “explore the campus so that you can be aware of the programs the school offers...It is always good to know who you can count on when you are in need of something” (Sonia, Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013).

Shadera added the following:

The school has a vast spectrum of clubs and organizations available to the students...These programs cannot only create new friendships and be a distraction from the hardships of classes, but also encompass some of the coping mechanisms that students use in order to reduce stress. (Essay, 11 Nov 2013)

However, while value was placed toward on-campus resources, including writing-based support systems such as the campus Writing Center and workshops for developing skills like time management, many of the co-researchers opted not to utilize these resources. Some students expressed being influenced by other student experiences in this area. For example, when Blaze shared his not-so-successful experience at the Writing Center, Neil noted that this resource may not be helpful. Despite recommending this resource in his final presentation, Neil stated he probably would not go himself due to what he had heard from others. He added that as a student who lives off campus, he “can’t take full advantage of a quiet study area or campus resources” (Neil, Essay, 9 Nov 2013).

A similar phenomenon was apparent in other final presentations. For example, Jordan pointed to time management workshops as being potentially helpful, but added that he also never attended one. In both of these examples, the co-researchers recognized the hypocrisy in their recommending a service but not using it themselves. These mixed

emotions around addressing self-management issues seemed to reflect the mid-transition stage the students were in at the time of the study.

### **Expectations May Not Match the Reality of College**

How many of you expected something different from college? (Brian, Presentation, 21 Nov 2013)

Brian asked the above question during his final presentation and a majority of the class raised their hands. For first-time freshmen, expectations included not only those that the students brought with them to college—for their academic and social lives—but also those placed upon them by others, including peers, professors, family and society. While pursuing college was seen as the norm, the expectations often differed from the reality.

Managing these expectations could be seen as a form of self-management, as in the previous section; however, due the multidirectional approach of these expectations, the co-researchers placed some of the responsibility on the student to manage them, while also identifying a potential source of the issue: high school did not fully prepare them for this transition to the college and the college academic discourse community. To demonstrate the student perspective of these issues, I have broken the expectations into the ways that social expectations and academic expectations can be obstacles for first-time freshmen. The student perception that high school fell short of preparing them will be addressed in the section to follow.

### **Social Expectations**

The co-researchers noted that the expectations, garnered from movies, television shows and other forms of influencing entertainment, had an impact on the way first-time freshmen transitioned into college. Ariana added that “the only image [first generation to

college students] have of college is exaggerated stories from friends or depictions from the media and movies that don't always focus on the academic areas" (Essay, 18 Nov 2013). These fun-filled images of parties, tailgates and Greek life can set students up for disappointment when their college life does not mirror what they have seen in the media. Brian expressed that, after attending a football game at another university in the first weeks of school, he struggled with deciding whether he was at the best university for him, or whether a larger school like UC Berkeley would be a better fit due to it looking more like he envisioned college would be.

For managing social expectations, making connections and not letting expectations become an obstacle to transitioning successfully were key. Social expectations reflected relationships with peers, as well as professors and other on-campus resources. Danielle noted that forming peer relationships could be difficult for introverted students and affect their overall transition to college, and getting over this hurdle may be even more difficult if students opt to go home over the weekends (Essay, 12 Nov 2013). First-year students who lived off campus or commuted to school also found making social connections more challenging.

Part of the difficulty in the social aspects of college was the expectations that students held around making friends. In his research project, Brian spoke to students from mainland US states, non-mainland US states, and US territories and found that fears around not being able to make friends were universal. He also found that the expectations of what the social interactions would involve did not meet the reality. All the interviewees "were met with different experiences than what they expected but that it was all for the better" (Presentation, 21 Nov 2013).

Interestingly, he also discovered that some of these fears were culturally imposed. Fortunately, the fears/concerns/preconceived notions or other culturally bestowed expectations were also proved wrong. For example, the students Brian interviewed from US territories, such as Guam, and non-mainland states, such as Hawaii, came to college ready to counter preconceived notions about where they came from. Brian noted that these expectations became an obstacle. Two students from Guam “worried that because of cultural differences between Guam and San Francisco making friends would be a hassle. They were happy that their expectations had not been met and in hindsight they wonder why they even worried” (Brian, Essay, 12 Nov 2013). Carlyn, a student from Hawaii, also “expected there to be some sort of conflict because she had been misled about what ‘mainlanders’ thought about Hawaiians. ...She came here with her guard up ready to confront anyone, but after she realized that everyone wanted to be friends she thought it was stupid about coming in with the expectations she had” (Brian, Presentation, 21 Nov 2013). Brian, who comes from Puerto Rico, also admitted: “I needed the help of others to realize that the biggest challenge that people from different cultures face in the college transition process is the expectations our different culture has bestowed upon us” (Essay, 12 Nov 2013).

In their efforts to make social connections, some students bonded with others who hailed from similar locations, which worked well for some and created additional challenges for others. Although his first friends on campus were students who shared his expectation around how others might perceive him, and also came from island homes, Brian saw the value in branching out to form bonds with students who did not share his

culture or background. In fact, forming a network of peers was considered by the co-researchers to be important for both the college transition and future success in the work world.

These social expectations were also a challenge in roommate relations. Many of the co-researchers reported working through roommate relationships in terms of getting sleep or getting work done; some of these challenges were due to socializing, others due to differences in schedules, but all affected the social aspects of the college transition. One area where this dynamic was especially challenging was among the rooms housing a mix of U.S. and international students. The co-researchers with international student roommates shared that they had looked forward to rooming with a student from another country. However, the university welcomed the international students to campus a week before the domestic U.S. students came to school. This arrangement made introductions more challenging, as the international students had already formed friendships with the other international students.

As a result, some of the U.S. domestic students reported feeling unwelcome in their own room, while others shared the efforts being made among the roommates to communicate and create friendships. Blaze shared: "There have been instances here at USF this year where students have not talked to their roommate more than one or two sentences for the first few months of school" (Blaze, Essay, 30 Oct 2013). Brittany stated: "My roommate (from China) is having a hard time. Even though she speaks a little English, she has trouble understanding many things that I say. Often times, she will use a translator on her cell phone in order to understand what I am trying to say. She also told me that she has been struggling to adjust to life here" (Journal, 18 Sept 2013). The co-

researchers noted their concerns for these roommates and their desire to support them as they experienced college in the United States. Brittany added that she and her roommate had worked out a sort of signing system to communicate around opening the window or closing the blinds in their room, for example, and utilized friends who could act as interpreters to find out more about each other and the transition to college from the international student perspective.

Forming relationships with professors was also deemed important and challenging. Ariana, Brian, Grant, and Neil all pointed to the potential for teachers to be a source of support in balancing expectations and achieving goals. Grant pointed out that professors were not only a great resource for information, but could become mentors (Essay, 12 Nov 2013). Brian was able to parlay his relationships with two different professors into an internship in his media major and on set production assistant work. Fostering a good relationship with professors involved “emailing, completing work, being nice, going to office hours” as well as “going to class and especially showing interest in the class” (Brian, Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013), in other words, following the implicit rules of school. Students who were transitioning successfully were already taking steps to form their networks, as well as having fun.

### **Academic Expectations**

While the social expectations stemmed primarily from media images of college life, the students’ academic expectations were multidirectional. The co-researchers noted expectations they had coming into college, based on what they had heard about the workload or how prepared they felt to tackle the academics, as well as expectations (or

hopes) they had to succeed, either self-imposed or from their family or cultural background. However, when they arrived at college, some of the co-researchers realized that the workload was even greater than projected and that professors, university staff and peers all had expectations of them that they had not anticipated.

Exacerbating their academic expectations was the fact that “over the years, the amount of workload the students undertake in college has increased greatly. Students are expected to perform at a higher standard than ever before” (Shadera, Essay, 11 Nov 2013). This pressure to succeed was also linked to the expectation to be independent—leading to sleep deprivation and increased stress and possibly creating an obstacle to seeking support from on-campus resources. The effects of needing to choose or not having yet chosen a major were also noted, as well as fears around requesting a change in major.

In addition, student expectations differ from professor expectations of the students. Ariana stated, “The expectations set through class syllabi and personal interactions were often not aligned with the expectations of first semester college students” (Essay, 10 Nov 2013; cited Ginley & Giraud. (2006). Identifying instructor expectations: A focus group experience. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association.) Feneida listed that college students are expected to: juggle workload (do all assignments, tasks), take responsibility (meet deadlines without supervision), achieve grade requirements (meet a higher grade to “pass”), be organized (schedule and structure projects), participate (speak up and pay attention in class), learn from mistakes and find what works (using trial and error), and

adjust to college in their own time, but quickly enough to succeed (Essay, 12 Nov 2013).

As the students recognize all that is expected of them, some felt pressure to “put themselves out there into extracurriculars, internships and jobs” (Diego, Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013). The co-researchers found that there was no need to rush into doing everything from the start. Students can “take the time to settle and test the waters” (Ariana, Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013). The co-researchers also believed that adjusting one’s attitude to be flexible to changes and giving rewards for completing work were useful approaches to meeting these demands, and rewards often meant opportunities to have fun and be social.

Academic challenges seemed even more monumental for international students. Blaze felt it seemed “impossible” for his international student roommate to succeed in college: “He can’t even keep up a conversation with me for more than 25 seconds, so how would he be expected to comprehend an hour and forty-five minute class?” (Blaze, Journal, 25 Sept 2013). Aedan reported that his international student roommate was having trouble adjusting to the academic requirements of college. It seemed “to be sink or swim in his classes” (Journal, 24 Oct 2013). The roommate seemed willing to ask friends for help, but not interested in visiting professor office hours.

For international students specifically, language and cultural hurdles made accessing support services even more difficult. In her letter project, Brittany pointed out that her roommate and some of her roommates’ friends (all international students) were unable to locate options on campus because the website was only available in English. While interviewing someone from an on-campus resource for international students,

Brittany was told that some of the services were hard to find on the website even for those fluent in English. In addition, many college classes give grades for participation, which may favor native-English speaking students unless the term is used broadly by the professor to include paying attention in class, posting on the class discussion board, or even assisting the professor by taking notes of class discussions, as was considered participation in our course.

### **The Perception that High School Did Not Fully Prepare for College**

I thought I knew what college entailed. College included a lot of reading, writing, and studying. How difficult could that be?...but going from high school to college is a big transition and some [freshmen] may not be fully prepared. (Feneyda, Essay, 12 Nov 2013)

In the process of identifying how and where the student co-researchers expressed their expectations for college and college level writing, one theme that repeatedly came to surface was the perception on the part of the students that high school could have helped them set more realistic expectations and better prepared them to meet the academic and nonacademic demands of college. Many of the student co-researchers (14 of 20) made direct statements toward this concept. Those who felt less prepared, or who witnessed close friends struggling, tended to look more critically at the institution of schooling. The areas in which the students believed high school fell short of preparing them for college differed by co-researcher, depending on their high school experience. Those students who felt prepared in one aspect of school, such as writing, often felt less than prepared for another, possibly related aspect, such as managing workload—the combination of which left students overwhelmed even when confident in their writing skills.

The students shared that they knew college would be different from high school,

but they were not clear on the extent of these differences due to what was expected of them at each level of schooling. These differences in expectations pointed to a perception gap, culture of leniency, and practice of standardized education as fostering habits that did not serve the students well in college. In addition the co-researchers noted lacking writing and reading practice and preparation for managing emotional challenges.

### **Perception Gap**

In the course of researching, the research team attributed some of the differences in expectations between high school and college to a “perception gap” between high school teachers and college professors. Brittany noted “that what is being taught in high school does not match what (is) being expected in college and how the level of success for freshman in college is being negatively affected” (Brittany, Essay, 12 Nov 2013).

Ariana added, “A disconnect exists between the skills high school teachers value and those the college professors see as important,” for example, “professors emphasize critical thinking and persuasive skills” (Essay, 10 Nov 2013).

### **Culture of Leniency**

What qualifies as successful also differs between high school and college. The co-researchers noted that college requires more “effort” and at times different grades to move forward. For example, a C- is considered passing at this college, rather than a D, like most high schools (Feneyda, essay, 12 Nov 2013). Sonia noted that in high school, grades for written work were based on “completion rather than quality (a rough draft could easily obtain you a C or C+),” but in college “everything contributes to the final grade—the

topic, style, grammar, analysis, tone, credibility (citations), etc.” (Journal, 10 Oct 2013).

What the co-researchers saw as a culture of leniency in high school also fostered certain habits that get carried over into college, forming what the students dubbed “the high school mentality.” (\*This concept will be covered in more depth in the next section.)

Ariana explained: “The habits of leniency in attendance and grading originate in high school and carry on to be counterproductive habits in college. Some of these behaviors that carry over include poor time management skills, low motivation, and a lack of studying and self-control” (Essay, 10 Nov 2013).

A lack of rigor was also noted as an issue in some high school courses, including grade inflation. Ariana pointed to students receiving high grades without mastering the subject material, and Neil noted a “dumbing down” or lowering of course standards as a factor in decreased student motivation and poor study habit development. While the co-researchers highlighted International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) course work as providing more rigor and possibly better academic preparation, these “advanced classes do not necessarily ensure that students are ultimately prepared for college, specifically college writing...[or] for the change that is to come when transitioning to college” (Pete, Essay, 31 Oct 2013).

In terms of workload, many of the co-researchers found they were surprised, overwhelmed, or lacked the skills to manage their college-level coursework. Harry added: “For freshmen especially, the amount of work in college can be quite a rude awakening; and many freshman find that high school did not prepare them for this and they do not have the skills to manage their work” (Essay, 12 Nov 2013). Blaze, Diego,

Feneyda and Pete pointed to high school having more “busy work.” Diego shared:

During my interview with Blaze, we realized how much high school was filled with ‘busy work’ or work without purpose, and that the opposite was true of college. Since both of us come from different backgrounds, our arrival to the same conclusion on the topic of ‘busy work’ in high school signals a greater and widespread problem. (Essay, 31 Oct 2013). (\*Note: Although these two co-researchers came from different backgrounds, they both attended public high schools in California, so they likely had to meet similar standards to graduate.)

### **Standardized Schooling**

The research team also noted “issues of deficiencies in critical thinking, lack of creativity, and stymied curiosity” (Diego, Essay, 31 Oct 2013). Shannon stated: “Because critical thinking and reasoning skills hold so much value in today’s world, the lack thereof [in high school] can hinder the success of a college student” (Essay, 12 Nov 2013). Critical thinking was seen as essential to becoming “competent members of society” (Diego, Essay, 31 Oct 2013), while curiosity lead to engagement (including ability to research) and “serves as the fuel for learning” (Diego, Presentation, 19 Nov 2013), and creativity was key to universities being “the central hub of new and innovative ideas” (Diego, Essay, 31 Oct 2013).

These issues were directly linked to a culture of “standardized schooling” (Diego, Presentation, 12 Nov 2013) and testing. The co-researchers identified that standardized tests focused on specific academic subjects only, did not allow for multiple intelligences,

and favored certain ways of thinking. As a result, students “have embedded in their minds that only what they are tested on is what is important. Brilliant and intelligent students are made to feel they are otherwise and in a university, a place with a variety of learning paths, that reality can be detrimental” (Diego, Essay, 31 Oct 2013).

Interestingly, the practices of test preparation and teaching to the test were also connected to how students formed the habits noted as not being useful in college, and this was linked to school accountability. As Shannon explained:

This accountability is the idea that certain schools must meet a certain average standardized testing score, and therefore in the future usually focus on students who tested in a lower division and require more attention. Because of this, *the students who need less attention may be developing bad habits, such as cramming, that will negatively affect their college learning experience. Because of instances such as these, there is a growing number of college students who lack the ability to discipline themselves in academics due to the bad habits they acquired in high school.* (Essay, 12 Nov 2013)

Lecture-style classes, common to high school, were also highlighted as problematic. Diego stated: “Since college is an environment of independent and active learning, clearly there is an issue when a number of incoming students are accustomed to just waiting to be told facts by instructors” (Essay, 31 Oct 2013). Grant found through researching this topic for his final essay that our brains retain only about 5 percent of the information conveyed in a lecture format. Pete added that the seminar style courses in his high school IB program had better prepared him for the college transition.

## Writing and Reading Practice

In addition to the workload differences between high school and college, the students noted a lack of experience in the type of writing and reading expected in college. For instance, paper requirements were not aligned between high school and college. Ariana said: “I guess it depends on the high school, but I don’t feel like my high school prepared us for college level writing” (cited in Shannon, essay, 12 Nov 2013). Ariana was not alone in this sentiment. Brittany, Feneida, and Harry joined her in finding the Five-paragraph format, commonly used in high school papers, to be limiting, distracting, or even trapping students who focused on this approach to essays. The students noted the challenges in switching “from a structured five-paragraph essay to a lengthier essay that allows more freedom” (Ariana, Essay, 10 Nov 2013).

Harry linked this format to the source of his time management challenges: “I’m used to writing five-paragraph essays that I could complete in only an hour or two, and I would always wait until the last minute to write them” (Harry, Discussion Board, 7 Sept 2013). The change in writing requirements demanded a different format that Harry was not used to schedule himself around. As a result, Harry found that he and other freshmen were not allotting enough time to writing assignments. To be successful in his written work, he realized he would have to make adjustments to plan essays in advance “and start writing them days before they are due” (Harry, Discussion Board, 7 Sept 2013).

The co-researchers also pointed to a lack of practice in high school with long papers, research papers, and skills such as criticizing an argument, defining a problem, proposing a solution, audience awareness, and revising. In talking with other freshmen

about how prepared they felt coming into college, Shannon found multiple students wished for “more experience with the type of writing done in college,” rather than essays focusing on literature analysis. She agreed that she too could have “benefited from more experience with different types of writing” (Shannon, journal, 28 Oct 2013). In high school, students may have analyzed “a novel or poem,” but college required the analysis to “be accompanied by more extensive research in order to prove a point or persuade the audience” (Shannon, journal, 28 Oct 2013). Even AP literature courses were limited by the goal to prepare for the AP exam.

Thai added that a lack of reading training affected her transition to college-level writing. Having attended school in Korea, prior to high school, she grew up with a busy school/extracurricular schedule with little time to read. She felt that because she was “not trained to read” she found it hard to read textbooks (Presentation, 19 Nov 2013). Blaze, Cody, Feneida, Grant and Shannon also mentioned students having difficulty with or skipping assigned reading. Some witnessed friends barely getting by because they did the bare minimum on essays and other assignments. Blaze, Brittany, Feneida and Harry added that like other college work, writing requires effort and planning. Students cannot get away with not doing the written work in college, as they may have been able to in high school, and it is the student’s responsibility to change their attitude and approach toward writing assignments. (\*Note: This topic will be explored further in the Role of Writing and Reading in College Success section.)

### **Emotional Preparation**

Perhaps most important to the transitional issues the co-researchers noted was the

lack of preparation in high school for the Emotional Intelligence aspects of college. Sonia stated that after “being tested for about twelve years on general subjects, most high school graduates enter college with the inexperience of managing interpersonal relationships, setbacks, anxiety, impulses, homesickness, and other aspects of emotional intelligence” (Essay, 12 Nov 2013). Aedan illustrated the effects of the lack of emotional preparedness through what he called “the issue and implications of the personal identity discovery currently taking place” (Journal, 24 Oct 2013). He described spending a lot of time “in thought,” rather than being social, and choosing to “prioritize learning about who I am and want to be as a person over finishing a reading, or a journal entry” (Journal, 24 Oct 2013). This decision wasn’t always a strategic or smooth experience, as he described the emotional roller coaster some students were experiencing, while being expected to meet academic responsibilities. Overall, this lack of E.Q. preparedness spoke to many of the self-management issues noted in the previous section and seemed to be the most likely reason that students may not complete their first year of college.

Despite noting differences between high school and college, very few of the co-researchers made recommendations in their action projects toward addressing this issue at the high school level. Many pointed to specific areas they felt high schools could improve, but only two (Ariana and Shannon) made suggestions toward high schools directly. The majority of the class, these two researchers included, felt that the bulk of the responsibility for addressing the perception gap should be at the college level—by both the schools and the students. In part, this was due to the belief that high schools, those within the U.S. public education system in particular, were not likely to change anytime

soon. Ariana pointed to the potential expressed by the promises of the Common Core State Standards, but whether these standards will meet these promises remains to be seen.

### **High School Mentality Versus College Mentality**

I have found that many students still carry that high school mentality with them...This is unfortunate because most of those tactics and practices that worked in high school don't necessarily work here in college. (Pete, Discussion Board, 27 Sept 2013)

As the research team completed their first month of the study, the members of Workshop Group III (Aedan, Brian, Brittany, Feneida and Neil) asked whether the co-researchers "have noticed freshman still carrying that high school mentality with them. Have they adapted to college by changing the way they study and complete homework assignments, or are they using the same techniques and practices they used in high school?" (Brittany, Discussion Board, 24 Sept 2013). This post led to a discussion about "high school habits" and starting college in "High School mode," and distinguishing between "high school practices" and "college practices." The term "high school mentality" was coined as encompassing this idea and frequently used when discussing their perception of the mentality required in college.

Many of the challenges associated with these mentality differences were linked to the areas in which high schools failed to prepare students for college. This theme of the "high school mentality" was referenced or alluded to in multiple final projects, as well as in Journal and Discussion Board posts throughout the semester. The students also noted that to adapt to college would involve a change in attitude.

### **The “High School Mentality”**

The concept of “high school mentality” seemed to center on habits formed in high school that may or may not have served students well in that academic setting, but when utilized in college led to less-than-successful results. So-called “high school habits” included “procrastination, cramming, not studying or reading required material, time management, lack of caring” (Shannon, essay, 12 Nov 2013). In addition, the practices of staying up late, relying on the five-paragraph essay format and not turning in assignments or “BS”-ing on homework or essays were frequently mentioned as exhibits of a high school mentality. Harry shared: “A lot of how I perceive assignments and tests is still affected by how I dealt with them in high school. I feel it is going to take me a while to fully assimilate into the college mindset” (Discussion Board, 30 Sept 2013).

As a result of these habits setting the mode, “the transition becomes a negative experience because, once the student enters college, the rigorous academic community becomes [an] overwhelming adjustment” (Shannon, Essay, 12 Nov 2013). Diego expressed that he thought he had transitioned to college smoothly, but the workload requirements called for a shift in mentality. He stated: “The problem is that I am still operating in a high school mindset. In high school, I did not need to contemplate and reflect on my work. I just needed to finish it.” (Diego, Essay, 31 Oct 2013). Ariana recognized that “the habits brought up” when talking about high school mentality “would be characterized as non-academic skills or soft skills...All of these have been found as crucial skills that help determine college success, but most are not taught in high school”

(Presentation, 18 Nov 2013).

The co-researchers pointed to the idea of having lots of free time between classes as being an illusion and linked to the importance of managing time and class attendance. Harry stated: “The volume and quality of work expected from me is so much higher than what I was previously used to”—“free” time is actually work time (Journal, 9 Sept 2013). In addition, due to the differences between time spent in class versus outside of class (with less in-class time required in college than in high school), skipping one day of a college class was equal to skipping three days in high school (Blaze, Journal, 7 Oct 2013), making the task of catching up after missing a class even more challenging. Kynan added that a lack of routine contributed to why “this high school mentality is still haunting people” (Discussion Board, 29 Sept 2013). He noted that the “periodic check points that were required in high school are gone. These high school checkpoints came from everyday routines that were available, such as getting schooling out of the way in a large chunk from about 8 to 3,” but in college “students are still trying to find their niches socially and craft their routines daily which causes problems” (Kynan, Discussion Board, 29 Sept 2013).

Brittany also pointed to “the writing mentality in high schools” as the root of issues in completing written work (Essay, 12 Nov 2013). Shannon noted that, alongside the “extreme amounts of writing” expected of students, “the widely understood college mentality is that of a balance among being responsible, being independent, and of course, socializing” (Essay, 10 Nov 2013).

### **Adapting to the College Mentality**

Checking one's attitude was seen as essential for adapting the high school mentality to the college mentality. The co-researchers recognized the freshmen who seemed to be adjusting well to college life had attitudes which reflected more of a college mentality. While some believed that "colleges must make a conscious effort to aid students who have been cemented to the previously discussed habits, as well as to realize that the student may not even understand the consequences of maintaining a high school mentality in college" (Shannon, Presentation, 19 Nov 2013), many noted the need for students to take primary responsibility. Shannon shared: "Although both high schools and colleges can make improvements to better prepare and serve their students, the majority of the responsibility in this case falls to the students themselves" (Essay, 12 Nov 2013).

Other co-researchers added specific attitude or mentality shifts that could be required in the process. In general, Diego felt students should "recognize college as a privilege" (Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013). Blaze said students should "treat school as if it's your job" (Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013). More specifically, students could adopt an attitude of flexibility or resilience. Shannon pointed to remaining "open-minded/flexible in the transition to college" (Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013), while Aedan encouraged students to be willing to go with the flow or "roll with punches" when encountering obstacles (Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013). Natalie noted the need to be optimistic. She felt students "always have to look forward to new experiences and make the best of everything," impressing the point that you are not likely to do well in class if "you are

sure you are going to fail the whole time” (Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013). She added that this attitude could help offset depressed feelings that students may encounter during this time of change and adjustment.

Being determined and persistent were also key facets of a successful college mentality. Aedan advised students to “persist and endure” (Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013), while Cody added that determination is essential for first-time freshmen “because nobody is babysitting them anymore” (Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013). This attitude of determination linked to the message shared by Cody, Grant, Feneida, Kynan, and Shadera surrounding the need to embrace the idea that school will take work, and students “should know not to try and just coast through school” (Grant, Discussion Board 2 Dec 2013). Diego said, “You cannot b.s. your way through college...college coursework, professors, and atmosphere actually demands the most of out you...Putting in one’s best in college is not so much a skill, but a standard” (Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013). The students also connected this idea to the cost/value of college—it is not worth paying so much for an education if students are not putting in “enough effort” (Shadera, Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013). Therefore, students should “take every class seriously and attend every class” (Shadera, Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013).

Ariana, Danielle, Feneida and Sonia noted that the attitude toward procrastination also required change. Danielle said students “can’t expect to get good grades if they study for quizzes/exams the night before even though they were able to do that in high school” (Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013). In addition, students needed to adjust their expectations.

Overall, freshmen should “not get swept up in the idea that college is a giant party...college is definitely not like what they read in fictional books and what is seen on television and movies” (Feneyda, Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013).

While the specific approaches or changes in attitude varied among the co-researchers, they agreed that the sooner students embraced a college mentality, the easier the transition to college seemed to be. Many of the co-researchers recognized the need to adjust their own attitudes in balancing their college life, making their advice as much of a reminder for themselves as for other first-time freshmen.

### **The Role of Writing and Reading in College Success**

Reading and writing is key in college success because these two will help develop skills necessary for the future. (Feneyda, Essay 12 Nov 2013)

Exploring the students’ experiences as they encountered the college academic discourse community was a central goal in this study. While a few of the co-researchers mentioned this discourse community in their work, most referenced writing more generally alongside reading or researching at the college level. Overall, they saw writing as an essential part of the process of transitioning to college, and that being successful in college meant developing methods to manage their writing workload in a sustainable way and to produce work that was of high caliber and met professor expectations.

What became apparent as the research team began this study was that the experience of entering into the academic discourse community could not be separated from the challenges of transitioning to college as a whole. These experiences were interlinked and interdependent. Students could arrive a school seemingly ready to write, but lose focus or fall behind due to mismanaging themselves or their time. They could

also encounter unforeseen personal issues, such as Sonia's description of falling behind when she learned of the arrest of a high school instructor who had been a friend and mentor. Challenges such as these can derail first-time freshmen as they aim to establish a foothold in college; they can also make joining the greater conversation of the academic discourse community a somewhat moot point in comparison to surviving a turbulent experience.

The co-researchers identified writing as a key part of college success. They felt that expectations for writing were high at this university, as indicated by the survey, and that writing played an important role in supporting all of their academic efforts. Feneida stated:

Writing plays a key role in this transition because all classes require some form of written communication so that the professors know whether or not the students have understood the basic concepts of the materials covered in class. Without writing, there would be no way for students to apply their own knowledge into a structured form. Higher expectations are set and students need to meet them quickly or they will have difficulties in the transition (Feneida, Essay, 12 Nov 2013).

To this concept, they also added the importance of reading and by proxy researching. The co-researchers highlighted multiple concepts in relation to the practices of writing and reading, including: The link between reading and writing, the changing role of research in their academic work, the need to seek support and tendency to use their friend and family networks as readers (as well as the importance of on campus resources), the value of peer review, and how being self-sufficient can make a difference—especially for

students who come to college under-prepared for college writing.

### **The Link Between Reading and Writing**

Alongside the need for students to take responsibility for themselves and their transition to college came the need to recognize the role that writing, as well as reading and researching, played in college success. These skills or practices were also seen as interdependent, and unavoidable in college, and the students expressed that trying to get away without doing the work was not advised, as any lack of effort was likely to be noticed by professors. Feneida added: “There is no possible way for a student to sneak their way around writing assignments because there are minute details that are necessary to be in the paper. If a student has not read the material, it is apparent in their homework and/or writing” (Essay, 12 Nov 2013).

Skills, habits and behaviors that supported writing included frequently practicing writing, through freewriting, journaling, or other writing in leisure. Brittany specified a combination of frequency, volume and variety in practicing both reading and writing. She explained that students “should try and write something different each week...In doing this, the student will be well-versed in different types of writing and will be comfortable with writing different lengths” (Brittany, Essay, 12 Nov 2013). The idea being that “the more students practice writing, the more they will write and the easier it will be to write for their classes” (Brittany, Essay, 12 Nov 2013). Neil added, “The constant writing can help people get the flow of writing for longer periods of time” (Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013). The freewriting exercise that the co-researchers did as part of this course was pointed to as a good way to get the “brain flowing with ideas” (Brittany, Essay, 12 Nov

2013). Brittany also noted that “practicing doing research will open student’s minds to thinking differently. Perhaps in testing out one of these suggestions, students will also find that writing comes naturally” (Essay, 12 Nov 2013).

Students were also encouraged to read a lot. Feneida and Thai both pointed to the importance of reading different genres and types of writing “to gain more knowledge and apply that knowledge on paper” (Feneida, Presentation, 19 Nov 2013). Thai noted that reading fosters a sense of grammar, creativity, syntax, diction and sentence structure that helps students develop as writers. She said: “If a student reads books, newspapers, or magazines, it is most likely that he or she will develop writing skills. But, if the student does not read, there is a high chance that he or she will struggle with writing” (Thai, Essay, 12 Nov 2013). In addition, reading helps students develop critical thinking skills and create more interesting and exciting essays “because the students recognizes the thought of a writer when they read (SIC)...they get used to the language, how the author thinks, and what the sentence structure looks like” (Thai, Essay, 12 Nov 2013). Speaking from personal experience as an English language learner and international student, Thai compared her reading habits and writing skills to those of a consummate reader friend. She said:

I was always the kid who went outside to hangout with friends instead of stay(ing) in the house and read(ing) books. My essays aren’t that creative, nor appealing to others. This is a result from not reading as much. On the other hand, my friend who read a lot as she was growing up, she got a perfect score on her SAT essay and got into Berkeley with English major. (Thai, Essay, 12 Nov 2013)

In addition to reading for leisure, the co-researchers noted that students can take steps to improve their research skills by reading and writing about various subjects of personal interest. This encouragement of using the practices of reading and writing to develop as researchers spoke to the way the students shifted their views in relation to the role of research in their academic work.

### **The Changing Role of Research in Their Academic Work**

Although the specifics around the students' research challenges seemed to be expressed primarily in the co-researcher's journal posts, the shifting role and importance of research in their academic efforts was apparent in the student research findings and the ways the students felt that being a part of this study helped them. The co-researchers reported challenges in coming up with research questions, finding relevant statistics and managing time around researching and organizing in the process. In addition, some found they needed to change their whole approach to research in their writing process. Blaze exemplified this change in approach as he pointed to the need to spend more time doing research and becoming knowledgeable on the subject prior to writing, rather than researching as he wrote (Journal, 2 Oct 2013). Sonia also reported a tendency to put off researching until after she had already written what she wanted to say and needed to integrate sources to illustrate her points. She stated, "Although I know I should, I usually don't do much research before choosing a topic. I also don't look for counter arguments unless it is specified in the instructions" (Sonia, Journal, 20 Oct 2013).

As the study progressed and the researchers developed their research skills in many different forms, from library research to personal interviews, more of the co-

researchers reported changes in their thinking around how and when research should be done and what qualifies as a valid source. Sonia, for example, expressed that a lightbulb had gone off for her through a journal entry exchange with me on this topic. She said, “I realized that researching takes a lot of work and patience. I have accepted the idea that I must do research before I pick a side in a particular topic and begin writing. However, that doesn’t mean I like it” (Sonia, Journal, 1 Nov 2013). Other students shared the sentiments expressed by Sonia and Blaze in recognizing the importance of researching while still being in the process of embracing this change in approach.

In addition, Natalie reported that she discovered how flexibility plays a role in researching and writing. Although she found the topic she had chosen—working while in college—to be challenging to write about, she recognized the importance of being willing to adjust her points to reflect what she was learning in the research process. She said: “I probably changed what I was writing about at least three times...but overall I am happy with how my paper turned out” (Natalie, Reflection, 2 Dec 2013). Neil added the value of being able to choose their own research topics for maintaining interest and motivation, stating: “We have proven that when we study topics that we’re interested in, we yield promising results” (Reflection, 1 Dec 2013).

Many of the co-researchers also recognized the value of broadening their range of sources in the research process. Aedan and Thai noted the value of the library, both the research librarians and the databases available to students. Neil pointed to using campus resources as potential sources of information, including other professors or staff in different departments. But most significant was the value placed in learning about each

other and through the experiences of other first-time freshmen. Many of students mentioned that they had never before considered themselves as potential data sources. Shadera said, “Before this project I never considered using my personal experience or my friends for my classwork. It has taught me that information can come from anywhere” (Reflection, 30 Nov 2013). (\*This topic will be covered in more depth in the section regarding how being part of the study helped the students.)

### **The Need to Seek Support and Tendency to Use Their Networks**

In addition to practicing writing and managing writing tasks, various practices around revising and getting feedback on writing were highlighted by eight of the twenty co-researchers (Ariana, Aedan, Brittany, Danielle, Harry, Kynan, Neil, Sonia). In particular, the co-researchers noted that moving from high school to college-level writing required using their friends or family network as proofreaders or on-campus resources, such as the university writing center, for support. Sonia stated that college papers are often “lengthy and structured differently to the typical five paragraph essay. Asking a classmate or visiting the reading and writing center to review your writing, can make you identify mistakes you didn’t before, ultimately making you a better writer” (Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013). Danielle pointed to the importance of using a combination of resources (e.g. the Writing Center, workshopping, peer editing, even family members) in an effort to have “more than one person proofread” the student’s written work (Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013).

Brittany also noted the value of having “many different people” read drafts and provide feedback (Brittany, Essay, 12 Nov 2013). Overall, “By having other people read

their work, students can also help one another move away from the common high school practices of writing a five-paragraph essay and not using personal pronouns” (Brittany, essay, 12 Nov 2013). Brittany added that “students should use the resources around them in order to improve their writing, especially in their freshman year. ...To improve and become a better writer, especially in college, asking for help from others is key” (Essay, 12 Nov 2013).

### **The Value of Peer Review**

In relation to the need to use the network of people and resources available to them in their writing efforts, the co-researchers noted the value of peer review and small group workshops that some courses offered. Kynan was a big proponent for highlighting where peer support was useful (and he recommended more peer review opportunities across the curriculum in his final project). He linked peer review to improving grades, teaching self-management, and developing skills that will be transferrable after graduation. He surveyed 50 students and found that “100 percent of students interviewed believed that revision of their work by teachers and other students would in fact increase their grades” (Kynan, Essay, 12 Nov 2013). He also interviewed a fellow freshman named Thomas, who “believes when he studies with others and has his Japanese coursework reviewed by others, he learns more and does in fact earn higher grades when compared to the tests/assignments that do not allow peer review” (Kynan, Essay, 12 Nov 2013). Brittany also pointed to her experience of peer editing her friend Kelsey’s papers as being helpful “in terms of cutting down her essays and noticing unnecessary

repetitions” and resulting in an improvement in Kelsey’s grade (Essay, 12 Nov 2013).

Brittany described the value of peer review by stating:

Peer editing can identify if the work is clear and delivers the message the writer intended. Students may have thought that their explanation was acceptable, but to their reader, it may be confusing and he or she may not be picking up the main idea. Having someone else read his or her essay would allow the student to be exposed to different ideas and opinions (Brittany, Presentation, 14 Nov 2013).

Kynan added that “Peer review also helps mature and teach people many new skills that are pivotal for success” (Presentation, 21 Nov 2013). He found in his research that peer review promoted communication, critical thinking, collaboration, leadership, self awareness, and idea and knowledge sharing; therefore, “requiring students to engage in peer review will not only increase the quality of completed work, but will better prepare students for the professional working world where these qualities are needed and valued” (Kynan, Essay, 12 Nov 2013).

### **How Being Self-Sufficient Can Make a Difference**

While the concept of being self-sufficient clearly links to the overall call for students to take responsibility, the difference when it came to writing was that taking control held the potential to help students overcome what could be seen as under-preparation for success. Embracing this sense of responsibility was seen as essential for college writing success and getting needed support. Brittany shared: “If students are going to get the help they need now, it is up to them to be self-sufficient. Although it may be challenging, not having proper writing training, students can still guide themselves

toward success when writing on a college level” (Essay, 12 Nov 2013).

Part of the challenge in this area pointed to the students’ expectations of themselves. In particular, students who come to college feeling they were prepared for college level writing, only to find themselves overwhelmed by workload or confounded by paper formats or other assignment requirements. In the survey, 17 of the 20 student co-researchers rated themselves as a 3 or higher (out of 5) in how prepared they felt for college-level writing. However, in the process of recording their experiences, and those of other first-time freshmen, many expressed the writing demand to be even greater than anticipated. Reconciling this mismatch between what they expect of themselves within the realm of meeting even greater expectations was a new challenge.

In addition, some of the students held the bar for their own writing even higher than their time frame or academic and nonacademic abilities allowed. For example, Diego had ideas that were so intricate that the amount of research he needed to fulfill his own goal often exceeded the amount of time he had to turn in the essay. As a result, he expressed that he felt he was constantly underperforming. This student exemplifies the way that academic and nonacademic demands can create challenges in completing college-level writing, but also how managing expectations and adjusting goals to fit the situation becomes an important skill or practice for first-time college students and college writing success.

### **How Being Part of this Study Helped the Co-Researchers in the College Transition**

This research project was a valuable experience as an incoming freshman and a great introduction into college writing. It is interesting given that the entire research project was based on the transition to college and possible methods to best transition to college, however *I feel this research project in itself was a great transition for students* as it was a way to get a taste of what to expect from the

college atmosphere and requirements from a college course and college assignment (Pete, Reflection, 3 Dec 2013).

Although some of the co-researchers were initially reluctant or concerned that being part of a research team during their first semester of college would involve a lot of extra work alongside the standard course requirements, every single student in the class stated that this study ultimately assisted them in transitioning to college, improving their writing and research skills, and/or achieving the course goals. Participating in this project encouraged them to look at their own habits and behaviors, as well as those of other first-time freshmen. As a result, they learned from others and saw themselves making changes in their own habits and behaviors. Sonia stated: "I was able to replace some of my bad habits with ones that would benefit me instead" (Reflection, 1 Dec 2013). Cody shared: "I learned many tools week to week that could help me in my everyday life" (Reflection, 30 Nov 2013).

Shannon added:

Throughout the process in observing other students around me or on the discussion board, I gradually began to change my habits in order to be the best student I could be. I have already noticed myself begin to catch, and stop myself, when I am procrastinating. I feel more confident in my writing and research skills, and due to this class, I am more organized and more comfortable in the college academic setting. (Reflection, 3 Dec 2013)

While many of these changes were still in-progress as the semester and the study ended, the student co-researchers reported that being a part of this project inspired them to make changes related to academics, time management, the social aspects of college life, and

their written work. In addition, the study allowed the co-researchers to contribute to the learning of others.

### **Academic and Time Management Changes**

Many of the modifications expressed by the co-researchers spoke directly to the challenges the students encountered around time management, procrastination and other aspects of the so-called high school mentality. Diego, Grant, Fenevda, Harry, Jordan, and Sonia all shared realizations and changes they had made in these areas. Jordan stated:

Many student(s) brought with them bad study habits that they had formed in high school to college. This affected their ability to manage their time and handle the difficult assignments. After learning this, I actually saw that I was also a victim of this and was able to adjust accordingly. (Reflection, 5 Dec 2013)

Tackling time management and the tendency to procrastinate was an ongoing battle for much of the class throughout the semester. Fenevda proclaimed that procrastination was her “biggest enemy.” She stated: “I need to drop it before it really messes me up”

(Reflection, 3 Dec 2013). Similarly, “In attempt to solve this problem,” Sonia shared, “I wrote on my agenda more often to stay organized and made it a habit to read my to-do list before going to bed” (Reflection, 1 Dec 2013). These efforts shifted her from feeling “very unorganized” to maintaining her grades and keeping up with the requirements of an 18-credit course load, along with conducting this research study (Sonia, Reflection, 1 Dec 2013).

After weeks of discussing procrastination and writing-related challenges experienced by his classmates and other freshmen, Diego found he too was struggling

with his writing assignments and posted a journal entry about staying up late to finish his work.

He explained:

A number of issues that plagued the average first year student were clearly ones that I also struggled with. It took some time for those problems to be fleshed-out, as I would not see them fully in play until the coursework really go going. ...I thought I would be the researcher that had the most success in their transition, but this experience and other similar ones proved me wrong. (Diego, Reflection, 3 Dec 2013)

The benefit of the co-researchers seeing themselves in the experiences of others was that they were able to try out potential solutions or find that they shared similar approaches to their challenges. Danielle, for example, shared, "I feel like the Research Project in a way helped with the transition to college because it was possible to see if other people were feeling the same way as you, which in turn could make you feel as though you are not alone" (Reflection, 3 Dec 2013). She found the fact that others classmates "also used family or friends as an outside source of help before submitting final papers" to be reassuring (Danielle, Reflection, 3 Dec 2013). This idea of not going through these challenging experiences alone was apparent throughout the semester in the Journal and Discussion Board posts. Although it was not clearly expressed as a skill, habit, or behavior that could support a successful college transition period, this sense of shared experienced clearly played a valuable role for the co-researchers.

In addition to learning from others how to manage themselves and their academics, the co-researchers noted being able to avoid obstacles they witnessed others

experience and increasing their sense of self awareness. Harry said, “I was able to learn about the trials and tribulations of other freshman and learn what to do and what not to do without having to make the mistake myself” (Discussion Board, 2 Dec 2013). Ariana agreed, stating,

It was difficult to be aware of what others around you are doing but in the end I think it helped bring about a consciousness of my own actions. When I saw others complaining about an assignment or struggling to keep up with class work I noticed the reasons behind why they were struggling and it helped me avoid those behaviors. (Reflection, 1 Dec 2013)

Also in an effort to manage their workloads, the co-researchers shared their attempts to find the optimum study environment by exploring the many potential locations for doing work across campus. Some also acknowledged taking a chance with on-campus resources for support or assistance, such as getting writing help at the Writing Center or research help via the research librarians.

### **Social Aspect Changes**

Participating in this study also affected the co-researchers’ social lives by their forming friendships through the research process. Brian found camaraderie among students from U.S. territories and non-mainland U.S. states, in part by seeking out others who may share his experience of coming from an island culture. Similarly, Sonia said, “We interacted with many people we did not know before, including strangers—some of which I became really close friends and others I learned a lot from” (Reflection, 1 Dec 2013). Fenyda shared that being a co-researcher forced her out of her comfort zone. She

said: "I'm not particularly fond of being around others, and having this experiment made me go out more and watch how others adjust to college" (Reflection, 3 Dec 2013). The study provided opportunities for each of these students to connect with other first-time freshmen and form bonds based on common experiences.

Even more profoundly, the students recognized the value of making these connections, honoring each other's experiences and perspectives, and seeing these interactions as opportunities to learn. Sonia shared, "I began to value the importance of personal communication and the benefits of knowing someone. I used to associate socializing with a waste of time, but now I see a simple acknowledgment as an opportunity to learn" (Reflection, 1 Dec 2013). This concept linked back to the importance of not only balancing the social and academic aspects of college life, but making time to foster the social aspects, and the value that can come from this communication among peers.

### **Writing-Related Changes**

As the semester began, students immediately identified issues surrounding their ability to manage themselves, interspersed with complaints about what they encountered on campus. For example, for the letter project, one student (Blaze) requested to write about the length of the cafeteria check out lines. As soon as he expressed this, other students asked to pursue this topic, possibly due to their own frustrations with the time spent in line, possibly due to a lack of ideas. After some consideration, I asked that only Blaze follow this line of research and that the others choose different topics to explore. The result was an array of topics that were more personal to the students' individual

experiences. By the final draft of the letter, Blaze had also abandoned his complaint about the cafeteria lines to pursue a more personally pressing topic based on his interactions with his roommate, an international student from China. These topics went to a deeper level than they may have if the students had not been considering the challenges and skills, habits, and behaviors they were witnessing in conjunction with this assignment.

While this finding was more from the university-researcher perspective, the co-researchers also noted writing-specific adjustments due to participating in this study. Some observed changes in how they approached writing. Shadera said: “Before this class, I relied heavily on the five paragraph format and at first it was very difficult for me to stray from that,” but throughout the semester she learned to “write freely,” to create her “own format while still adding all the information,” to “properly execute PIE (Point-Illustrate-Explain paragraph structure) using the right amount of illustration and examples,” and to “expand and explain (her) ideas” (Reflection, 30 Nov 2013). Whether these shifts were due to participating in the study specifically or the nature of being in a first semester required writing class was harder to discern.

Many of the co-researchers pointed to how participating in this study improved their research and writing skills overall (Ariana, Aedan, Blaze, Brittany, Fenyda, Neil, Pete, and Thai). Neil pointed directly to particular data collection methods (the journals, discussion board, and dialogues with a partner), alongside other writing class components (the free writing and workshopping), as broadening his view of what constitutes research material. He shared, “Before doing this research project, I would have never thought that I would ever use this information as resources for research papers” (Reflection, 1 Dec

2013). Natalie noted that the study opened her up to the wealth of resources available “that wouldn’t be found by just doing a Google search” (Reflection, 2 Dec 2013). Thai added that, “Touching on a lot of different styles of writing helped a lot too” (Reflection, 3 Dec 2013), which connected to the value of reading and writing a variety of genres as a useful skill, habit, or behavior among first-time freshmen. Aedan agreed and highlighted how he learned about summary, tone, organization, using library databases and citation, in particular. Ariana pointed to the value of small group workshopping, and Pete highlighted that “the process of transcribing,” albeit “not enjoyable,” was “an interesting ‘rite of passage’ in collecting information” and “a step towards transitioning into the adult world of college in itself” (Reflection, 3 Dec 2013).

Brian added that he has also received appropriate and supportive feedback from his fellow co-researchers, as well as from professors, which made him think deeper about the topics he was exploring. Harry also pointed to feedback from other students, upperclassmen in particular, as valuable and leading to him changing how he managed his writing tasks.

The specific assignments were also seen as helpful in developing writing skills. Brittany “liked how the assignments in class were geared toward the study” because it allowed her to “focus on ideas for the study while also practicing new skills for writing assignments” (Reflection, 30 Nov 2013). Brittany and Ariana both noted how the assignments progressed as the study evolved. Ariana explained:

Each assignment built off the last one. It was clearly shown how the skills from the first essay we wrote were used in the last and this helped with remembering

the rules and formats instead of immediately forgetting them once the assignment was turned in. I could feel myself learning how to better structure essays and developing writing skills that I would have never used in high school. (Reflection, 1 Dec 2013)

Even more significant than being exposed to various forms and formats for writing, some of the co-researchers expressed that they “discovered the power” (Sonia, Reflection, 1 Dec 2013) or importance writing can hold. Sonia stated that, before doing this study, she “never saw writing as a way to reach out to others” (Reflection, 1 Dec 2013). Brittany pointed to how the “the research my fellow classmates and I did for our policy letters and research papers could be used to improve conditions at [the university]” (Reflection, 30 Nov 2013).

### **How They Contributed to the Learning of Others**

Along with gaining valuable skills or adjusting their own behaviors or habits throughout the research process, the co-researchers recognized ways that they added value or contributed to the learning of others. In particular, the students noted the act of giving and receiving feedback. Brian said, “I feel confident that the feedback I have given throughout this first semester is of great value” (Reflection, 3 Dec 2013). Other students also saw how their workshop feedback and discussion board comments, and in particular their dialogues, furthered the research process and led to their final recommendations.

Recognizing the shared struggle among freshmen led to larger realizations, as well. Natalie, for example, found kinship with other freshmen in their plight to find employment both on and off campus. Beyond the scope of the research questions, she

recognized a misconception about the student population at private four-year universities. She shared: “People usually think that it is mostly rich kids that go to private schools and they wouldn’t have any reason to work, but probably around half of the school population works” (Natalie, Reflection, 2 Dec 2013). Her realization pointed to a “need to change the education system in the U.S.” (Natalie, Reflection, 2 Dec 2013) to enable students to reduce their financial stress while pursuing higher education.

Overall, the students felt the research they conducted held potential to not only help each other, but to add value for other students in the future. Cody shared, “I saw [participating in this study] as an opportunity to do something that was bigger than myself,” and in the end, “I really hope that my words I have put into the study might have hit home with some of my classmates or in the future they might hit home with somebody else who is just coming into college” (Reflection, 30 Nov 2013).

### **Recommendations from the Co-Researchers for Future Action**

My fellow classmates have pointed out important issues that most of the [university] community can relate to and have offered practical solutions, some involving administrative action while others involving action from students. (Neil, Reflection, 1 Dec 2013)

As the student co-researchers observed behaviors or habits that could be changed, suggestions were made via the discussion board throughout the semester. In some cases, these recommendations spurred the decision to pursue further research on a specific topic in the letter or final essay assignments. The final essays and presentations required a call-to-action, which led many of the students to address a specific audience in their writing—those who could achieve the action suggested. In addition to the recommendations in

these essays and presentations, the student co-researchers made recommendations in their final discussion board posts and in their final reflections on the whole research project process.

To organize the students' findings, I have compiled the recommendations made by the student co-researchers in the final discussion board posts, final essays and presentations, and final reflections on the research process, based on to whom the recommendation was directed. Although technically the recommendations were addressed to their classmates and me, as the professor of the course, the students were clear (most of the time) about who was in a position to make this change happen. These recommendations were targeted to high schools (in general), the college/university the co-researchers attended, and current and future first-time freshmen.

### **To High Schools**

Although the student co-researchers identified multiple areas in which they felt that high schools were falling short in preparing students for college, they directed few recommendations toward high schools. Shannon suggested that high schools should train students to form better habits in preparation for college (Essay, 12 Nov 2013). The habits formed in high school, in particular by students who know how to get by in school while putting in little effort or utilizing habits that are not sustainable under the college workload, set the tone for future success. Learning to manage themselves and their workload prior to coming to college would enable more first-time college students to make the transition into college and college-level writing effectively.

Ariana added to this recommendation the hope that the newly-enacted Common Core State Standards, being implemented in states throughout the country, will aid in

preparing students for college and in particular assist in developing the soft-skills necessary for success. She calls for high schools to implement these standards with these goals in mind (Presentation, 18 Nov 2013). Overall, the sentiment was that policy changes to address issues surrounding inequity in schools, the culture of leniency and standardized schooling, and the “perception gap” were not likely to happen any time soon, so students would be better served by changing their own expectations, habits, and attitude.

### **To the College/University**

The recommendations for the college/university covered a range of areas, including support groups or courses/seminars, university-wide requirement changes, and professional training or requests for faculty.

**Support groups or courses/seminars.** These requests for further support of the student body included courses, seminars, workshops or orientations meetings addressing multiple challenge areas featured in the discussions and writing assignment topics throughout the semester. These topics included support around adjusting habits developed in high school, emotional challenges, sleep deprivation, stress management, homesickness, academics, and job searching and management.

To offset the potential for students to arrive at college with a host of bad habits in tow, Ariana, Diego and Shannon all requested a college/student success course. Although the university currently offers several college support workshops, the students pointed to the mandatory student success courses offered at other colleges and universities, and they acknowledged the potential value in offering something similar at their school “to remind or teach students strategies that are beneficial when studying,” and to “help with time

management and dealing with emotion effects that accompany the transition to college” (Ariana, Presentation, 18 Nov 2013). Diego suggested this course could be taught by a graduate student from the School of Education and aim to promote critical thinking, creativity and curiosity. The course could also link to the social justice focus of the university and the graduate student’s area of research focus, while using minimal lecture and more student presentation to encourage research and experimentation (Essay, 31 Oct 2013).

Offering a workshop during orientation was another option to make students aware of the bad habits that they may have brought with them to college and point out relevant support resources available on campus to aid in their transition to college.

Shannon stated:

I personally would have benefited from these workshops if they were incorporated into the Freshman Orientation program. Not only do I think that they could act as a ‘wake up call’ to college freshmen, but also as a way of motivating new college students to take responsibility for their learning. (Shannon, Essay, 12 Nov 2013)

Sonia specified the need for Emotional Intelligence awareness workshops to be created by the Center for Academic and Student Achievement (CASA), with referrals made to the Counseling and Psychology Services (CAPS) as needed for unlimited sessions (Essay, 10 Nov 2013). (Note: This suggestion also falls under the request for a university-wide recommendation, in that the request involves implementing a new assessment for incoming students and unlimited student counseling sessions, both of which would involve policy or procedural changes.)

Aedan and Cody both suggested incorporating sleep deprivation awareness (including the physical, mental, and quality of life effects) into new student Orientation to promote healthy sleep habits. This meeting could be mandatory and students could be surveyed at the end of every semester to determine the effects of sleep loss on the individual. In addition, the university could use the information from the survey to develop an action plan utilizing on-campus resources. The school could also promote getting enough sleep throughout the semester via banners and signs across the campus.

Harry had a similar suggestion for stress awareness seminars. These seminars would highlight the benefits of exercise, in particular, as way to reduce stress and include flyers with quick facts about the effects of both short and long term stressors. He said: “If more students knew about this fantastic way to reduce stress and better themselves mentally and physically, we would start to experience a much brighter and happier campus” (Harry, essay, 12 Nov 2013) (\*“brighter” meaning more intelligent).

Also under the heading of support groups or seminars, Danielle recommended ongoing support groups for homesickness. The groups could meet for an hour throughout the semester at different times to accommodate students’ varied schedules and aim to develop healthy coping mechanisms and strategies while creating personal connections and support systems through increased communication channels and sharing food and items that remind students of home.

Danielle stated:

If the university sets up support groups, students would be able to let their feelings out, which helps their overall emotional health, learn healthy strategies to cope with homesickness, as opposed to drinking or doing drugs, and meet new

people that they can relate to and hopefully build bonds with. (Presentation, 21 Nov 2013)

Danielle noted that she saw a flyer for a homesickness support group on campus that met only once and she was not able to attend due to a schedule conflict. Her idea built upon this existing mechanism.

In addition to these various ideas to support students emotionally, the student co-researchers also acknowledged the need to increase academic support. In particular, Grant recognized that academic support structure provided for student-athletes (or specifically the baseball and basketball teams) could benefit *all* students. He stated:

Sometimes college students just cannot handle being on their own and end up flunking out because they do not have anyone making them stay on track academically. College athletes on the other hand have structure. They have coaches and academic advisors watching over them, along with a demanding practice schedule. (Grant, Essay, 12 Nov 2013).

The university could assist students in the transition from high school to college “by monitoring every student as the student-athletes are monitored” (Grant, Essay, 12 Nov 2013). How the university would provide this increase in structure and monitoring was still in development at the time of Grant’s request.

In contrast, Natalie was specific in her request for the university to provide more support for students who work (hold a job) alongside going to school. She recommended the school reach out to students to inquire about job-related challenges, provide academic counseling, promote the use of academic resources, offer more on-campus jobs to first year students, and contact off-campus businesses nearby that employ students to make

sure the students are not overworked/overscheduled (Essay, 30 Oct 2013). These efforts would help students who are looking for work or already working while juggling a full course load feel more supported by the school.

**University-wide requirements.** The direct requests for changes in university policy or procedures covered incoming student assessment, attendance, summer reading and a plan for international student integration.

The assessment piece appeared in the support workshops above in connection with the idea of surveying students around sleep deprivation, inquiring about job-related challenges, and testing all incoming freshmen for Emotional Intelligence.

In terms of assessing Emotional Intelligence, Sonia explained:

After determining the rate of emotional intelligence among the freshmen class, the Center for Academic and Student Achievement (CASA), which focuses in helping students transition into college and designing student success workshops, could contact those who score under the average. With that information, CASA can also organize workshops that promote emotional intelligence. ...For those who need more assistance, CAPS can change the policy that limits the number of council sessions. This way the university will offer students services that can help them learn how to manage their feelings, ultimately helping them transition to college. (Essay, 10 Nov 2013)

As previously stated, this action plan would involve a change not only to how students are assessed, and possibly placed into courses, but also to the counseling center's policy around the number of sessions students are currently permitted.

Alongside Grant's request for students to receive more structured support and

monitoring as they transition into college and the academic discourse community, he believed that all classes should require attendance. He shared: "If all teachers required attendance, students would show up to class more and in effect learn more and create those valuable relationships with their peers and professors" (Grant, Essay, 12 Nov 2013). This belief aligned with the results of his library research, which spoke to how much students learn in class. Although the number reflecting the amount students retained during a lecture was low (approximately 5 percent), Grant expressed that this was more than a student would learn by not attending the class at all. In addition, the networking and mentoring possibilities were valuable to future success.

Another idea to improve performance in class was to require incoming freshmen to do some pre-reading for their courses. Thai researched the Summer Reading program, which the university recently discontinued due to lack of consensus on which one shared book would be appropriate across the curriculum. In past years, the university has had a book, and in one year a painting, for students to consider prior to coming to campus. The author or the subject of the book has also spoken on campus as part of this program.

In contrast, Thai's version of summer reading spoke to readings that were class specific; she highlighted the value of beginning reading for courses such as Biology or Chemistry prior to coming to school to reduce the workload when on campus. In her research for this suggestion, Thai conducted four student interviews and "they all answered that summer reading will actually help because it will give the students a heads up on what the class is going to be about and get ready for the lectures," but they also felt "it would be better for them personally if the Professors didn't give out summer readings

because they would like to enjoy their summer” (Presentation, 19 Nov 2013). Therefore, despite Thai’s good intentions, implementing this recommendation could be a challenge.

To assist the integration of international students campus, a topic of recent discussion among multiple departments at this university, Blaze recommended that the school consider setting limits on international student enrollment to allow for more individualized support of the international students in their transition to college. He also recommended having an American Culture class, similar to one offered at the University of Southern California (USC) to further assist in adjusting to life in the United States (Presentation, 19 Nov 2013). (\*Note: He was not aware of the First Year Seminar currently offered in this topic area—American Cultures Seminar. He added that the course could broaden its scope to include other student success aspects, such as managing personal finances and the differences in cost of items in this country compared to the student’s home country. His concern stemmed from noticing his international student roommate “blowing his money” on CDs, video games and other incidentals.)

Brittany also provided some suggestions regarding the transition to college for international students, including a change to expand the current Buddy program (which pairs international students with domestic U.S. students and holds social events) and the role of the mentors. Although this recommendation was part of the letter assignment, rather than the final essay or presentation, the request for action grew out of the class’s research and Brittany was the only student co-researcher who chose to continue revising her letter assignment throughout the semester for submission to the department that could address the various aspects of her suggestions. This letter has already been received by

the director of International Student and Scholar Services. (\*See Appendix H)

**Faculty requests/training.** The suggestions for faculty seemed to center on how courses are conducted. Ariana pointed out that “freshmen come in with little to no experience of college and the differing expectations that accompany coursework. Then they are expected to have all these skills that were never required in high school and that were never explicitly stated” (Presentation, 18 Nov 2013). To remedy this situation, she recommended that professors explicitly state course expectations “either through syllabi or personal interactions” (Ariana, Presentation, 18 Nov 2013). In addition, Ariana shared that professors could acknowledge and “incorporate the cultural aspects and interests of students to work with existing skills to achieve the desired outcome of each paper” (Essay, 10 Nov 2013).

Pete tapped into his experience garnered through participating in the International Baccalaureate program at his high school to suggest incorporating a seminar style teaching format into every course, rather than a lecture format (Essay, 31 Oct 2013). Kynan had a similar suggestion but for implementing peer review across the curriculum. He shared that “implementing peer review processes in university and college classrooms will increase students’ communication skills, will create stronger critical thinking skills, and will help students be able to better understand and assess themselves and their own performances, both during and after college” (Kynan, Essay, 12 Nov 2013). To accomplish this goal, “Workshops should take place before school begins that are put on by the Center for Teaching Excellence. These workshops will educate teachers on the benefits of peer review and mandate that they incorporate some sort of review process in

their classrooms” (Kynan, Presentation, 21 Nov 2013). The combination of peer review and seminars (over lectures) somewhat echoed Diego’s recommendation for a student success workshop that would also move away from lecture format and rely on peers-teaching-peers. Therefore, some of these suggestions could potentially be used in conjunction or even in place of one another.

### **To Future First-Time Freshmen**

These recommendations were as much for the co-researchers themselves as they were for future freshman transitioning into college and the academic discourse community. Again, the suggestions spoke directly to the challenges observed and experienced by the student co-researchers. The overall message of these suggestions was the need for students to take responsibility for their education and change the habits or mentality formed in high school to meet college expectations. The co-researchers called upon fellow freshmen to “take charge” and “to realize that high school and college are completely different” (Feneyda, Presentation, 19 Nov 2013). Feneyda added, “It is you (the student) that must change your studying habits, social life and the way you handle your responsibilities because you are on your own now. Your parents may still be there to support you, but you need to make your own decisions” (Presentation, 19 Nov 2013).

More specifically, Jordan suggested that students keep a planner and commit to a schedule to manage their time. In his presentation, he told his classmates: “By creating a schedule and committing to it, you will find that you can finish your work in a timely fashion while still having some you time” (Jordan, Presentation, 21 Nov 2013). Similarly, Neil suggested for students to prioritize their schoolwork over social opportunities and to

choose their study environments wisely. He offered: “While there are exceptional cases, ...students should generally study in quiet areas without distractions. When they study in these areas, they spend less time getting their work done while still keeping it high quality” (Neil, Essay, 9 Nov 2013). Grant recommended using classes as a resource, not only for course information, but for networking with peers and faculty. Brian also noted the value of finding mentors, and Harry showed the value of seeking advice from upperclassmen and making changes to one’s habits accordingly.

Making school a priority also allowed Neil to get more sleep at night, and he recommended this approach to preventing sleep deprivation (Essay, 9 Nov 2013). Aedan and Cody also highlighted the importance of understanding the effects of sleep loss on one’s body, mind and well-being. They believed that recognizing the role that sleep plays in the college transition can make a difference for student success.

In addition, incoming freshmen were advised to take the initiative to manage themselves around stress, by increasing awareness of the effects of stress on the body and mind, and developing coping mechanisms to alleviate stress. Shadera noted that

Everyone handles stress differently and there is no perfect way to deal with stress. Students need to recognize this and take it upon themselves to find the best way they can manage their stress most effectively. There are clearly many resources that [the university] provides to students for stress management, it is up to you, the student, to take advantage of them and manage your own stress. (Presentation, 13 Nov 2013)

Harry added that students should consider the potential benefit of exercise as a solution (Presentation, 19 Nov 2013).

Brittany recommended that students take an active role in the transition to college writing, as well. This approach would involve finding people to read and critique their written work (e.g., classmates, professors, the writing center), writing and reading more (frequency, volume, and variety), practicing research skills, managing tasks and stress, moving beyond the five-paragraph format, and not procrastinating. She explained:

Some high school students entering college are less prepared for the writing assignments that await them. ...In order for students to overcome this boundary and be successful in college, they can seek critiques from others, write and research more in leisure, and manage their time. (Brittany, Essay, 12 Nov 2013)

Ultimately, “students can help themselves improve writing at a college level” (Brittany, Presentation, 14 Nov 2013), by taking responsibility for their development.

Feneyda agreed and added that students can meet the expectations of college by adopting the studying, reading and writing habits needed to succeed. One aspect of this change involved recognizing the importance of writing in college. Brian added that having an attitude that “goes with the flow” and “will embrace what happens” rather than freaking “over expectations or changes” is also key to this transition (Presentation, 21 Nov 2013).

Many of the recommendations from the student co-researchers involved students not only taking responsibility for themselves and their workload requirements, but also utilizing the resources available on campus. Shadera pointed to the various clubs and classes, as well as the on campus meditation room, for managing stress. Harry directed everyone toward the gym. Brittany and Neil recommended the campus writing center. In addition, the student co-researchers recognized the resource they have in each other and

their fellow students—both those sharing in the experience of coming to college for the first time and those who have made the transition successfully and sustainably.

### **Reflections on the Process from the Instructor/University Researcher Perspective**

I'm already so impressed by these brilliant souls. They have succeeded in tapping into some of the major obstacles of education without any prompting—aside from being reminded to post a journal entry. (University Researcher Journal, 12 Sept 2013)

In my first journal entry, I made the above note in relation to the students' first journal posts. As both the instructor and university researcher, I found this strong start to the project was very exciting. The students went on to demonstrate development in many of the areas we aim for in the required writing classes, as well as to recognize the importance of nonacademic skills and to lay the foundations for critical consciousness (Freire, 1974). Whereas most of my reflections will contribute to the Discussion section in Chapter V of this report, some were specific to the findings of this study. These included realizations about the class's attendance and participation, areas of focus and overall development, as well as some missed opportunities for further discussion.

### **Attendance and Participation**

This class was not only a required course, rather than one that the students self-select, this section met early in the morning at 8am on Tuesday and Thursdays. As many instructors can attest, attendance in early morning classes can be spotty, especially after midterms when the initial honeymoon period of starting school wanes and students are faced with the full demands of college life. Despite the many challenges expressed by the student co-researchers, I found this class to be one of the best attended 8am classes that I had ever taught in more than ten years at this university. In addition, the participation

level was consistently high among the students. While some tended to post more on the discussion board than they spoke up in class, all of the students handed in every written assignment and all participated in the paired dialogues. This assignment involved creating interview questions, recording the dialogue and transcribing the conversation—every pair turned in a recording and transcript and utilized their dialogues when triangulating data sources. We also had very little discussion as a class around grades. The students seemed motivated primarily by exploring topics they had selected and the opportunity to improve the college transition experience for their fellow and future freshmen.

### **Focus and Development**

In the process of conducting this study, the students achieved many of the course goals of the first-year writing classes, including some of the hard-to-measure aspects of the course, such as critical thinking and metacognition. Although some of these skills were still a work-in-progress as the semester drew to a close, I agree with my fellow co-researchers that this study provided a foundation that combined writing development with components from a student success course in a way that involved the students in the process rather than lecturing about the potential pitfalls of the college transition.

The student co-researchers' recommendations to high schools, their college, and all incoming freshmen (both present and future) showed how clearly they recognized the importance of nonacademic skills in their academic pursuits. In fact, there was very little emphasis or discussion about academics without mention of nonacademic skills and how they support academics. Their distinctions between the high school and college mentalities and how the current system of standardized education fosters this difference were also significant, as the students developed a critical lens through which to view the

institutional forces surrounding them. Most of all, I was glad to see the shift from blaming the school, and the system of schooling, toward calling upon students to take responsibility. Perhaps inspired in part by reading John Taylor Gatto's "Against School," the students recognized the need to "take control" and to put "effort" into their college experience. They highlighted how the university can support students in creating awareness and providing options to manage the effects of stress, sleep deprivation, time management issues, and balancing a job with rest of college life (academic, social, personal), but ultimately they (the students) were responsible for managing challenges, meeting expectations and being successful in a sustainable way. The students' final reports, presentations and reflections also pointed to how connected these skills are to each other.

The biggest takeaway that I witnessed from this study was the changes in skills, habits and behaviors made by the co-researchers themselves. These changes involved recognizing the *funds of knowledge* they brought with them to college, from time or stress management, to networking, to writing-related skills, which could be utilized during this transition and shared with others as tips for how to improve. For example, Brittany and Jordan shared their time management tricks, whereas Harry and Shadera offered stress management skills. Cody, Danielle, Grant, Harry, and Kynan all valued using their people networks to achieve their goals. Brittany, Pete and Shannon tapped into their writing-related skills to help others. Many of the challenges identified allowed someone in the group to make a suggestion (either based on experience or later based on research). Some discovered they had the makings of certain skills, even if they had not yet been called upon to use them (e.g., Brian recognizing his people network and managing his

expectations, or Sonia recognizing her Emotional Intelligence). They also saw the value of their experiences, as they became researchers and their experiences became data.

The study provided a launch pad for questioning what they observed and recognizing their own ability to investigate and research options for addressing the challenges they faced. Shadera shared: "I have learned so much, not only about myself but also many skills that I will hopefully be able to utilize throughout my 4 years at [this university]" (Reflection, 30 Nov 2013). Many of the students echoed this sentiment in developing fundamental skills and recognizing the need to change habits and behaviors in order to be successful in college and their future lives. Overall, being a part of this study encouraged the students to apply these skills (both old and new) toward a tangible goal in providing specific recommendations for future action.

### **Missed Opportunities**

One missed opportunity was in my decision not to record class conversations. Recording the workshop group interactions in particular would have been useful to further track the development of the students as writers and researchers, as well as provide the co-researchers who were not in the group with more discussion on the topics covered in those meetings. For some students, hearing the perspective and feedback from their fellow co-researchers in these small group meetings was essential to refining their thoughts on the topic they were researching. The transcripts from these discussions would not only be helpful for my own research, in terms of this report, but sharing these discussions with the rest of the class could have provided an additional resource for others pursuing related topics or further fueled conversations on the discussion board.

In addition to the many topics introduced by the students in the journals or

discussion board posts that became part of their final projects, some topics which were relevant to their experience were dropped along the way. These missed opportunities surrounded challenges involving: Managing identity issues (including gender identity), the technology gap (including the push to go paperless on campus), the benefits (or lack of) in attending the university's forward/bridge program, the relationship between social interaction and writing success, prioritizing one personal obligation over another (making sacrifices for friends/family), texting as an alternate form of communication, recognizing and applying jargon and lingo, seeing the role of reading across the curriculum, writing in timed-writing situations, class participation and the effect on grade and attitude toward a class, maintaining the pace of college life (avoiding the fade to the finish tendency), connecting work done in class to future writing or work done in other classes, and the relationship between confidence in writing and adapting to the challenges of the college writing workload. These topics could provide opportunities for further exploration in future research, as many speak to issues raised in the literature.

**CHAPTER V:  
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, DISCUSSION,  
RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS**

“Well, this is it. I am officially a researcher” (Diego, Reflection, 3 Dec 2013).

This study explored the student perspective on what contributes to a successful and sustainable transition to college and college-level writing. Unlike other studies considering college readiness, this study aimed to make the students the drivers of the research, as they are the ones most affected by, yet least involved in, academic reforms and curriculum or policy changes. Using a Participatory Action Research approach, the students in one section of Written Communication I during the Fall 2013 semester formed a research team. Together, they developed questions, pursued information and created data, and devised plans for future action. As the instructor and university researcher, I was also a member of the research team, however, my role included being the initial facilitator, question poser and supporter, and the students increasingly took on these roles as the study and semester progressed. I aimed to balance my responsibilities in a way that allowed the students to express their ideas in their own terms at the level of development they had achieved when the study concluded.

The findings of this study reflect the themes the students identified and direct quotes from their work illustrate their revelations. By design, the study focused on the student perspective, and the findings were limited to what the students reported in terms of issues and solutions in the given time period. Overall, this study demonstrated that “given the proper tools, the people most affected by a problem are not only capable of better understanding their realities, but also are the best equipped to address their

struggles” (Koirala-Azad & Fuentes, 2010, p. 1). As Diego, one of the student co-researchers, stated, “No other group knows about these problems as closely as we freshman do” (Reflection, 3 Dec 2013).

This chapter summarizes the findings from Chapter IV of this report, discusses the co-researchers’ findings in relation to the research questions stated in Chapter I and the existing literature from Chapter II, makes recommendations based on the implications of the findings, and concludes with some final thoughts on the process.

### **Summary of Findings**

The research team conducted two mini cycles of the PAR approach and generated a variety of themes. The first cycle resulted in a letter project calling for a change of policy or protocol on campus. These letters were shared amongst the co-researchers to initiate the process for the second PAR cycle. During this cycle, the students reflected upon the research findings of the first cycle and deepened their level of questioning alongside developing their research skills. Each team member chose a topic to explore in relation to the transition to college and college level writing and presented their findings and call for action to the rest of the team at the end of the semester.

In the process of their research, the team recognized that the experience of entering into the academic discourse community could not be separated from the challenges of transitioning to college as a whole. They saw writing, alongside reading and researching, as essential to college success, and that being successful in college means developing methods to manage their academic workload, social lives, and personal obligations in a sustainable way. They called upon their fellow freshmen to adjust their mentalities and expectations, and to take responsibility for themselves and their

education, because the habits and behaviors that worked in high school may not serve them well in college.

They also called upon high schools to foster better habits in students that can assist in the transition to college, and believed that colleges can better meet students where they are as they enter the Ivory Tower and support them via courses, seminars or workshops (particularly during orientation) that address managing time, stress, sleep, job/sport obligations, and emotional challenges. In addition, colleges could implement policies and faculty training to foster the nonacademic skills, which the research team found as essential to achieving academic success.

Overall, the student co-researchers found being a part of this study helped them in their transition to college and college writing. They saw themselves in the challenges observed in other first-time freshmen, believed they were contributing to the learning of others, and felt their writing and research skills developed as a result of the data collection and reporting methods. They were also motivated by the opportunity to choose their own topics and to improve the transition experience for future incoming freshmen. As the instructor and university researcher, I recognized how aligning this study with the course requirements resulted in better class attendance and participation, as well as meeting some of the harder-to-measure course goals, such as critical thinking and metacognition. In addition, the PAR approach provided ample opportunity for the students' ideas and voices to be explored, developed and shared.

### **Discussion**

To place the findings of this study into context, this section aims to address the Research Questions, as well as reflect upon the relevant existing literature.

### **Research Question #1: What Challenges Do First-Time College Students Encounter as They Enter the College Discourse Community?**

The student co-researchers identified an array of challenges that were consistent with the literature. For sake of discussion around these challenges, this section focuses on those issues pertaining to writing specifically, to self-management and expectations, and to the high school versus college mentality. The students also faced other challenges in trying to explain their obstacles as they encountered them, which were not identified as themes, but are important to note in this section.

**Writing issues.** Upon arrival at college, many of the student co-researchers felt they were prepared for college writing only to find otherwise as the assignments began to stack up. They were overwhelmed by workload and unfamiliar with paper formats, and not accustomed to using research as a process to frame their writing. The students felt limited by the five-paragraph essay format they had relied upon in high school and expressed they had not had enough practice with the type of writing that college required. Their level of preparation for writing varied among their high school experiences. These realizations reflect the findings of Beil and Knight (2009), Kiuvara, et al (2009) and Sanoff (2006). Beil and Knight (2009) noted in their findings that “the types of writing expected in college—criticizing a written argument, defining a problem and proposing a solution, and analyzing the needs of a writing audience—had not been assigned with any frequency” in high school (p 7), and from the student perspective, not much has changed since that study was conducted.

The co-researchers also saw writing as an essential part of the process of transitioning to college. The transition to the academic discourse community could not be

separated from the transition to college as a whole. Being successful in college meant developing methods to manage their writing workload in a sustainable way and to produce work that was of high caliber and met professor expectations. While some students arrived feeling more equipped for the written work, juggling the writing workload with the other challenges of transitioning to college affected their ability to perform even when confident in their writing ability. Wymer et al (2012) found that 55 percent of the students in their study felt that high school had prepared them well for college. However, half of the students reported not turning in assignments, and one third spent a shockingly low amount of time on their course work, resulting in more than 20 percent of students repeating their composition classes.

These statistics could relate to the finding in our study regarding preparation for writing alongside the other challenges in the college transition. Even students who came through Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs expressed they may have been ready for writing, but their preparation for the other changes in the college transition was lacking. This issue speaks to questions around the areas that high schools focus on for college preparation and whether confidence in writing ability is enough to help students get over the initial hurdle of the college transition. Further research could delve deeper into equity issues among the students' high school experiences as they relate to writing preparation.

**Self-management and expectation issues.** Many of the issues identified by the student co-researchers centered on self-management, including management around time, sleep, stress, personal and job or sport obligations. They also included differences between high school and college in terms of expectations, workload and time spent on

work. These observations were similar to the differences identified by Balfanz (2009) and Sanoff (2006), both of whom noted a disconnect between high school and college expectations. They also spoke to the hidden curriculum of school, as discussed by Apple (2004), Bizzell (1992) and Emig (1971), among others, and the findings of Karp and Bork (2012) around what community college students identified as necessary for success.

Interestingly, the student co-researchers in our study seemed to have no problem calling themselves to task around these issues. They also shared tips or ideas for improvement, which spoke to their potential funds of knowledge around these skills. They became very comfortable with discussing their levels of stress and lack of sleep, as well as their tendency to procrastinate or struggle with balancing their time for work and play (or even work at a job or sport with school work and being social). They even discussed the obstacles they experienced around the fear of not making friends. During the course of the semester, these topics became more personal in nature; the students went from observing others to sharing more of their individual experiences in relation to the chosen topics. For some students, more intimate issues may have become easier to share as the class became a community (e.g., Danielle sharing her struggle with homesickness). For others, their research may have provided the language for explaining their experiences (e.g., Sonia and Aedan describing their personal, emotional challenges).

**High school versus college mentality issues.** Closely linked to the self-management and expectation issues were the issues related to habits, behavior and attitude. The concept of having the right mentality to succeed in college became a big part of the student co-researchers' findings and recommendations. This point also related to the findings by Karp and Bork (2012).

Recognizing the array of challenges being faced by themselves and other first time freshmen caused the student co-researchers to question the methods used in high school to prepare them for the nonacademic aspects of college. As a result, the students demonstrated elements of critical consciousness and joined the ongoing debate in the United States around the effectiveness of schooling and the focus on standardized testing. This standardized form of schooling was deemed to cause students to develop bad habits and lack a college mentality. This observation, initially flagged by Shannon, was particularly interesting, as the tendency to concentrate on raising student test scores left those who had achieved the desired score to their own devices. This lack of focus on the more effective students, or belief that the system works for them, could point to why even white, middle class, and in some cases privately-educated students, have issues with transitioning to the academic discourse community.

The questions raised by the students around the lack of rigor, along with opportunities to be creative, curious and think critically, also pointed to the challenges they faced entering college, as well as to potential equity issues. They noted a “perception gap” in the continuum of schooling due to the difference in expectations between high school and college. The presence of busy work in high school (as noted by Blaze and Diego) and the regular checkpoints by teachers (as noted by Kynan) also seemed to contribute to those college freshmen they observed as doing the bare minimum to get by and running into problems in the process, similar to what Wymer et al (2012) noted above. Many of the co-researchers argued that a key challenge in the college transition was recognizing that a change in mentality was necessary.

**Other challenges.** Although the student co-researchers began the semester with identifying seemingly superficial issues, such as the length of the cafeteria lines, they deepened their topics as the study progressed and their research skills developed. Their final projects held personal significance, with most of the topics stemming from their experiences as well as those observed in other first time freshmen. However, the students also hinted at other challenges that were not explored in depth, but could be if the study had continued for more time. For example, Sonia mentioned challenges with technology, and the campus-wide push to go paperless, but did not explore this topic further.

Similarly, identity challenges surfaced in Aedan, Sonia and Diego's experiences. Aedan specifically stated that he was caught in an identity crisis, partly driven by gender identity questions. Sonia realized her Emotional Intelligence quotient may play a role in her ability to manage challenging personal events alongside entering college, and Diego recognized that he was just like the first time freshmen he was observing—with the same challenges in time management and workload—rather than being an objective researcher of the first-time freshmen experience. These identity questions no doubt carried into the next semester—which I can attest as Diego was in my class the following semester—but for most of the student co-researchers, identity was not yet part of what they were considering. They definitely saw themselves in the experiences of others, and recognized they shared some of the same challenges, so their advice was as much to themselves as to other first time freshmen. However, naming these challenges in relation to their sense of identity did not come up in the course of this study.

The fact that these topics were not shared among the research team to the same extent as the topics that were chosen for the final project and presentations could speak to

where the students were in their cognitive development. As Perry (1970) noted in his cognitive epistemology scale, students arrive at college in a stage of development where they may not yet be making these connections. Diego exemplified this in his thinking around how students receive education, and how tests tend to dictate what is important to learn. The co-researchers also showed this in the way they discussed academic and nonacademic skills—some defining the terms quite literally, others seeing more of a link between the skills honed in college and success in the workplace.

This student perception could speak to the ongoing process of development they are experiencing alongside this big life change. In college, they are expected to be independent, yet seek support via the available resources. These are skills that are seen as essential in studies by Karp and Bork (2012) and Nieto (1994). Whereas we could view these as examples of being autonomous and managing one's needs, in the student perception during this transition process, they could be seen as conflicting goals—be independent, but ask for help. Because the student co-researchers were juggling the transition to college alongside conducting a study about this experience, they may not have had the bandwidth to go deeper in their first semester than this report demonstrates.

We can see this sense of inner conflict in Natalie's experience of writing about balancing a job alongside the academic and social aspects of college. She expressed not only changing her final project topic multiple times, but also struggling to put her experience into words. I responded to her during this time with reassurance that writing about something *as* you experience it can be challenging. In the end, she articulated the job challenges well, but a closer look at her report shows that she found using the facts

from her survey and experiences of other first time freshmen as a way to bridge to sharing her personal challenges with working during school.

Perhaps these challenges would have become more central to the study if the project had continued a second semester, after the initial entry into the college environment was complete. As Aedan noted, the transition to college may take two years. Questions about identity and other such realizations may be a later step in this process than we reached as a research team during the first semester.

**Research Question #2: What Skills, Habits And Behaviors Do First-Time College Students Employ as They Settle into Their New Discourse Community and Tackle the Writing Demands of Their First Semester of College?**

An overview of the skills, habits and behaviors the research team felt contributed to a successful and sustainable transition resembles the many how-to books available on managing time and stress, organizing and planning tasks, and writing well. However, they also reflect the recent research on the particular traits or behaviors that contribute to success, which have been characterized in the literature as nonacademic, noncognitive, intangible, tacit, or soft skills (Nieto, 1994; Karp and Bork, 2012; Tough, 2012). Although the role these skills play in academic success will be explored further in response to Research Question #3, connecting these skills to the existing literature can lead to many discussion points. The topics highlighted here include: How the students owned up to their role and responsibilities, how the students' words did not always reflect their actions, the multifaceted role of building and using people networks and support systems, the value of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, and what these findings showed in terms of entering the academic discourse community.

**Owning up to their role and responsibilities.** Similar to Karp and Bork's (2012) findings, taking control and managing oneself and one's workflow within the academic and social demands of college was a key finding for the student co-researchers in our study. According to Karp and Bork (2012), "Students need to be able to think critically about their various roles and obligations and to develop strategies that will work for their unique circumstances. They also need to have enough awareness to recognize when strategies are not working, in order to make appropriate modifications" (p. 29). They called this taking advantage of the "fluidity" of the role of being a college student. The student co-researchers acknowledged the need to be independent, while recognizing the opportunity to tap into external resources for support. They felt that they, as college students, should make school a priority, be accountable, have a plan, and look for solutions rather than lay blame. They also needed to adapt to changes and go with the flow. Ultimately, they believed, their success was up to them.

**Words versus actions.** Although the particular skills, habits, and behaviors the student co-researchers highlighted as essential spoke directly to the challenges they identified for first-time freshmen, employing these methods toward success was a different issue. The student co-researchers recognized what they needed to do; however, some chose to recommend actions that they were not taking, such as managing their time, avoiding procrastination, or getting enough sleep. According to Perry's (1970) cognitive epistemology scale, learners move from viewing truth in absolute terms of Right and Wrong (obtained from "Good" or "Bad" Authorities) to recognizing multiple, conflicting versions of "truth" which represent legitimate alternatives. Where the students are in their development upon entering college, as students, critical thinkers and researchers, can

affect their ability to observe and change their own behavior. The fact that some students made recommendations to others in their final projects (which will be explored further in response to Research Question #4) that they themselves did not follow may be indicative of where the students were in both the transition process and their cognitive development.

However, being a part of this study may have created the environment for the student co-researchers to develop through the stages of Perry's scheme. The students moved from a sense of their experience being unique and different from others, to being similar to what they observed in other freshmen, to identifying what may help and doing research around the available resources, to committing to a suggestion for future action based on their research. This progression shows the "integration of knowledge learned from others with personal experience and reflection," noted in Rappaport's (2011) breakdown of Perry's Scale. In their presentations, Jordan, Neil and Aedan acknowledged their hypocrisy in making suggestions they were not implementing, which may demonstrate recognition of their development, even if they did not heed their own advice.

Perry's scheme also notes that learners can be in one place on the scale in some parts of their lives and in a different place in other areas. This point may reflect why some students seem so "together" in one life area, only to be derailed by an event in another aspect of their lives. Many college instructors have seen strong students fall apart after a breakup with a significant other, for example, and risk failing out of school. As Sonia, Aedan and Diego's experiences of personal challenges exhibit, obstacles can come from external and internal events. The ability to manage oneself around these events can be the difference between success in the college transition and the decision to drop out or transfer to another school. Danielle, who struggled with homesickness, and Brian, who

questioned whether this school met his vision of what college life should be, specifically noted considering whether a transfer of schools was the solution.

How these challenges and experiences shaped these students as individuals, and what this meant in terms of how they saw themselves (their sense of identity), may have been a work-in-progress as the semester ended. However, the skills, habits and behaviors the students utilized to keep themselves in school throughout their first semester demonstrated a range of coping mechanisms and abilities, which spoke to the funds of knowledge they brought with them to college. For some of the students, recognizing and naming the challenge or obstacle prompted them toward making a change. For others, the catalyst to make a change came via sharing what was going on with someone else, along with the fear of failing or sense of flailing. This person (or people) varied among the students—from instructors to staff to family members to peers—but showed the importance of having a support system of some sort. Perhaps, with an extension of this type of study throughout the first year, more data around the resources available to support these coping mechanisms could be examined, alongside what would prompt those who made suggestions they did not follow to use the resources they tout.

**Building and using people networks and support systems.** Tough (2008) talked about the X Factor that made a difference for students in the Harlem Children’s Zone, Bloome (2008) noted the importance of interpersonal relationships in reframing school participation, and Duncan-Andrade (2006) and Valenzuela (1999) pointed to the value of authentic care or *cariño* in creating a reciprocal relationship between student and school. Alongside the importance of students taking responsibility for their own education, as noted by the co-researchers in many of their suggestions for future action, the role that

others play can make a key difference in student academic success. The student co-researchers pointed to many ways that others supported them in their academic efforts. Harry highlighted how he garnered ideas from upperclassmen for managing his written work, Danielle noted how both her mom and her roommate provided personal and academic support, and Grant pointed to a formalized system of support for student-athletes.

The students also argued the importance of building networks of peers and creating mentor-like relationships with professors. Brian and Grant both made specific nods to networking in their projects. However, these relationships come with some added obligations for both peers and professors. For peers, the responsibility to be an authority on a level never before experienced becomes a reality as students sometimes provide the only feedback that their classmates will receive in revising their projects for a grade. Karp and Bork (2012) also noted this increased level of responsibility to each other as students and peers in their study with community college students, including being open minded and supportive of the positions of others—both of which were either suggested or demonstrated by the student co-researchers in our study.

This sense of increased responsibility extended to the student/instructor relationship, including how interactions are conducted. Students are charged with communicating “with instructors honestly, early on and often” (Karp & Bork, 2012, p. 29). In return, they will not only better meet the course expectations but build relationships that can increase opportunities, such as the mentorship described by Grant or the internships acquired by Brian during this study. However, the responsibility also rests with the instructors, who may be required to shift their approach to teaching. Pete,

who experienced seminar style courses in his high school IB program, called for more seminar style classes at the college level as a result of this study, and Kynan called for more peer review opportunities across the curriculum. This shift from a more distant lecture to a more intimate seminar style and small group work approach to teaching may be a challenge or unwelcomed change for some professors, but there is potential value for both student and teacher. In their research focusing on the “important transition” to “literacies expected in college courses” (p. 3), Wymer et al (2012) described how the instructor researchers found mentorship to be an important part of their collaboration with their student co-researchers, and the rewards reaped included not only more diligent research but an ongoing spark of interest in other students toward joining research projects in the future.

Another aspect found by the student co-researchers in our study reflected the “help-seeking” that Karp and Bork (2012) found to be one of the four components of the community college student role. Similarly, the student co-researchers recognized the willingness to tap into the availability of on-campus resources as an important part of the college transition. Many of these resources were highlighted in the co-researchers’ suggestions, including the Writing Center, counseling center, meditation center, gym and clubs for physical activity, and workshops geared toward managing time, stress and homesickness. Whereas not all of the students were taking advantage of these resources—as Cody called out during the question/answer portion of one presentation, “We can’t manage our time well enough to go to the time management workshop”—the recognition of the opportunities available for support could be considered an important step, as well as the realization that participation was their choice and any repercussions

experienced by not making use of these resources was their consequence.

Our study also reinforced the belief expressed by Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) that sharing student work can increase student motivation and honor student voices, as well as provide important insight on the student perspective to individuals in positions of power. The students not only shared their ideas with each other via their presentations, but as the instructor and academic researcher in this project, I have already begun to share the student co-researchers' ideas beyond this report and intend to pursue opportunities to extend the reach of their findings in the coming months.

**Using intrinsic and extrinsic rewards.** Many of the students in this study talked about balancing academic and social obligations. One option was to use rewards as motivation for completing work, and these rewards often meant opportunities to have fun and be social. This approach was easier said than done in some respects, as the student co-researchers noted that managing time around their obligations was an ongoing challenge. Harry argued that free time was an illusion, and Kynan noted that the lack of check-ins from authority figures could be a key component of why students struggle. In comparison, the students found that being part of this study provided both motivation and discipline that contributed to their ability to succeed this semester.

These extrinsic and intrinsic motivators point to Pink's (2009) research, as well as challenge the current construct of schools using grades or test scores as the ultimate goal. According to Pink (2009): "The problem with making an extrinsic reward the only destination that matters is that some people will choose the quickest route there, even if it means taking the low road" (p 51). College instructors have encountered students who hear what it will take to get the "C" to pass and do the bare minimum to get that grade. In

contrast, this study may have caused students (not naming names) who might have started with the “just get a C” attitude to do more work or be driven toward making adjustments in their approach to their academics. We as a class had very little discussion around grades, and I experienced no grade-related arguments (e.g., challenges or questions about the grading process). In addition, both attendance and participation were high among the co-researchers. In some cases, the students expressed having an inner dialogue and questioning how they were approaching their work in comparison to the other freshmen they were observing.

In one example demonstrating this type of inner dialogue, Harry shared:

This study “forced” us, for lack of a better word, to find the answers. It encouraged us to think about things we were doing and things we weren’t doing as vital information toward the study and I found myself subliminally analyzing situations. I started asking myself questions like “Is the fact that it’s still 11pm and I haven’t started a single sentence of my paper due tomorrow affecting my transition? What are the implications of this? Is there a better way to do this?”

This study stimulated a love-hate relationship with hindsight where I often caught myself thinking, “yeah, I could’ve done that better. I’ll reflect on that in my journal” (Reflection, 2 Dec 2013).

Pink (2009) centered motivation around autonomy, mastery and purpose, and aligning this study with the course goals modeled these intrinsic motivators for the student co-researchers, as well as for myself as the university researcher and instructor. Although I introduced the idea of the study and the primary focus area of the transition to college and college-level writing, the students controlled how the study evolved. Some took on

challenging topics because they were personally interested in finding answers to their questions (Danielle, Natalie, Sonia), others had revelations that changed their approach to their topic (Blaze, Grant), others saw how they changed others (Brian, Brittany), and still others witnessed changes within themselves (Aedan, Diego, Harry). The students worked to improve their presentations of their findings (from polishing the writing in their letters to deepening research for their final projects to creating clever presentation approaches), and they did this in service of future freshmen (to improve their experience at the school and assist in making the transition smoother and sustainable).

Many of the students noted that they felt they were doing something that was bigger than themselves. They saw the value in helping others immediately and the potential to help others in the future with their findings. They also saw themselves as legitimate sources of research data as well as legitimate researchers in the course of the study. Although the students may have seen other extrinsic rewards from being a part of this study, such as forming new friendships or achieving a certain grade by managing and planning their work flow, the intrinsic benefits seem to be ongoing. As Shannon stated, “What I have realized is that while participating in this research process as a college freshman, I have learned a lot about myself as a student, as well as how to become an even better one” (Reflection, 3 Dec 2013). This realization involved recognizing skills the students already possessed, as well as developing new ones.

**Entering the academic discourse community.** The process of entering the academic discourse community was visible throughout this study, as was the students’ efforts to do so in a way that met expectations (their own and those of professors, family and peers). Looking at the progression of the research and development of the

researchers, we can see how the students deepened their topics as their research skills developed. We can also see how their approach to researching changed over time, from Sonia and Blaze recognizing the roles of researching and drafting, to Grant and Natalie adjusting their arguments as they learned more about their topic through the research and workshop processes.

However, the transition was very much still in-progress for the student co-researchers as the semester (and study) ended. Extending the study throughout the first year of college could yield more insight into how students initiate themselves into the academic discourse community, including the specific writing techniques the students employed and what works toward writing success. Many of the changes noted in this study—around planning, time management, seeking support from others, utilizing one's personal network as readers, or visiting the professor or campus Writing Center—held the potential to be sustainable and lead to success, but determining what skills, habits and behaviors translate directly to academic success could take more time to assess. Such exploration could also better connect the students to their own funds of knowledge, as well as provide ideas for further developing their skills.

Among the aspects of the academic discourse community topics that the co-researchers in our study acknowledged was the importance of reading and writing to college success. Similar to Wymer et al (2012), who found that less experienced readers and writers struggled to make sense of unfamiliar college workloads and expectations, the student co-researchers recognized that freshmen with more reading and writing experience seemed to fair better in managing academic writing demands. In relation to the Tate/Lindemann discussion around writing and reading, Brittany, Thai and Shannon

recognized the reciprocal relationship between reading and writing and how increasing the frequency, volume, and variety of these practices can support academic efforts. Whereas Tate (1993) and Lindemann (1993) parsed out which reading should be done in which course areas, the students believed the more practice one has with all forms of reading and writing, the more readily accessible the skills they develop will be as students encounter the demands of college assignments across the curriculum. The students also pointed to the value of researching topics of personal interest, both in their classwork and in their free time to gain practice. Extending the length of this study could further follow the development of the reading/writing relationship and researching for the fun of it.

The student co-researchers also demonstrated the beginnings of acquiring and utilizing academic discourse. This speaks to part of the discussion between Bartholomae (1985) and Elbow (1991) regarding whether students should use the language of academic discourse upon entry to the academy or be permitted to use their own vernacular to express their ideas while learning the intellectual concepts of academia. As this study reflects, the co-researchers appeared to use their own terminology to describe their experiences, which could be seen as more akin to Elbow than Bartholomae in the spectrum of that debate. As an instructor, I tend to introduce academic and rhetorical terms to students at this level of writing early in the semester, and I frequently use this terminology in explanations of assignments. However, if the students had been restricted to expressing their ideas via academic terms rather than using their voices, the research team may not have yielded the same results from the study and the students may not have developed or used the terms that became the themes in this report, such as the “high

school mentality” and “standardized schooling.” In addition, despite being very much in the throes of change and not always able to articulate what they were experiencing, many of the students found ways to share their experience by not being limited to academic language (e.g., Natalie and her job experience, Sonia relaying her changing approach to researching).

Upon reflection, some of the students did adopt academic ways of expressing themselves in the course of the semester. For example, Sonia found the term *Emotional Intelligence* to explain what she was experiencing, Kynan used *peer review* to request the specific instructor training he thought would most benefit students, and Shannon referenced *discourse community* to discuss “the need for change when transitioning from the high school to collegiate level” (manuscript, 19 Nov 2013). These and other terms—critical thinking, illustration, sleep deprivation—became a part of their lexicon through the process of being in the class and researching the topics they chose.

Because the focus of the study was, in a sense, the initiation into the academic discourse community, the students deserve credit for taking ownership of this transition. They were not removing all responsibility from the schools, but they were realistic about where immediate changes could be made. Overall, the co-researchers agreed they needed to embrace what the school expected, even if their own expectations did not match. The predominant advice was for students to change their mentality to match the requirements of college, not that the bar in college should be lowered.

**Problematizing the dominant discourse.** Because transitioning successfully meant having the ability to sustain in college throughout the first year and into the future, all that the students employed was seen as a base to build upon. The transition was also

seen to involve some trial and error, in order to find what works on an individual basis for the particular circumstance. However, as Hayes (2006) notes, students are disciplined according to the habits and behaviors sanctioned by the dominant culture.

This perspective could raise questions around whether the habits and behaviors isolated by the student co-researchers should be problematized in relation to the dominant discourse prevalent in academia. The student co-researchers questioned the role of schooling in their lives and their experiences with how high school prepared them for college. However, the depth of this discussion did not challenge issues of equity in the ways that I, as the university researcher, may have hoped when commencing the study. Also, the students did not delve deeply into the role that their own funds of knowledge, in particular those which reflected the nonacademic skills they viewed as essential to academic success, played in contributing to their transition to college. Although some aspects of their findings spoke to the skills, knowledge, and support systems the students brought with them to college, more exploration of these issues could yield more insight in this area.

Further study could open debate among the students around who is truly served by the skills they are encouraged to develop and how educational equity issues may affect them at the college level. However, for the purposes of this study, the students were looking at how to be successful in the current system. Some of their suggestions did speak to making changes within the structure of high school, the university, or the education system as a whole, but most of these changes were intended to help the incoming freshmen transition smoothly and get the most out of college in its current iteration.

### **Research Question #3: What Role Do Nonacademic Skills Play in the Transition to the College Discourse Community?**

In her research, Nieto (1994) pointed to specific characteristics for student success, including confidence, resilience, optimism, determination and self-reliance/self respect. Similar to Nieto's findings, the student co-researchers also noted many of these directly in their research and exhibited some of these characteristics. For example, the students in this study, like the students in Nieto's research, appeared to gain confidence and support through their people network and outside activities. Danielle noted specific people as key facets of her support system, and Grant's transition success was tied to his progress on the field and the network of services supporting him as a student athlete. In addition, Aedan and Brian both pointed to a need to be resilient and "roll with" what the college transition brings. Natalie spoke directly to the need to be optimistic, and many others argued for taking control, responsibility and putting forth effort to succeed. These aspects of attitude were part of what made up what the students called the "college mentality," as opposed to the "high school mentality."

Karp and Bork (2012) and Tough (2012) noted the importance of similar nonacademic traits in their research. As Karp and Bork (2012) stated, there are "largely unspoken behaviors, attitudes, and expectations to which students must adhere if they are to be successful" (p. 2). For the students in our study, academic and nonacademic skills were inextricable. When asked whether a particular skill, habit or behavior was academic, nonacademic or both, the resounding answer was "both" for most of the skills they had identified as important in the transition to college and college writing. Although the students may not define these skills in the same way as academic researchers, they rarely

mentioned an academic challenge without a nonacademic skill, habit or behavior being part of the solution. This finding does not mean nonacademic skills are more important, but rather they are of equal importance in the pursuit of sustainable academic success, as Karp and Bork (2012) also determined.

How these nonacademic or “soft skills” related to the “funds of knowledge” that the students brought to college remains an area for further exploration. In particular, the ways that nonacademic skills contribute to college writing success could be further investigated and connected to which funds of knowledge and other literacies support the students’ college transition efforts.

In addition, Karp and Bork (2012) noted that “it is imperative that students develop the appropriate reflective and metacognitive skills, which may be harder to achieve as such skills require student to cultivate new ways of thinking” (p. 37). As the instructor, I noted how the students achieved many of the hard-to-measure academic goals, such as critical thinking and metacognition, in the course of conducting this study. They reflected on their behavior and habits, as well as those of other first time freshmen, and made adjustments and recommendations accordingly. As Harry’s quote (under Research Question #2 above) about procrastinating shows, the co-researchers thought about their thinking. Although their efforts to adjust remained a work-in-progress as the semester closed, the foundation for further development of these skills was in tact.

#### **Research Question #4: What Action(s) Could Be Taken in the Future to Support First-Time College Students in the Transition to the College Discourse Community?**

In reflecting upon the co-researchers’ recommendations for future action, what stands out is not only *what* they suggested but *to whom* they made recommendations, as

well as *how* they chose to present those ideas in this forum. To connect the students' ideas and recommendations with the existing literature, this section discusses the concepts introduced by the co-researchers around self-management and adopting the right attitude for college success, the continuum of schooling and the role high schools and colleges play in student preparation for college success, and some of the clever approaches used by the students to present these ideas and capture the attention of their classmates and fellow freshmen.

**Self-management and attitude.** The vast majority of the students' suggestions were to each other and other first-time freshmen, upholding the discoveries made by Karp and Bork (2012) around self-management being key to the role of a college student. Self-management included being organized and planning time, becoming aware of the effects of stress and sleep loss, and using the available on-campus resources to address these issues before they become problems. Fanetti et al (2010) also noted that "instead of the detailed rubrics, repeated drilling, and objective testing they knew in high school, college students find themselves largely autonomous and left to figure out what's expected of them on their own" (p. 78). The student co-researchers in our study felt that freshmen need to take control of their education to be successful. Although there may be some initial confusion around being independent versus tapping into available resources, the students recognized these acts as interdependent rather than mutually exclusive.

In addition, changing one's attitude from a high school-based mentality to one appropriate for success in college and college level writing was essential. Karp and Bork (2012) highlighted attitude, and the behaviors and habits associated with having the right attitude for college success, as an essential part of their findings. Fanetti et al. (2010) also

found that shifting the rate of success and preparation for college began with a change of attitude. Similarly, the students in our study were specific about what constituted the right attitude, however the tone of these attitude shifts varied. Some of the researchers took an upbeat approach (be “flexible,” “optimistic,” “roll with it”), whereas other researchers were more direct and harsh in their messaging (be “determined,” no “b.s.-ing,” “suck it up,” no one is “babysitting you anymore”). Ironically, the “babysitting” quote came from a college athlete who not only benefitted from all the support systems provided to student athletes but was enrolled in Project Success, which involved periodic check-ins for academic support. Therefore, some of the researchers were clearly still in the process of recognizing their own needs and challenges, as well as the services from which they benefitted that not all other students shared, as these suggestions were being made.

Again, aligning with the findings of Karp and Bork (2012), who stated, “students must *balance the multiple roles* that they may play in their life” (p. 10) and the “competing demands” (p. 16) of academia, the recommendations in our study pointed to striking a balance as essential. The co-researchers recognized that the onslaught of expectations could lead freshmen to feel driven to get out there and make things happen; however, they noted that students should not feel pressured to do everything at once. Taking time to adjust and using trial and error to find what works best were recurring messages, as was balancing academics with social time. Overall, the endnote was hopeful and sustainable—freshmen who took responsibility and control can make this transition smoothly and successfully.

**Continuum of schooling.** Alongside the many recommendations directed at first-time freshmen, the co-researchers provided some suggestions for academic institutions,

and school systems as a whole, toward supporting students in their college preparation and success. Many of these recommendations centered on developing and bolstering writing efforts, so students would not be shocked by shifts in writing workload, formats, and research demands upon entry into academia. These suggestions spoke to the disconnect between high school and college expectations, as mentioned by Costino (2008), Dana, Hancock and Philips (2011), Jameson (2007), and Venezia et al (2003).

One potential solution involved considering high school and college as being part of a natural progression. Fanetti et al (2010) argued, “As we think of elementary, middle, and secondary education as occurring on a continuum, with one grade preparing students for the next, we must begin to think of postsecondary education occurring on the same continuum, with high school learning intended specifically to prepare students for the next level of study” (p. 77). Venezia et al (2003) also called for this continuum perspective as being an important part of improving post secondary opportunities, in effect changing K-12 policymaking and oversight initiatives to K-16.

In a similar way, the student co-researchers pointed to how high schools could better foster the nonacademic skills, habits and behaviors that contribute to academic success, and how colleges can better meet incoming freshmen where they are. Freshman Orientation was highlighted as a vital for implementing a “wake up call” to first-time college students around the potential challenges they may face, the self-management aspects that are essential in the college transition, and the available support systems. The students also requested that support systems currently available to select groups (such as student athletes) be made available to all freshmen and additional support be extended to

those students in need, due to low Emotional Intelligence or unexpected events or personal challenges.

These shifts may involve some policy changes as well as some training for faculty or staff. In addition, the students highlighted specific areas of training for faculty, such as using peer review techniques in classrooms across the curriculum. Overall, the co-researchers requested that colleges be understanding of the fact that incoming freshmen may not yet know what they do—they may not have the self-awareness yet to see how what they do can undermine their efforts.

**How suggestions for action were presented.** Perhaps just as significant as the student co-researchers' findings were the clever approaches some took in presenting their ideas. Not only did the presentations provide the opportunity for the students to share their voices, but they demonstrated multiple literacies. As Bloome (2008) states, "Literacy is inherently multiple...Literacy practices are embedded in and influence social situations and social events (e.g., face-to-face interactions) which are themselves embedded in broader cultural and social contexts including institutional contexts such as schooling" (pp. 251-252). In these presentations, the students used their knowledge of their audience, primarily each other as fellow first-time freshmen, to create attention-grabbing approaches to their calls for action. The mediums used included rap, video, PowerPoint, photo narrative, and many humorous moments.

Jordan began his presentation with what looked like a flaw in his PowerPoint. As he fumbled with the technology, he took out his cellphone, declared how embarrassing the moment was, and began to tap in a number. The screen behind him flashed to an image of himself at his computer, answering the phone. Jordan-in-the-class confessed to

Jordan-on-the-screen that he had not managed his time well around a concert he wanted to attend over the weekend, and now his presentation was not ready. The on-screen version of himself took the presentation over and gave a speech about time management and the on-campus resources available to students. Both the element of surprise and the humor of the situation, as well as the relevance of the topic, connected with the audience.

In a similar way, Cody used humor in his presentation on sleep deprivation by giving his speech to a backdrop of pictures of his classmates sleeping in various classes. However, not all of the presentations relied on humor. Sonia used a video, in which she played all the roles—a newscaster, a student protester, a psychologist—to propose that all freshmen should be tested for Emotional Intelligence and provided extra counseling sessions as needed. Brittany brought in the voices of freshmen from her research and around campus to discuss best practices around managing writing assignments. Harry enlisted a fellow freshman to perform a rap he wrote about stress management through exercise. Aedan put his speech aside to convey an honest portrayal of his near breakdown and how the steps that led him to the brink can be avoided.

Although some of the presentations could have used more polish and practice, and some of the research could have used more sources and insight to further flesh out the student's understanding of the topic and ideas for future action, the overall effect of these presentations met multiple goals of the class and study. They also spoke to Duncan-Andrade and Morrell's (2008) suggestion to share the students voices, Mahiri's (2005) experience of encouraging students to convey messages through different media, and Bloome (2008), Moll, Amanti, Neff, and González (1992), and other New Literacy

Studies experts on welcoming the use of students' funds of knowledge and multiple literacies in the course of academic pursuits.

### **Recommendations (from the University Researcher Perspective)**

Given the implications of this study, my recommendations from the perspective of the university researcher speak to how the findings of the research team can lead to learning and development for colleges and college writing departments. They will also include ideas for further research.

### **Learning and Development**

As the student co-researchers suggested, I echo the need to acknowledge the problems inherent in the current standardized schooling environment, including the way it fosters bad habits in students who are academically “okay” and leaves freshmen less-than prepared for the critical thinking and creativity required in the transition to college and college writing. Those within academia can take steps to assist in this transition by making students aware of the differences between high school and college, as well as the skills, habits and behaviors that lead to success. Even better, we can have *other students* make presentations on these topics and use personal examples and clever presentations in the process, as the students in this study demonstrated. Increasing the mentorship opportunities between first and second year students could also be a source of support in this transition.

We, in academia, can also consider the role that first year writing classes can play in supporting this transition. As the research team identified, the transition to college level writing is interlinked with the transition to college. Managing the writing workload was identified as a key part of being successful in college—somewhat verifying the idea

that college success is directly linked to college writing success. Distinguishing what makes someone successful in a sustainable way in college writing means considering the skills, habits and behaviors that make someone successful in academia as a whole and in other aspects of life. Therefore, writing classes could consider implementing more opportunities to utilize nonacademic skills and develop the so-called college mentality. They could also help to identify which skills students have brought with them in order to bolster a sense of confidence in some aspects of the college transition upon entry. Merging writing courses with some facets of student success classes may not be a popular suggestion, but the reality is that writing instructors may already be addressing some of these challenges in the process of working with first year college students.

One possibility could involve incorporating studies, such as the one in this report, within the first year writing class structure. The PAR approach in particular allowed for the students to identify, discuss, and address the issues they identified while building the skills required to meet course goals and prepare for more advanced written work they will encounter in their college and future careers. These skills included critical thinking and metacognition, in particular around researching topics they identified. The fact that this group's attendance and participation were also strong, alongside hitting on the skills we encourage in first year writing courses, showed that they were motivated by more than grades. Perhaps this type of intrinsic motivation could create a paradigm shift away from putting letter grades on written work. If external motivators could be set aside for intrinsic options that allow for more autonomy while encouraging mastery and instilling a sense of purpose, students could potentially be driven by the desire to explore, improve and serve a greater need or purpose, rather than the desire for a 4.0 grade point average.

In addition, because college success relies on a combination of academic and nonacademic skills, we should consider the way we place students in college writing. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) argued that assessments should occur in a real world context and involve skills required to succeed in school and in workplace. As we continue to identify which skills affect a student's ability to manage the challenges of entering the academic discourse community alongside the academic workload, we may want to incorporate some form of assessment of nonacademic skills in our placement systems. The Education Testing Service (ETS) has developed a 30-minute test to assess such nonacademic skills as commitment, self-management, and social support as well as academics. While this test may not serve the needs of every institution, the fact that ETS is connecting nonacademic skills to college retention and success demonstrates a growing recognition of the importance of these skills.

### **Future Research**

As this report demonstrates, involving students in the research process can yield many valuable outcomes. The PAR approach was a unique experience, requiring a lot of trust in the process while constantly questioning, as the university researcher, whether we would end the study with any findings related to the original research questions. However, seeking opportunities for students to share their perspective in their own words is something I would highly recommend for future research.

The student perspective could also be used to delve deeper into some of the topics introduced in this study but not fleshed out in the limited timeframe of the process. For example, further research could explore the challenges experienced by first time freshmen and the larger issues of equity in education. A follow-up study to this one could

research whether the use of on-campus resources addresses the challenges isolated by the students, or the value of mentoring between second year and first year students, if that suggestion were to be implemented. More research could also explore identity.

Throughout the course of this project, only three students mentioned themes specifically related to identity, but this could change as the students weathered the initial bumps of the transition into academia and more of the co-researchers encountered identity-related issues. Perhaps by continuing a similar study throughout the first year or even after the first year is completed, as a comparison between where the students started in their first year and where they feel they are as they start their second year, themes related to identity could be future explored.

With many college campuses going paperless, researchers could also explore the effect on students experiencing a technology gap. In this study, a few students noted challenges they experienced working primarily on screens; however, other students may be struggling to adapt in silence. The skills, habits and behaviors that contribute to this adjustment could align with some of the findings in this study. Opportunity may exist for students to learn from each other around how to adapt successfully.

Particularly relevant to this study, further research could provide more specifics on the relationship between the nonacademic skills and writing success. Students could focus more directly on the ways that non school-based reading and writing support academic writing success, or how the use of technology in the way that technology limits writing (to 40 characters, for example) affects academic written work (e.g., do students become more concise in their thinking?)

Additional research ideas that were present in the missed opportunities of this study included: the potential benefits of attending the university's forward/bridge program, the relationship between social interaction and writing success, the challenges of prioritizing one personal obligation over another (making sacrifices for friends or family), the recognition and application of jargon and lingo in different academic fields, the role of reading across the curriculum, writing in timed-writing situations, class participation and the effect on grade and attitude toward a class, maintaining the pace of college life (avoiding the fade to the finish tendency), connecting work done in class to future writing or work done in other classes, and the relationship between confidence in writing and adapting to the challenges of the college writing workload.

In short, many potential areas for further research exist when discussing the transition to college and college-level writing, especially when considering these topics from the student perspective. While most of the ideas listed here focused on the college or university arena, many more ideas could be posed for exploring the work done to prepare students in high school, or as Ariana noted in our study, how the implementation of the *Common Core State Standards* will address the need for furthering the nonacademic skills, habits and behaviors which contribute to academic success. The ideas presented here reflect where the research team landed at end of the study period. By design, this study focused on the student perspective during the college transition process. Further exploration, over a longer time frame, may yield deeper results or insights. However, the kernels of critical consciousness shown by the students hint at the possibilities of greater insight in the future (with or without a formal study to guide them).

## Conclusion

We think of college as the place where students develop ‘their own voices,’ where they find the confidence to ‘think for themselves’ and ‘outside the box.’ Students are confronted with alien ideas and challenged to articulate and advocate for their own. (Fanetti et al, 2010, p. 78)

The research in this study contributed to the growing body of knowledge that explores student perspectives and the role of nonacademic skills in college success. The student co-researchers confronted challenges, articulated needs, sought solutions and advocated for themselves and others. Although limited by the timeframe of the study, the co-researchers’ findings around the transition to college and entrance into the academic discourse community spoke to many areas of existing educational research, including college preparation, standardized testing, high school and college expectations, the value of incorporating multiple literacies, and the skills and attributes that contribute to student success. In the process, they improved as students, developed as writers, and envisaged themselves as researchers. They also recognized that they created data that was worthwhile to study. Shadera said, “Before this project I never considered using my personal experience or my friends for my classwork” (Reflection, 30 Nov 2013), and this validated her experience and utilized her funds of knowledge. In addition, she felt this “study was a very good way to help freshmen transition into college without them even realizing it” (Shadera, Reflection, 30 Nov 2013).

Unlike other research involving the student perspective, the PAR approach of our study allowed for the students to recognize that they were in a position to make a difference. They saw their experiences as part of a process and an opportunity to improve this process for those who would follow. They seized the opportunity to share their ideas and to combine their own terminology with the concepts they discovered in their research

to convey their calls to action. Many of the students also stated how they grew personally throughout the process, from Aedan coming to terms with his own personal challenges to finish the semester in good standing, to Brittany helping a friend and fellow freshman meet her own writing workload demands, to Neil seeing the power instilled in his writing and sharing his voice. He stated, “The study has taught me that even as freshmen we have the power to change our school for the greater good, and I am glad I had the opportunity to be part of it” (Neil, Reflection, 1 Dec 2013).

These examples represent the sentiment shared by the research team that something unique happened during this semester. The co-researchers not only studied the transition to college and college-level writing, or shared tips on making the transition smooth and sustainable, they each, in their own way, became agents. Subjects, not objects (Freire, 1974). They learned, as John Taylor Gatto (2003) suggested, to “take” their education and to “manage themselves.” And I, as a researcher, instructor and doctoral student, learned with them.

## References

- Achieve, Inc. (2005). *Rising to the challenge: Are high school graduates prepared for college and work?* Washington, DC: Author.
- ACT. (2010). *A first look at the Common Core and college and career readiness*. Retrieved from <http://www.act.org/commoncore/pdf/FirstLook.pdf>
- ACT. (2012). *The condition of college & career readiness 2012*. Retrieved from <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/cccr12/readiness5.html>
- Addison, J. & McGee, S.J. (2010). Writing in high school/Writing in college: Research trends and future directions. *CCC*, 62(1), 147-179.
- Adler-Kassner, L. (1999). Just writing, basically: Basic writers on basic writing. *Journal of Basic Writing*, 18(2), 69-90.
- Aldeman, C. (2010). College- and-career-ready: Using outcomes data to hold high schools accountable for student success. *Education Sector*. Retrieved from <http://www.educationsector.org/publications/college-and-career-ready>
- Antrop-González, R. & De Jesús, A. (2006). Toward a theory of critical care in urban small school reform: Examining structures and pedagogies of caring in two Latino community based schools. *The International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 19(4), 409-433.
- Anyon, J. (1997). *Ghetto schooling: A political economy of urban education reform*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Anyon, J. (2005). *Radical possibilities: Public policy, urban education, and a new social movement*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Anzaldua, G. (1984). Speaking in tongues: A letter to third world women writers. In C. Moraga & G. Anzaldua (Eds.), *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color* (pp. 167-168). New York, NY: Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press.
- Apple, M. (1994). Series editor's introduction. In A. Gitlin (Ed.), *Power and method: Political activism and educational research* (pp. ix-xii). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Apple, M. (2004). *Ideology and curriculum*. New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Applebee, A.N. & Langer, J.A. (2006). *The state of writing instruction: What existing data tell us*. Albany, NY: Center on English Learning and Achievement.
- Armstrong, W. (2000). The association among student success in courses, placement test scores, student background data, and instructor grading practices. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 24.8. Retrieved from <http://www.informaworld.com>
- Aronowitz, S. (2000). Writing is *not* a skill. *The knowledge factory*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Arum, R. & Roksa, J. (2011). *Academically adrift: Limited learning on college campuses*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.
- Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25, 297-308.
- Aud, S., KewalRamani, A., Frolich, L. (2011). *America's youth: Transitions to adulthood (NCES 2012-026)*. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education

- Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012026.pdf>
- Ayers, R. (2011, January 5). Evaluating student learning: The moneyball approach. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rick-ayers-/evaluating-student-learn\\_i\\_b\\_804478.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rick-ayers-/evaluating-student-learn_i_b_804478.html)
- Ayers, R. (2011, March 11). Education wars--The next generation. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rick-ayers-/education-wars-the-next-g\\_b\\_817697.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rick-ayers-/education-wars-the-next-g_b_817697.html)
- Balduf, M. (2009). Underachievement among college students. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 20(2), 274-294.
- Balfanz, R. (2009). Can the American high school become an avenue of advancement for all? *Future Child*, 19(1), 17-36.
- Banks, J. (Ed.) (1996). *Multicultural education, transformative knowledge, and action: Historical and contemporary perspectives*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Barefoot, B. (2000). The first-year experience: Are we making it any better? *About Campus (Jan-Feb)*. Retrieved from [https://www.unb.ca/web/saintjohn/teachlearn/\\_resources/bb.pdf](https://www.unb.ca/web/saintjohn/teachlearn/_resources/bb.pdf).
- Bartholomae, D. (1985). Inventing the university. In M. Rose (Ed.), *When a writer can't write: Studies in writer's block and other composing process problems*, (pp. 273-285). New York, NY: Guilford.

- Bazerman, C. (2002). The case for writing studies as a major discipline. In G. Olson (Ed.), *Rhetoric and composition as intellectual work*, (pp. 32-40). Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Beaufort, A. (1997). Operationalizing the concept of discourse community: A case study of one institutional site of composing. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 31(4), 486-529.
- Beil, C., and Knight, M. A. (2007). Understanding the gap between high school and college writing. *Assessment Update*, 19(6), 6-8.
- Belden, Russonello & Stewart (2005). *Learning to write, writing to learn: Americans' views of writing in our schools. A report of a national public opinion survey conducted for the National Writing Project*. Retrieved from <http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/2273>
- Berlin, J. (1982). Contemporary composition: The major pedagogical theories. *College English*, 44(8), 765-777.
- Berlin, J. (1988). Rhetoric and ideology in the writing class. *College English*, 50(5), 477-494.
- Bernasconi, L. (2008). The jewels of ERWC instruction. *California English*, 14(1), 16-19.
- Bernstein, B. (1975) *Class, codes and control*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York, NY: Schocken Books.
- Bettinger, E. & Long, B. (2006). Institutional responses to reduce inequalities in college outcomes: Remedial and developmental courses in higher education. Retrieved from <http://www.gseacademic.harvard.edu>
- Bettinger, E. & Long, B. (2009). Addressing the needs of underprepared students in

- higher education: Does college remediation work? *Journal of Human Resources*, 44(3), 736–771.
- Bizzell, P. (1982). College composition: Initiation into the academic discourse community. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 12(2), 191-207.
- Bizzell, P. (1992). *Academic discourse and critical consciousness*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Bland, et al. (2012). Stress tolerance: New challenges for millennial college students. *College Student Journal*, 46(2), 362-375.
- Bloom, A. (1987). *The closing of the American mind*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Bloome, D. (2008). Literacies in the classroom. In B. Street and N.H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Language and Education*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Volume 2: Literacy, 251-262.
- Bovill, C., Cook-Sather, A., & Felten, P. (2011). Students as co-creators of teaching approaches, course design and curricula: implications for academic developers. *International Journal for Academic Development*. 16(2), 133-145.
- Brandt, D. (2009). *Literacy and learning: Reflections on writing, reading and society*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Brererton, J. (1995). *The origins of composition studies in the American college, 1875-1925*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Brodkey, L. (1995). Writing permitted in designated areas only. *Higher education under fire: Politics, economics, and the crisis of the humanities*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Brunk-Chavez, B. and Fredricksen, E. (2008). Predicting success: Increasing retention and pass rates in college composition. Retrieved from [http://works.bepress.com/beth\\_brunk\\_chavez/19/](http://works.bepress.com/beth_brunk_chavez/19/)
- California Dept. of Education. (2013). Advancement via individual determination. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/ps/avidgen.asp>
- Chaffee, J. (2012). Teacher: One (maddening) day working with the Common Core. In V. Strauss, The answer sheet. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/>
- Chow, H. P. H. (2003). Exploring predictors of educational experience and academic performance among university students in Regina. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 49(1), 101-105.
- Collier, P. J., & Morgan, D. L. (2008). “Is that paper really due today?” Differences in first-generation and traditional college students’ understandings of faculty expectations. *Higher Education*, 55, 425–446.
- Common Core State Standards Initiative: Preparing America’s students for colleges & career.* (2014). Retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org/>
- Condon, W. (2004). Assessing and teaching what we value: The relationship between college-level writing and critical thinking abilities. *Assessing Writing* 9. Retrieved from <http://survey.csuprojects.org/uploads/j-/gh/j...Q/Assessing-WritCritThink.pdf>
- Condon, W. (2009). Looking beyond judging and ranking: Writing assessment as a generative practice. *Assessing Writing*. 14.3. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov>.

- Connors, R. (1997). *Composition-rhetoric*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Cook-Sather, A. (2006). Sound, presence, and power: 'Student voice' in educational research and reform. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 36, 359-390.
- Costino, K. (2008). Service vs. subject matter: Merging first-year composition and first year experiences. *Writing Program Administration: Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators*, 31(3), 52-62.
- Cox, R. D. (2009). *The college fear factor: How students and professors misunderstand one another*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Creswell, J. (2009). *Research design*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Crowley, S. (1995). Composition's ethic of service, the universal requirement, and the discourse of student need. *JAC*, 15(2). Retrieved from <http://www.jaconlinejournal.com/archives/vol15.2/crowley-compositions.pdf>
- Crowley, S. (1998) *Composition in the university: Historical and polemical essays*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Dana, H., Hancock, C., & Phillips, J. (2011). The future of business: Merit in writing across the curriculum. *American Journal of Business Education*, 4(10), 51-58.
- Delpit, L. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58(3), 280-298.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York, NY: The New Press.

- Duncan-Andrade, J. (2006) Utilizing cariño in the development of research methodologies. In J. Kincheloe, P. Anderson, K. Rose, D. Griffith & K. Hayes (Eds.) *Urban education: an encyclopedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing.
- Duncan-Andrade, J., & Morrell, E. (2008). *The art of critical pedagogy*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Dworkin, R. (1988). What is equality? Part 4: Political equality. *University of San Francisco Law Review*, 22(4), 1-30.
- Education Testing Service (2014). Introducing the new *SuccessNavigator* assessment. Retrieved from <http://www.ets.org/successnavigator>
- Elbow (1991). Reflections on academic discourse: How it relates to freshman and colleagues. *College English*, 53(2), 135-155.
- Elbow (1993). The war between reading and writing: And how to end it. *Rhetoric Review*, 12(1), 5-24.
- Elliot, N., Deess, P., Rudiny, A., & Joshi, K. (2011). Placement of students into first year writing courses. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 46(3), 285-313. Retrieved from [http://www.njit.edu/middlestates/.../Placement\\_FirstYearWriting\\_2011.pdf](http://www.njit.edu/middlestates/.../Placement_FirstYearWriting_2011.pdf)
- Emig, J. (1971). *The composing processes of twelfth graders*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English. Research Report No. 13.
- Emig, J. (1977). Writing as a mode of learning. *College Composition and Communication*, 28(2), 122-128.
- Emig, J. (1983). Non-magical thinking: Presenting writing developmentally in schools. In D. Goswami and M. Butler (Eds), *The web of meaning: Essays on writing*,

- teaching, learning and thinking* (pp. 135-144). Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook.
- Fals-Borda, O. & Rahman, M.A. (Eds). (1991). *Action and knowledge: Breaking the monopoly with participatory action research*. New York, NY: Apex Press.
- Fanetti, S., Bushrow, K., & DeWeese, D. (2010). Closing the gap between high school writing instruction and college writing expectations. *English Journal*, 99.4.
- Fielding, M. (2004). Transformative approaches to student voice: theoretical underpinnings, recalcitrant realities. *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(2), 295-311.
- Fish, S. (1980). *Is there a text in this class?: The authority of interpretive communities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Fordham University. (2008). *Undergraduate bulletin 2012-2014: Core curriculum*. Retrieved from <http://69.7.74.46/section8/section85/>
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York, NY: Pantheon, 215-237.
- Fraser, N. (1989). *Unruly practices: Power, discourse and gender in contemporary social theory*. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota UP, 1989.
- Freire, P. (1974). *Education for critical consciousness*. London, England: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (2005). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare teach*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Fritzsche et al. (2003). Individual differences in academic procrastination tendency and writing success, *Elsevier*, 35(7), 1549-1557.
- Furumoto, R. (2005). No poor child left unrecruited: How NCLB codifies and

- perpetuates urban school militarism. *Equality and Excellence in Education*, 38, 200-210.
- Gardner, D. (1983). *A nation at risk*. Washington, DC: National Commission National Commission on Excellence in Education.
- Gatto, J.T. (2003). Against school: How public education cripples our kids and why. Retrieved from <http://harpers.org/archive/2003/09/against-school/>
- Gee, J.P. (1989). Literacy, discourse, and linguistics: Introduction and what is literacy? In E. Cushman, E. Kintgen, B. Kroll & M. Rose, *Literacy: A critical sourcebook* (pp. 525-544). Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Gee, J.P. (2002). Learning in semiotic domains: A social and situated account. *National Reading Conference Yearbook*, 51, 23-32.
- Giroux, H. (1983). *Theory and resistance in education: A pedagogy for the opposition*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.
- González, N., Moll, L.C., & Amanti, K. (2005). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in households and classrooms*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc.
- Greene, M. (1978). *Landscapes of learning*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Greene, M. (1986). In search of a critical pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56(4), 427- 442.
- Harris, J. (Feb, 1989). The idea of community in the study of writing. *College Composition and Communication*, 40(1), 11-22.
- Harris, D. (2006). Implications of high-stakes accountability and comprehensive school reform on urban schools. In J. Kincheloe and k. hayes (Eds.), *Metropedagogy:*

*Power, justice and the urban classroom* (pp. 3-39). Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense.

Hayes, K. (2006). Minds & bodies of perpetual lockdown: The educational experiences of court-involved youth in urban classrooms. In J. Kincheloe and k. hayes (Eds.), *Metropedagogy: Power, justice and the urban classroom* (pp. 115-132). Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense.

Heath, S.B. (1982). Protean shapes in literacy events: Ever-shifting oral and literate traditions. In E. Cushman, E. Kintgen, B. Kroll, and M. Rose (eds.), *Literacy: A critical sourcebook*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 443-466.

Heckman, J. (2006). Catch'em young: Investing in disadvantaged young children is both fair and efficient. *Wall Street Journal*, A14.

Heckman, J. & Masterov, D. (2007). *The productivity argument for investing in young children*. Paper presented at the Allied Social Sciences Association annual meeting, Chicago, IL.

Heinemann. (2012). Fountas & Pinnell leveled book website. Retrieved from <http://www.fountasandpinnelleveledbooks.com/aboutLeveledTexts.aspx>

Heller, Mary. (1999). *Reading-writing connections: From theory to practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Hesse, D. (2005). Who owns writing? In S. Miller (Ed.), *The Norton Book of Composition Studies* (pp. 1247-1260). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

- Hill, D., Stumbo, C., Paliokas, K., Hansen, D., & McWalters, P. (2010, July). *State policy implications of the Model Core Teaching Standards* (InTASC Draft Discussion Document). Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.
- Hillocks, G. (2002). *The testing trap: How state writing assessments control learning*. New York, NY: Teachers College.
- Holdsworth R. (2000). Schools that create real roles of value for young people. *UNESCO International Prospects*, 115(3), 349-362.
- hooks, b. (1988). *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking black*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hymes, D. (1974). *Foundations in sociolinguistics: An ethnographic approach*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Information economy. (2013). In BusinessDictionary.com online. Retrieved from <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/information-economy.html>
- Ingels, S. J., Planty, M., & Bozick, R. (2005). *A profile of the American high school in 2004: A first look—Initial results from the first follow-up of the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS: 2002)* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
- Jameson, D. A. (2007). Literacy in decline: Untangling the evidence. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 70(1), 16-33. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Jaschik, S. (2010). New evidence of racial bias on SAT. *Inside Higher Ed* (June 21, 2010). Retrieved from <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/06/21/sat>

- Jolliffe & Harl. (2008). Texts of our institutional lives: Studying the “reading transition” from high school to college: What are our students reading and why? *College English*, 70(6), 599-617.
- Karp, M. & Bork, R. (2012). ‘They never told me what to expect, so I didn’t know what to do’: Defining and clarifying the role of a community college student. *CCRC Working Paper No. 47*. New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Kaufer, D. & Waller, G. (1985). To write is to read is to write, right? In D. Atkins and M. Johnson, *Writing and reading differently* (pp. 66–92). Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press.
- Kelly, P. (2010). Why equality? On justifying liberal egalitarianism. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 13(1), 55-70.
- Kincheloe, J. (2006). Introducing metropedagogy: Sorry, no short cuts in urban education. In J. Kincheloe and k. hayes (Eds.), *Metropedagogy: Power, justice and the urban classroom* (pp. 3-39). Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense.
- Kincheloe, J. (2011). Home alone and bad to the bone: The advent of a postmodern childhood. In S. Steinberg (Ed.), *Kinderculture: The corporate construction of childhood, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition* (pp. 438-480). Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Kiuhara, S.A., Graham, S., & Hawken, L.S. (2009). Teaching writing to high school students: A national survey. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 101.1, 136-160.
- Koirala-Azad, S. & Fuentes, E. (2010). Introduction: Activist scholarship—possibilities constraints of participatory action research. *Social Justice*, 36(4), 1-5.
- Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities*. New York, NY: Crown.

- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Education Research Journal*, 32(3), 465-491.
- Lavin, D., & Hyllegard, D. (1996). *Changing the odds: Open admissions and the life chances of the disadvantaged*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP.
- Lee, C. (1997). Bridging home and school literacies: Models for culturally responsive teaching, a case for African-American English. In J. Flood, S. Heath, and D. Lapp (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching literacy through the communicative and visual arts* (pp. 334-345). New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Macmillan.
- Lee, V. & Smith, J. B. (1997). High school size: Which works best for whom?" *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 19(3), 205-27.
- Lerner, J. & Brand, B. (2006). The college ladder: Linking secondary and postsecondary education for success for all students. Retrieved from <http://hub.mspnet.org/index.cfm/13716>
- Leung, C., & Safford, K. (2005). Chapter 15: Nontraditional students in higher education: English as an additional language and literacies. In B. Street (Ed.), *Literacies across educational contents: Mediating learning and teaching* (pp. 303-324). Philadelphia, PA: Caslon Publishing.
- Lindemann, E. (1993). Freshman composition: No place for literature. *College English*, 53(3), 311-16.
- Lubienski, C. & Lubienski, S. (2006). *Charter, private, public schools and academic achievement: New evidence from NAEP mathematics data*. National Center for

- the Study of Privatization in Education Teachers College, Columbia University.  
Retrieved from [www.ncspe.org/publications\\_files/OP111.pdf](http://www.ncspe.org/publications_files/OP111.pdf)
- Lunsford, A. (1990). Composing ourselves: Politics, commitment, and the teaching of writing. *College Composition and Communication*, 41(1), 71-82.
- Lunsford, A. & Garnes, S. (1979). Anatomy of a basic writing program. *Journal of Basic Writing*, 2(2), 38-51.
- Macedo, D. (2006). *Literacies of power: What Americans are not allowed to know*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Maguire, P. (1987). *Doing participatory research: A feminist approach*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Center for International Education.
- Mahiri, J. (2005). *What they don't learn in school*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Mailloux, S. (2013). A good person speaking well: Eloquentia perfecta in U.S. Jesuit Colleges: A brief genealogy. *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*, 43, article 6, 10-13.
- Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education. (2010). Metco Program. Retrieved from <http://www.doe.mass.edu/metco/>
- Matier, P. & Ross, A. (2012). USF official quits over China students. *San Francisco Chronicle*. Retrieved from <http://www.sfgate.com/default/article/USF-official-quits-over-China-students-3887904.php>
- Mattern, K & Packman, S. (2009). Predictive validity of ACCUPLACER scores for course placement: A meta-analysis. Retrieved from <http://research.collegeboard.org/>

- Matsuda, P. K. (2012). Let's face it: Language issues and the writing program administrator. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 36(1), 141-163.
- Matzen, R., & Hoyt, J. (2004). Basic writing placement with holistically scored essays: Research Evidence. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 28(1), 2-34.
- McAlexander, P. (2000). Mina Shaughnessy and K. Patricia Cross: The forgotten debate over postsecondary remediation. *Rhetoric Review*, 19(1/2), 28-41.
- McCormick, J., Hafner, A., Saint Germain, M. (2013). From high school to college: Teachers and students assess the impact of an expository reading and writing course on college readiness. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 3(1), 30-49.
- Mitra, D. (2008). *Student voice in school reform: Building youth-adult partnerships that strengthen schools and empower youth*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & González, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: a qualitative approach to connect households and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31(2), 132-141.
- Moll, L. & Gonzalez, N. (1994) Chapter 9: Lessons from research with language-minority children. In E. Cushman, E. Kintgen, B. Kroll, and M. Rose (Eds.), *Literacy: A critical sourcebook* (pp. 156-171). New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Morante, E. (1987). A primer on placement testing. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 59, 55-63.
- Morrell, E. (2004). *Linking literacy and pop culture: Finding connections for lifelong learning*. Norwood, MA: Christopher Gordon Publishers, Inc.

- Morrell, E. (2008). *Critical literacy and urban youth: Pedagogies of access, dissent, and liberation*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Morrow, N. (1997). The role of reading in the composition classroom. *JAC: A journal of rhetoric, culture & politics*, 17(3), 453-472.
- Nagle, J. P. (2001). *Voices from the margins: The stories of vocational high school students*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). (2011). *The nation's report card*. Retrieved from [http://nationsreportcard.gov/writing\\_2011/](http://nationsreportcard.gov/writing_2011/)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (2011). *The integrated post secondary education data system*. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/glossary/?charindex=F>
- National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform*. Retrieved from [http://datacenter.spps.org/uploads/sotw\\_a\\_nation\\_at\\_risk\\_1983.pdf](http://datacenter.spps.org/uploads/sotw_a_nation_at_risk_1983.pdf)
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Common core state standards*. Washington, DC: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers. Retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org/>
- National Writing Project & Nagin, C. (2006). *Because writing matters: Improving student writing in our schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Nieto, S. (1992). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education*. White Plains, NY: Longman.

- Nieto, S. (1994). Lessons from students on creating a chance to dream. *Harvard Educational Review*, 64(4), 392-426.
- Nieto, S. (2000). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Longman.
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act*. (2001). Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html>
- Noguera, P. (2001). Racial politics and the elusive quest for excellence and equity in education. In *Motion Magazine*, September, 2001. Retrieved from <http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/er/pnrp1.html>
- North, S. (2011). On the place of writing in higher education (and why it doesn't include composition. In L. Massey & R. Gebhardt, *The changing of knowledge in composition: Contemporary perspectives* (pp. 194-120). Logan, UT: Utah State University Press.
- Nygreen, K. (2006). Reproducing or challenging power in the questions we ask and the methods we use: A framework for activist research in urban education. *The Urban Review*, 38(1), 1-26.
- O'Brien-Moran, M. & Soirferman, K. (2010). Do first-year university students know what to expect from their first-year writing intensive course? Online Submission, Paper prepared for the Annual Hawaii International Conference on Education (9th, Honolulu, HI, Jan 7, 2010). Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED508998.pdf>

- O'Malley, J. (2013). Not for ourselves alone: Rhetorical education in the Jesuit mode with five bullet points for today. *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*, 43, article 6, 10-13.
- Orner, M. (1992). Interrupting the calls for student voice in “liberatory” education: A feminist poststructuralist perspective. In C. Luke and J. Gore (Eds.), *Feminisms and critical pedagogy* (pp. 74-89). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Park, P. (1993). What is participatory research? A theoretical and methodological perspective. In P. Park, M. Brydon-Miller, B. Hall, T. Jackson (Eds.), *Voices of change: participatory research in the United States and Canada*. Toronto, CA: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education Press.
- Paulson, E. & Armstrong, S. (2011). Mountains and pit bulls: Students’ metaphors for college transitional reading and writing. *Journal of adolescent & adult literacy*, 54(7), 494-503.
- Payne, C. (1984). *Getting what we ask for: The ambiguity of success and failure in urban education*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Perry, W. (1970). *Forms of intellectual and ethical development in the college years: A scheme*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Piaget, J. (1950). *The psychology of intelligence*. (M. Piercy & D.E. Berlyne, Trans.). London, England: Routledge.
- Pink, D. (2009). *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us*. New York, NY: Riverhead.
- Rappaport, W. (2011). William Perry's scheme of intellectual and ethical development. Retrieved from <http://www.cse.buffalo.edu/~rapaport/perry.positions.html>

- Ratio atque Institutio Studiorum Societatis Iesu, 1599*—see *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum of 1599* (translation by Farrell, 1970).
- Richardson, E. (2003). *African-American literacies*. London, England: Routledge.
- Roderick, M., Nagaoka, J. & Coca, V. (2006). *Closing the aspirations-attainment gap: Implications for high school reform*. Washington, DC: MDRC.
- Rose, M. (1983). Remedial writing courses: A critique and a proposal. *College English*, 45(2), 109-28.
- Rose, M. (1989). *Lives on the boundary: A moving account of the struggles and achievements of America's educationally underprepared*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Russell, D. (2002). *Writing in the academic disciplines: A curricular history*. 2nd ed. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP.
- Salem, L. & Jones, P. (2010). Undaunted, self-critical, and resentful: Investigating faculty attitudes toward teaching writing in a large university writing-intensive course program. *Writing Program Administration: Journal of the Council of Writing Program Administrators*, 34(1), 60-83.
- Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. (1990). Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, cognition, and personality*, 9(3), 185-211.
- Salvatori, M. R. & Donahue, P. (2009). Disappearing acts: The problem of the student in composition studies. *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture*, 10(1), 25-33.
- Salvatori, M. and Donahue, P. (2012). What is college English? Stories about reading: Appearance, disappearance, morphing, and revival. *College English*, 75(2), 199-

217.

- Sanoff, A. P. (2006). What professors and teachers think: A perception gap over students' preparation. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 52(27), B9.
- Santelices, M.V. & Wilson, M. (2010). Unfair treatment?: The case of Freedle, the SAT, and the standardization approach to differential item functioning. *Harvard Educational Review*, 80(1), 106-134.
- Schultz, K. & Hull, G. (2008). Literacies in and out of school in the United States. In B. Street and N.H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Language and Education*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Volume 2: Literacy, 239-250.
- Shaughnessy, M. (1977). *Errors and expectation: A guide for the teacher of basic writing*. New York, NY: Oxford UP.
- Shor, I. (1987). *Critical teaching and everyday life*. 1980. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.
- Shor, I. (1997). Our apartheid: Writing instruction & inequality. *Journal of Basic Writing*, 16(1), 91-104.
- Street, B.V. (2003). What's "new" in New Literacy Studies? Critical approaches to literacy in theory and practice. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 5(2), 1-14.
- Street, B & Street, J. (1991). The schooling of literacy. In D. Barton and R. Ivanic (Eds.), *Writing in the community* (pp. 143-66). London, England: Sage, 1991.
- Swales, J. (1990). The concept of discourse community. In D. Downs and E. Wardle (Eds.), *Writing about writing* (pp. 466-479). Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martins, 2011.

- Tate, G. (1993). A place for literature in freshman composition. *College English*, 55(3), 317-21.
- Thaiss, C. & Porter, T. (2010). The state of WAC/WID in 2010: Methods and results of the U.S. survey of the International WAC/WID Mapping Project. *College Composition and Communication*, 61(3), 534-570.
- The College Board. (2012). *The SAT report on college & career readiness: 2012*. Retrieved from <http://press.collegeboard.org/sat>
- The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum of 1599*. (1970). (Allan P. Farrell, S.J., trans.) Retrieved from [http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/ulib/digi/ratio/ratio\\_web.html](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/ulib/digi/ratio/ratio_web.html)
- The National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges. (2003). *The neglected "R": The need for a writing revolution*. New York, NY: College Board.
- The National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges. (2004). *Writing: A ticket to work...Or a ticket out*. New York, NY: College Board.
- Todd, V. & Hudson, J. (2008). Using student opinions regarding traditional vs. writing across the curriculum teaching techniques: A qualitative pilot study. *College Teaching Methods & Styles Journal*, 4(1), 19-23.
- Tough, P. (2008). *Whatever it takes: Geoffrey Canada's quest to change Harlem and America*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Tough, P. (2012). *How children succeed: Grit, curiosity, and the hidden power of character*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- University of San Francisco. (2013). University of San Francisco - At a glance. Retrieved from <http://www.usfca.edu/about/usfstatistics/>

- University of San Francisco Department of Rhetoric and Language. (2013). *University of San Francisco Department of Rhetoric and Language academic program review 2012-2013*.
- Valenzuela, A. (1999) *Subtractive schooling: U.S.-Mexican youth and the politics of caring*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Vareene, H. & McDermott, R. (1999). *Successful failure: The school America builds*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Venezia, Kirst, Antonio (2003). Fix k-16 disconnections, or betray the college dream. *The Education Digest*, 68(9), 34-39.
- Verba, S. (1996). The citizen as respondent: Sample surveys and American democracy presidential address, American Political Science Association, 1995. *American Political Science Review*, 90(1), 1-7.
- Voss, R. (1983). Janet Emig's the composing processes of twelfth graders: A reassessment. *College Composition and Communication*, 34(3), 278-283.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind and society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wright, D. & Mahiri, J. (2012). Literacy learning within community action projects for social change. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 56(2), 123-131.
- Wymer, K., Fulford, C, Baskerville, N., & Washington, M. (2012). Necessity and the unexpected: SoTL student-faculty collaboration in writing program research. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 6(1). Retrieved from <http://www.georgiasouthern.edu/ijstol>

- Yamamura, E., Martinez, M., & Saenz, V. (2010). Moving beyond high school expectations: Examining stakeholders' responsibility for increasing Latina/o students' college readiness. *High School Journal*, 93(3), 126-148.
- Yazzie-Mintz, E. (2007). *Voices of students on engagement: A report on the 2006 high school survey of student engagement*. Bloomington, IN: Center for Evaluation & Education Policy.
- Zhao, Y. (2009). Comments on the common core standards initiative. 46-52. *Journal of Scholarship & Practice*, 6(3), 46-52.
- Ziajka, A. (2014). The University of San Francisco fact book and almanac 2014. Retrieved from [http://www.usfca.edu/uploadedFiles/About\\_USF/docs/USF\\_Fact\\_Book\\_and\\_Almanac.pdf](http://www.usfca.edu/uploadedFiles/About_USF/docs/USF_Fact_Book_and_Almanac.pdf)

**Appendix A:**  
**IRBPHS Approval**

*Protocol Exemption Notification*

To: Julie Sullivan  
From: Terence Patterson, IRB Chair  
Subject: Protocol #95  
Date: 05/10/2013

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your project (IRB Protocol #95) with the title **READY TO WRITE: EXPLORING THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE OF COLLEGE WRITING** has been approved by the University of San Francisco IRBPHS as **Exempt** according to 45CFR46.101(b). Your application for exemption has been verified because your project involves minimal risk to subjects as reviewed by the IRB on 05/10/2013.

Please note that changes to your protocol may affect its exempt status. Please submit a modification application within ten working days, indicating any changes to your research. Please include the Protocol number assigned to your application in your correspondence.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your endeavors.

Sincerely,

Terence Patterson,

Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

IRBPHS - Univeristy of San Francisco

Counseling Psychology Department

Education Building - Room 017

2130 Fulton Street

San Francisco, CA 94117-1080

[\(415\) 422-6091](tel:4154226091) (Message)

[IRBPHS@usfca.edu](mailto:IRBPHS@usfca.edu)

## **Appendix B:**

### **Informed Consent Form**

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

#### **CONSENT TO BE A PARTICIPANT/CO-RESEARCHER**

##### **Purpose and Background**

The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of first-time freshman college students regarding preparedness for college-level coursework in the required writing courses at one private four-year university in Northern California.

I am being asked to participate because I am a college student enrolled in Professor Sullivan's course.

##### **Procedures**

If I agree to be a participant/co-researcher in this study, the following will happen:

1. I will complete a short questionnaire giving basic information about me, including age, gender, race, religion, and writing history.
2. I will work with my fellow researchers to develop a plan for collecting/analyzing data via the course discussion board and student journals, as well as through the written course assignments.
3. I will participate in an interview/dialogue with a fellow co-researcher assistant, during which I will be asked about my educational history, writing history and experiences, and transition to college-level writing.
4. I will complete the survey and participate in the interview, discussion board, journal, and assignments as part of my Rhetoric and Composition course at the University of San Francisco.

##### **Risks and/or Discomforts**

1. It is possible that some of the questions on the background and educational experiences survey may make me feel uncomfortable, but I am free to decline to answer any questions I do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.
2. Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Co-researchers

will be referred to by first name in all data and reports, but I am free to request a pseudonym be used in place of my first name at any time. Study information will be coded and kept in locked files at all times. Only study personnel will have access to the files.

3. Although the study will be integrated with a required course, I may opt out of participation in the study without an effect to my grade in the course.

### **Benefits**

There will be no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. The anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of the skills, habits and behaviors used by first-time freshman in the transition from high school to college level writing.

### **Costs/Financial Considerations**

There will be no financial costs to me as a result of taking part in this study.

### **Payment/Reimbursement**

There will be no payment to me as a result of taking part in this study.

### **Questions**

I have talked to Professor Sullivan about this study and have had my questions answered. If I have further questions about the study, I may contact her via email at [jasullivan@usfca.edu](mailto:jasullivan@usfca.edu).

If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I should first talk with the co-researchers, including Professor Sullivan. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the IRBPHS, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing [IRBPHS@usfca.edu](mailto:IRBPHS@usfca.edu), or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

### **Consent**

I have been given a copy of the "Research Subject's Bill of Rights" and I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep. PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. My decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on my present or future status as a student or employee at USF.

My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

---

Subject's Signature

Date of Signature

---

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date of Signature

**Appendix C:**  
**Permission to Adapt Survey**

**Sharon James McGee**  
**May 7 (1 day ago)**

Dear Julie,

Joanne and I are fine with you adapting the survey. We'd appreciate it if you'd let us know of any publications that come out of it, as we are interested in the long-range scope of such questions. We appreciate you asking.

Would you mind, too, sending the citation for the Wymer study?

Best of luck with your project,  
Sharon

Sharon James McGee  
Associate Professor and Chair  
Department of English Language and Literature  
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville  
Box 1431  
Edwardsville, IL 62026  
[618.650.2060](tel:618.650.2060) (p) | [618.650.3509](tel:618.650.3509) (fax)

**Appendix D:**  
**Student Survey**

**Student Survey of Writing in College**

Adapted from: Addison, J. & McGee, S.J. (2010). Writing in high school/writing in college: research trends and future directions. *College Composition and Communication* 62(1), 147-79.

1. Your First name (only):
- 2: Gender:     Female            Male
3. How old are you?
4. On the USF breakdown of diversity how do you identify (circle one)?  
African American, Asian American, Caucasian, International, Latino/Hispanic,  
Native American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Chose not to Disclose
5. Is there another way you would identify yourself in terms of race/ethnicity/diversity?
6. Please specify your religious affiliation (if any):
7. Academic status: (e.g., First semester college student—Freshman)
8. Any college courses prior to coming to USF? (If yes, in which subject area?)
9. Did you transfer any college credits when you enrolled in USF? (If yes, which courses and approximately how many credits total?)
10. What is your hometown?
11. How would you describe your hometown?
12. Which kind of high school did you attend?  
Public   Private   Parochial   Charter   Magnet
13. How would you describe your high school? (e.g., location, size, student population, areas of focus, etc.)
14. Are you first in your family to attend a four-year college or university?
15. How many years of English did you take in high school?

16. Have you taken other kinds of writing classes, such as journalism, creative writing, or any other kind of course in which a primary focus was writing? No Yes.

Name of course(s):

17. Which of the following kinds of writing tasks do you recall doing during high school in any kind of class? (Some answers will overlap. Please circle as many as apply.)

Research paper      Essay exam answers      Personal narrative      5-Paragraph Essay

An obituary      A poem      Short story      Rhetorical Analysis      Newspaper article

Business Letter      Speech      Argumentative paper      Lab report      Summary

Evaluation      Journal      Other (please specify)

18. When you wrote papers in your English classes, did you get written feedback from your teacher about the quality of the paper? Yes No

19. Did you usually receive a grade for the paper? Yes No

20. In English classes, did your teachers devote class time to discussing the paper, giving advice about how to write it, or the like? Yes No

21. In English classes, did your teachers devote class time to peer-review or small group discussions of your papers? Yes No

22. In your best estimate, how often did you have writing tasks/assignments in classes other than English? Often      Occasionally      Rarely      Never

23. If you wrote in other classes, what classes did you write in? (please specify.)

24. When you produced writing in other classes, did you get written feedback from your teacher about the quality of the paper? Yes No

25. Did you usually receive a grade for the writing? Yes No

26. Did your teachers devote class time to discussing the paper, giving advice about how to write it, or the like?

In most courses      In some courses      In a few courses      Never

27. Did your teachers give you guidelines about how to write in various disciplines?

Yes No

*The following questions will ask about your overall experiences and attitudes about*

*writing.*

28. How important do you think writing is to your future job or career? (Scale from 1-5, 1 being “Not very important”, 5 being “Very important”, can also state “Don’t know”)

29. How often do you think you will have to write in your current courses at USF?

Very often                  Often                  Sometimes                  Rarely                  Never

30. How would you characterize your feelings about writing? (Please circle the answer that is the closest match to your feelings.)

I enjoy writing and look forward to most writing tasks.

I enjoy writing for personal goals but do not like school-related writing.

I do not like to write.

31. Which of these responses best matches your perception of your writing ability? (Please circle.)

I think I write as well or better than most of my peers.

I think I write about the same as my peers.

I think most of my peers write better than I do.

I think almost all of my peers write better than I do.

I don’t know how my writing compares to my peers.

32. How much emphasis do you think USF places on writing? (Please circle.)

Too much                  Enough                  Not enough                  Don’t know

33. How confident are you with your ability on the following tasks?: (Scale from 1-5, 1 being “Not very confident”, 5 being “Very confident”, can also state “Don’t know”)

Write appropriately for different audiences

Organize a paper

Develop a main idea

Use paragraphs appropriately

Use supporting evidence

Analyze ideas/arguments/data

Synthesize information from multiple sources

Appropriately use, cite, and document sources

Quote and paraphrase appropriately

Record data and/or use appropriate level of detail

Use correct grammar and syntax

Employ correct mechanics (spelling and punctuation)

34. To what extent do you engage (or plan to engage) in the following strategies when writing? (Scale from 1-5: 1 being “Never use”, 5 being “Always use”, can also state “Don’t know”)

Write multiple drafts

Discuss my writing with my teacher

Discuss my writing with the Writing Center or a tutor

Discuss my writing with other students (including peer review)

Discuss my writing with someone other than my teacher or tutor

Consult reference books or websites

35. Overall, how prepared do you feel at this time for college-level writing assignments (Scale from 1-5, 1 being “Very unprepared”, and 5 being “Very prepared”)?

36. What kind of non-school related writing do you regularly engage in? (Please circle all that apply)

Journaling    letters    email    texting    short stories    poetry

Personal essays    blogging    social networking    reviews/critiques    lists

other fiction (please specify)    other non-fiction (please specify)

37. What kind of non-school related reading do you regularly engage in? (Please circle all that apply)

newspapers    magazines    fiction books    non-fiction books    poems    short stories

blogs    social media    news(online)    reviews    personal essays    Other (specify)

*The following questions will ask about your experiences writing in college. (Skip if N/A.)*

38. Did you take another Composition or course at this or another institution?

Yes    No

39. Have you taken any other kind of course that focuses on writing at this or another institution?    No    Yes. Type of course:

40. What kinds of writing did you produce in these college courses? (Please circle)

Summary and/or analysis    Abstract    Research paper

Lab report    Personal opinion paper    Annotated bibliography    News stories

press releases    Essay exam answers    Case study    Narratives    Journals

reflection papers    Impromptu in-class writing    Reaction paper    Outlines

Critiques, evaluations, or reviews    Professional letters and/or memos

Literature review    Collaborative (or group) project

Analysis (poem, story, or other reading)    Other (please specify)

## Appendix E:

### Essay Assignment: People Who Tell the Truth Assignment

Assignment: Essay #1  
People Who Tell the Truth  
(Profile)

Outline Due:  
Full Draft Due (for workshop):  
Final Draft:

**What:** You will create a profile of an individual who represents the same spirit as those profiled on the Americans Who Tell The Truth website.

**Why:** To further explore the voices that resonate with us and the many ways that individuals can tell the truth, share their voice, and be “activists” in their own way. In the process you will hone your argumentative skills, think critically, be creative and demonstrate you understand the basics: Audience, Intention/Purpose, etc.

**How:** Follow the steps of The Process listed below. Please note the goals of being professional in your presentation while analyzing not only what people say, but how they say it, and how their words are received by their audience.

#### The Process

1. Choose a profile on the <http://americanswhotellthetruth.org/> website that stands out/resonates with you—try to pick someone you were not familiar with before you saw this profile (unless you find one you cannot resist sharing)(NOTE: MLK, jr. is off limits).

Write one paragraph reflecting on why this profile resonates with you.  
*Consider: Why did you choose this profile? Was it the individual, what he or she does, or what he or she said that caught your eye? What is the message (intent/purpose) conveyed by the quote? How was the message conveyed? Who is the audience for this message? In what way does the biography add credibility to the person’s words?*

\*You do not have to answer *all* of these questions in your paragraph, but you should be able to contribute to the class discussion. Bring paragraph to class.

2. Based on our class discussion, who do you think belongs on this site (who has not yet been so honored)? Choose one individual who evokes the spirit of this site—through their words, art, music, etc—and who also resonates with you. Create a profile on your person of choice. \*This individual does not have to be an American or known as an activist, but the profile should *celebrate* the individual as one who “tells the truth.”
3. Your profile should include the following elements:

- 1.) A *visual* of the person—this can demonstrate your creativity through drawing or designing the image, or you can download a photo or drawing done by (and credited to) someone else;
  - 2.) A *quote* from the individual (or image or excerpt of his/her work)—again, you can be creative with this, as long as it fits with the spirit of the original profiles;
  - 3.) A *biography* of the individual, highlighting the information that your audience (myself and your classmates) needs to know to understand the individual's background and the role he/she plays in telling the truth (\*\*Use AT LEAST THREE (3) SOURCES and CITE appropriately in MLA Format);
  - 4.) A brief *analysis* of not only *what* this individual says, but *how* he/she says it—consider the same questions asked regarding the Profiles and the topics raised during class around audience, intention, purpose, tone, word choice;
  - 5.) You may use the personal pronoun “I” (meaning you) where appropriate, but not at will. Aim for professional tone.
4. The OUTLINE of this profile can be either a formal or a list outline, but the FULL DRAFT should be a complete draft—as if you will be passing it in for a grade. The FINAL DRAFT of this profile should look professional—stapled, with page numbers, and a Works Cited page. (It will be graded as an essay.)
  5. In addition to handing in the paper, you should be prepared to introduce the individual you chose to profile, explain why you chose this individual, and read the quote chosen (in approximately 5 minutes or less).

**Potential Pitfall:** Be sure to include a Works Cited (MLA format), include page numbers, and staple EVERY DRAFT. Otherwise, feel free to be creative with this. Pick someone who resonates with you and the rest will come together.

**Appendix F:****Sample Essay: People Who Tell The Truth**

Harry  
September 5, 2013  
Written Comm I

Julian Assange

The date is April 5, 2010. Stifled chatter pervades the National Press Club hall, a private organization for journalists and writers. A slight air of uneasiness begins to fill the room as the chatter reveals who will be presenting at today's gathering. Suddenly, the lights dim and a video begins to play. The video, 39 minutes in length, is titled *Collateral Murder*. It consists of footage from a U.S. Army Apache helicopter in Baghdad on July 12th, 2007 (Froomkin). In this footage, the journalists witness a series of "air-to-ground" attacks in which the Apache helicopter fires on a group of suspected enemy targets - none of which show any sign of hostility during the course of the video. Remarks such as, "Oh yeah, look at those dead bastards," can be heard by US Military operatives during the event. When all the smoke is cleared, an estimated 10 men are dead including Namir Noor-Eldeen, a Reuters photographer, and Saeed Chmagh, a civilian driver.

Minutes after the attack, an unmarked van drives up to the scene of the carnage and Saleh Mutashar, the driver of the van, begins to help the wounded. He shows no signs of aggression but the US personnel operating the Apache request permission to engage anyway, stating that it "looks like [the men] possibly, picking up bodies and weapons" (*Collateral Murder*). The crew is given permission and the helicopter opens fire on the van, killing Mutashar and severely injuring two children that he happened to be transporting. "Well, it's their fault bringing their kids to a battle," one crewman can be heard saying.

*Collateral Murder* soon became a viral hit, plastering itself all over social media sites and news outlets and sparking a huge uproar in communities all over the globe. James Fallows of *The Atlantic* stated "...at face value it is the most damaging documentation of abuse since the Abu Ghraib prison-torture photos" (Romano). But the question remained: who leaked the video? How did closely-guarded and highly encrypted footage of such a controversial and top-secret operation find itself in the hands of everyone with access to the internet? The people who attended the National Press Club knew the answer to this question. They knew that the man who published the video was a veteran whistleblower; someone who struck fear in the hearts of organizations around the world with secrets. The man's name was Julian Assange. A man who "tells the truth" by exposing it and making it his mission to publish documents that reveal illegitimate practices by governments and private entities to inform the public about the clandestine atrocities and nefarious activities these large organisations are up to behind the public's back, all while placing himself in an immense level of danger.

Born on the 3rd of July, 1971, in Townsville, Australia, Julian Assange had an unusual upbringing. Unlike most children his age, Assange spent most of his youth travelling with his mother and father as they put together theatrical productions. As a result, he attended 37 schools before the age of 18 -- often times being homeschooled. It became evident early on that Assange was acute and when he wasn't helping his parents with their productions, he spent his time developing a skill for programming and hacking into computer systems, using a computer he got from his mother as a gift. (Biography)

In 1991, Assange took his hacking skills to the next level and, teaming up with a group of hackers, broke into the master terminal (used to monitor and control all

computer systems) of Nortel, a large Canadian telecom company. He was caught and assumed responsibility for 25 charges, eventually only having to pay a small amount in damages. Despite his run in with the law, Assange continued to pursue a career in computer programming and software development, also studying mathematics at the University of Melbourne (dropping out, however, for “moral reasons.”)

Assange’s fame (or infamy, to many) began with the founding of WikiLeaks in 2006, “a website that posts secret documents and information in the public domain” (Harrel). The rationale behind Wikileaks was the hope that leaking confidential documents that showed controversial governance would put an end to illegitimate practices by these governments. In their first year of operation, Assange and his team at WikiLeaks surprised the public by amassing over 1.2 million leaked documents - all by anonymous sources, as per the site’s strict anonymity credo. 7 years after its launch, Wikileaks is still going strong, publishing hundreds of thousands of documents - most of which target illegitimate practices by the US Government.

Julian Assange tells the truth not by what he says himself, but by what he exposes of others. For hundreds of years, Governments around the world have claimed to be transparent -- especially the government of the United States. While gimmicks such as President Obama’s Open Government Initiative attempt to assure the public that transparency is still a top priority, this is simply not true. The U.S. government hides far too much information from the people - much of it information that directly impacts us as individuals. Assange tells the truth by uncovering this information and exposing wrongdoings by the government that have simply been “swept under the rug.” The leak of the *Collateral Murder* video is an example of this. It gave the public key insight into

the more disturbing nature of the war in Iraq. It showed us that the way individuals are being treated there goes against our values as a nation, even in a time of war - and and it tells the truth about the government's shady practices.

Another way Julian Assange tells the truth is through self-endangerment. Exposing confidential documentation from a powerful entity such as the United States government has very dangerous consequences; in fact, in mid 2010, amidst the release of *Collateral Murder*, it was made apparent that "Pentagon investigators are trying to determine the whereabouts of the Australian-born founder of the secretive website Wikileaks for fear that he may be about to publish a huge cache of classified State Department cables that, if made public, could do serious damage to national security" (Shenon). The United States, as evident by the treatment of suspected terrorists at Guantanamo Bay, does not take acts against its national well being by foreigners very lightly, and it would be safe to assume that the capture of Julian Assange by US authorities would not end well for him. Assange's assumption of risk and endangerment by the entities he exposes further shows how he tells the truth, with their eagerness to capture him emphasizing the fact that they have something to hide and that the information he has against them is damaging.

In the world today, and more specifically in the United States, government transparency is crucial. If we can't trust the government, we are left vulnerable to information that could have a huge impact on our lives. This can be seen by recent whistleblower Edward Snowden's leaks of NSA files which show the agency was secretly collecting information such as "email, video and voice chat, videos, photos, voice-over-IP chats (such as Skype), file transfers, and social networking details

(Greenwald)" on any individual they wanted to. Julian Assange, while not tied to Snowden's leaks, does exactly the same to expose governments while admirably placing himself in harm, and it's why I believe he tells the truth.

#### Works Cited

Froomkin, Dan. "WikiLeaks VIDEO Exposes 2007 'Collateral Murder' In Iraq." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 05 Apr. 2010. Web. 16 Sept. 2013.

"Collateral Murder - Wikileaks - Iraq." *YouTube*. YouTube, 03 Apr. 2010. Web. 16 Sept. 2013.

Romano, Tricia. "'Collateral Murder'" *Julian Assange and WikiLeaks — Crime Library on TruTV.com*. TruTV, n.d. Web. 16 Sept. 2013.

Harrel, Eben. "WikiLeaks Founder Julian Assange." *TIME.com*. Time Magazine, 26 July 2010. Web. 16 Sept. 2013.

"Julian Assange Biography." *Bio.com*. A&E Networks Television, n.d. Web. 16 Sept. 2013.

Greenwald, Glenn, and Ewen MacAskill. "NSA Prism Program Taps in to User Data of Apple, Google and Others." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 06 June 2013. Web. 16 Sept. 2013.

Shenon, Philip. "Pentagon Manhunt." *The Daily Beast*. Newsweek/Daily Beast, 10 June 2010. Web. 16 Sept. 2013.

## Appendix G:

### Essay Assignment: Policy Letter

Assignment #2  
Letter

Draft Due:  
Final Draft

**What:** You will write (and if so desired mail) a letter asking a person or organization to change a policy or practice. You should genuinely feel the policy greatly affects you or a group that you care about in the transition to college or college-level writing. If you do choose to mail the letter, and it generates the results that you call for, you will get an automatic “A” for this assignment.

**Why:** There are many good reasons to develop your argumentative skills and letter form allows you to apply those skills to a specific audience in a compact and directed form, while attempting to better a situation in your world.

**How:** Your letter will be evaluated primarily on awareness of audience, including your ethos, your support for your claims, and your skill in explicitly recognizing the reasons for the policy and proposing an alternative that addresses these reasons.

#### **The Process:**

- Choose a policy or practice that you would like to change. Decide what you would like to see done and prepare a proposal or suggestion for change. Determine who (in terms of audience) can make that change happen.
- Do research both into the history of the policy and the potential for your solution. What information will support your claim? What roadblocks can you anticipate your solution might run into? How can you circumvent these roadblocks or prepare your letter to counter an opposing argument?
- Write a summary of the policy, and the reasons it exists, as well as explaining your suggestion for changes—this will require research, examples, and other evidence.
- Workshop your letter in class, first on the “macro” level (concept, audience, supporting evidence, tone), then on the “micro” level (paragraph formation, organization, grammar).
- Hand in your final draft of your letter for Grading Round 1—based on the criteria we will set in class. (Grading Round 2 will be the “A” you’ll receive if your letter gets the results you call for.)
- If you decide to mail the letter. Make any necessary alterations—post grading—to your final draft, print out a fresh copy, and address an envelope to the receiver or prepare to email. (Your initial grade will stand until you have received a response addressing the policy/suggestions.)

**Grading Criteria:** To be decided in class. (Some of you will take on topics that won’t get responses right away. In these cases, you will probably keep your first grade. Should you hear by the end of the semester, bring in the response and I will make an adjustment.)

**POTENTIAL PITFALL:** Not doing enough research into why a policy exists or how your suggestions would work to improve the situation will read as unprofessional griping—this is not the impression you want to impart with this letter. Remember your ethos.

**Appendix H:**  
**Sample Essay: Policy Letter**

\*NOTE: This letter was longer than most (the majority were one-two pages). Brittany added details when she decided to share the letter with International Student and Scholar Services.

November 26, 2013

2325 Golden Gate Avenue  
San Francisco, CA 94118

Laura Gerth  
Director  
International Student and Scholar Services  
2130 Fulton Street  
University Center, Room 402  
San Francisco, CA 94117

Dear Laura Gerth:

I am writing in regards to the transition into college for international students. There are 1,340 international students from 87 countries attending USF (“International Student Population”). Every one of them has to adjust to a new culture and place and accept that they are far away from home. To guide them, the international students can find solace on the university’s main website. However, the website is only available in one language, English. Students are also not speaking up and asking the questions they need answered. In doing so, they are missing out on the valuable resources on campus and having a harder time adjusting to life in the United States.

While researching, I discovered USF provides numerous services through the Learning and Writing Center, the Speaking Center, and the International Student and Scholar Services to support students in this transition. The Learning and Writing Center offers peer tutoring, supplemental instruction from students who have already taken a class, 30 minute writing appointments, workshops for being academically successful, one-on-one appointments with the staff, plenty of open space to work, computers, textbooks, and tips for studying (“What We Do”). After briefly speaking with a female student at the center’s front desk, I learned the tutors provide one-on-one instruction in order to help with study skills, time management, note taking, test taking, and speaking with professors (Learning). She also said the Learning and Writing Center hired an ESL or English as a Second Language tutor (Learning).

In a similar way, the USF Speaking Center prepares students for upcoming presentations and speeches (“Speaking”). The coaches are there to advise on communication skills and

delivery, constructing speeches with proper transitions, and forming main points (“Speaking”).

The International Student and Scholar Services, ISSS, offer “orientation programs, immigration advising and document support, informational workshops, educational programs, and advocacy/training” (“International Student and Scholar”). The various educational programs include the International Student Association, the Global Living Community, and the International Network Program (“International Network”). There is also an ESL program, so that students can take classes to enhance their English skills (“Academic”).

All of this information can be found on the university’s website, [www.usfca.edu](http://www.usfca.edu). This website, while informative, can be complex and cumbersome. I spoke with a male student at the International Student and Scholar Services’s desk who, when trying to help me find statistical information, said, “It is just a bit hidden” (International). This was interesting to me because, if I was not able to find this data, I wondered how much harder it would be for an international student who does not speak, read, or write English very well to complete the same task. Although as college students we are expected to be independent and self-sufficient, finding these resources online is difficult.

In addition to the language barrier with the university’s website, many international students are reluctant to ask for help. My roommate, for example, is quite shy and is having a hard time adapting to the new environment. She is hesitant to ask questions, which prevents her issues, both academic and non-academic, from being resolved. She conveyed to me that she does not use the website, and that she only uses USF connect, for this reason, and she refuses to ask for assistance. Since the information she is looking for is on the website, she has no idea about the extent of the resources she has at her disposal because they are hard to find. My roommate is like many international students on campus. Therefore, without knowing about the resources, international students cannot thrive at USF.

If the website was offered in different languages, then there would not be such a challenge and the international students would have better access to the resources on campus. During a focus group, I asked my roommate if this alternative would be more suited to her needs, and she replied enthusiastically with a nod and a smile. Two other international students agreed that they would use the website more if it was offered in their language.

In addition to changing the website, to prevent students from cultures who are less likely to seek help from being uninformed of the resources on campus, each international student could be assigned a mentor. Although there is an Academic Mentor Residential Advisor and other Residential Advisors in my building, they are very busy and do not have a significant amount of time to allot to each student. My Residential Advisor has an on-campus job, the duties of being an RA and the assignments from her classes. She said, “We’re students also and we have a lot of specific responsibilities as RA’s. So, it’s difficult for us to focus on one resident” (Residential).

I also realize the International Student and Scholar Services has a Buddy Program, but this requires the international students to sign up to be a part of the program (“USF”). By leaving it up to the students, many decide not to participate. John Oronte, who is in charge of the Buddy Program, said, “It changes from year to year but I would say anywhere between 5% to 15% of the international students take advantage of it” (Oronte). The Buddy Program is a great resource on campus for international students, however, many international students who need the program are not receiving help. The three international students I spoke with are of the remaining percent that are not a part of the program but would greatly benefit from its support.

To ensure every international student receives the help they need, a mentor could be assigned, just as the CASA and faculty advisors are assigned, that way the international students have a point of contact. The mentor would be a USF undergraduate student who is knowledgeable about the steps international students must take in order to attend USF. They do not have to be students who speak the same language as the international student they are mentoring and they do not have to be international students themselves. It is better if the international students have a mentor who is different from them. If the international student is paired with someone who is not similar to them, they learn more about other cultures and are exposed to different types of people.

Aside from student volunteers, the mentors could be students from the Go Team. There are thirty-six members this year (“Go”). By being mentors, these students would be fulfilling their duty as Go Team Leaders (“Go”). They would be helping the incoming international students adjust.

In addition to the Go Team, students from fraternities and sororities could be mentors. According to Nick, a member of one of USF’s fraternities, there are about nine fraternities and sororities. He said the two social fraternities and the two social sororities make up a combined total of 200 to 300 students. The two multicultural fraternities and the two multicultural sororities have roughly 15 students and there are more than 100 students in the co-ed service fraternity. The fraternities and sororities on campus are committed to “philanthropic activities” because they “help sustain the guiding values that allow our members to develop a broader perspective of civic engagement” (“Pillars”).

Some clubs on campus may also want to contribute. My friend is a member of two clubs on campus, the Nursing Student Association and Students for Cancer Awareness. There are about 100 students in the Nursing Student Association, and about 100 in the Students for Cancer Awareness club. She said these groups are always looking for more community service hours and the deed does not necessarily have to pertain to medicine. As mentors, their participation would prompt other clubs and organizations to get involved. The involvement sends a message that service does not have to pertain to their area of interest. By being a part of the program, these students are helping their fellow peers.

The whole idea is to have enough students as mentors so that one mentor would have a maximum of five international students in his or her group. If enough students get involved, then every international student could be helped. Not only would these groups on campus be helping the international students, the mentors would be learning something as well. This effort would build more of a community because each group would be exposed to someone from a different country. They would be learning about new beliefs, opinions, and customs.

As a way of welcoming the international students to USF and introducing themselves and their role in aiding them, the mentors could be reachable during the summer in order to help the students fill out the necessary paperwork and respond to any questions the international students may have. During the first few weeks of classes, the mentor would evaluate each student's transition and give them an extra push to use the resources. The mentor would call each international student at least once a week to see how they are doing. Calling at first will be a challenge, however, over time the mentors will become more comfortable communicating with the international students and the international students will also feel more comfortable communicating with someone who does not speak their language. The mentor would also meet one-on-one with the student once each week for the first month of classes. After the mentor and international student discuss if the student still needs that level of attention, the phone calls and meetings would reduce to once a month. The mentor would only help as long as the student needed it and they would be easily accessible to the students. Ideally, the mentors would only be assigned to the international student for their first year at USF. After each year, the process should repeat with new students.

The three international students I spoke with liked the idea of having a mentor. They even suggested being in a group of less than five people, that way the mentor would not have too many students to assist and the students in the group could meet new people. The mentor would still have individual time with each international student, but they could also gather the group together for social events and even partner with other groups.

In these small group meetings, the mentor could educate international students on some of the cultural differences and give them tips for being successful in college. In one instance, one of the students said she, like many others, wished to be educated on the Jesuit religion. She said, because she comes from a country with a different religion, she did not want to be impolite or offend anyone when making comments since she does not know about the religion. The mentor could touch upon this area as well as any upcoming events and which ones would be beneficial to the student. The three international students said they do not know which events on campus are important for them, so they ignore the events because they do not know about them.

This entire process may take a while, but having a mentor so readily available would be influential for international students and would ultimately uphold the International Student and Scholar Service's goal of encouraging "a global perspective for the USF community through educational and programmatic outreach" ("International Student and

Scholar”). The international students would be connecting with different people and getting the appropriate help they need.

While not everyone will or may need to utilize the campus resources, such as the Learning and Writing Center, the USF community needs to ensure all students know about them. I hope you consider these suggestions as they are vital in carrying out the many goals that are set forth by the Learning and Writing Center, the Speaking Center, and the International Student and Scholar Services.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Brittany (Last name removed)

#### Works Cited

“Academic English for Multilingual Students (formerly ESL).” *University of San Francisco*. White Whale Web Services, 25 Sept. 2013. Web. 24 Sept. 2013.

“Go Team.” *University of San Francisco*. White Whale Web Services, 21 Nov. 2013. Web. 24 Sept. 2013.

“International Network Program.” *University of San Francisco*. White Whale Web Services, 25 Sept. 2013. Web. 24 Sept. 2013.

International Student and Scholar Services desk attendant. Personal interview. 23 Sept. 2013.

“International Student and Scholar Services.” *University of San Francisco*. White Whale Web Services, 25 Sept. 2013. Web. 24 Sept. 2013.

“International Student Population.” *University of San Francisco*. White Whale Web Services, 25 Sept. 2013. Web. 24 Sept. 2013.

Learning and Writing Center desk attendant. Personal interview. 24 Sept. 2013.

Oronte, John. Personal interview. 29 October 2013.

“Pillars of Success.” *University of San Francisco*. White Whale Web Services, 22 Nov. 2013. Web. 24 Sept. 2013.

Residential Advisor. Personal interview. 28 Oct. 2013.

“Speaking Center.” *University of San Francisco*. White Whale Web Services, 25 Sept. 2013. Web. 24 Sept. 2013.

“USF Buddy Program.” *University of San Francisco*. White Whale Web Services, 25 Sept. 2013. Web. 24 Sept. 2013.

“What We Do.” *University of San Francisco*. White Whale Web Services, 25 Sept. 2013. Web. 24 Sept. 2013.

## Appendix I:

### Essay Assignment: Research Essay

Note: From University Research/Instructor Journal Entry dated: 7 November 2013.

One aspect of this assignment that has been a challenge is that there was no assignment sheet, which isn't usually my style. I tend to provide a written map of the process for them to follow (along with the What, Why and How of the assignment and some potential pitfalls highlighted). This time, in crafting the assignment sheet, I realized that the assignments may not all fit into the same structure. While the overall big picture of the structure could be similar, the analysis portion of the essays may lend themselves to a few different options. So, I gave them three choices. And this may have made things more confusing than if I'd tried to get them all to fit their ideas into, say, a proposal.

Option 1: A debate-on-paper—some chose this format even though their topic didn't have a clear debate. In some cases, the comparison structure still held, but in others, there was a debate being forced that wasn't really a debate, and the result was riddled with clarity issues. Some of these were easy to redirect toward...

Option 2: A Proposal—since I made a point of making all of them bring their arguments to a call-for-action, many can be swung into a Proposal-like format. Unlike some professors, who swear by a 80/20 split between background/summary information and explanation of the proposal, I feel that the amount of background and detail needed for outlining the proposed idea can vary depending on the topic and audience. So I don't lock them into that structure. I do, however, emphasize that just dropping a proposal isn't sufficient. They need to explain how the proposed idea will address the issue (even if just in part) and how it will work (in other words, how it is feasible and what it would look like at USF).

Option 3: An Argument—this was the catch all/fall back option. If the idea didn't immediately lend itself to a debate and you were unsure about a clear proposal to address the issue, then this could be the option for you. However, some chose this out of familiarity. The drafts that followed this structure barely broke the 5-paragraph format and many didn't use both the library research and our research from this project to link the ideas.

For all of the papers, I encouraged them to consider (and summarize) the library research on their topic and then connect the points found to what we've observed and discussed at USF. They were also encouraged to use any examples/quotes from the journals, blackboard discussion, letters, and dialogues, as well as conduct new interviews with fellow freshmen. A few immediately posted questions on blackboard related to their topic. For others, I made links during workshop (between people working on similar subjects or others who have mentioned the topic in some way in the discussions we've had—mostly online.) During workshopping, I also encourage on the spot brainstorming.

## **Appendix J:**

### **Sample Essay: Research Essay (Proposal)**

Diego  
Written Communication I  
Professor Sullivan  
October 31, 2013

#### **The Trifecta of Transition**

I have had the tendency during these first two and half months of college to place myself in many difficult situations that have crunched me for time and sleep. When this happens, I pose myself a question: What is holding me back and causing me to write off some of my assignments until the very last minute? It must be the way that I think and assess my college work. The problem is that I am still operating in a high school mindset. In high school, I did not need to contemplate and reflect on my work. I just needed to finish it. As I had written in a discussion board entry, the high school mentality has made getting an education resemble working a job more than an actually learning (Re: Complaining). A number of my own classmates have also pointed out that the mindset that is demanded by college work does not match up with the habits leftover from high school. Thus to help other freshmen struggling in adapting the college mentality, I urge the university's administration to enlist Graduate students from the School of Education as instructors in mandatory, frequent workshops dedicated to preparing freshmen on how to approach college work. This program would teach the importance of critical thinking, creativity, and curiosity in a college context, whereas in earlier schooling, these attributes had been underdeveloped or inhibited.

The state of schooling across the nation and across the globe has been described as dismal from a number of education experts. Decorated public school teacher John Taylor Gatto observed that the school system within the United States was closely fashioned to the institutional structure of prisons. He also cited the influence of the Prussian educational system as the main cause in current problems found in many schools. The Prussian system's purpose in its native land was to suppress questioning and critical thinking, (Gatto). Additionally, British education authority Sir Ken Robinson draws upon history to inform us that schooling was originally created to aid industry in the creation of skilled laborers and not creative thinkers. People with a predisposition to intelligences and talents outside school expectations are often barred from expressing their creativity (Robinson). His conclusions are not too far off. According to evolutionary psychologist at Boston College, Peter Gray, as children, we explored and discovered the world on our own terms. Once we entered school, that drive for curiosity was extinguished by standardized instruction (Davis). Such limitations are responsible for the present drop-out rate in America, that is at 20% or at 1 out of 5 people (Dropout Crisis...). The problem with schooling is ensuring that students get the most out of their respective educations. The state of education today hinders much of that from happening.

Critical thinking is an invaluable skill that all incoming college freshmen should ideally have. Linda Elder of the Critical Thinking Community states that "critical thinking is self-guided, self-disciplined thinking which attempts to reason at the highest level of quality in a fair-minded way" (Define Critical...). As university students expected to be competent members of society, such a skill is essential. I am not alone in this belief, as according to Professor Emeritus at the Rochester Institute of Technology,

Eugene Fram, major groups such as K-12 educators, college faculty, employers, and politically-engaged individuals all expect critical thinking from college graduates. It is clear from this wide array of people, that many expect college students to be mentally well-equipped in order to solve today's wide range of problems. The importance and need for critical thinking in college students shows how clearly this skill is a valued component in university classes.

Despite the overall agreement on the importance of critical thinking, the reality that exists within our high schools paints a different picture. A study conducted by the Conference Board, a global business research group, revealed that of all the employers surveyed, 70% felt that high school graduates were lacking in applied skills, which includes critical thinking (Kafer). Teaching of critical thinking must be insufficient in a majority of high schools to warrant such large response by employers. The problem might derive from the fact that early on in schooling, according to education reformer Aaron Oliveri, students learn to “[wait] for the teacher to provide information” and as a result, not use “critical analysis or...independent research.” Since college is an environment of independent and active learning, clearly there is an issue when a number of incoming students are accustomed to just waiting to be told facts by instructors. A transition into college academics from such a system is clearly problematic.

Another attribute essential to college learning is creativity. Known to come about when one is “in the zone,” creativity is the generation of new ideas, new connections, and problem solving skills (Creativity). Universities are places touted to be the central hub of new and innovative ideas, so they must ensure that students employ some measure of creativity in their coursework. According to Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner, there

are different intelligences and intelligence combinations that serve as the means for human beings to interact with their surroundings in distinctive ways (Educational Resources...). The aptly-named Multiple Intelligences Theory puts into perspective the fact that due to the variety of intelligences that exists, creativity itself is diverse. Creativity is essential to a university's goals of innovation and is found in wide range of forms.

The pervasiveness of standardized testing in American schools represents a systematic negating of creativity and its many forms. During an interview, my classmate Blaze told me about his troubles with the timed writing of the SAT, as writing was not necessarily his strong suit (Caruso). I would imagine that Blaze excels in one of the other intelligences in Gardner's theory and clearly this standardized test, among other similar examinations, placed sole favor in an intelligence that he considered his weakest. Despite there being the justification of having testable, academic standards, the nation of Finland had abandoned standardized tests and its students, on average, are now excelling in their regular exams (Sanchez). In college, examinations are created directly by the professor and centered around what they considered the main ideas of the curriculum they created. On the other hand, many student have hitherto dealt with important tests, be it the SAT or the STAR, that have embedded in their minds that only what they are tested on is what is important. Brilliant and intelligent students are made to feel they are otherwise and in a university, a place with a variety of learning paths, that reality can be detrimental.

Among the chief attributes needed in college is a deep sense of curiosity and the ability to search for new knowledge . Educational researcher Dr. Sugata Mitra conducted

experiments with a single computer and a single internet connection in the heart of a number of Indian villages. He found that, when left to their own devices, children allowed their curiosity to take over and gradually began to figure out how to work a computer and what they needed to know. Ever since we were little, we have possessed an innate sense of curiosity ingrained deep within. Accordingly:

Children are often are often most curious about with which they are somewhat familiar and about which they have some ongoing interest. [Thus] research on children's interests offers important insights about the development of curiosity" (Engel).

In order to truly learn, students, like their younger counterparts, must have a basic interest in what is being taught and in order to generate interest, the subject being taught must not be just forced. When allowed to let their curious minds run wild, people tend to become more engaged and hungry for knowledge.

One of the main inhibitors to curiosity in schools is student sentiment of coursework being irrelevant and lacking in fulfillment. Once again, during my interview with Blaze, we realized how much high school was filled with "busy work" or work without purpose, and that the opposite was true of college (Caruso). Since both of us come from different backgrounds, our arrival to the same conclusion on the topic of "busy work" in high school signals a greater and widespread problem. The Future Project confirms this as the case, as one of their studies found that not only did 80% of students see their schoolwork as irrelevant towards academic growth, but also revealed that 80% of drop-outs felt that they would have stayed in school if work had been less drill-based (Moran). These students could see the pointlessness of their work due to its disconnection

to real-world applications. Schooling has instilled within many attitudes that stop curiosity with coursework that lacked in engagement and relevance to the real world situations.

There needs to be work done around the issues of deficiency in critical thinking, lack of creativity, and stymied curiosity among USF's freshmen. The program I proposed earlier would have seminars throughout the year emphasizing those subjects, as well as other focus areas surrounding the topics of mindset and college success. The instructors leading the seminars would gear them to be open. There would be a formal instruction component, but that would only constitute a quarter of the session. Students would be required to choose from a number of subjects and do a presentation on it. Those presentations would take up the remainder of the sessions' time. Experimentation and innovation would be encouraged, as extra credit would be given to creative presentations. The repeating basis of the sessions would allow for the retention of information. This program could also fall in line with the mission of the university of social justice by structuring the sessions' format around critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is a form of learning that "intrinsically [motivates] [students] to learn about their world within the context of a larger society" (Gordon). This opportunity to teach with critical pedagogy serves as an opportunity and incentive for Graduate students to lead the sessions. They could write about the experience in a report or include it in their dissertations.

This proposal presents us with a genuine opportunity to reverse the damage caused by years of schooling. Not only that, but it can also simply serve as a way to transition first years into the environment of college academics and social justice present here at USF. My hope is that there will be less freshman in the future that would have to

grapple with the struggle that confronts me now. With this program, we, the faculty and students of USF, can make that conflict a thing of the past.

#### Works Cited

Caruso, Blaze. Personal Interview. 1 Oct. 2013.

“Creativity.” *PBS - This Emotional Life*. Vulcan Productions, 2011. Web. 31 Oct 2013.

Davis, Joshua. “How a Radical New Teaching Method Could Unleash a Generation of Geniuses.” *Wired Business*. *Wired Mag.*, 15 Oct.2013. Web. 20 October 2013.

“Define Critical Thinking” *The Critical Thinking Community*. Foundation for Critical Thinking. 2013. Web. 30 Oct. 2013.

Diego Aldana [Diego Aldana]. “Re: Complaining.” *USF Blackboard*. University of San Francisco, 12 Sept. 2013. Web. 12 Nov. 2013.

“Dropout Crisis Facts.” *America’s Promise Alliance*. America’s Promise Alliance, 2013. Web. 31 Oct 2013.

“Educational Resources: Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences Theory.” *PBS – Great Performances*. Public Broadcasting Service, n.d. Web. 30 Oct 2013.

Engel, Susan. *Children’s Need to Know: Curiosity in Schools*. *Harvard Educational Review* (Winter 2011): 627. Web. 12 Nov. 2013.

Fram, Eugene. “Wanted: More U.S. College Grads With Critical Thinking Skills.” *Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com Inc. , 8 Nov. 2013. Web. 12 Nov. 2013.

Gatto, John Taylor. “Against School.” *The Writer’s Presence: A Pool of Readings*. Ed. David McQuade and Robert Atwan. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2012. 665-672. Print.

Gordon, Jake. *Critical pedagogy as an instructional leadership initiative in a small urban high school setting*. Diss. California State University, Long Beach, 2012. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2012. *ProQuest*. Web. 22 Oct. 2013.

Kafer, Krista. “High School, College Graduates Lack Basic and Applied Skills, Employers Say.” *Heartlander Magazine*. The Heartland Institute, 1 Dec. 2006. Web. 12 Nov. 2013

Mitra, Sugata. “The child-driven education.” TED. Oxford, England. July 2010. Lecture.

Moran, Marcia. "Cultivating Curiosity and Engagement." *Positive Business DC*. Positive Business DC, 19 Feb. 2013. Web. 12 Nov. 2013.

Oliveri, Aaron. "Children in America's school lack critical thinking skills." *examiner.com*. Clarity Digital Group LLC, 14 Jan. 2013. Web. 12 Nov. 2013.

Robinson, Ken. "How schools kill creativity." TED. Monterey, CA, USA. February 2006. Lecture.

Sanchez, Erika L. "America's dumbest idea: creating a multiple-choice test generation." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media Limited, 12 Nov. 2013. Web. 13 Nov. 2013.

## Appendix K:

### Essay Assignment: Final Presentation

Final Presentation

Full Draft Due:

Final Draft Due:

**What:** Based on your research, craft a 5 minute speech introducing the issue or topic (and proposed idea or call to action) and convincing us that we should support your argument. For this assignment, you will assume your audience is the same audience as you essay addressed, and that they may not as knowledgeable on the topic or agree with your point of view.

**Why:** Transferring an argument from print to speech can be challenging, but a necessary skill in many professions. You will occasionally be called upon to speak on a topic you have written about.

**How:** Your essay serves as an existing manuscript. Now you need to transform it into a speech-length manuscript that highlights the key points, then condense that even further into an extemporaneous Speaking outline—fitting on note cards. The Final Manuscript will be turned in after your speech—this should be word for word what you plan to say (as if it were going to be loaded into a teleprompter). You may also use visual elements to support your proposal—let me know if you need to use any of the room technology so we can prepare ahead of time.

#### The Process:

1. Revisit your essay and isolate the key points raised, so you can summarize the information your audience needs to know.
2. Strategize your game plan. You don't have time to hit on everything or to use every example or quote. Which of them speak most directly to your argument? What does your audience need to understand to be convinced your idea is valid?
3. Prepare an outline of what you plan to say. Rewrite your manuscript accordingly. Bring manuscript draft to class.
4. Based on feedback, revise your speech to make it even more professional and convincing.
5. Reduce your manuscript to a Speaking Outline in the form of notes on note cards **no larger than 4x6**.
6. Bring both your Final manuscript and Speaking Outlines to class. Do speech.

#### Grading Criteria:

In addition to argumentative skills (and citation), your presentation will be graded on: Accuracy and relevance of information, Adaptation to audience, Delivery: Evidence of rehearsal (fluency, timing, vocal variety), Appropriateness for situation.

**POTENTIAL PITFALL:** Be sure to follow the assignment carefully and bring both your note cards and final manuscript to class. (And, as always, to cite your sources.)

## Appendix L:

### Sample Essay: Presentation (Sonia)

#### Manuscript (Newscast in Video format—all roles played by Sonia)

**Anchor Sonia:** Good evening and welcome to Eyewitness San Francisco News at six. I am Sonia Hertado and here is breaking news. A research study performed by the University of California Los Angeles found that only 51.9 percent of college students' emotional health is above average.

(Scene changes)

**UCLA research leader:** Emotional intelligence is “an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one’s ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures” (Low, Lamax, Jackson, & Nalson 5). Our study indicates that fewer college freshmen are reporting to have above average emotional health. These numbers are due to stress, financial concerns, and other factors (Higher Education Research Institute).

**Anchor Sonia:** Other studies show a positive correlation between academic success and higher emotional intelligence (Low, Lamax, Jackson, & Nalson 7). College freshmen were interviewed on the subject:

(Scene changes)

**Student from USF:** After being informed that my AVID mentor was arrested for sexual assault my first semester as a freshmen, I failed to turn in written assignments in my rhetoric and anthropology classes. After multiple attempts of completing my homework, I gave up. I wasn't motivated and didn't have the willingness or the adequate mental state to stay focused.

**Anchor Sonia:** Data supports that freshmen experience a mix of emotions, among them homesickness and anxiety, that impact their academic life. Meanwhile, students pressure the University of San Francisco's congress to pass the EQ bill. Let's go live with Sonia out is San Francisco.

(Scene changes)

**Reporter Sonia:** Although universities offer services meant to facilitate the transition to college, students from the University of San Francisco have proposed a bill that requires incoming freshmen to take an Emotional Intelligence test prior to enrollment.

**Protester Sonia #1:** Students are coming to college unprepared emotionally. Institutions must do something to help them. We don't want our young adults to drop out and fail. Universities like USF should require students to take EQ tests.

**Protester Sonia #2:** EQ tests measure “competencies including awareness, stress tolerance, problem solving, and happiness” (What is Emotional Intelligence). With that information, the Center for Academic and Student Achievement (CASA), which focuses in helping students transition into college and designing student success workshops (What We Do), could contact those who score under the average and also organize workshops that promote Emotional Intelligence. Those who need further assistance could be referred to Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). Unfortunately, CAPS only offers a limited amount of counseling sessions for students per year (CAPS Services). We also propose that the counseling sessions be unlimited. This way the university can offer students services that can help them learn how to manage their feelings, ultimately helping them transition to college.

(Scene changes)

**Anchor Sonia:** This is a growing movement that has many concerned. It is an action that many wish to see implemented so that students are successful in college. That is all for Eyewitness SF News. I am Sonia Hertado and have a good evening.

(Curtains close)

**Appendix M:****Sample Essay: Presentation (Harry)****Manuscript (Rap—Performed by a fellow freshman)**

You're a first semester freshman on that college grind  
The work is piling up  
And you're stressed out your mind  
Busy schedules and long nights  
They take their toll  
And you're so worked up  
You wake up looking like a troll  
You don't know how to handle it  
This is all so new  
Seems like you took a bite  
And it's more than you can chew  
You start to think to yourself  
How the hell did this start  
When did everything  
Begin to fall apart  
You look back and realise  
The origin of your mind's demise  
All this stress from no organization  
And you can't seem to bring it to a cessation  
No matter how hard you try  
You just can't seem to get by  
Nothing you do Ever gets you through  
Tried methods like deep breathing  
To relieve your stress  
But they all fail to help you  
And you're still an anxious mess  
What you don't understand though  
Is the effect this can have  
On your mind and your body  
It's really, very gaudy  
At first, everything's okay  
But then your mind decays  
You become irritated  
And your blood pressure's up  
You turn to drugs  
Or fill your cup (2X)  
But these things only make it worse  
The false sense of betterment  
Is very terse

The problem of stress though  
Is not incurable  
The list of remedies is surprisingly full  
But the one that many people seem to forget  
Actually happens to be your best bet  
It's to hit the gym  
And to hit it hard (2X)  
Exercise is the best way  
To relieve the stress  
All while simultaneously increasing your bench press  
But let's be honest  
Nobody really cares  
How much you can lift  
Or how fast you can run up stairs  
But we digress from the main point  
Exercise isn't just for poor joints  
Studies have shown  
It leads to more blood  
Going straight to your brain  
Which makes work less of a pain  
There's also a release  
Of hormones  
Like dopamine, endorphins  
That help you cover zones  
These things  
All inhibit stress  
And allow you to finish your work  
With some finesse  
So what I propose to USF  
Assuming that they're not deaf  
Is to hold some seminars  
Listing the benefits  
More people need to know  
How the gym can help you glow  
And maybe eventually  
Stress will be something we outgrow.

\*Harry's presentation also shared lists that outlined:

- What causes stress in college?
- What are the effects of stress?
- How can exercise help?

**Appendix N:**  
**Sample Final Reflection (Kynan)**

Without a doubt hearing that the class required a research project in the beginning of the semester had me questioning if this was really the right course I should be taking. Soon after it was outlined I realized how beneficial it could be to my experience. By nature I am an observer, I always try and discover what makes people tick, therefore by observing others the project was right up my alley.

At first, writing reflections seemed extremely unnecessary. I often asked myself why we couldn't simply write a paper now and again relating to what we were seeing, or a specific situation such as the proposal without all the posts. I realized part way into the semester that the reflections actually spurred my interest on numerous occasions and informed me on what others were seeing. The combination of my newfound curiosity and the availability of all the information really gave me insight into what was going on in and around campus for many different types of people.

With ideas free flowing on the board as well as in discussions campus wide, picking a topic for our final research project was easily accomplished and well thought out. In choosing peer review I had a multitude of information to choose from due to class homework exercises. The most beneficial of these activities would have to have been our (dia)logue. The (dia)logue forced me (and Brian) to bounce ideas off of one another for an extended period of time, and in doing so helped me to realize what I truly cared about and wanted to research for the paper. Without this exercise to get ideas flowing, I feel as though the discussion board and journals would have been less effective.

Although this research project was time consuming, it was not challenging. The work we did was stretched out over time making it much more manageable. The ease with which we completed the project and study is a testament to how successful it was. I feel as though I not only learned important strategies for myself to be more successful in college, but also got a glimpse of what others were going through. I was able to understand and relate to how everyone around me was coping with the transition into college. This study was extremely beneficial, and after all was said and done, I was very glad that I had the opportunity to participate. I learned more about myself as well as others college experiences.

## Appendix O:

### Sample Final Reflection (Sonia)

Forming part of a research project was not something I intended to do on my first semester in college. Although at first it was something I didn't look forward to do (since it indicated more work), I am satisfied with my contributions and achievements. Through the collaboration of the entire class, we identified many skills, habits, behaviors that helped freshmen (us and our peers) transition into college. By pinpointing these behaviors, I was able to replace some of my bad habits with ones that would benefit me instead.

I learned the importance of time management. After noticing and reading on blackboard the lack of time management skills our class appeared to have, I became conscientious that I myself didn't have the discipline to manage my time. As a result I was procrastinating. In attempt to solve this problem, I wrote on my agenda more often to stay organized and made it a habit to read my to-do list before going to bed. Although the first couple of weeks in college were very unorganized (taking eighteen credits and on top of that performing a research project is not something you can do with your eyes closed), I was able to maintain my grades up and keep up with the research. Being able to plan my day out and follow my schedule (at least partially) allows me to more things in time's day.

Throughout the scope of the research *I have also discovered the power of writing*. After extensive research on my topic I chose to write a proposal. I thought this format would be adequate because it would suggest a solution and a plan to action, versus an argumentative paper that would identify a problem and support it with evidence. Before I

never saw writing as a way to reach out to others, but now I am amazed at the information and ideas you can carry across by researching and formulating an appropriate paper.

Conducting research has also changed my view on social life. In order to become aware about the difficulties of other freshmen transitioning into college, we interacted with many people we did not know before, including strangers—some of which I became really close friends and others I learned a lot from. I began to value the importance of personal communication and the benefits of knowing someone. I used to associate socializing with a waste of time, but now I see a simple acknowledgment as an opportunity to learn.

Although at times the work seemed a bit excessive due to the aggregation of work from all my classes, I managed to complete most assignments on time. The assignments were not challenging, they were time consuming because they required a lot of research. Overall, this paper was very valuable because I gained a lot from it. I am satisfied with the knowledge I gained and am proud of my self for completing the research paper. I am definitely going to apply the things that I learned from this research to my life.