The Impact of Taking Basic Writing on Later Writing Course Performance and Graduation at a Career-Focused Four-Year University

Justin Nicholes and Cody Reimer

ABSTRACT: In the context of ongoing discussions about student costs of non-credit developmental writing, this study reports on the affordances of Basic Writing as a traditional, stand-alone course at a career-focused, four-year university. Participants were students who took Basic Writing and Composition 1 between Fall 2011 and Spring 2013 (N = 2,693) in order to give them 4-6 years to graduate. Binary logistic regression analysis indicated that students whose first class was Basic Writing graduated at a rate not significantly different from that of students whose first class was Composition 1. Additionally, students who passed Basic Writing received grades in Composition 1 and 2 not significantly different from those received by students placed directly into Composition 1. Once Basic Writing students reached Composition 1 and 2, however, they were statistically significantly more likely to graduate within 4-6 years. Covariates of gender identity, ethnic identity, first-generation status, and grades were accounted for in predictive models and are discussed in relation to localized Basic Writing program assessment at four-year and especially career-focused contexts. While Basic Writing remains under review across the U.S., this study indicates that, at the present research site, the additional time and experience students gain through successful completion of an additional writing course may contribute to timely graduation.

KEYWORDS: Basic Writing; curricular assessment; first-year writing; persistence

The cost of Basic Writing for students who take it remains a topic deserving sustained attention in writing studies and, specifically, in BW scholarship. To underscore a portion of ongoing discussions in the field, consider two back-to-back sessions at the 2019 College Composition and Communication Conference (4C2019). At a panel titled "Performing Rhet/

Justin Nicholes *is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. His research concerns the role writing plays in constructing academic identities, enhancing learning, and supporting college-student persistence and has appeared or is forthcoming in* The WAC Journal, Across the Disciplines, Studies in Educational Evaluation, Journal of Teaching Writing, Scientific Study of Literature, *and elsewhere.* ***Cody Reimer*** *is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. He has directed its composition program, and currently chairs the system's English Placement Test committee. He also serves on the Editorial Board for* Communication Design Quarterly.

DOI: 10.37514/JBW-J.2020.39.1.03

Comp for Fifty Years: A Roundtable of Senior Scholars," senior scholars in writing studies discussed BW as often affectively detrimental and as financially unjust to students (Brereton et al.). Senior-scholar panelists generally supported a position similar to that of Mya Poe et al., that students deserve the dignity of credit-bearing coursework. Meanwhile, in the next 4C2019 session, taking place, incidentally, in the same conference room, the Council on Basic Writing SIG (Special Interest Group) convened to discuss the affordances of BW in the face of threats to funding and misunderstandings of BW's possible value. Discussions at the CBW SIG centered on how BW from teacher-scholars' perspectives provides students with an early ally and supports students' rhetorical skills, writing know-how, self-efficacy, and persistence to graduation. In the end, while the senior scholars at "Performing Rhet/Comp for Fifty Years" might be said to have presented BW as costly in terms of impeding and discouraging students, the CBW discussed BW as a potential investment.

As reflected in the present study, we were motivated to assess one aspect of the cost of BW at one career-focused, four-year, open-access public university in the U.S. Midwest in terms of timely graduation. What, we asked, was the graduation rate of students starting with the research site's traditional, stand-alone Basic Writing course compared to that of students who started in Composition 1? Was there a statistically significant difference between these rates? At what rate did Basic Writing students, once they reached Composition 1 and Composition 2, graduate compared to that of students who did not take an extra semester of (albeit non-credit) writing?

We realized while carrying out this large-scale quantitative assessment study that, though a third of U.S. college students test into developmental college coursework (*Diploma*), developmental coursework, indeed, remains controversial (Evans). Evidence of the impact of taking a developmental course (whether it be reading, math, or writing) on college-student graduation rates has been somewhat mixed (Attewell et al.), and failing a developmental class has been strongly linked to dropout (Cholewa and Ramaswami). Supporters of developmental education have argued that criticisms are based mostly on myths: Specifically, they argue that developmental education potentially boosts retention rates, prepares students in critical areas, and benefits society (Boylan and Bonham; Otte and Mlynarczyk). Recent research has also suggested that placement into developmental reading, writing, or math coursework has no impact on students' academic self-concepts or self-efficacy (Martin et al.)—although Mlynarczyk has argued that college students feel discouraged when placed into "remedial" writing (5) and, more

recently, that Basic Writing should end (Brereton et al.). Still other research has reported that students who successfully navigate developmental college coursework are more likely to graduate than equally prepared peers at two-year colleges (Attewell et al.). With a great deal of the overall controversy of developmental coursework pertaining to taxpayer and administrative cost (*Diploma*), and legislation looking gladly to cut fought-for resources for incoming students who may benefit from additional support (Miller et al.), no clear signs exist of the controversy soon being resolved.

As mentioned above, the controversy, as it pertains to BW studies, still largely centers on how to carry out developmental writing instruction (Evans), how to address equity and disparate impact on students especially at two-year institutions (Mya Poe et al.), and what to call it (Mlynarczyk; Otte and Mlynarczyk). Ed White offers a possibly helpful theoretical point when arguing that BW coursework supports students as they enter academic discourse communities ("Revisiting," "The Importance"). Likewise, Attewell et al. reported that students at two-year colleges who took BW as a stand-alone course graduated at higher rates than students who never took it, although BW lacked this statistically significant relationship at four-year colleges. Meanwhile, Peter Adams has reported results from Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) instruction, in which students engage in developmental writing coursework while enrolled in credit-bearing Composition 1 rather than before it. At two-year colleges, accelerated models of developmental reading and writing have been reported as benefiting short-, mid-, and long-term outcomes of students, including their transferring to four-year colleges, and have often involved reducing the number of exit points between multiple non-credit developmental-education courses (Edgecombe et al.; Smith Jaggars et al.). Successful outcomes of co-requisite ALP have applied to numerous colleges and contexts with similarly positive outcomes for student retention and cost-effectiveness (Adams). Mlynarczyk has drawn on this ALP data to argue for an end to remediation as peripheral to the institution in favor of acceleration.

Career-Focused Institutions, Stand-alones, and Basic Writing

We entered this provocative issue with the intention of assessing some of the outcomes of a current BW model at a four-year, open-enrollment, career-focused university. We did so to better understand how the research site's BW course was functioning, to explore what interventions might be devised to address issues related to its functioning, and to model research

methods for the present type of institutional context for the consideration of the field. Retention-studies research has suggested that a career-focused context is potentially unique, illustrating that (a) curricula enriched with career focuses have increased student graduation rates (Conner et al.); (b) students forming career goals in relation to their major and institution have been found to have higher GPAs (Nakajima et al.) and to be more likely to persist (Ozaki); and (c) curricula without clear bridges to careers have been linked to humanities-student dropout (Mestan). It might be expected that institutions with clear career focuses would encourage a greater level of persistence. As noted, earlier foundational studies report that students who take BW coursework persist in college longer than students of similar backgrounds who do not (White), while other, more recent research has shown ALP models help students earn grades in later writing courses higher than they probably would have had they taken traditional, stand-alone courses (Adams). However, more research seems necessary to explore further what advantage, if any, successful navigation of a single BW course confers to students in contexts such as the present research site (four-year, career-focused) compared to students placed directly into Composition 1—especially when the *cost* of BW (in terms of timely graduation) is explored in regressive models that also account for various other student factors, such as gender identity, ethnic identity, and first-generation status.

The present study accounted for all students who took Basic Writing and Composition 1 between Fall 2011 and Spring 2013 at the research site in order to give students 4-6 years to take Composition 2 and to graduate, a common timeframe used to measure timely graduation (ACT). Results of binary logistic regression analysis, among other significant findings, indicated that at this career-focused research site,

- The variable of taking either Basic Writing or Composition 1 as a first class was not a statistically significant predictor of graduation in regression models. In other words, the cost of starting college with Basic Writing was no greater than the cost of starting with Composition 1 when the outcome was graduation within 4-6 years.
- Basic Writing students received grades in Composition 1 and Composition 2 not significantly different from those received by students placed directly into Composition 1. That is, results here suggest the possibility that Basic Writing adequately prepared

students in ways beyond the scope of this study to succeed in Composition 1 and 2.

- Once they reached Composition 1, students who had taken Basic Writing were statistically significantly more likely to graduate within 4-6 years than students placed directly into Composition 1. Likewise, once they reached Composition 2, students who had taken Basic Writing were significantly more likely to graduate within 4-6 years than students placed directly into Composition 1.

According to binary logistic regression models (detailed in Methods and Results below), at the present research site, the cost of starting with BW in terms of timely graduation was no more significant than the cost of starting with Composition 1; however, navigating and passing an additional writing class—in an interconnected, rhetorical skills-based sequence of general-education writing courses—significantly increased students' odds of graduating by the time they reached Composition 1 and Composition 2.

Importantly, we note here that it remained beyond the scope of the present study to compare outcomes of Basic Writing to the impact of an ALP model. It also remained beyond the scope of the present study to conclude how much more helpful it might have been if some students placed into Composition 1 had also engaged in additional writing support. We hope, above all, to present "replicable, aggregable, and data-supported (RAD)" scholarship (Haswell 210). We urge additional research teams to replicate and build upon this study to determine if these results are site-unique or more generalizable to other four-year institutions whose BW courses are conceptualized as scaffolding students into Composition 1 and Composition 2.

In earlier foundational literature, BW has been discussed as assisting students' entry into academic discourse communities (e.g., White, "Revisiting," "The Importance"). If every class that students encounter represents its own unique discourse community, which students are tasked with understanding and navigating (Melzer), then the additional social practice of managing a class and writing assignments, in an interconnected writing course sequence, may confer an advantage to Basic Writing students once they reach Composition 1: Additional time to practice writing with support, after all, is a main justification for stretch program models (Glau). Yet for this advantage to follow Basic Writing students to Composition 2 as well suggests the possibility that successful navigation of Basic Writing, in addition to giving student simply more time to practice and gain skills in college-level writing, also requires a level of determination and perseverance, or *grit*

(Duckworth). Some evidence already exists that students in developmental coursework, nationally, report higher levels of motivation (*Diploma*).

Retention and writing studies research, of course, has described the complicated picture of interrelated factors impacting college students' success. Variables of importance in institutional data traditionally, and in research and writing studies research particularly, include among other variables *gender identity*, *ethnic identity*, *first-generation status*, *grades* as a measure of course performance, and *persistence* in remaining in college from semester to semester until graduation (Tinto). The present study used a regression analysis that included these variables as covariates in predictive models of student performance and persistence. We include these variables to help contextualize the impact of taking Basic Writing with respect to these complex and interrelated factors.

These variables have proven important both in retention studies, as well as in BW specifically and writing studies generally. For instance, students institutionally labeled as female have been described in earlier research as entering BW coursework already disadvantaged by patriarchal, oppressive social systems, necessitating the modeling of gender-inclusive language in BW (Cochran). Research into textbook representation may indicate progress in terms of the field of writing studies having worked to create learning materials that support increasingly sophisticated discussions of gender issues (Marinara et al.). Still other research into how students are graded when graders are aware of or infer a student's gender have suggested a pro-female-label bias (Haswell and Haswell). Meanwhile, graduation rates have often indicated that students institutionally labeled as female are graduating at significantly higher rates than students labeled as male (Peltier et al.). So while we are reluctant to report in gender-binary ways, we include the institutional labels (female, male) available in the current set of institutional data.

In addition to gender identity, the variable of ethnic identity remains one of importance in assessment research. Asao B. Inoue, for instance, has pointed out that students of color and multilingual students are "historically [...] closest to failure in writing classrooms" (332). Complicating racist consequences of grading systems is that issues of race have in the past been absorbed by the label *basic writer*, which affects how writing studies may understand race in relation to writing processes and assessment (Prendergast). While first-generation students self-identified as African American have been reported as being more likely to persist to graduation compared to other first-generation college students (D'Amico and Dika), overall, students of color have been reported to leave college at significantly higher rates than

students categorized as white (Peltier et al.).

Students' first-generation status has also represented a barrier to college performance (D'Amico and Dika). Karen Bishop Morris has argued that experiential learning can be more effective for first-generation students than traditional classroom experiences since these students may be more capable of navigating such learning experiences. Meanwhile, Holly Hassel and Joanne Baird Giordano have questioned whether four-year colleges suitably meet the needs of many first-generation college students compared to two-year colleges. Historically under-served and vulnerable (Kester et al.), first-generation college students have been reported as significantly more likely to leave college than students who have one or both parents who graduated from college (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al.). Even students whose parents attended college without graduating have been reported as being more likely to graduate than students whose parents never attended (Padgett et al.).

Finally, the grades that students receive in college, and particularly in developmental writing courses, must be taken into consideration. Cholewa and Ramaswami reported that failing a fall developmental class was a significant predictor of dropout. Inoue has described grading systems as often racist in their consequences since they hold standard-edited English, or a dialect of English most associated with and within closest reach to white Americans, as the standard against which all students are ranked. If we accept Joyce Olweski Inman and Rebecca Powell's observation that first-year writing courses can represent a kind of institutional microcosm where students' academic self-concepts are forged, then grades do much more than reflect writing and classroom performance: They become material, however subjective, with which students construct academic selves.

Given the importance of the issues and variables described, we asked the following research questions to shed light on the impact that taking Basic Writing seemed to have on students as they moved through a writing sequence when covariates of gender identity, ethnic identity, first-generation status, and grades were joined in predictive models in this public four-year career-focused site:

1. Are the odds of graduation impacted by students' first writing class taken (Basic Writing vs. Composition 1)?
2. Are the odds of getting an A or B in Composition 1 and Composition 2 different for students who first took and passed Basic Writing?

3. Are the odds of graduation different for students who first took and passed Basic Writing compared to those of students starting with Composition 1?

Methods

This study was reviewed and determined to be exempt by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Wisconsin-Stout. Student-record data came to us, the researchers, as already anonymized, and it was institutionally collected from a comprehensive, public, career-focused four-year polytechnic university with a reported student employment/placement rate of 98%. The university reports a student body of approximately 9,500, with 2,100 first-year students enrolling each academic year. Approximately 8,200 students are undergraduates, and the other 1,300 are graduate students. The university is a predominantly white university, with 86% of students institutionally categorized as "White/Caucasian," and with 53% of its students designated as "male." Finally, the university reports an overall graduation rate of 55.5% for its White/Caucasian students, and 42% for its students of color and students categorized as "Two or More Races." The national persistence-to-degree rate for similar institution types is, $M = 36.9\%$, $SD = 20.6$ (ACT 7).

The course sequence that was investigated included Basic Writing, Composition 1, and Composition 2. Course outcomes for the first-year composition program were derived from the outcomes described by the Council of Writing Program Administrators and pertained to knowledge and performance of (a) rhetorical knowledge, (b) critical thinking, and (c) composing processes/writing strategies. Basic Writing focused on source integration and rhetorical metalanguage, critical reading and writing, and lower-order assistance pertaining to writing accuracy. Composition 1 placed additional emphasis on academic research and evidence-based argumentation, and Composition 2 emphasized the entering of ongoing academic discourses. The university allocated funds to enable limiting the cap of Basic Writing to 15 students while Composition 1 and 2 had enrollments capped at 25 students.

The research site, as part of the University of Wisconsin system, used a system-wide, instructor-developed test to determine student placement in first-year composition courses. To ensure that the test mirrors the curriculum in introductory English composition courses throughout the system, a committee exists that includes one representative from each institution, as well as one state high school English teacher. This committee convenes twice each year to write and revise test items and discuss issues pertaining

to test content and university curricula. The committee works closely with a psychometrician to ensure the instrument's reliability, which is above .90. Writing program administrators at each institution within the system determine what cut scores will place students into which class.

Additionally, the English department delivering instruction at the research site practices a policy of "diagnostic" first-week writing in Basic Writing, which has been noted as one way (though perhaps not the only or even most ideal) of checking if any student has been misplaced in BW (Klausman et al.). The department nonetheless has attempted to put into policy the recommendation that multiple pieces of writing and forms of evidence be used in determining BW placement (Hassel et al.). The Director of Composition at the research site had the discretion to adjust the placement test cut scores based on how frequently diagnostics indicated students were misplaced. In this fashion, each institution within the university system was meant to be agile in ensuring students are appropriately placed. It is worth noting, however, that the site's cut scores had remained the same since 2002: The frequency with which students had been identified as misplaced (by diagnostic tool or other means) had been too low to warrant adjusting the cut rates.

Concerning data analysis, three main conditions for binary logistic regression were met: The dependent variable was dichotomous with mutually exclusive values in all cases (in other words, each variable contained only two possible values, 0 or 1), sample sizes were large, and multicollinearity of predictor variables was checked and determined not to be an issue that could create misleading results (Leech et al.).

Results

1. Are the odds of graduation impacted by students' first writing class taken (Basic Writing vs. Composition 1)?

Students who took Basic Writing or Composition 1 as their first writing class between the Fall 2011 and Spring 2013 semesters were included in the analysis to give students 4-6 years to graduate (see Appendix for crosstabulations). Odds ratios suggest that the odds of graduating within 4-6 years are increasingly greater for students categorized as female, students who were continuing-generation, and students who received an A or B in that first class. Though the graduation rate of students who started in Basic Writing (46.1%) was descriptively lower than that of students who started in Composition 1

(49.5%), this difference was not statistically significant in the model.

Table 1. Logistic Regression Predicting Who Graduates After Their First Writing Class

Variable	*Beta*	*Standard Error*	*Odds ratio (95% C.I.)*	*p*
Gender Identity	.273	.058	1.31 (1.17, 1.47)	< .001*
Ethnic Identity	.100	.084	1.11 (.937, 1.30)	.237
First-Generation	-.297	.058	.743 (.663, .833)	< .001*
Grade Received	1.15	.066	3.15 (2.77, 3.59)	< .001*
Took Comp 1 (versus BW)	-.058	.111	.944 (.760, 1.17)	.603

* = statistically significant at the <.05 level.

2. Are the odds of getting an A or B in Composition 1 and Composition 2 different for students who first took and passed Basic Writing?

Odds ratios suggest that the odds of getting an A or B in Composition 1 are increasingly greater for students institutionally identified as female and White or Caucasian. Alone, being a first-generation student or taking Basic Writing were not significant predictors of getting an A or B in the equation.

Table 2. Logistic Regression Predicting Who Will Get an A or B, or a C and Below, in Composition 1

Variable	*Beta*	*Standard Error*	*Odds ratio (95% C.I.)*	*p*
Gender Identity	.685	.083	1.98 (1.69, 2.33)	< .001*
Ethnic Identity	.418	.122	1.52 (1.20, 1.93)	.001*
First-Generation	-.137	.082	.872 (.742, 1.03)	.096
Basic Writing	-.159	.136	.853 (.653, 1.11)	.243

* = statistically significant at the <.05 level.

Next, the odds of getting an A or B in Composition 2 are shown to be increasingly greater for students institutionally identified as female and significantly lower for first-generation students.

Table 3. Logistic Regression Predicting Who Will Get an A or B in Composition 2

Variable	*Beta*	*Standard Error*	*Odds ratio (95% C.I.)*	*p*
Gender Identity	.435	.096	1.55 (1.28, 1.86)	< .001*
Ethnic Identity	.166	.144	1.18 (.891, 1.56)	.248
First-Generation	-.226	.095	.789 (.662, .962)	.018*
Basic Writing	-.164	.157	.849 (.624, 1.16)	.299

* = statistically significant at the <.05 level.

3. Are the odds of graduation different for students who first took and passed Basic Writing compared to those of students starting with Composition 1?

Basic writing students in Composition 1. For analysis of whether taking Basic Writing conferred any significant advantage *once students reached Composition 1*, students who took Basic Writing and Composition 1 between the Fall 2011 and Spring 2013 semester were included in the analysis to give them 4-6 years to graduate.

The odds ratios suggest that the odds of students in Composition 1 graduating within 4-6 years are increasingly greater for (a) students institutionally identified as female, (b) continuing-generation students, (c) students who received an A or B in Composition 1, and (d) students who took Basic Writing. Alone, the variable of ethnic identity was not a significant predictor in the equation once students reached Composition 1 regarding odds of graduating within 4-6 years. Once students have reached Composition 1, having taken Basic Writing confers a statistically significant advantage in terms of students' odds of graduating within 4-6 years (60% graduation rate for students in Composition 1 who started with Basic Writing; 56% for students in Composition 1 who started with Composition 1).

Table 4. Logistic Regression Predicting Who in Composition 1 Will Graduate Within 4-6 Years

Variable	*Beta*	*Standard Error*	*Odds ratio (95% C.I.)*	*p*
Gender Identity	.202	.084	1.22 (1.04, 1.44)	.016*
Ethnic Identity	.119	.128	1.13 (.876, 1.45)	.355
First-Generation	-.395	.084	.673 (.572, .793)	< .001*
Composition 1 Grades	1.42	.087	4.14 (3.49, 4.90)	< .001*
Basic Writing	.345	.144	1.41 (1.07, 1.87)	.016*

* = statistically significant at the <.05 level.

Basic writing students in Composition 2. For analysis of whether taking Basic Writing conferred any significant advantage *once students reached Composition 2*, students who took Basic Writing and Composition 1 between the Fall 2011 and Spring 2013 semesters were included in the analysis to give them 4-6 years to take Composition 2 and to graduate.

Odds ratios suggest that the odds of students in Composition 2 graduating within 4-6 years are increasingly greater for (a) continuing-generation students, (b) students who earned an A or B in Composition 2, and (c) students who had taken Basic Writing. Alone, gender identity and ethnic identity were not significant predictors in the equation once students reached Composition 2 regarding odds of graduating within 4-6 years. This again suggests that, once students have reached Composition 2, having taken Basic Writing confers a statistically significant advantage in terms of students' odds of graduating within 4-6 years (74% graduation rate for students in Composition 2 who started with Basic Writing; 67% for students in Composition 2 who started with Composition 1).

Table 5. Logistic Regression Predicting Who in Composition 2 Will Graduate Within 4-6 Years

Variable	*Beta*	*Standard Error*	*Odds ratio (95% C.I.)*	*p*
Gender Identity	.158	.098	1.17 (.967, 1.42)	.106
Ethnic Identity	.237	.148	1.27 (.949, 1.69)	.109
First-Generation	-.331	.098	.718 (.593, .870)	.001*
Composition 2 Grades	1.24	.101	3.45 (2.83, 4.20)	< .001*
Basic Writing	.539	.177	1.72 (1.21, 2.42)	.002*

* = statistically significant at the <.05 level.

Summary of Results

1. Students placed into Basic Writing do not experience statistically significantly lower odds of graduating than those of students placed directly into Composition 1. Additionally, ethnic identity did not significantly predict graduation. What did significantly predict graduation were the variables of first-generation status and gender identification.
2. When it comes to who receives an A or B in Composition 1, taking Basic Writing predicts neither success nor failure significantly. Being a first-generation college student likewise predicts neither success nor failure significantly. Being institutionally categorized as white or female, however, does significantly predict receiving an A or B.
3. When it comes to who receives an A or B in Composition 2, taking Basic Writing predicts neither success nor failure significantly. Ethnic identity likewise predicts neither success nor failure significantly. Being a first-generation college student, however, does significantly predict receiving a C and below while being categorized as female significantly predicts receiving an A or B.
4. When it comes to who in Composition 1 graduates, passing Basic Writing significantly predicts success. Likewise, being categorized as female and earning an A or B in the class predict success significantly. Being a first-generation college student significantly predicts lower odds of graduating. Ethnic identity, meanwhile, predicts neither success nor failure significantly.
5. When it comes to who in Composition 2 graduates, passing Basic Writing significantly predicts success. Likewise, earning an A or B in the class significantly predicts success. Once more, being a first-generation college student significantly predicts lower odds of graduating. Ethnic identity and gender identity, meanwhile, predict neither success nor failure significantly.

Discussion

To recap, the purpose of the present large-scale quantitative assessment study was to report on the impact of BW at one four-year, career-focused polytechnic university. The research process included an exploration of the student cost of taking BW in the form of a single, traditional stand-alone course called Basic Writing on student performance in Composition 1 and Composition 2 as well as on graduation—when other covariates were taken into consideration, including grades and institutional labels of gender, ethnicity, and first-generation status. Results of binary logistic regression analysis indicate that the cost of starting with BW is no greater than the cost of starting with Composition 1 when the outcome variable is timely graduation. Surprisingly, analysis also indicates that students who pass the research site's BW course are statistically significantly more likely to persist to graduation within 4-6 years once they reach both Composition 1 and Composition 2 compared to students who did not have an extra semester-long writing class.

On a theoretical level, the findings here may support the usefulness of two central positions in writing studies generally and in BW particularly. The general position that BW instruction has the potential to assist students' entrance into academic discourse communities seems worth exploring and possibly applying here (White, "Revisiting," "The Importance"). Basic Writing, taught according to what Deborah Mutnick and Steve Lamos would perhaps describe as an "academic initiation approach" (29), sought to prepare students with rhetorical knowledge as well as active reading skills to, in part, enter academic conversations. That writing is both a social and rhetorical activity has been categorized as a threshold concept in writing studies (Roozen), and it seems worthwhile to consider how fruitfully this concept explains the findings here. The value of having an extra semester of writing has been underscored by stretch-model outcomes (Glau), and perhaps the benefits of the extra time of writing for students who need it as well as an additional institutional ally, in spite of the course not being credit-bearing, in certain respects outweighs costs.

The potential impact that the research site's career-focused, polytechnic status has on the results is also open for debate. As noted earlier, retention-studies research has illustrated that (a) curricula enriched with career focuses have increased student graduation rates (Conner et al.); (b) students forming career goals in relation to their major and institution have been found to have higher GPAs (Nakajimaa et al.) and to be more likely to

persist (Ozaki); and (c) curricula without clear bridges to careers have been linked, at least, to humanities-student dropout (Mestan). An assumption might be entertained that institutions such as the one considered here, with clear career focuses, can encourage greater levels of persistence and perseverance. This is a claim that requires more analysis, and answering it beyond speculation lies outside the scope of the present quantitative-design study.

A second theoretical implication here concerns the concept of perseverance, or *grit* (Duckworth), perhaps interpretable in the data by the students who successfully navigated Basic Writing at this research site. Earlier research has already reported that students who enroll in developmental education are among the most motivated in the U.S. (*Diploma*). The findings here add to our knowledge by suggesting the possibility that students' grit may characterize their performance through Composition 1 and, hearteningly, even through Composition 2 toward graduation while the grades students earn in these sections are not significantly different from students placed directly into Composition 1. Again, the potential relationship that the university's explicitly career-focused, polytechnic mission and identity had with these outcomes warrants additional research.

Yet complicating these overall findings on the impact of BW is the impact of covariates included in predictive models developed and reported on here. Being institutionally categorized as white predicts getting an A or B in Composition 1 but not in Composition 2. If students categorized as white in general find themselves within closer reach to academic discourse-community features (Inoue), what is it about advancing to Composition 2 that relates to this advantage beginning to wane? Being institutionally identified as female, too, is shown in this sample to confer an advantage in terms of grades in both Composition 1 and 2, as well as graduation, a finding perhaps reflecting earlier studies suggesting that writers labeled as female may be producing—and/or may be stereotyped as producing—more effective college writing and may be graded as more capable as well (Haswell and Haswell). Being a first-generation college student, too, does not predict grades in Composition 1 but does predict lower grades in Composition 2 as well as lower graduation rates overall, suggesting that first-generation college students, as college-writing coursework expects greater entrance into academic conversations, perform at a disadvantage. This seems to reflect that, in this study as in earlier ones, being a first-generation student poses an especially formidable barrier to college performance (D'Amico and Dika) and that four-year colleges may need to continue to explore ways to suitably meet the needs of first-generation college students (Hassel and Giordano).

What, then, might composition instructors and researchers consider in light of these large-scale findings?

The findings here, we argue, have important pedagogical implications. BW being clearly linked to Composition 1 and Composition 2, at least in course objectives, seems vital. Jason Evans, for one, has discussed the importance of "framing the Basic Writing course more strongly as a stepping-stone to [students'] transfer composition course" (9). For the department where this study took place, rhetorical knowledge and active reading as a means of entering ongoing academic conversations were meant to be emphasized with increasing sophistication, at least as reflected in course-sequence objectives. Additionally, writing sequences may do well to continue to provide additional support to students who may enter college with ground to make up to approximate rhetorical moves associated with academic conversations. It is also possible that the research site's having a single BW course—rather than several—already reflects the accelerated model of, for instance, Chabot College, which found that trimming down its number of developmental courses from two to one significantly boosted student performance and persistence (Edgecombe et al.). Maybe a single non-credit course at four-year and/or at career-focused universities is not a significant impediment to students' timely graduation.

Unanswered questions abound, and the present study must be considered in light of its limitations. For the value of exploring trends among a representative sample at one four-year polytechnic, we traded insight into the experiences and dispositions of the students involved. While our study reports clear statistical advantages conferred to students who successfully navigate BW in terms of graduation rates, vital research remains to be done. We may want to explore further the question of what writing studies as a field expects students to carry with them through first-year writing course sequences if we want aggregable and replicable answers to how students accumulate discourse-community social practice and know-how, particularly at career-focused institutions where students and stakeholders may expect general education to support the career-focused institutional mission and identity. Liane Robertson and Kara Taczak recently referred to writing studies as an "'un-discipline,'" meaning that "we are a field without a consistent content in the introductory course representing our area of study, without consensus about research-based curricular approaches to FYC, and often without expertise behind the delivery of our FYC courses" (186). Additionally, we call for qualitative-design approaches. How might we characterize the motivation of students who successfully navigate BW, and to what degree is

it helpful to ask whether this success is based on self-efficacy, academic identities, rhetorical knowledge, grit, or other knowledge-based or dispositional factors? What roles, if any, do career-focused instruction and career-centered institutional messages play when it comes to students' persistence through BW and general-education writing coursework?

As BW coursework and developmental education weather scrutiny (Mutnick and Lamos), it seems vital that the field continues discussing the cost of BW affectively, academically, and timewise. When a student enters BW and asks why the course they are in does not count toward their degree, at least at the research site featured in this study, instructors may find it motivating to let students know that passing Basic Writing significantly raises the student's odds of graduating within 4-6 years compared to students who did not have an extra semester of writing. While the affordances of large-scale quantitative analysis include the ability to consider large-scale trends, qualitative studies perhaps in the traditions of case-study and phenomenological designs are needed to give individual voice to the limitations and affordances of developmental writing coursework.

Works Cited

ACT. "National Collegiate Retention and Persistence-to-Degree Rates, 2018." 2018, www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/MS2807rev1-retention-persistence-2018-07.pdf.

Adams, Peter. "ALP FAQs." *Basic Writing e-Journal*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2016, pp. 1-8.

Attewell, Paul, David Lavin, Thurston Domina, and Tania Levey. "New Evidence on College Remediation." *The Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 77, no. 5, 2006, pp. 886-924.

Bishop Morris, Karen. "Introductory Writing as the Gateway to Stronger Communities, College and Career Success." *Writing Pathways to Student Success*, edited by Lillian Craton, Renée Love, and Sean Barnette. The WAC Clearinghouse and UP of Colorado, 2017, pp. 15-24.

Boylan, Hunter R. and Barbara S. Bonham. "Seven Myths About Developmental Education." *Research and Teaching in Developmental Education*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1994, pp. 5-12.

Brereton, John, Judy Buchanan, Cinthia Gannett, Donald McQuade, Rebecca Mlynarczyk, Sean Molloy, Richard Sterling, Alice Horning, Katherine Tirabassi, and Kathleen Blake Yancey (Chair). "Performing Rhet/Comp for Fifty Years: A Roundtable of Senior Scholars." Conference on Col-

lege Composition and Communication. March 13-16, 2019. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA.

Cholewa, Blaire, and Soundaram Ramaswami. "The Effects of Counseling on the Retention and Academic Performance of Underprepared Freshmen." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2015, pp. 204-25.

Cochran, Effie Papatzikou. "Giving Voice to Women in the Basic Writing and Language Minority Classroom." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1994, pp. 78-90.

Conner, Shanna L., Douglas A. Daugherty, and Megan N. Gilmore. "Student Retention and Persistence to Graduation: Effects of an Introductory Life Calling Course." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2012, pp. 251-63.

D'Amico, Mark M., and Sandra L. Dika. "Using Data Known at the Time of Admission to Predict First-Generation College Student Success." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2013, pp. 173-92.

Diploma to Nowhere. Strong American Schools, 2008.

Duckworth, Angela. *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance.* Scribner, 2016.

Edgecombe, Nicole Diane, Shanna Jaggars, Di Xu, and Melissa Barragan. "Accelerating the Integrated Instruction of Developmental Reading and Writing at Chabot College." *CCRC Working Paper No. 71*, 2014, ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/accelerating-integrated-instruction-at-chabot.html.

Evans, Jason. "To Live with It: Assessing an Accelerated Basic Writing Program from the Perspective of Teachers." *Basic Writing e-Journal*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2016, pp. 1-26.

Glau, Gregory R. "*Stretch* at 10: A Progress Report on Arizona State University's *Stretch Program*." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2007, pp. 30-48.

Hassel, Holly, and Joanne Baird Giordano. "Occupy Writing Studies: Rethinking College Composition for the Needs of the Teaching Majority." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 65, no. 1, 2013, pp. 117-39.

Hassel, Holly, Jeff Klausman, Joanne Baird Giordano, Margaret O'Rourke, Leslie Roberts, Patrick Sullivan, and Christie Toth. "TYCA White Paper on Developmental Education Reforms." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2015, pp. 227-43.

Haswell, Richard H. "NCTE/CCCC's Recent War on Scholarship." *Written Communication*, vol. 22, no. 2, Apr. 2005, pp. 198–223.

Haswell, Richard H., and Janis Tedesco Haswell. "Gender Bias and Critique of Student Writing." *Assessing Writing*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1996, pp. 31-83.

Inman, Joyce Olewski, and Rebecca A. Powell. "In the Absence of Grades: Dissonance and Desire in Course-Contract Classrooms." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 70, no. 1, 2018, pp. 30-56.

Inoue, Asao B. "Theorizing Failure in U.S. Writing Assessments." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2014, pp. 330-52.

Jaggars, Shanna Smith, Michelle Hodara, Sung-Woo Cho, and Di Xu. "Three Accelerated Developmental Education Programs: Features, Student Outcomes, and Implications." *Community College Review*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2014, pp. 3-26.

Jenkins-Guarnieri, Michael A., Melissa M. Horne, Aaron L. Wallis, Jeffrey A. Rings, and Angela L. Vaughan. "Quantitative Evaluation of a First Year Seminar Program: Relationships to Persistence and Academic Success." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2015, pp. 593-606.

Kester, Jessica, Rebecca Block, Margaret Reinfeld Karda, and Harold Orndorff III. "Improving Success, Increasing Access: Bringing HIPs to Open Enrollment Institutions through WAC/WID." *Across the Disciplines: A Journal of Language, Learning, and Academic Writing*, vol. 13, no. 4, 2016, pp. 1-17, wac.colostate.edu/atd/hip/kesteretal2016.cfm.

Klausman, Jeffrey, Leslie Roberts, Joanne Giordano, Brett Griffiths, Patrick Sullivan, Wendy Swyt, Christie Toth, Anthony Warnke, and Amy L. Williams, "TYCA White Paper on Placement Reform," 2016, www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Groups/TYCA/PlacementReform_Revised.pdf.

Leech, Nancy L., Karen C. Barrett, and George A. Morgan. *IBM SPSS for Intermediate Statistics: Use and Interpretation*. 5th edition, Routledge, 2015.

Marinara, Martha, Jonathan Alexander, William P. Banks, and Samantha Blackmon. "Cruising Composition Texts: Negotiating Sexual Difference in First-Year Readers." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 61, no. 2, 2009, pp. 269-96.

Martin, Kimberly, Molly Goldwasser, and Eugenia Harris. "Developmental Education's Impact on Students' Academic Self-Concept and Self-Efficacy." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2017, pp. 401-14.

Melzer, Dan. *Assignments across the Curriculum: A National Study of College Writing*. Utah State UP, 2014.

Mestan, Kemran. "Why Students Drop out of the Bachelor of Arts." *Higher Education Research & Development*, 2016.

Miller, Katrina L., Emily Wender, and Bryna Siegel Finer. "Legislating First-Year Writing Placement: Implications for Pennsylvania and across the Country." *Journal of Writing Assessment*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1-8.

Mlynarczyk, Rebecca. "Acceleration vs. Remediation: What's in a Name for Composition Studies?" *Basic Writing e-Journal*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2016, pp. 1-16.

Mutnick, Deborah, and Steve Lamos. "Basic Writing Pedagogy: Shifting Academic Margins in Hard Times." *The Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, edited by Gary Tate, Amy Rupiper, and Kurt Schick. Oxford UP, 2014, pp. 20-36.

Nakajima, Mikiko A., Myron H. Dembo, and Ron Mossler. "Student Persistence in Community Colleges." *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, vol. 36, no. 8, 2012, pp. 591-613.

Otte, George, and Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk. *Basic Writing*. Parlor Press, 2010.

Ozaki, C. Casey. "Possible Selves, Possible Futures: The Dynamic Influence of Changes in the Possible Selves on Community College Returnees' Persistence Decisions." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory, and Practice*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2016, pp. 413-36.

Padgett, Ryan D., Megan P. Johnson, and Ernest T. Pascarella. "First-Generation Undergraduate Students and the Impacts of the First Year of College: Additional Evidence." *Journal of College Student Development*, vol. 53, no. 2, 2012, pp. 243-66.

Peltier, Gary L., Rita Laden, and Myrna Matranga. "Student Persistence in College: A Review of Research." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1999, pp. 357-75.

Poe, Mya, Jessica Nastal, and Norbert Elliot "Reflection. An Admitted Student Is a Qualified Student: A Roadmap for Writing Placement in the Two-Year College." *Journal of Writing Assessment*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2019.

Prendergast, Catherine. "Race: The Absent Presence in Composition Studies." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 50, no. 1, 1998, pp. 36-53.

Robertson, Liane, and Kara Taczak. "Disciplinarity and First-Year Composition: Shifting to a New Paradigm." *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity*, edited by Rita Malenczyk, Susan Miller-Cochran, Elizabeth Wardle, and Kathleen Yancey. Utah State UP, 2018, pp. 185-205.

Roozen, Kevin. "Writing Is a Social and Rhetorical Activity." *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies*, edited by Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle. Utah UP, 2015, pp. 17-19.

Tinto, Vincent. "Through the Eyes of Students." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory, and Practice*, 2015, pp. 1-16.

White, Edward W. "The Importance of Placement and Basic Studies: Helping Students Succeed under the New Elitism." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1995, pp. 75-84.

---. "Revisiting the Importance of Placement and Basic Studies: Evidence of Success." *Mainstreaming Basic Writers: Politics and Pedagogies of Access*, edited by Gerri McNenny and Sallyanne H. Fitzgerald. Routledge, 2001, pp. 19-28.

APPENDIX

Crosstabulations and Percentages for Statistical Tests Run

A. Persistence to Graduation for Students Whose First College Writing Class was Basic Writing (Based on 395 as the total number of BW students who entered any time between F11 and S13 and 182 as the total number of BW students who graduated in 4-6 years)

Variable	Category (*n*)	Graduation Within 4-6 Years (*N* = 395)	
		Yes 182 (46.1%)	No 213 (53.9%)
Gender ID	Female ID (162)	88 (54%)	74 (46%)
	Male ID (233)	94 (40%)	139 (60%)
Ethnicity ID	Person of Color (103)	48 (47%)	55 (53%)
	White or Caucasian (292)	134 (46%)	158 (54%)
First-Generation Status	First-Generation (215)	89 (41%)	126 (59%)
	Continuing-Gen (180)	93 (52%)	87 (48%)
Basic Writing Grade	A (93)*	54 (58%)	39 (42%)
	B (141)	75 (53%)	66 (47%)
	C (101)	47 (47%)	54 (53%)
	DFW (60)	6 (10%)	54 (90%)

*Of the 93 students who got an A in Basic Writing, 54 (58%) graduated within 4-6 years of taking that class.

B. Crosstabulation for Predictors and Outcome—BW Students Persisting to Composition 1 by S13

Variable	Category (*n*)	Persisting to Composition 1 (*N* = 395)	
		Yes	No
Gender ID	Female ID (162)	128 (79%)	34 (21%)
	Male ID (233)	167 (72%)	66 (28%)
Ethnicity ID	Person of Color (103)	75 (73%)	28 (27%)
	White or Caucasian (292)	220 (75%)	72 (25%)
First-Generation Status	First-Generation (215)	166 (77%)	49 (23%)
	Continuing-Gen (180)	129 (72%)	51 (28%)
Basic Writing Grade	A (93)*	83 (89%)	10 (11%)
	B (141)	117 (83%)	24 (17%)
	C (101)	81 (80%)	20 (20%)
	DFW (60)	14 (23%)	46 (77%)

*Of the 93 students who got an A in Basic Writing, 83 (89%) persisted to Composition 1.

C. Crosstabulation for Predictors and Outcome—Composition 1 Grades (Based on 2,100 as university-reported enrollment average of new students per year and 2,693 as total number of students taking Composition 1 over the two years of F11 to S13)

Variable	Category (*n*)	Composition 1 Grades (*N* = 2,693)		
		A	B	C
Gender Identity	Female (1,262)	427 (34%)	482 (38%)	192 (15%)
	Male (1,431)	305 (21%)	507 (35%)	334 (23%)
Ethnic Identity	White or Caucasian (2,368)	654 (28%)	889 (38%)	453 (19%)
	Person of Color (325)	78 (24%)	100 (31%)	73 (23%)
First-Generation	Yes (1,231)	301 (24%)	470 (38%)	253 (21%)
	No (1,462)	431 (30%)	519 (36%)	273 (19%)
Basic Writing	Yes (260)*	63 (24%)	90 (34%)	59 (23%)
	No (2,433)	669 (28%)	899 (37%)	467 (19%)

*Of the 260 students who took Basic Writing and persisted to Composition 1, 63 (24%) got an A in Composition 1.

D. Crosstabulation for Predictors and Outcome—BW Students Persisting to Composition 2 by S13

Variable	Category (*n*)	Persisting to Composition 2 (*N* = 395)	
		Yes	No
Gender ID	Female ID (162)	107 (66%)	55 (34%)
	Male ID (233)	130 (56%)	103 (44%)
Ethnicity ID	Person of Color (103)	66 (64%)	37 (36%)
	White or Caucasian (292)	171 (59%)	121 (41%)
First-Generation Status	First-Generation (215)	124 (58%)	91 (42%)
	Continuing-Gen (180)	113 (63%)	67 (37%)
Basic Writing Grade	A (93)*	70 (75%)	23 (25%)
	B (141)	97 (69%)	44 (31%)
	C (101)	58 (57%)	43 (43%)
	DFW (60)	12 (20%)	48 (80%)

*Of the 93 students who got an A in Basic Writing, 70 (75%) persisted to Composition 2.

E. Crosstabulation for Predictors and Outcome—Composition 2 Grades (Based on 2,116 as number of students from original N of 2,693 who made it to Composition 2 after enrolling any time between F11 and S13)

Variable	Category (*n*)	Composition 2 Grades (*N* = 2,116)			
		A	B	C	DFW
Gender Identity	Female (1,020)	358 (35%)	395 (39%)	167 (16%)	100 (10%)
	Male (1,096)	257 (23%)	454 (41%)	224 (20%)	161 (15%)
Ethnic Identity	White or Caucasian (1,862)	542 (29%)	756 (41%)	339 (18%)	225 (12%)
	Person of Color (254)	73 (29%)	93 (37%)	52 (20%)	36 (14%)
First-Generation	Yes (944)	258 (27%)	372 (39%)	174 (18%)	140 (15%)
	No (1,172)	357 (30%)	477 (41%)	217 (19%)	121 (10%)
Basic Writing	Yes (205)*	60 (29%)	73 (36%)	43 (21%)	29 (14%)
	No (1,911)	555 (29%)	776 (41%)	348 (18%)	232 (12%)

*Of the 205 students who took Basic Writing and persisted to Composition 2, 60 (29%) received an A in Composition 2.

F. Crosstabulation for Predictors and Outcome—Graduation Within 4-6 Years after Persisting to Composition 2 before End of Spring 2013

Variable	Category (*n*)	Graduation within 4-6 Years (*N* = 2,116)	
		Yes	No
Gender ID	Female ID (1,020)	715 (70%)	305 (30%)
	Male ID (1,096)	710 (65%)	386 (35%)
Ethnic ID	Person of Color (254)	1,265 (68%)	597 (32%)
	White or Caucasian (1,862)	160 (63%)	94 (37%)
First-Generation Status	First-Generation (944)	597 (63%)	347 (37%)
	Continuing-Gen (1,172)	828 (71%)	344 (29%)
Composition 2 Grades	A (615)	493 (80%)	122 (20%)
	B (849)	621 (73%)	228 (27%)
	C (391)	226 (58%)	165 (42%)
	DFW (261)	85 (33%)	176 (67%)
Basic Writing	Yes (205)*	152 (74%)**	53 (26%)
	No (1,911)	1,273 (67%)	843 (33%)

*Of the 205 students who took Basic Writing and persisted to Composition 2, 152 (74%) graduated within 4-6 years.

**This number does not reflect an additional 30 students who took Composition 1 and Composition 2 beyond Spring 2013 but before the 4-6 years time to graduation. 152+30=182.