Journal of Basic Writing

JBW

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JOURNAL OF BASIC WRITING

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CALL FOR ARTICLES

We welcome manuscripts of 20-30 pages, double spaced, on topics related to basic and ESL writing, broadly interpreted. Submissions should follow current MLA guidelines. Manuscripts are refereed anonymously. To assure impartial review, include name(s), affiliation(s), mailing and e-mail addresses, and a short biographical note for publication on the cover page only. The second page should include the title but no author identification, an abstract of about 150 words, and a list of four to five key words. Endnotes should be kept to a minimum. It is the author's responsibility to obtain written permission for including excerpts from student writing, especially as it entails IRB review (which should be noted in an endnote).

Contributions should be submitted as Word document attachments via e-mail to: Hope.Parisi@kbcc.cuny.edu, and Cheryl.Smith@baruch.cuny.edu. You will receive a confirmation of receipt; a report on the status of your submission will follow in eight to ten weeks.

All manuscripts must focus clearly on basic writing and must add substantively to the existing literature. We seek manuscripts that are original, stimulating, well-grounded in theory, and clearly related to practice. Work that reiterates what is known or work previously published will not be considered.

We invite authors to write about such matters as classroom practices in relation to basic writing or second-language theory; cognitive and rhetorical theories and their relation to basic writing; social, psychological, and cultural implications of literacy; discourse theory; grammar, spelling, and error analysis; linguistics; computers and new technologies in basic writing; assessment and evaluation; writing center practices; teaching logs and the development of new methodologies; and cross-disciplinary studies combining basic writing with such fields as psychology, anthropology, journalism, and art. The journal is in active dialogue with the scholarship of new literacies, translingualism, multimodality, digital rhetorics and online and social-media impacts as per intersectional writing identity formations.

The term "basic writer" is used with wide diversity today, and critiques the institutions and contexts that place students in basic writing and standardize academic language, as much as it may illumine the subtexts of individuals' writing practices. To help readers, therefore, authors should describe clearly the student population and settings which they are discussing.

We particularly encourage a variety of manuscripts: speculative discussions which venture fresh interpretations; essays which draw heavily on student writing as supportive evidence for new observations; research written in non-technical language; and collaborative writings which provocatively debate more than one side of a central controversy. A familiarity with the journal is the best way to determine whether JBW is your next venue for scholarship.

EDITORS' COLUMN

In summer 2021, we emerge into the next phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. Vaccinations have begun to have an impact on our lives, allowing us to see friends and family and return to some activities that have been either virtual or impossible for long months. One such activity is work. In higher education, many of us—with trepidation and hope—are transitioning back to a campus environment that looks more like 2019 than 2020.

While these changes restore some sense of normalcy and joy as we reconnect with communities that matter to us, we cannot erase what we have experienced and learned in the last year and half. We face shifting expectations that require increased flexibility and fresh perspective; we may have a whole new set of worries that we could not even have imagined before. Our "new normal" demands action, calling upon us to rebuild our communities within radically transformed structures. Change is not a new phenomenon, of course. The structures that shape our lives and interactions—from government and other institutions to family, friends, and jobs—are always evolving, and our practices and attitudes have to evolve along with them. They just don't usually change as quickly as they have since March, 2020.

This issue of *JBW* grapples with change—not the rapid change of a global pandemic, but the more gradual change that has always shaped Basic Writing and all the communities it touches: students, faculty, classrooms, programs, departments, and institutions. While slower, our field's changes also demand action. The authors in this issue examine a range of responses to change, including rethinking our pedagogical approaches and teacher preparation, developing flexible pathways for students, and redefining professional communities of practice. In their examples of out-of-the-box thinking, we are reminded that the only constant is change, requiring adaptability and creativity. This creativity can be a force for good. When the bottom falls out of our plans, we innovate, marshalling new communities and assembling new structures as we imagine a better, more equitable future.

In our first article, "Learning on the Job: Instructor Policy Literacy in the Basic Writing Course," Gregory Bruno makes the case for developing instructors' policy literacy as a step toward creating more caring classroom communities to promote student success. The policy knowledge that Bruno promotes—for instance, knowledge about credit-bearing work and cost to students—is especially important for instructors of basic writing students, who may not have generational knowledge about how to navigate the complex information streams in college. As Bruno argues, "Instructors with high

levels of policy literacy are often able to teach with a more effective grasp of the material context of their students' lives." This connection to students' lived experience, while outside an instructor's typical professional purview, not only informs students' choices, potentially increasing their persistence; it also demonstrates empathy, which further benefits their academic success. "Many instructors who teach Basic Writing have their hearts in the right place," Bruno says, "but without the requisite policy literacy, they may do more harm than good, as they are more prone to see the classroom as an isolated arena, reinforce the misalignment between rigor and policy, or worse, evince a lack of care."

Emily Suh and Darin Jensen shift the focus from students to instructors, who also can feel isolated or unsupported and benefit from caring communities. In "Examining Communities of Practice: Transdisciplinarity, Resilience, and Professional Identity," Suh and Jensen first establish that "Basic Writing is part of the transdisciplinary profession of developmental education, whose professional development is both under-theorized and under-supported." Thus, they apply a transdisciplinary lens to develop a fuller understanding of "developmental educators' sense of professional identity, engagement in the field and discipline, and how teacher-scholars in these contexts become resilient and sustain their practice." By situating their study alongside the recent special issues of *JBW* on graduate education, they further connect the value of ongoing professional support to other forms of teacher training and mentorship. According to Suh and Jensen, "fostering a strong professional identity has implications for student success, teaching excellence, and professional engagement," as well as for professional resilience. Inclusive professional networks, like caring and inclusive classrooms, promote well-being for all.

The opportunity to make informed choices also promotes well-being. Too often, institutions fall back on old practice and broad generalizations to make assumptions about what its community members, especially students, "need." Kailyn Shartel Hall argues against this "one-size-fits-all mentality." In "'My ACT Score Did Not Let Me Take AP English as Dual Credit': A Survey on High School Experiences of Basic Writers," Hall shares a study of students who would not typically have qualified for the corequisite course (based on students' previous AP/honors courses or high placement scores) but chose or tested into the corequisite option anyway. Hall states, "These discoveries changed the tenor of conversations we had as a Basic Writing program. Our program's goals shifted immediately from understanding how to structure the corequisite best for administration purposes to getting a better under-

standing of the students enrolled in both versions of the course so we could make necessary changes to placement procedures." By moving away from administrative assumptions and priorities and taking students' previous experiences and choices seriously, Hall and her colleagues could reflect on how to "better support the students we have in the classroom rather than the theoretical underperforming students we presumed we had." Hall's study underscores the powerful value of student experience and voice in programmatic revision.

Rachel Ihara also promotes this value in her article, "Basic Writing Reform as an Opportunity to Rethink First-Year Composition: New Evidence from an Accelerated Learning Program." Ihara traces her institution's move from separate basic writing and first-year composition programs and courses to combined courses with enhanced assessment processes and other supports for basic writers. Her study demonstrates that, "By unsettling the boundary between 'remedial' and 'regular' college writers, mainstreaming programs ultimately challenge us to rethink the goals of college writing writ large." For example, at Ihara's institution, some basic writing students exceeded expectations in the combined sections while other students, who did not have the benefit of the more rigorous support or assessment models, struggled. Based on these findings, Ihara argues that rigid categories for college writers narrow our vision when it comes to student ability and need; in turn, such categories also limit innovation and opportunities for faculty collaboration that would benefit our programs and students. The case of her college shows that the "creation of. . . two categories of students—underprepared and prepared—undermined the notion that there could be benefits to a similar programmatic approach to assessing writing in composition."

The authors in this issue demonstrate the importance of creative thinking as we reimagine our work-based communities and structures, and continue to create new ones. Sometimes, we have to open ourselves up to new ways of seeing in order to build better futures for ourselves and our students. Through intentional collaboration and a little out-of-the-box thinking, we can more effectively advance communities of care, educational justice, and equity—those principles at the core of Basic Writing as a discipline and so critical in this precarious "new normal" moment.

--**Cheryl C. Smith** and **Hope Parisi**

Learning on the Job: Instructor Policy Literacy in the Basic Writing Course

Gregory Bruno

ABSTRACT: *As the cost of college tuition continues to soar, community colleges and state and local governments offer a wide range of access and opportunity programs to best serve low-income and academically underprepared students. In this article, I present a case study of two instructors, both of whom regularly teach Basic Writing courses at the community college, and examine how administrative and financial aid policies, as well as outreach and opportunity program protocol, affect classroom pedagogy and student experience. Ultimately, I argue that these two educators, one part-time and one full-time, successfully navigate the bureaucracy of a complex policy network only through repeated concrete interactions with students and over extended periods of time. Many instructors with lower levels of policy literacy, and especially those novice, part-time, and contingent instructors tasked with teaching in a web of policies, may struggle to best serve Basic Writing students at the community college in ways yet unaccounted for by the field.*

KEYWORDS: *Basic Writing; college access; community college; disparate impacts; financial aid; policy literacy*

In the spring of 2019, Enoch Jemmott, a student at Queens College (CUNY), published an op-ed titled "The Implicit Punishment of Daring to Go to College While Poor" with *The New York Times,* in response to his own experiences navigating college enrollment and aid applications. Jemmott's piece, an articulate testimony to the experience of a low-income student attempting to navigate the bureaucracy of federal financial aid and college access programs, highlights the persistence of social and economic class as an obstacle in higher education for many Americans. Jemmott's central claim is best summarized in his words: "I came to realize that, in every step along the way, we had to do more because we had less" (3). The simplicity and irony

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of this statement should strike us all as tragic. In all of the academic work I have read concerning access, efficacy, and economic support for low-income students, nothing resonated like these words. Nothing seemed to capture the frustration, absurdity, and humiliation embedded in the experiences of so many college aspirants at CUNY and nationwide.

When I first read Jemmott's testimony, I had just finished my own yearlong research study working with community college students and their Basic Writing instructors. I was preparing to defend my doctoral dissertation, a study focused primarily on examining the efficacy and transparency of aid and access programs for low-income students enrolled in Basic Writing courses. I sought to understand how low-income and first-generation students, specifically community college students enrolled in Basic Writing, experienced the implementation of financial aid and institutional or administrative programs and policies. My research findings were similar to Jemmott's personal experience. Students struggle to complete their aid applications and understand how financial aid policies impact their course selection and placement, which may lead to higher rates of attrition and a future of economic constraint.

These realities are compounded for students who place into pre-freshman coursework. There is a direct link between economic constraint, access to financial aid awards, and student attrition. According to Thomas Bailey of the Community College Research Center, "Only 44 percent of those referred to developmental reading completed their full sequence, and only 31 percent of those referred to developmental math completed theirs. Further, the more courses in the referred sequence, reflecting a greater skills deficiency, the more likely students were to fail to complete it" (2). While Basic Writing students persist at higher rates than those students enrolled in math or reading, only 68% of students who place into Basic Writing courses persist into standard first-year composition (1). With attrition rates so high, educators must consider the effect of policy infrastructure undergirding such courses and programs, as these tip the scale for students weighing the decision to persist based on time and cost.

The impact of such trends cannot be overstated. As student loan debt continues to soar, students who opt to pursue higher education at the community college, and their educators, will need to be hyperaware of the financial circumstances determining their educational and employment prospects.

For example, the student debt crisis brought on in part by the rising cost of tuition—an over 200% increase since 1980—reflects the average cost

per-credit hour increase across all colleges and universities (Newfield). The fact that cost-per credit hour pricing has continued to grow even for courses without matriculated credit *points* adds insult to injury for so many students who are already struggling. At the same time, programs that aim to resolve this problem of cost, programs like the City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associates' Program (ASAP), are first to be targeted in periods of fiscal austerity (St. Amour).

To best meet the needs of our students, educators must critically recognize the shifting landscape of college admissions and enrollment policies and the ongoing evolution of Basic Writing and writing programs in general. While one might reasonably argue that this responsibility should fall first on the shoulders of administrators or policy makers rather than students and especially instructors, my argument here is that educators—especially those working at the nexus of such complex political, economic, and social contexts in community colleges—must possess a policy literacy to equitably and effectively facilitate in their roles as first-year and Basic Writing instructors. Such a task is not impossible, nor extraneous, as instructors with high levels of policy literacy are often able to teach with a more effective grasp of the material context of their students' lives.

In this article, I recall my meetings with two community college Basic Writing instructors, both of whom have come to possess a deep sense of policy literacy. I present two interwoven dialogues with educators at one suburban commuter community college in New York State from the fall of 2018. Together, we sought to create deeper knowledge concerning the social impact of commensuration, or "the transformation of different qualities [of instruction for basic writers] into a common metric," through the complex network of policies and practices at the community college and related to the Basic Writing course (Espeland and Stevens). We conceived how this process of transformation dictates the methods by which class hours are processed at the community college and how this affects student experience. Credits commensurated as hours "count" for some offices (usually financial aid and for matriculation), while others "count" as credits for the registrar and for enrollment status. What emerged was the need for dialogue around policy and its confusions, the value instructors ascribe to policy in their work, and their own processes of acquiring a functional policy literacy.

Both participants emphasize that they developed their own individual sense of policy literacy mainly through direct and repeated contact with students and colleagues over extended periods of time. This was time spent teaching students, engaging with students outside of class, and working

alongside colleagues in the classroom and at administrative sites, signaling that while these policies and their implications are—presumably—available, their realities are best learned through firsthand experience. What results, unfortunately, is a scenario in which instructors with less policy literacy unintentionally play a part in putting their students at a disadvantage, lacking knowledge of relations among roll-out, influence, and impact, of administrative and economic policies around and within Basic Writing.

All told, I explore the extent to which experienced Basic Writing instructors consider policy literacy an important part of their work and validate *experience* as repeated and consistent contact with Basic Writing students and the Basic Writing program in order to realize what one participant calls "on-the-job training." Necessarily, these questions manifest in an inquiry into how effectively these Basic Writing instructors may help their students to develop policy literacy, as well. I recommend that we invest in research on the effects of policy literacy on the experiences of Basic Writing instructors and students; encourage discussion of relevant policy within writing departments and especially in instructor dialogue pertaining to departmental protocol and assessment practices; and provide more support for adjunct and contingent faculty members who often do not have regular access to campus staff and offices that are sites for investigating policy contexts that undergird their Basic Writing courses.

THE NEED FOR POLICY LITERACY AMONG BASIC WRITING INSTRUCTORS

While the policy landscape underlying the experiences of Basic Writing students at American community colleges continues to evolve, problems of access and equity persist. Over the past decade in particular, Basic Writing programs have undergone rapid and dramatic transformations. Co-requisite instructional models such as Peter Adams' Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) have fundamentally changed the way educators conceptualize supplemental instruction for academically underprepared writers. By rolling pre-freshman credit hours together with credit-bearing course loads, these programs aim to address both the academic and economic needs of many struggling students (Adams et al.); however, what results is often a complex web of policy initiatives—including the unequal commensuration of credit hours and points—the unintended consequences of which can spell logistical and bureaucratic disaster for students and their families, many of whom may already see college itself as an alien landscape.

One might recognize the effects of these complexities by examining the persistence rates of students enrolled in first-year advisement programs (FYAP) aimed partly at clarifying such policies. In short, students who participate in FYAP persist at higher rates than their classmates who do not. The increase is even higher among students from minority backgrounds (Adil), particularly for Black men (Cody). This research is important, as it relays that the more access students have to trusted faculty and staff with relevant policy literacy, the more likely students are to persist and succeed in their coursework.

Consider how few students understand the details of the Basic Writing program and the policies relevant to them. In a previous study, I interviewed students about their own understandings of the relationship between financial aid policies and their Basic Writing courses. One student was wholly unaware of how Basic Writing courses exhausted her financial aid awards as well as the type of aid she had been awarded in general. Another admitted to never having taken a pre-college assessment test and was thus unaware of under what circumstances he was enrolled in Basic Writing in the first place, while yet another habitually dropped and re-enrolled in Basic Writing, unaware of how his academic standing was recorded and of how those false-starts were reflected in his aid award eligibility (Bruno).

Bureaucratic obfuscation at the community college is well-documented. Burton Clarke described it as a "cooling out," wherein the administration, funding, and delegation of community college instruction often obfuscate the path toward matriculated, credit-bearing work, effectively building moats rather than drawbridges for disenfranchised students. Clarke's ideas, first posited in the 1960s, have relevance today. In a study from 2019, Katharine M. Broton found that "a private grant program, which triggered a repackaging of students' financial aid awards, *decreased* the educational degree aspirations and expectations of 2-year college students, on average" (79, author's emphasis), largely substantiating and extending the points articulated by Clarke nearly 60 years earlier, namely that additional layers of bureaucracy, even when they are well-intentioned, have the potential to dissuade students from persisting.

Similarly, Ira Shor, in his *JBW* article "Illegal Literacy," describes some of the same absurdity, as both he and one student were "baffled at the unfriendly registration process—the closed courses, limited choices, numerous steps, complex financial aid, rising tuition, and frequently changing requirements" (101). While Shor's article was written over two decades ago, many of the same oppressive institutional practices persist at public colleges across

America. Clarke's work implies a responsibility of the institution to broker clear relationships between students and policy, while Shor's argument is one of political consciousness marking the detriments of bureaucracy for the most vulnerable students. Both Clark's institutional standpoint and Shor's critical consciousness resonate clearly with the current discussion of the financial and bureaucratic elements of disruption implicit in Basic Writing programs today.

More recently, the push to abolish Basic Writing programs across the country has equally altered student expectations for pre-freshman writing. This type of systematic restructuring of the writing program is still underwritten by a rhetoric of "excellence" and "standards" (Lamos 389). Regardless of the intent or efficacies of these changes, the simple act of revising or restructuring writing programs makes for more logistical obstacles, at least temporarily, as instructors (and students) must sort out policies and their applications in their academic and professional lives. What results is a period in which many instructors are confused about the relevant polices themselves. Until and unless they witness the impacts of these policies through the experience of their students, instructors may be unaware of how the rush to implement change harms their courses, their curricula, and most of all their students.

The educational sociologist Kevin Doherty asserts that the community college functions largely as a "contradiction," a dissonance that manifests in the space between the intended goals of the college and the actual institutional rollout of said programs and policies. While educators' primary focus lies in the pedagogical and curricular decisions relevant to such endeavors, they are often beholden to the constraints of fiscal and administrative policy design. This means that classrooms are impacted, that students are affected. One might extend Dougherty's analysis to the more specific field of Basic Writing and recognize that, given the general, albeit unintended, propensity of policy design and the restructuring of writing programs to obscure the path toward persistence, many policy maneuvers may actually be having the unintended effect of cooling out students by way of obfuscation.

This study recognizes that, early in their careers and without the advantage of sustained contact with students, colleagues, and the policies that govern their college experiences, many educators do not possess the necessary *policy literacy* (Lo Bianco) to responsibly engage with these issues. Here is the problem: educators who teach Basic Writing courses are often unprepared for and unaware of the complex political and financial contexts that shape their teaching. The Basic Writing classroom draws a sort of under-

current, one that subtly dictates the moves of both students and instructors. This influence, largely overlooked, has deep implications for connection, confidence, and rapport. Students may think that their instructors understand these contexts and come to feel abandoned or frustrated once they realize that instructors do not.

Those instructors who do possess a functional policy literacy may communicate a greater sense of ease and belonging for burdened students, while sharing policy knowledge may translate to those students making more informed decisions about their academic careers, something that can save them time and money while clearly articulating the path toward graduation. Given that over half of "dependent students with family incomes below $30,000 in 2011–12 started at a community college" (Chen et al.), and that 60% of all community college students enroll in pre-college coursework (Bailey), the likelihood of Basic Writing instructors working with students from extreme economic disadvantage is high. All of this amounts to circumstances in which a high level of instructor policy literacy is critical in the Basic Writing course.

Thus, the role of Basic Writing instructors is really twofold: First, they must navigate the pedagogical and curricular moves of effective teaching with academically underprepared students, and second, they must broker the political, administrative and financial bureaucracies of the community college. The latter of these imposed responsibilities requires not only policy literacy but also an empathy for the material conditions governing many of our students' lived experiences.

These issues are exacerbated by the increasingly complex labor politics of community colleges. According to the American Federation of Teachers, 53% of all courses at community colleges are taught by part-time faculty ("Reversing Course") and 65% of all developmental courses are taught by part-time faculty (Shults). Because the majority of educators who teach Basic Writing at community colleges are adjunct and contingent faculty, one cannot reasonably expect them to have the time or resources for investigating the many policies and practices pertaining to their courses. Adjunct and contingent faculty members are widely recognized not only as overworked and underpaid, but also as geographically isolated on the college campus, often without regular available office space, places to interact with colleagues and students, and little interaction with the important administrative offices and staff that undergird the Basic Writing experience. In this light, our underinvestment in the adjunct and contingent faculty that teach such a significant proportion of our most vulnerable students in Basic Writing

courses at community colleges begins to appear as the most obvious, but easily remedied, problem in policy literacy.

There is also a more general and legitimate argument to be made that instructors should *not* possess this knowledge, that they should float above the political and economic contexts, seek to make learning relevant and meaningful for students, and engage with students solely in view of their academics. Over the years, I have heard a few colleagues bemoan the "extra" responsibilities implicit in teaching Basic Writing courses, not that they require more pedagogical attention, but rather that Basic Writing courses come with the additional labor of the instructor serving as both financial aid counselor and academic advisor. But critically informed educators, those of us who maintain that education in setting is necessarily a political action, are aware that the material contexts and lived experiences of students have an important impact on academic performance and must be part of our purview. Thus, educators must strive to dismantle the systems of oppression that have historically disenfranchised so many students from underrepresented demographics. In this regard, a *critical* literacy for both students and instructors must be a part of a functioning policy literacy. Nor is it enough to anticipate how these policies and systems operate. Educators must also question *why* they operate, the ways in which they do, and advocate for students by holding policy authors and relevant actors accountable for equitable academics.

As writing programs across the country find themselves in a near constant state of flux, the impacts and effects of policies relevant to Basic Writing grow more cryptic. If educators develop their sense of literacy solely through classroom contact, without seeking closer access to centers of policy activity where its workings can be more fully recognized and where instructors can intervene, policy changes will still rewrite the rules underneath them, only to further disenfranchise the same student demographics such programs purport to address. This is not an argument for stasis, but rather an analysis of how, when, and where instructors develop the policy literacy necessary to make meaningful contributions to the full range of students' lived experiences.

POLICY LITERACY IN A BASIC WRITING CONTEXT

The term "policy literacy," coined by Joseph Lo Bianco, generally refers to the "kind of literacy that literacy educators and researchers need to deploy to participate in and understand the 'policy moment'" (213). Lo

Bianco originally theorized this term in the context of language policy, specifically as a way to seek inclusion of language needs and interests at a national level, but much of this theory has application in discussions of higher education policy, as the political infrastructure of public higher education and community colleges functions similarly to the bureaucracy of national policy decisions, albeit scaled back significantly. Lo Bianco's central idea is that "The policy process is the main vehicle in democratic societies for establishing authorised intervention and determining resource allocation" (213). Put another way, policy literacy allows relevant actors access to the means by which their fields and professions are governed. In the case of educators at community colleges, policy literacy grants access to the political, administrative, and financial structures that underly their institutions and directly impact their students—which works to ensure the persistence and retention of Basic Writing students.

Current research reports that the overwhelming majority of low-income and first-generation students possess a startling low level of policy literacy, as is evidenced by the "[loan] borrowing behavior" of first-generation college students (Furquim et al. 70). Many, in fact, are unaware of how their financial aid is processed or applied to their student accounts or what form their aid takes. This could mean that many students are not adequately preparing to enter repayment on student loans, while others may be unaware of the minimum requirements to maintain status or matriculation in grants or scholarship and fellowship awards.

Policy literacy, in this sense, might also be understood as a type of "institutional literacy," a wealth of knowledge pertinent to the "rules of the game," most of which is inherited, and passed down through social networks. As Stephanie Merz describes it, institutional literacy is

> situated *in relation* to the larger institution, as *part of* the larger institution, or as a *manifestation* of the larger institution. The classroom is an important location to do this work—it is a local manifestation of institutional values. When we ask students to engage in literate practices in the classroom level, those practices are in fact related to larger institutional values. Institutional literacy is a means to explore those relationships. It does not entail simply knowing how to read and write at the university, but institutional literacy makes visible those connections between the macro and the micro, the local and the global, the classroom and the university. Institutional literacy is a method to engage students with their individual experiences

as they are related to larger institutional structures. (142, author's emphasis)

Whereas institutional literacy prioritizes the networks and relationships necessary for effectively navigating the institution, policy literacy, by contrast, emphasizes educators' understandings of the bureaucratic infrastructures that undergird the institution as a whole.

For first-generation students, a population disproportionately represented in Basic Writing, this literacy is only distributed on the campus itself, primarily through a narrow field of relations and interactions students are free to take on. In most cases, students' primary relationships in the community college form among their instructors. In this regard, many students benefit from meaningful interactions with people "specifically, high-status, non-kin, agents who occupy relatively high positions" in and around the university, "who are well positioned to provide key forms of social and institutional support" to shepherd them through the first-year writing course and bridge toward the social capital of the institution (Stanton-Salazar 2). Given the dialogic and often biographical nature of first-year writing courses, Basic Writing instructors may adopt this role by cultivating the exchange of policy-related questions and information. As part of a critical praxis, Basic Writing instructors can only engage this work if they possess the requisite policy literacy themselves.

Policy literacy "requires that academics and teachers of literacy become more immersed in the operations of policy." It asks that agents "elevate literacy measures to prominence beyond education frameworks" (Lo Bianco 226) and recognize the significance of their practice in the context of the administrative and bureaucratic operations of the college as an institution. This call addresses that instructors—and especially Basic Writing instructors—may ultimately be capable of a general redistribution of embodied cultural capital as policy literacy—those tools, skills, and experiences necessary for best navigating experiences and advising students at the public two-year college. This sentiment may best be summarized by the Austrian economist, Fritz Machlup, who argued that "improvements of capacity, as a rule, result from the acquisition of 'knowing what' and 'knowing how'" (Machlup 8).

METHOD

In the fall of 2018 and over the course of three months, I met with two instructors at one community college in New York state. At this time, the writing program was experimenting with replacing their Basic Writing courses

with a co-requisite model based on the Accelerated Learning Program. Both educators have been teaching Basic Writing courses and are recognized by their colleagues as experts in the teaching of pre-freshman writing courses. Given the nature of this study, and my own involvement in the data, interviews provided a good opportunity for "the joint production of *accounts* or *versions* of experiences, emotions, identities, knowledges, opinion, truth, etc." (Rapley 16, author's emphasis). Interviews with multiple participants produce an opportunity for a range of experiences and perspectives (Rubin and Rubin), which could help represent how policy and Basic Writing intersect, overlap, or collide at community colleges.

Approached with pre-written questions, my interviews supported participant-led dialogue. This became a collaborative, active format wherein, "interviewer and respondent tell a story together" (Denzin 343). Such a design allowed for greater dialogue, not just between the participants, their narratives, and their histories, but I was also able to work with what John M. Johnson calls a "complimentary reciprocity" wherein there was an exchange of "some form of help, assistance, or other form of information" (288).

I chose to meet with these two participants because I sought to see the issue of policy literacy in the Basic Writing course from the perspective of both a contingent faculty member as well as a tenured professor. Barbara[1], a native New Yorker spent a time teaching in Georgia before returning to New York as a doctoral candidate in higher education leadership. She is well versed in student support structures, something substantiated by her working across multiple campuses and in a variety of roles from adjunct lecturer to student support specialist. Melody was recently awarded full-professorship, earned her doctorate from an ivy-league university, and originally specialized in linguistics and Medieval literature. Her introduction into Basic Writing was originally borne out of the "needs of the department," as she puts it, rather than an independently motivated choice. Regardless of the differences between Barbara's and Melody's formal education and professional status at the college, both are professional educators but also, in a sense, professional students who seek to grow their knowledge of the field through their proximity to the workings of institutional power and its conveyances in the community college. Because it was not in my original study of students to ask instructors' race, I do not assume their racial identities and do not report it here. Still, I acknowledge the overarching need in my own, and any, theory of policy literacy for instructors and other policy agents to come from and identify with the same communities as the students they serve.

At the heart of this study, I considered the following primary questions, all of which I believe work to reveal the complexity and obfuscation of administrative policies at the community college.

- To what degree do community college Basic Writing instructors consider themselves literate in the details of academic, administrative, and financial aid policies?
- To what extent do community college Basic Writing instructors consider policy literacy a part of their professional responsibilities?
- To what extent do community college Basic Writing instructors believe that academic, administrative, and financial aid policies affect their classrooms and their students?

What emerged was an analysis of instructor literacy related to three important types of policies:

- Credit commensuration
- Grading and accreditation
- Financial aid and awards

Instead of framing my discussion around these questions and emergent findings, these questions are reflected in the implications of this text. I organize responses according to the above mentioned "types" of policies: credit commensuration, grading and accreditation, and financial aid and awards. The division of these types, I admit, is somewhat artificial, as the relationships between these issues overlap in ways that make them nearly impossible to untangle. However, by dividing my interpretation of the data into subcategories, I was able to locate key findings relevant to increasing policy literacy among faculty and persistence among students. I aim to describe their relevance and impact, and the possibility of their influence in future work, in the latter portions of this paper.

INTERPRETATIONS: INTERVIEWS WITH TWO BASIC WRITING INSTRUCTORS

At the outset of my interviews, it did not take long for Barbara and Melody to begin discussing how financial aid and other administrative policies affect their teaching and classroom experience in the Basic Writing course. In discussing credit commensuration, grading policies for Basic Writing courses, and the distribution of loan awards, both Barbara and Melody recognized the material influence of policy design and their own

lack of preparedness, stressing that they are often underprepared to meet the challenge of mitigating their effects. Melody describes this succinctly when she states, "You know, we don't stick to our specialties, so we often have to multi-task, and [undergo] on-the-job-training." Despite the fact that Barbara and Melody are established and well-respected Basic Writing instructors, they recognize their shortcomings in light of the intersection of administrative and financial aid policies in the Basic Writing course and at the community college.

What became clear to me, however, was that in identifying their own perceived shortcomings, Barbara and Melody were demonstrating their high level of policy literacy. Only in retrospect— when recalling a period in which they were *developing* their policy literacy—were they able to critique their own confusion and misunderstandings. This implies that many instructors may not even be aware of the limitations of their policy literacy in the moments it is most important. In the following sub-sections, I relay the observations and experiences of Barbara and Melody as they recall the impact of policy on their classrooms and teaching, as well as their own paths to a functional level of policy literacy. Together, these reflections reveal the complex ways policy literacy affects the classroom experience for both educators and students.

Credit Commensuration

Perhaps the most striking aspect of policy illiteracy among both students and instructors in Basic Writing courses comes in the confusion surrounding credit commensuration. These enrollment policies are notoriously confusing—a bureaucracy of forms, protocols, and policies—part of the "cluttered and clotted condition" subsuming "the learning needs of teachers and students" (Shor 101). This is one way these policies obfuscate the *commensuration* of credits. Far too often, credits "count" differently for different administrative offices. For example, a Basic Writing course might "count" as a credit *hour* for the purposes of keeping a student matriculated and enrolled in services such as student health insurance, but that same hour may not "count" as a credit *point* for the Office of the Registrar. The implications of this bureaucratic mess are often dire. Dropping below a full-time credit load can jeopardize a student's access to health insurance, financial aid, and matriculation. This often makes it difficult for working students with uncounted credits to maintain steady hours or for students with familial need to meet their personal obligations. If this type of policy is so important, why don't more students and teachers understand it?

Both Barbara and Melody describe a general confusion surrounding the commensuration of Basic Writing classes that occupies the first few days of class; the course counts as "hours" and not as "points." Students, naturally, are confused. As Barbara and Melody face explaining credit commensuration to their students, they reckon with the fact that early in their careers, they wrestled with their own misunderstandings of the issue. They know their Basic Writing coursework is costing students money while not counting toward their degree, but this point is slow to resonate. Barbara explains:

> I don't think students are aware. I'm not sure how it's explained to them, because you think of the process. . . They come in and take this test that they had no clue about—there's no studying or anything—and then they're in this class. They're like, "Oh, cool—this is the class I'm taking." They don't even understand that this is not counting toward your credit, but it is exhausting your financial aid, and you have to think about a student who might be in developmental English and developmental Math.

Here Barbara underscores what feels like her own implicit understanding, something she credits to having taught Basic Writing at the community college "since the beginning of time." She identifies with students' vulnerability, marking disenfranchisement. As with all good Basic Writing instructors, such identifications form early and strong.

To continue, Barbara describes her experience working as a "specialist of academic support" at another college, which she knows provides insider access and a privileged standpoint. Not all Basic Writing educators have the opportunity to specialize before their teaching begins. Barbara describes:

> I work with pretty much all adult students, and they are students who probably are classified as going into a developmental course, so yeah it really is all related [to teaching Basic Writing courses]. It's just about trying to meet the students where they are right now, and then getting them to place where they want to—and essentially need to—be for whatever their goals are academically, and their whole selves basically.

Barbara stresses her experiences working directly with adult learners have helped to expose her to a variety of plights requiring students' policy literacy at the community college. That deeply refined institutional knowledge is necessary as a baseline for navigating policy is evidence of the complexity

of higher education bureaucracy as well as the risk it poses to vulnerable students.

Barbara also reasons that her students struggle to understand these issues at the most basic, conceptual level. When students do begin to perceive implications of knowing too little of policy, for example, commensuration, Melody reports that students see this as an issue of "fairness."

> I've had students tell me that this is a waste of time, and students' parents will often say that this is a way for the school to get money from them. So, they didn't view this as a skills thing. Students have said that they were frustrated that 101 is a prerequisite that they can't take, and so they're feeling as though they're being held up.

In addressing remedial placements as an issue of "fairness," Barbara's students are identifying a more generalizable trend, namely that basic education courses in many circumstances do appear to have an impact on students' rates of retention and persistence – a point widely recognized in Basic Writing literature, but which continues to be challenged by more current research (Schnee and Shakoor; Schrynemakers et. al.).

Above all, Barbara and Melody observe students' frustration and confusion concerning the commensuration of credits. Such feelings are justified. Nowhere is this material clearly articulated. As Barbara says, "I don't think they're getting that. . . information from financial aid or orientation." How might we simplify the way information is distributed to Basic Writing instructors and students, especially given that basic writers and many adjuncts teaching Basic Writing are in a skewed position against a large and often obscure system?

While both Barbara and Melody have developed a relatively strong policy literacy, they note that many of their colleagues—especially contingent faculty and those teaching Basic Writing for the first time—rarely have the exposure necessary to develop this type of literacy. Barbara relays that she does not believe that many new instructors conceive of how commensuration policies influence their courses, especially credit commensuration:

> I don't think that they are well-informed. It takes time for you to know the institution's policies about those things. It takes time for you to be informed about that, right? So, just coming in, I didn't know my first semester. So, thinking back to my first semester, "This is it," and someone told me that they don't get credit for this, that this is just a pre-req for them to get into 101, and I was like, "Oh,

okay," and that's pretty much what I knew. . . but it's always been a population I'm interested in, so I'm not sure if everybody else is doing that sort of research. . . and if they're brand new, I can't imagine that they are...

Barbara's emphasis on "time" is an important aspect of her discussion. She recognizes that only through consistent and repeated exposure did she develop a functional policy literacy and doubts whether "everybody else is doing that sort of research." If adjunct, contingent, or early-career instructors do not have the time or exposure to learn these policies, if they are not pursuing the relevant literature or spending time near or around sites of policy action within the college, the students who enroll in their courses—by no fault of their instructor and only by the roll of the dice—may be at a significant disadvantage.

Direct contact between adjunct faculty members and department chairs, program directors, and departmental mentors makes this information more accessible (Diegel), but as both Barbara and Melody describe, most adjuncts are left to learn on their own. Barbara explains that her only exposure to information about the Basic Writing course and its credit commensuration policies came by word-of-mouth, which should remind us of Melody's claim about "learning on the job." These informal exchanges are described by Barbara and Melody, who recall both receiving policy information as well as relaying policy information via e-mail, over coffee, and in the faculty lounge.

Again, Barbara's comment that she is "not sure if everybody else is doing that sort of research" is really the key here. While Barbara's own professional interests in Basic Writing student populations and pedagogies may have helped to substantiate her knowledge, her understandings—as she readily admits—have come primarily from the *time* she has spent with students and in a variety of roles, ranging from instructor to student support specialist. This begs an important question: What is happening when Basic Writing instructors do *not* independently seek this information and have not had much experience with Basic Writing student populations? The constraints of teaching, especially for many adjuncts who are historically overworked and underpaid, could make these asks difficult.

Grading Policies

Because the commensuration of Basic Writing credits is so cryptic, students rarely perceive how their work is evaluated. Dealing with so much

obfuscation around credit accumulation likewise obscures the process of grading. This is further complicated by the trend toward non-grading, labor-based grading, and portfolio evaluation at community colleges and in Basic Writing courses. In any of these approaches, instructors forgo standard numerical grading throughout the duration of the semester, which—while well-intentioned—can often further obfuscate an already numbingly bureaucratic process and alienate the students with the most need. These innovations are often placed on top of, or adapted to, departmental and campus policies that are not fully flexible. These layered combinations make it difficult for both instructors and students to recognize the limitations, possibilities, and impacts of grading in Basic Writing courses.

For their Basic Writing courses, Barbara and Melody describe a "SWUR" grading policy, which Melody explains stands for "'Satisfactory, Withdrawal, Unsatisfactory, or Repeat.' If they've completed all of the work, but they just didn't complete it at the college level, students get the R and then Withdraw is W." I asked her how accessible this information was, if it was generally understood. She responded frankly: "I'm going to say no, because it actually wasn't until two years into my teaching this course that someone actually explained what 'R' meant to me, and that's because I asked, 'What is the difference—I don't understand.' Like I had to hunt it down."

Such a phenomenon felt so unbelievable that I decided to try to hunt this information down myself. I figured I would visit the English department website to get some clarity. When I followed the hyperlinks from page to page and finally clicked on "developmental writing," I was brought to a dead page. Where could I find the answers? How is this course graded? I couldn't help but wonder how many confused and anxious faculty must have done the same thing, sought out the information, and wound up at this same dead end. It took a while, but I was able to track down some information. After navigating my way to the course catalog, I read that basic reading and writing courses were assigned according to placement exam score, graded on an S-W-U-R basis, and could not be applied to any degree or certificate. Still, this was unclear. What does SWUR mean, anyway? There was no definition, only acronyms. So, it was not just me, nor was it just Melody. This information was as confusing as it was inaccessible. Even if one had the initiative to track this information down, it's unlikely that they would know what to do with it.

Barbara describes a similar sense of frustration and even despair when she explains how her course is graded to her students. Her students do not typically understand the evaluation processes, so she attempts "to engage them and tell them how valuable this course is to them and that. . . just trying

to motivate them so that they feel better about the situation." But she also adds that many instructional faculty, and most other part-time faculty, do not get the SWUR policies either. She explains this in an extended response:

> I'm actually mentoring a new adjunct. She came last year. We had coffee and stuff. So, her first semester, she didn't teach developmental, and I think that might be kind of—if at all possible—they try not to do that anymore? I don't know. Maybe? I don't think it's an official rule, but I think they may just try not to do that. . . so this year, she got a developmental writing and a 101, and then the e-mails about the portfolio reading came up, and she e-mailed me and said, "Hi, I haven't talked to you, but I got developmental writing this semester and a 101. I saw this e-mail about a portfolio—what is that?" So, I was like, "Oh, cool. . . " I have all the information, and I gave her the information, but "You're teaching developmental writing, and you don't know about the end requirement of that course. Wow, that's problematic."

Barbara is emphatic in her frustration with such a fundamental lack of information, though she remains empathetic to her fellow part-time colleague. She believes this problem stems from the institution, the nature of adjunct labor, rather than an individual shortcoming. She reminds me that adjuncts simply do not "have the institutional knowledge, because you're not there. You don't have an office. You're floating around, but you're also teaching at ten thousand different places, so even if there is an info session like that, you're not available to go."

Barbara's description of an "institutional knowledge" is really a synonym for policy literacy. When she says "You're not there. You don't have an office," she means you do not have the downtime or the casual interactions with colleagues and students that would lead to a functional policy literacy. Again, it appears time, exposure, and insider access are the decisive elements in developing a deep and functional policy literacy.

Of course, grading policies are more complex than simply administering final grades. Throughout our interview Melody muses on the implications of grading policy design on her classroom. She thinks about the campus-wide attendance policy, which states that absence equivalent to one week's coursework results in a failure of the course. Instructors have leeway here. But while most instructors opt to threaten a reduced grade, this type of bargaining doesn't work in the Basic Writing course, because the

course is graded on a pass/fail basis. What seems like a moot point reveals deep problems with policy implementation in the Basic Writing course, as Melody explains:

> So if I say, I deduct 10 points [for attendance], I deduct 10 points from what? 10 points deducted from "pass" equals what? . . . Some people I know will say, if you miss 5 or more classes, you won't be able to submit your portfolio, so at least there is some sort of policy that tries to reinforce that attendance is important, but at the same time you're trying to be more lenient than the school's official policy.

This scenario exemplifies the complexity of the relationship between policy and the course experience, including pedagogy and classroom management. As an experienced instructor, Melody has a good understanding of the campus attendance and enrollment policies, but to a novice instructor, the idea of allowing leeway on a campus wide attendance policy is nothing short of Kafkaesque. As Melody describes, what results is often a cryptic and confusing network of pedagogical moves based on a flawed understanding of the policy implications.

Financial Aid and Award Policies

Of all the policies that govern the experience of Basic Writing instructors and students, the impact of financial aid and awards may be the most abstract, and one may argue, the least associated with the Basic Writing instructor's professional responsibility. And yet, both Barbara and Melody contend that they witness aid and award policies influencing their classroom practice every semester.

For example, Melody keeps a running calendar in her head. Over the course of her career, she has learned that both state and federal aid awards are disbursed about a week after classes begin. This means her students will not see those funds, and cannot use them to purchase their textbooks, until the third of fourth class session. In her words:

> The way the students have explained it, the textbook money does not come to them until the first week of class, so if I have them do homework from the textbook, then to some of them that represents a hardship, because they can't outlay the cash and get reimbursed.

This type of practical issue is only understood through experience, and so a novice instructor worried about course preparation, syllabus design, and classroom management would likely miss it.

What the students are experiencing is an incongruity between classroom experience and financial aid policy, and Melody—who is a seasoned educator— knows how to adjust because she has listened to her students over the years. She has been in the classroom where these realities have impacted her practice in concrete ways. She has taught when only half of her students had access to texts and materials. In assigning her work through digital formats and even paper photocopies, Melody has found a workaround. Are we to reasonably expect that all instructors can intuit or afford the type of moves Melody has made?

Put simply, in the case of aid distribution and the problem of textbooks, students receive financial aid to attend class, but then the methods of administering financial aid awards make it impossible to complete the coursework unless an instructor adjusts for the schedule of aid distribution. This, however, is dependent on the instructor *knowing* that they have to make those adjustments in the first place. Both Barbara and Melody comment on this throughout their interviews. Barbara has more years in the Basic Writing classroom and more formal training in support services, while Melody has evolved her nuanced understanding of policy in Basic Writing through other responsibilities at the community college as well as through teaching.

For example, Melody has served as a member of the academic dismissal committee in a role that offered insight into the material conditions of her students' lives. I asked Melody about college cost and students' reactions to accruing debt while enrolled in developmental writing, and she responded by describing academic dismissal hearings as a place many students first confront their mounting debt.

> Our academic dismissal hearings are for students who have failed two semesters, and there's more language I could look up for you, but I haven't done it in a semester or two, so I've forgotten it, but basically, they are failing out, and before we let them come back, they have to come talk to us. And some of them have really compelling stories, so you sit there and go--okay, there's a reason your head wasn't in the game. But other students say, "Well, I was working 40 hours a week," so you ask, "What's your plan for this semester," and they say, "I'm gonna work 40 hours a week," and you can say, "Okay, you didn't figure it out yet. You didn't get what caused the

problem." But one of the things I always ask at those dismissal hear-
ings is, I ask about their financial situation, because some of them
are already 10, 15, 20 thousand dollars in debt. And they have no
idea. I think it's because they're on financial aid, and they don't
see the numbers. You know it's like magic money. . . . As you know
they don't see the bill, and then they see the bill and they gasp.

Melody's experience with the academic dismissal hearing committee was
not required because she taught Basic Writing; rather, it was a contingency
of her position as an associate professor. This reveals that her understand-
ings of how financial aid policies impact the standing of her Basic Writing
students came only through her interactions with those students who were
already at risk of being dismissed from the college, already had failed Basic
Writing, and had already accrued mounting student loan debt. This type of
position—serving on an academic dismissal committee—is not something
that most, or even many, instructors are likely to have, especially not adjunct
and contingent faculty. As a full-time faculty member, Melody possesses
the status of a privileged insider. She is closer to the institution, and so she
has more policy knowledge than even a part-time instructor teaching the
same courses.

IMPLICATIONS

As I read over the data from Barbara and Melody's interviews, I came
to realize that time as well as institutional positioning and experience were
the decisive factors in forming a functional policy literacy. While such an
observation may at first appear intuitive, I began to reflect on Janice Kaplan
and Barnaby Marsh's pop-science book, *How Luck Happens*. As their central
thesis, they argue that "luck" is not some supernatural phenomenon, but
rather a calculus in which one can manage the variables within their control
to increase the likelihood of a desired outcome. The simplest example they
give is as follows: If one wants to succeed as an actor, spend as much time as
possible in the cafes around Hollywood production sets. The same may be
said here. To better understand the policies pertinent to the Basic Writing
course, spend more time around the department and students. Instructors
must come from and identify with these communities, finding ways to
decrease the distance between students and the institution.

At the outset of this study, I asked three primary questions: To what
extent do community college Basic Writing instructors consider themselves
literate in the details of academic, administrative, and financial aid policies?

To what extent do community college Basic Writing instructors consider policy literacy to be a part of their professional responsibilities? And further, to what extent do community college Basic Writing instructors believe that academic, administrative, and financial aid policies affect their classrooms and their students? Despite differing backgrounds and institutional statuses, Barbara and Melody revealed strong policy literacy, a shared sense of instructor responsibility, and a common understanding of the impact of such policies. In addition, it also became evident that first, a nexus of time and experience creates the best opportunity for Basic Writing instructors to develop a functional policy literacy; second, that students who arbitrarily place into sections with more policy literate instructors may have a more informed and generative experience, and perhaps even more success, in Basic Writing; and third, that novice and contingent faculty members should not be saddled with or faulted for this incongruity.

In my interviews, instructors disclose that they do not have formal academic or professional training in either writing pedagogy or higher education policy. Barbara and Melody have learned the political nature of their work through first-hand experience. Given that most Basic Writing courses have high instructor turnover, the students who land in Barbara's and Melody's classes are the lucky ones. They will receive an education informed by meaningful understandings of relevant commensuration, accreditation, and financial aid policies. Barbara is an expert in student support services, a doctoral candidate in educational leadership and administration, who still admits only to understanding the ins-and-outs of the political network unique to community college mainly through first-hand experience. Melody, a tenured professor who has navigated the same program, department, and policies for over a decade, states the same.

Recognizing how both instructors and their students understand policy design is critical in gauging how community colleges work. Many instructors who teach Basic Writing have their hearts in the right place, but without the requisite policy literacy, they may do more harm than good, as they are more prone to see the classroom as an isolated arena, reinforce the misalignment between rigor and policy, or worse, evince a lack of care. I have heard a select few Basic Writing instructors tout the "toughness" of

their grading, believing that their job is to repair a student's writing before they earn their seat in the first-year writing course. While I protest this sentiment first on a pedagogical level, I am also viscerally reminded of Hsun Tsu's comparison of education to the act of straightening a board (Tsu), not to mention repeated failures in developmental education exhaust financial aid, and exclusive enrollment in developmental studies prohibits students from accessing many need-based awards programs.

Thus, policy literacy has deep implications for Basic Writing students, the majority of whom come from low-income backgrounds and are often the first in their families to attend college. Those students who wind up in classrooms with policy-literate instructors will be at an advantage, as these instructors can pass along that institutional knowledge, or the rules of the game, that often predict success or failure for so many students.

In this regard, policy-literate instructors may produce more policy literate students. This is important, as the cost of college and the complex web of financial aid policies most clearly affect the most economically disenfranchised. Given that financial aid policies are so cryptic and loan lending policies so predatory, many students who cannot afford to pay for college out of pocket may wind up in financial situations far worse than if they had not enrolled in the first place, because they lack the requisite cultural or social capital necessary to navigate for better loan conditions, a fact evidenced by the notorious practices of some private for-profit colleges (Gavira).

I want to be clear: this phenomenon is not indicative of the *people* who populate these positions but rather the nature of the position itself. The very nature of part-time faculty positions makes it such that adjunct instructors are less likely to be included in departmental meetings and less likely to occupy institutional spaces where policy is created or enacted in real time, but— perhaps more importantly— they are equally unlikely to be included in informal dialogue with colleagues around the office. Barbara and Melody recall that many of their policy understandings evolved out of "water-cooler" talk, as colleagues trouble-shoot the more onerous parts of their work. They mean to say that a part-time position places these instructors at a distance from opportunities around campus for learning more about institutional policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As stated, the primary finding from this study is that experience, time, and repeated interactions with both students and faculty around the Basic

Writing course leads to the highest levels of policy literacy, but that institutional location, status, and privileging also play a significant part. Recommendations must build on these understandings, expedite the process of attaining a functional policy literacy, and address the institutional inequities that ostracize adjunct and contingent faculty in particular.

First, there is a great need for more research into the efficacy of policy implementation among Basic Writing instructors and especially among part-time and contingent faculty members at community colleges. Second, writing programs need to include meaningful and substantive dialogue about policy in their discussions of departmental protocol as a way to make clear the relationship between policy and practice. Third, adjunct and contingent faculty members require more support and mentorship, not simply in terms of pedagogical development, but also in their ability to navigate policies early in their careers.

1. *More Research into the efficacy of policy implementation among Basic Writing instructors.* The dearth of research in instructor policy literacy is notable. Given that Basic Writing courses are often beholden to a uniquely complex set of policies and protocols, more research into the efficacy of the dispersal of these policies and protocols can only help educators and administrators bring the picture of this complex problem into focus. While there is a small body of literature on policy literacy, there is even less available research in part-time, contingent, and adjunct faculty members' experiences working with the complex policy framework undergirding the Basic Writing course.

   Particular research might take on the sub-area of adjunct and contingent faculty's experience with policy literacy in Basic Writing. Similar research might be conducted through the professional development materials available to prepare instructors to teach Basic Writing. Ultimately, research might continue to ask: In what ways are instructors preparing to teach Basic Writing being prepared to navigate the policy network undergirding their courses?

   Here, research could work to extend our understandings of what Mary Soliday posits as "the politics of remediation." Research and recursive practice in the politics of Basic Writing is critical in developing the meaningful dialogue addressed in these two recommendations. Without more data on the experiences of adjunct and contingent faculty preparing to teach Basic Writ-

ing, we can neither equitably reform policies nor ensure that the educators who must work within them have access to the literacy necessary to understand and implement them. Some of this work has already been taken up by scholars in the field of Basic Writing studies. As Lynn Reid aptly questions in her *JBW* article from 2018: "Are administrators and legislators inherently disinterested in equitable education across the board? Are all instructors who are labeled 'Basic Writing experts' necessarily aligning their work with a social justice mission?" (28).

2. *Linking the Discussion of Policy Decisions with Departmental Protocol.* Community college writing programs are frequently tasked with reimagining their department protocol. Committees regularly form to redefine the protocol of writing programs' learning outcomes, assessment practices, and goals in general. Because the study of learning outcomes and assessment practices is viewed by many as an ongoing and evolving sub-field in the discipline of Writing Studies, connecting more dialogue about the policies that undergird those outcomes and assessment practices might lead to higher levels of policy literacy among writing department faculty members. After all, learning outcomes and grading and assessment practices represent the political nature of a writing program. Educators should thus be encouraged to consider the implicit political nature of their work not necessarily as *additional* labor but rather as an embedded aspect of teaching Basic Writing.

    One way to link the discussion of relevant policy to these issues of protocol is to specify the symbiotic relationship between policy and protocol. While learning outcomes and assessment practices are often discussed, argued, and designed over pedagogical orientation, it is important that instructors also recognize their policy relevance – that these decisions manifest in concrete experiences for Basic Writing students.

3. *Advocating for Adjunct and Contingent Faculty in Basic Writing.* The problem of adjunct labor extends far beyond the scope of a study such as this. We should all be aware that the problems identified by these participants have much more to do with the politics of adjunct faculty labor than they do the shortcomings of individual adjunct faculty members. Still, I make this practical recommendation based on the belief that, even though adjunct labor is in desperate need of reform and reinvention, Basic Writing students will benefit

from an increased policy literacy of *all* writing program instructors.

Adjunct and contingent faculty members teaching the Basic Writing course might, for example, be grouped into cohorts with more seasoned instructors with a functional level of policy literacy. This strategy is not unique among portfolio assessment groups, and thus research into the efficacy of such a strategy as well as its implementation could pave the way for a more equitable distribution of policy literacy among instructors and ultimately to the benefit of students.

Taken together, these recommendations represent an effort to increase dialogue and collaboration among Basic Writing instructors, college administrators, and other policy agents. Given that writing programs are often seen as programs unto themselves, Basic Writing programs become an even more esoteric community, further separate from the college community at large. By encouraging Basic Writing instructors to address the implicitly political nature of their work by means of a more developed policy literacy, we might work toward a more intelligent, equitable, and transparent policy design, one that is not imposed solely from the top down, but rather informed, and even authored, by the very people who need to understand it most.

NOTE

1. Names are pseudonyms.

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Examining Communities of Practice: Transdisciplinarity, Resilience, and Professional Identity

Emily Suh and Darin Jensen

ABSTRACT: This article examines transdisciplinarity in developmental education and Basic Writing in the context of externally-driven developmental education reforms. We report on a pilot study survey of 143 developmental educators regarding their professional identity, engagement, and resilience. Respondents identified professional roles and interactions with colleagues as central to conceptualizations of their practice and community. Respondents reported maintaining professional resilience through connections with students, colleagues, and their sense of agency. Despite the importance respondents placed upon connections with practitioners and their recognition of the transdisciplinary nature of their work as professionals, findings indicate limited awareness of the transdisciplinary nature of the community of developmental educators. Implications are discussed for widening developmental educators' community of practice to connect practitioners from diverse fields, professions, and institutional contexts. Future directions are discussed for developing teacher-scholars' types and levels of resilience for the purpose of exercising a voice in national debates about developmental education reform.

KEYWORDS: Basic Writing; community of practice; developmental education; professional identity, resilience; transdisciplinary

The two recent special issues on graduate education in Basic Writing in the *Journal of Basic Writing* point to enduring trends in the profession that deserve attention and research. In her article, "Faculty Development

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and a Graduate Course for Pre-Service and In-Service Faculty: Finding and Enacting a Professional Identity in Basic Writing," Karen Uehling writes, "Perhaps the factor that has most influenced my recent thinking about faculty development and graduate courses is the almost impossible challenge for Basic Writing faculty to find and enact a professional identity" (66). We agree. In the present context of externally-driven education reform efforts, professional identity, engagement in the profession and discipline, and resilient practices faculty develop to sustain their work are of vital importance. Laura Gray-Rosendale, the special editor for these two issues, writes, "the main theme of [the second] issue is professionalization in graduate education" (2). In this article, we seek to look beyond the important topic of professionalization in graduate programs to understand developmental educators' sense of professional identity, engagement in the field and discipline, and how teacher-scholars in these contexts become resilient and sustain their practice.

Our article reports and interprets the results from a survey of 143 developmental educators. We identified respondents' professional roles and interactions with colleagues and asked about their sense of agency. While the study draws from a large number of developmental educators, we present our work as a pilot study, based upon our recognition of a low response rate and the respondent pool's limited representation of adjunct and contingent faculty. Despite these limits, we argue that our findings suggest a need for transdisciplinary awareness in the Basic Writing and developmental educator communities of practice. In other words, we call for an understanding of Basic Writing as existing within the context of developmental education specifically, and higher education more broadly. Moreover, we discuss implications for developing teacher-scholars' types and levels of resilience, especially in the face of national, often top-down education reforms.

In our study, we specifically looked at developmental education as a whole. This lens may seem an odd fit for the *Journal of Basic Writing*, but we don't think so. When national discussions around "remedial" education occur, they are often aimed at developmental education as a whole. By siloing out Basic Writing, we lose the opportunity for knowledge-sharing and solidarity with professionals facing the same pressures across artificial disciplinary and institutional divides. As Uehling argues, "To strengthen our sense of identity, we might begin by building connections among our diverse current and potential Basic Writing instructors. We need the voices of those from many academic backgrounds to describe how they were drawn

to this work, how they pursued a professional identity, and the kinds of bridges they see or have constructed from their original discipline to Basic Writing" (58). This point is important, and we argue that this vision must be advanced. To be effective in developing a sustainable professional identity and to serve our students, we must undertake a transdisciplinary approach to developmental education as a whole or risk falling victim to Susan Naomi Bernstein's warning in the special issue that "Under no circumstances should the reading be narrowed to Writing Studies, or to the emergent field of Basic Writing Studies. Writing Studies and Basic Writing Studies, in their attempts to professionalize, systemize, and codify our discipline, often reify the systemic hierarchies that stigmatize placement in Basic Writing as a potentially permanent marginalized status" (11). Like Bernstein (*Teaching Developmental Writing*), we contend that Basic Writing is part of the transdisciplinary profession of developmental education, whose professional development is both under-theorized and under-supported. Indeed, rather than examining just Basic Writing or Writing Studies, we must adopt a wider lens to be effective as a profession that serves students.

Transdisciplinarity may be unfamiliar to some readers. It is usually thought of as a research strategy that brings together groups from across disciplines to work on a systemic research problem (Bernstein). We apply it to the disciplines and communities of practice that make up developmental education, contributing to what Christie Toth, Brett Griffiths, and Kathryn Thirolf refer to as "acts of translation characteriz[ing] a distinctive mode of professional engagement [called] *transdisciplinary cosmopolitanism*, an inclusive and pragmatic approach to accessing research and practice that is uniquely suited to two-year college English faculty's professional roles" (94). In fact, we believe that Barbara Gleason in "Forming Adult Educators: The CCNY MA in Language and Literacy" makes a similar argument for the transdisciplinary nature of our work. Gleason explains:

> In presenting the MA in Language and Literacy as a model, we recommend that other graduate program administrators, faculty, and students consider expanding curricula to include a blend of adult learning, TESOL, language studies, composition and rhetoric, and Basic Writing studies. We also recommend that graduate programs consider expanding program missions to include forming educators for multiple professional pathways rather than focusing on one or even two professional careers. (86)

In a graduate program model meant to address systemic problems of adult literacy education, Gleason describes five disciplines working in concert to prepare pre-professionals for work in the field. Other scholars have similarly embraced a transdisciplinary lens for viewing its work and potential across two-year college literature. For instance, in "Who is the Basic Writer? Reclaiming a Foundational Question for Graduate Students, New Teachers, and Emerging Scholars," Hope Parisi explains:

> While macro-reflections of Basic Writing have filtered my perceptions of the field for quite some time, I did not realize the extent to which intersections with policy in the scholarship were peopled with so many research-smart social science professionals, voicing many similar concerns. Some of these scholars are familiar to us, such as Hunter Boylan and Vincent Tinto; and others less so. And the extent to which many of our comp-rhet, community college scholar-colleagues have been optimizing this research toward reform proves its relevance to the work of the two-year college "teacher, scholar, activist" (Sullivan "The Two-Year College")." (121)

Another example of transdisciplinarity might be identified in a recent shift in organizational nomenclature—from the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) to the National Organization of Student Success (NOSS). This change highlights an existential rift between the ways educators approach teaching and the ways outcomes of that teaching are measured, but it also looks to a transdisciplinary approach—including advising and several academic disciplines to address a systemic problem—namely, the success of underprepared students. However, this name change also exemplifies developmental educators' struggle to establish a professional identity during a time when remedial courses and placement assessment are under sustained scrutiny by organizations such as Complete College America and MDRC (an organization that used to be called Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation but which officially changed its name to its acronym in the early 2000's).

In the face of such criticism and the widespread reduction or elimination of developmental education, such as in Florida and North Carolina (Levine-Brown and Anthony), close examination of developmental education practitioners' preparation, professional identity, and resiliency of practice becomes increasingly important (Boylan and Bonham). Existing research on developmental education focuses almost exclusively on out-

comes (e.g., retention or student success) of developmental educators' work without examining developmental educators themselves as mechanisms for facilitating that success. Despite developmental education's long-standing roots of promoting educational access, research on the professional identities of developmental educators who engage in that vital work remains underexplored (Suh). The two special issues of *JBW* centering on graduate education examine how preparation forms professional identity. This focus is important, but a coterminous examination of ongoing professionalization and identity in the field is necessary. In this piece, we bring a social sciences orientation to our examination of the professional identity Basic Writing instructors have as transdisciplinary developmental educators.

A limited sense of shared professional identity harms developmental educators' resilience, or ability to remain strong in the face of professional challenges (Jensen and Suh). The present pilot study examines how developmental educators define their professional identity, including the ways they engage in and remain resilient in their work, and their goals.

EXPLORING DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATORS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Limited previous research has surveyed developmental educators regarding their perceptions of their roles within the field. Eric Paulson, for example, reported on the perceptions of recognized "leaders in the field" who were surveyed for their judgments about whether certain topics were "on" or "off the radar screen" (i.e., relevant to the field) and whether those topics should be on or off ("Developmental Education Radar: 2013" 36). However, the unit of analysis for both the survey's first (Paulson "Developmental Education Radar: 2011") and second iteration (Paulson "Developmental Education Radar: 2013") was specific topics in developmental education, and respondents were chosen based upon their status as recognized leaders within the field. As a result, the radar surveys provide limited insight into the "rank and file" of developmental practitioners. Similarly, a survey of interviews published in the *Journal of Developmental Education* illustrated the emergent interest about professional identity among recognized leaders within the field (Stahl et al.). Additionally, research on the practitioner perspective of "what effective teaching means" (Abbate-Vaughn and Paugh 16) and the development of educators' professional identities rarely consider developmental educators' sense of identity or their ability to persist in the field (see also Busey and Waters; Kenny et al.).

Disciplinary research from two-year college writing studies has included Basic Writing instructors, who are themselves a specific subset of developmental education practitioners. Based on their survey of Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) members, Christie Toth and Patrick Sullivan concluded that English departmental scholarship practices must move away from individual to department- or college-wide efforts. The authors identified this shift as a move toward local teacher-scholar communities of practice, which they define as "a professional model in which scholarly engagement becomes an integral part of a department's teaching and administrative work" (248). Toth and Sullivan's work is part of a larger trend, spanning the last fifteen years, in two-year college English scholarship to reconfigure the identity of two-year college English teachers, including their preparation, engagement in the field, and engagement with scholarship (Andelora "Teacher/Scholar/Activist"; Jensen and Toth; Jensen et al., 2018; Calhoon-Dillahunt et al.; Sullivan "Two-Year College Teacher-Scholar-Activist"). However, the available research has not examined practitioner perspectives within a comprehensive view of developmental education as a field which transcends disciplinary and professional boundaries, such as developmental mathematics, developmental literacy, advising, and tutoring. Such a collective view of developmental education might be established within a community of practice frame (Lave and Wenger).

The existing literature on developmental education as a larger field also has not examined how developmental educators engage in a community of practice. Lynn Reid touches on this in the recent special issue *JBW* in her article "Disciplinary Reading in Basic Writing Graduate Education: The Politics of Remediation in *JBW*, 1995-2015," where she argues that "job market preparation and teaching practicums alone are inadequate preparation for the 'future tense' of professional work that practitioners in Basic Writing might face" (8).

We seek to understand the lived experience of Reid's future tense. Without this understanding, we, as a field, are unclear about how we can establish and maintain our professional identity and connections, our goals, or our resilience. Understanding these aspects of the developmental educator community of practice is of vital importance to our collective ability to respond effectively to external pressures, maintain a resilient field, and to serve our students who are often vulnerable.

METHODOLOGY

In order to explore whether developmental educators currently engage in a community of practice, this study reports on the following questions:

1. What factors do developmental educators include in their professional identity?
2. How do developmental educators describe their professional identity?
3. How do developmental educators enact or experience professional resilience?
4. With whom do developmental educators connect as they engage in their work?
5. What goals do developmental educators hold for their work?

Given that the current conversation around developmental education centers on elimination, reduction, and instrumentalization in a context of austerity, we must understand our identity and community of practice to survive and serve our students. These questions identify and interrogate aspects of professional identity for Basic Writing instructors and developmental education practitioners as articulated by the literature (see Toth and Sullivan; Griffiths and Jensen; Jensen and Toth: Griffiths: Gleason). Moreover, the lack of previous research on developmental educators' professional identity demands further investigation. We designed the present study as a pilot for a larger inquiry. For this portion, we surveyed widely from various national professional organizations that engage developmental educators.

Definitions and Theoretical Framing

Operationally, we define professional identity as professional self-concept grounded in the educator's values, training, motivation, experience, talents, and professionalization (Griffiths; Toth et al. "Distinct and Significant"). Educators' professional identity is essential to a field's professional autonomy, or professionals' level of control related to their professional identity in personal, institutional, and regional areas. This professional identity draws from teacher-scholars' abilities to enact their own professional autonomy and epistemological authority (Griffiths; Larson; Sarfatti Larson). A lack of professional identity can negatively affect teacher-scholars' resilience, or their ability to remain strong in the face of change, high teaching loads, and more (Suh and Jensen). In contrast, fostering a strong

professional identity has implications for student success, teaching excellence, and professional engagement (Griffiths and Jensen). Further, student success has been observed as a central component to conceptualizations of professional identity in discipline-specific studies of developmental educators (Diaz; Khoule et al.; Severs). A shared professional identity is central to a group's community of practice.

Integral to both professional identity and the professional community of practice is the notion of professional resilience. Broadly defined, resilience is the ability to withstand shock or change and can be examined through discrete lenses. For our work, we follow Griffiths and Jensen who define three types of resilience: individual, psycho-social, and design (Griffiths and Jensen). Individual resilience is a characteristic of a single individual responding to stressors in her environment (Griffiths and Jensen; Rutter). Psychosocial resilience refers to "a dynamic psycho-social process which protects a group of individuals from the potential negative effects of stressors they collectively encounter" (Morgan et al. 552). Griffiths and Jensen explain that "seen this way, individual behaviors can contribute to (or detract from) the resiliency of the group or team" (302). Commitment to a common goal shared within the community supports individuals' resilience, or ability to bounce back from stress (Griffiths and Jensen). Griffiths and Jensen draw on the concept of design resilience from architecture, too. This concept of resilience examines how structures or systems are built to withstand environmental stress. This model may be applied to departmental, professional, or institutional structures and systems.

Communities of practice describe a group of people who share a craft or profession and a commitment to a common goal. Gray-Rosendale in her recent *JBW* editor's column argues that now is a "pivotal time [. . .] in our changing landscape of Basic Writing history, theory, and practice" (2). To understand that landscape, we must seek a clear definition and scope of our community of practice. We employ Lave and Wenger's definition of a community of practice as having a domain, a community, and a practice. A community of practice is an occupational group wherein newcomers are mentored into more central roles by members of longer standing. This mentoring constructs not only the newcomer's membership but their identity, too. Through their shared identity, community members work towards common goals. Research on postsecondary educators' professional engagement is often framed through Lave and Wenger's theory of communities of practice (Gehrke and Kezar; Smith et al.). Researchers have documented, for example, how developmental educators across disciplinary traditions and

professional roles share the goal of student success (Boylan "Targeted Intervention for Developmental Education Students"; Casazza "Strengthening Practice"; Diaz; Khoule et al.; Severs).

We therefore apply a community of practice (Lave and Wenger) theoretical framework in this pilot study, arguing the community's domain as developmental education, in national groups like NOSS, the Council on Basic Writing (CBW), the Two-Year College English Association (TYCA), and CRLA, as well local groups as discrete as a faculty community or department; and our shared practice as the work of developmental education, which we see as broadly conceived across disciplines. In the present study, we apply this framework to deepen our exploration of the connections between developmental educators and to explore if and how developmental educators share a sense of professional identity, engagement, and resiliency.

However, what constitutes the community of practice for the professional identity of developmental educators, and its intersection with Basic Writing, is often absent from discussions of developmental education models and teaching (Arendale; Boylan "Targeted Intervention for Developmental Education Students"; Parker et al.; Smittle). In fact, while developmental education has been looked at in parts (i.e., math faculty, literacy, or student support), a holistic view of the community of practice for developmental educators—and particularly the role of Basic Writing within this community—is absent from the literature. In graduate preparation for Basic Writing, Reid finds a similar absence, noting, "though practitioners in Basic Writing studies often refer to 'the politics of remediation,' there are few pedagogical models that address how to teach this facet of professional life to graduate students and emerging professionals" (6). Systemic investigation across the transdisciplinary communities of developmental education is vital if we wish to move beyond lore and to sustainable resilient communities of practice.

Instrument

Data from this pilot study were collected through adaptation of Toth and Sullivan's survey for Two-Year College Association (TYCA) members. Because the original survey intended to measure the professional engagement and resiliency only of two-year college English faculty, some of the language was modified in the instrument to reflect a wider range of professional organizations and to collect additional professional demographic information. We intended that the survey instrument's increased scope would help in theorizing the transdisciplinary community in developmental education.

In addition to the established survey items in this pilot study, respondents were asked to list their institutional roles (e.g., Advisor, Counselor, Learning/Writing Center professional, Testing Center Professional, and Math Instructor), and their membership within Council of Learning Assistance and Developmental Education Associations (CLADEA) organizations.

Our resulting developmental education practitioner survey totaled eighteen items: seven Likert or multiple choice and eleven open-ended items. Multiple-choice items included organizational membership information, conference attendance, and frequency/type of professional development engagement. Open-ended items solicited respondents' opinions and experiences related to engagement with other professionals, accessing research and scholarship, and areas of developmental education engagement. Content validity of the survey instrument was established by consulting with members of the NADE board and close adherence to the topics of the original survey instrument (Toth and Sullivan). Despite being a potential methodological limit to the study, the small sample size from our low response rate coupled with the vocabularies of the different disciplinary and professional organizations allowed us to capture initial data which can serve as a foundation for further questions and larger studies.

Preliminary results were presented at a session during the 2019 National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) conference. Session attendees reported seeing and responding to the survey and confirmed our analysis. In response to the survey, one attendee noted that the current perception of developmental education in his state of Mississippi "perpetuates a symbiotic isolationism between students and developmental educators" and the rest of the institution, whereby developmental education is considered separate from, and therefore a barrier to, students' success within the college. This reported perception of developmental educators as existing outside of the student support community of practice further illustrated the need for developmental educators' active engagement in establishing a cohesive identity for their profession and professional practices.

Respondents

The survey was sent to NADE (now NOSS) members via a Facebook post on the NADE page and a link in the 2018 national conference Guidebook app. The survey was open for two weeks following the 2018 NADE conference; the survey was also sent to the Developmental Math Community of the Association of Mathematics at the Two-Year College for two weeks

during their annual conference. In order to extend the representativeness of the sample to encompass a variety of institutional roles and disciplines, a link to the survey was posted on listservs for LRNASST-L (a primary means of communication for CRLA members), the Council for Basic Writing (703 members), the Two-Year College Association (624 members), and the Developmental Mathematics Community of the Association for Mathematics in the Two-Year College with 400 members (Paula Wilhite, e-mail message to the author, January 18, 2019). At the time of distribution, NADE had 2,366 members (Annette Cook, e-mail message to the author, January 24, 2019) and the LRNASST-L had approximately 2,200 members (Winne Cooke, e-mail message to the author, January 18, 2019). The survey was completed by 143 developmental education professionals.

Demographic data collection was limited to encourage respondent participation. However, relevant characteristics emerged from respondents' answers to the items, including the number who identified as fulfilling different developmental practitioner roles (see Table 1; role counts exceed sample size because respondents could identify multiple roles).

Table 1. Self-Identified Roles

Developmental Educator Role(s)	Respondents
Writing/IRW Instructor	71
Math Instructor	33
Reading Instructor	31
Advisor	27
Learning/Writing Center Professional	24
ESOL/ESL Instructor	10
Administrator	9
Counselor	4
FYC Professor	1
Learning Center Instructor	1
Testing Center Professional	1

These responses indicated the overlapping nature of many practitioners' work. For example, all four respondents who identified as Counselors listed additional roles; seven of the nine Administrators listed other roles. Among Learning/Writing Center Professionals, eighteen out of twenty-four respondents listed additional roles including Advisor, Testing Center Professional, Administrator, and Reading or Writing/IRW instructor.

As a group, the 143 respondents claimed a cumulative total of 250 advanced degrees in a total of ten fields, including education (74 advanced degrees), English (62), Reading/Literacy (28), Mathematics (26), Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (14), and Counseling (11), among others. In total, respondents reported holding 187 master's degrees and 63 doctorate degrees. Based upon the survey distribution methods, we posit that respondents represented a highly engaged portion of the transdisciplinary developmental educator community. However, respondents were not limited to those who could afford to engage through conference attendance. Although neither the CRLA nor CBW listservs require active membership in their affiliated professional organization, 126/143 (88.1%) of total respondents reported being members of professional organizations, and 128/143 (89.5%) reported participating in at least one conference during the previous year. The range of professional memberships and conferences attended speaks to sample diversity: four respondents listed membership in four international organizations (one per respondent), and the sample included members of 25 national organizations with a focus on two-year colleges, higher education, administration, tutoring, counseling/advising, multicultural education, disciplinary knowledge, or learning support.

Data Analysis

Open-ended item responses were coded through thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke), which is particularly useful for analyzing survey data since it allows researchers to examine emergent themes which were not present in the survey questions (Tanaka et al.). Responses to each open-ended item were combined, and the researchers independently coded for broad, inductive themes and then more specific themes within the codes aided by Dedoose qualitative analysis software. A single utterance (i.e., response phrase) could yield multiple tokens (i.e., portion of the response invoking a specific code), so the total number of codes was greater than the number of respondents (i.e., there were 226 tokens resulting from the survey prompt to define "Community of Practice"; total sample size n = 143). After this

independent coding, the researchers cross-checked tokens for each code, calculating inter-rater reliability by dividing the number of matches by the number of independently assigned codes. The inter-rater reliability for this item was 0.90 (202 matches of 226 codes initially), and the researchers reworked codes until all discrepancies were resolved.

FINDINGS

In conducting this pilot study, we cast an intentionally wide net across professional organizations. We begin by discussing how respondents conceptualized their professional identities and then introduce findings related to their connections to other developmental educators, resilience, and goals.

Professional Identity

Similar to the literature describing the comprehensiveness of developmental education (Casazza "Harvard Symposium 2000"), respondents reported a variety of components to their definition of a developmental education practitioner. Notably, three respondents rejected the label "practitioner." One respondent explained,

> With all due respect, the term "practitioner" makes me seem like a medical professional, which then seems to associate me with the "medical model" or the "deficit model" (or "remedial model") of Developmental Education, wherein a student has a disease or a deficit which needs to be "cured" or "fixed" or "remediated." So, in essence, I object to the use of this term to describe developmental-education educators.

Because of space constraints, table 2 reports only the three most prevalent dominant themes and the three most frequent corresponding subthemes, e.g., content area, students, andragogy/pedagogy. For example, see table 2. [Credentials/Formal] Training Knowledge of is a dominant theme as it was mentioned in 230 tokens. But this is made discrete in the subthemes where we note three groupings from this larger category.

Italicization denotes *in vivo* code, or a code derived from a direct quote.

However, the majority of respondents (121/143) accepted or positively responded to the term "practitioner." Most frequently, respondents defined practitioners based upon specific forms of required Training or Knowledge of, frequently related to the *Content Area*: "For example, a writing center practi-

Table 2. Themes for Developmental Education Practitioners

Dominant Themes	**Subthemes**
[Credentials/Formal] *Training, Knowledge* of (230)	Content Area (71)
	Students (58)
	Andragogy/Pedagogy (33)
Action (122)	*Support Focused on Students* (42)
	Constant Cycle of Improvement (23)
	Teaching (23)
Specific Roles (45)	Faculty (25)
	Academic Support e.g., *Tutors, Student Success* (9)
	Administrators (7)

tioner would have done research in writing center praxis and theory before taking on that job." As the respondent indicates, practitioners were often defined based upon *Actions* associated with their practice (122/436). Perhaps because of the multiple roles many respondents held at their institutions, not all respondents defined practitioners within narrow disciplinary confines. In fact, two respondents specifically identified practitioners as working beyond a single discipline, such as the respondent who noted, "'Transdisciplinary cosmopolitanism' is a fair way to capture what a developmental educator often does in terms of training." Although these definitions suggest developmental educators' professionalization and sense of professional identity, respondents did not indicate a sense of a shared identity as developmental education practitioners whose practice collectively transcends disciplinary boundaries. Instead, respondents who specifically defined their work in this way identified themselves in ways which did not suggest their recognition of

a strong collective identity with others who share in this transdisciplinary work beyond their institutional contexts.

Connections Between Developmental Educators

Although respondents' definitions of developmental education practitioners suggested the absence of a clearly articulated developmental educator identity, open-item responses illustrated the complex and nuanced ways in which developmental educators viewed themselves as connected to others. In response to the three open-ended items asking respondents to define their community of practice, and what a practitioner is, and to describe how they remain resilient, respondents discussed the importance of *Colleagues/Coworkers* (53), *Conferences* (24), *Scholars/Scholarship* (14), and *Mentor(s)* (8). The high rate of respondents' professional membership (126) and conference attendance (114), which respondents often reported as not being supported by their institutions, may be indicative of the respondents' efforts to connect to other professionals—even at personal financial cost.

Over one-third (58) of the respondents identified as belonging to a community of practice in response to the open-ended item asking, "How do you define your community of practice?" Primarily, they defined their community of practice based upon institutional Roles (51) and interactions with *Colleagues* (51; to reiterate, *italics* indicates *in vivo* code emerging from participant responses) and within various Locations (36) (see table 3).

Because some respondents described multiple aspects of their community of practice, some responses had multiple codes, such as a response which included "Fellow faculty members at my university and faculty across the country." In addition to the dominant theme of Roles, this utterance was coded twice for the dominant theme Location (for *Nation-wide* and *Within My Department*, respectively). As this response illustrates, respondents most frequently defined their community of practice as others who share their specific role(s). Several respondents described the multiple layers of their communities of practice, noting that in addition to departmental or institutional communities' practices, they also participated in communities of practice that transcended geographic or disciplinary boundaries.

Finally, respondents' inclusion of *Scholars* is a noteworthy aspect of how the surveyed respondents conceptualized the developmental education community of practice. Although the phrase "research" is mentioned only nine times in reference to the community of practice, "conferences" are mentioned an additional eight times. As one respondent noted, "My

community of practice includes scholars and practitioners (faculty, staff, students, and administrators) exploring postsecondary reading and learning support." These comments illustrate the central role scholarship holds, specifically within the developmental education community of practice for the surveyed practitioners. These responses and the ten mentions of fellow *Scholars* as a subtheme within *Colleagues* echo Toth and Sullivan's efforts to "consciously cultivate local teacher scholar communities of practice, a model in which scholarly engagement becomes an integral part of a department's teaching and administrative work" (248). Indeed, the responses suggest that the teacher preparation sought by Reid must include an explicit connection to scholarship not just about Basic Writing but also the field of developmental education writ large and its applications to supporting and sustaining the professional engagement of developmental educators.

Table 3. Developmental Educators' Community of Practice

Dominant Themes	Subthemes
Roles (51 total)	*Faculty* (27)
	Academic Support, i.e. *tutors, staff* (17)
	Advisors, counselors (7)
Colleagues (49)	*Colleagues* (22)
	Professional Organization (17)
	Scholars (10)
Location (34)	*Community College* (18)
	Nationwide (9)
	Within My Department (7)

Resilience

Respondents most frequently referenced *Students* (63) in their discussions of resilience. Subthemes within the dominant theme of *Students* varied between advocating for students regarding issues of *Access* (18) and *Working. . . in Collectivity with Students* (12), such as by "getting to know my students as individuals, letting them tell me their story, and then, together, devising a plan for academic improvement/success." The dominant theme *Connect with Colleagues* (51) was another common way the surveyed developmental educators reported remaining resilient, such as the practitioner who described "surrounding myself with colleagues and mentors who challenge me to stretch myself and by considering new pedagogical practices when I feel I've hit a wall." Importantly, although this response contained a psycho-social component, it—and others like it—did not meet our definition of psycho-social resilience because it did not contribute to the group's ability to respond to collectively experienced stressors (Morgan). In fact, responses frequently highlighted the importance of individual agency, which could be seen in other dominant themes such as *I Believe in What I'm Doing* (26), *Reflecting on My Own Practice* (13), and *Autonomy* (5). As one respondent noted, "I view developmental education as the most important component of higher ed when it comes to social justice, the American Dream. The importance of the work we do keeps me resilient."

Despite the hopeful tone of most responses, several respondents noted the challenge of remaining resilient: "I keep going because I have amazing colleagues who want good things for our students, too, but I find myself inching more and more toward the 'jaded' side of teaching every semester." The same respondent continued, "This is a sad time for higher education, particularly for those marginalized groups who many of us have dedicated our entire careers toward helping. It feels bleak." The respondent's language echoed the sentiments of others who described similar challenges in persevering against austerity measures to eliminate developmental courses and limit other services for students enrolled there. Respondents frequently cited colleagues, within and across campus and professional organizations, as inspiration during these troubling times.

Goals

Working toward shared goals is a theoretical condition of the community of practice (Griffiths and Jensen; Lave and Wenger). Respondents described their community of practice based on a *Goal*(*s*) or action to be

accomplished in 31 utterances. For example, one respondent noted, "My community is a body of professionals whose *goal* is to prepare students for curriculum courses while staying up to date with the latest tools and strategies in our field." The respondent's use of "professionals" suggests the respondents' transdisciplinary understanding of developmental education as a field which encompasses several disciplines and institutional roles. Respondents described *Goal*(*s*) in their definition of developmental education practitioners and as necessary to their resilience.

The survey results illustrated how respondents in this pilot study held similar goals and overlapping roles, which some respondents specifically identified as "transdisciplinary" in reference to the ways their work transcended disciplinary boundaries. Additionally, a few respondents described the importance of multilayered communities of practice and the role of researchers/scholars in those communities. Respondents, as a whole, however, demonstrated limited recognition that other developmental educators shared experiences and hopes for the impact of their work. Thus, the responses suggested an emergent but limited shared professional identity for the field of developmental educators, and as a result, the relationships that many described cultivating with other practitioners did not meet the definition of psychosocial resilience for a community of developmental educators.

LIMITS

Measures of quality for survey results usually include response rate and representativeness (Fincham). The present pilot study's number of respondents is but a small portion of the membership of any particular developmental education-related organization. Of the CLADEA organizations, only NADE/NOSS and CRLA provided venues for sharing the survey. Only 36/2,366 (1.5%) of NADE/NOSS members completed the survey, and the researchers' own narrow disciplinary identities as developmental literacy/English faculty may have further limited access to discipline-specific communities which serve developmental educators outside of the CLADEA umbrella. Finally, this study does not examine specific issues related to the community of practice or professional identity of contingent and part-time faculty. It is estimated that these practitioners make up at least half of postsecondary faculty in the U.S. (AAUP, n.d.; National Center for Education Statistics) and whose exploitation and lack of resources (Kahn et al.) compound the issues examined in this study. Although these limits prevent the authors from generalizing the findings to the larger community of developmental

educators, this pilot study offers a first of its kind examination of how the surveyed developmental educators make meaning of their professional work as transcending disciplinary boundaries.

NAMING WHAT WE NEED

Below we discuss three ramifications from the findings: the need for transdisciplinary identity in developmental education and Basic Writing, a shared sense of community of practice as an antidote to siloed disciplines and professions, and attention to a community of practice model as a means toward establishing a more resilient profession.

Transdisciplinary Identity. This pilot study indicates that the responding developmental educators conceptualized themselves as discipline-specific practitioners based upon their disciplinary training and practices (i.e., running a learning support center). Respondents maintained and drew support from other developmental educators who shared their institution or subject matter. In fact, several respondents described their practice as grounded in what might be represented as overlapping circles of department, institution, discipline, and field—what one respondent described as "a vast community of practice with different layers." However, even this respondent described the outermost layers, which included membership in national associations, as being a discipline-specific community of practice. As a whole, respondents suggested important, but limited, awareness of the transdisciplinarity of their work and the potential for their communities of practice to transcend institutional boundaries or job titles given their shared goal of student success and their shared practices of drawing from a belief in their work and connections with colleagues to establish and maintain resilience.

A Sense of Community. Despite the preponderance of respondents' self-defined discipline-specific roles, a limited but important group of respondents recognized the transdisciplinarity of their work. In response to the open-ended item about under-researched areas in developmental education, one respondent noted the need for

> Cross-disciplinary training and the failure, at times, for disciplinary silos to share information (so developmental instructors involved in NADE may not be talking to the Council on Basic Writing within the CCCCs [Conference on College Composition and Communication], and neither may be drawing from research from CRLA or TESOL, both of which have rich research histories).

We concur with this respondent and others, arguing the need for scholarship exploring how to create a stronger sense of collective identity based upon developmental educators' shared professional label and goals. This shared professional identity would allow developmental educators to band together across disciplinary divides to better enact their mission of student success, to advocate for their students and their profession, and to strengthen their sense of professional resilience in the face of external reform pressures. We see this need to broaden the field and scholarship as engaging with Reid's findings that

> Within *JBW*, there are clear patterns in the way that authors recount stories about facing the politics of remediation: state legislators and administrators are evil and greedy; institutions enact disembodied policies; the general public fails to understand the work of Basic Writing; and Basic Writing experts are stalwarts of social justice working against these difficult odds. (28)

Reid claims for Basic Writing a transdisciplinary *ethos* in seeking to move graduate education "beyond close reading of a few scenarios and instead read across texts to locate patterns that might help us to strategically position our work for stakeholders we may have forgotten or opportunities we may not have considered" (27).

Community of Practice as Model. We see the community of practice model as a way forward to establish and strengthen individual, psychosocial, and design resilience of new and veteran developmental educators through national organizations (Jensen and Griffiths). As Toth and Sullivan point out, a focus on "cultivating teacher-scholar communities of practice" may "bring fresh focus and resources" (262) to our efforts. It may be that engagement in establishing a national identity that transcends professional titles will increase psychosocial and design resilience in developmental education. The work of teacher-scholar-activism that refigures two-year college studies as a movement explicitly facing the political realities of education in the 21st century may be such a model. Further, practitioner scholars who share in this transdisciplinary work beyond their institutional contexts may well have better structures in place to support their resilience.

MOVING FORWARD

The results from this pilot survey lead us to ask additional questions as we engage in creating this professional identity and community of practice.

Most notably, we wonder: Is there a community here? What is the value of crafting and sustaining a cohesive transdisciplinary professional identity for developmental educators? What labor, structures, and resources are required if such work is valuable? Should the developmental educator identity be a unifying one despite disciplinary differences?

We believe in the notion of a community of developmental educators, of which Basic Writing is a necessary component, which shares the goal of supporting students' postsecondary success. The findings point to a community in need of additional identification and organization. Findings from a national study of professionals engaged in postsecondary student support and transitions similarly suggest that practitioners most frequently identify as developmental educators, despite their perceptions of attacks on the field (Jensen and Suh). Following this and our pilot study, we believe there is an acknowledged, yet undeveloped, national developmental educator identity that must be strengthened through explicit engagement with a community of practice model.

One way to engage in this work is to build institutional collaborations and transdisciplinarity within and across departments and institutions. Christie Toth, Patrick Sullivan, and Carolyn Calhoon-Dillahunt point to "cross sector disciplinary alliances that expand educational opportunity, improve professional equity, and advance social justice" (86). Their examination of inter-institutional partnerships is instructive in its explicit negotiations of the ethical work required to work across disciplinary and institutional silos. This type of work, and other partnerships like it (see Suh and Jensen "Building Professional Autonomy"; Uehling) allow for engagement across institutions in equity-centered partnerships (Jensen). Extrapolating this work across disciplines within institutions as developmental educators create a community of practice and articulate solidarity is a logical next step.

We recognize, too, that the instantiation and maintenance of a resilient community of practice will require work with administrators and policy makers. Responses noted a range of areas in which developmental educators' abilities to participate in the community were limited by institutional policies ranging from eliminated conference support to reduced support for professional development. Scholars argue for engagement with administrators "to educate administrators about the disciplinary values and pedagogical excellence we espouse" (Griffiths and Jensen 316). Further, as Jeff Andelora ("Teacher/Scholar/Activist"; "The Teacher/Scholar"; "Forging a National Identity") and Patrick Sullivan ("My English 93 Class"; "The Two-Year College"; *Economic Inequality*) make clear in their conception of the

teacher-scholar-activist identity, the developmental educator community of practice must find ways to engage in public-facing activism; we must have our "house" in order to provide a cogent response to this national moment.

Another issue worth examining is graduate program support. It is necessary to mentor and recruit new members of a community of practice (Lave and Wenger), and this is especially true in developmental education and Basic Writing where so few new members enter the community with formal training in postsecondary student transitions and support. Programs such as the one Gleason describes in "Forming Adult Educators: The CCNY MA in Language and Literacy," which are transdisciplinary and aimed at preparing future professionals rather than replicating old models, are of vital importance. Moreover, we can look to two-year college writing studies which has long looked at how graduate preparation is enacted in the profession and what effect that has. The Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) has a series of guidelines which demonstrate the evolution of two-year college writing studies identity (TYCA 2004, 2011), community of practice, and engagement with graduate education. The recent 2015 guidelines (Calhoon-Dillahunt et al.; Jensen and Toth) were accompanied by articles and symposia which explicitly tied graduate educators' responsibilities to helping to foster a resilient profession (Griffiths and Jensen; Suh and Jensen; Jensen and Toth; Toth and Jensen).

This pilot study points to developmental educators having a shared common goal, but not a complete and shared sense of professional identity or systems or schemes in place to create and maintain resilience. These findings signal the field's needs for additional research on how to strengthen a sense of professional identity within a transdisciplinary community of practice and establish resilience for practitioners and the field. We suggest that, with a carefully targeted sample of developmental educators who identify as engaging in and benefiting from their community of practice, future case study research could examine how practitioners connect to each other across disciplinary and institutional silos to establish forms of resilience and ultimately to support students. Most importantly, there is a need to draw from developmental educators as research collaborators in order to answer the questions emerging from this preliminary research about developmental educators. Engaging practitioners is essential to reclaiming the field by engaging in scholarship and public-facing activism, thus contributing to the national conversation by leading discussion on reform by us, for us, with us.

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"My ACT Score Did Not Let Me Take AP English as Dual Credit": A Survey on High School Experiences of Basic Writers

Kailyn Shartel Hall

ABSTRACT: At a four-year public comprehensive university in 2017, a mandated attempt to implement a corequisite model for Basic Writing education challenged assumptions about the types of students enrolled in the existing program. Students, who by institutional placement measures (ACT scores) would be placed in First-Year Writing, were voluntarily enrolling in Basic Writing courses despite administrative assumptions that they did not need the course. Additionally, I found that students who took AP English and Dual-Credit in high school were also enrolled in Basic Writing. Findings from three years of survey data from students (enrolled in both prerequisite courses and corequisite courses) and institutional data indicate programs need to revise curriculum and placement practices to meet the needs of the students enrolled, rather than the needs of the hypothetical deficient writers institutions presume enroll.

KEYWORDS: ACT; AP English; Basic Writing; basic writers; corequisite; placement

Much of the data on corequisite programs for Basic Writing is based in work at two-year institutions, but state legislators and university administrators often appear to operate under a one-size-fits-all mentality with regard to developmental education, and much of the field's conversation on placement revolves around the skills and needs of students in the First-Year Writing (FYW) course. Understandably, many programs have shifted focus to align with what administrators ask for, often to preserve and maintain what they can, but this can result in flattening local concerns and student voices in favor of applying broader solutions that may or may not even apply in a program's context. My work takes a localized look at the experiences of students in a Basic Writing program at a four-year public university, during

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the early stages of implementing a corequisite model for Basic Writing. I experienced firsthand how the differences in the student population change the ways that students approach and interact with a corequisite writing course. It is no secret that the implementation of these courses is changing the landscape of Basic Writing, eliminating developmental education altogether in some cases. With Basic Writing courses gone, students who may wish for additional support in their writing lose that opportunity. Legislators and university administrators wouldn't know that, because they haven't asked the students themselves. If they had, they would see that many of their so-called cost-effective measures have hindered students' preparation for college-level writing.

As changes were implemented by my department's administrators, I wanted to understand more about the students in our Basic Writing courses, so I decided to ask the students about their experiences directly through a survey. In the prerequisite course, students take Basic Writing before they are eligible to enroll in First-Year Writing. The new corequisite model would shorten this process and make it more intensive: students would take the two courses concurrently, resulting in six credit hours of English in one semester. The program and I needed information on how this change was being received.

When I set out, I initially had a few main questions for the students: Why did they choose the corequisite? What experiences with writing were they bringing to the classroom? Did they see a benefit in taking the corequisite over the prerequisite? I originally hoped that this data set would provide our program with information on the effectiveness of the corequisite compared to our existing prerequisite course. However, as the project progressed, from the initial survey in Fall 2017 to the most recent in Fall 2019, the insight from the students led to the survey itself evolving alongside my understanding of what the students wanted (and needed) from a Basic Writing course. Perhaps most striking was that I found our program had students enrolled in Basic Writing who had taken advanced English courses in high school, such as AP or another Honors designation, but had lower placement scores, which then forced them into Basic Writing. Others had high placement scores and took the class voluntarily. These discoveries changed the tenor of conversations we had as a Basic Writing program. Our program's goals shifted immediately from understanding how to structure the corequisite best for administration purposes to getting a better understanding of the students enrolled in *both* versions of the course so we could make necessary changes to placement procedures.

This project has also encouraged reflection within the program about how, potentially, to revise the Basic Writing curriculum to better support the students we have in the classroom rather than the theoretical underperforming students we presumed we had. With a more nuanced understanding of why students are voluntarily taking support classes that some administrators, legislators, and teachers deem unwanted and unnecessary, we can revise curriculum for those courses to better meet the needs of the students present. Administrators and educators making decisions about the future of Basic Writing programs should not make assumptions about students' need for the course based on test scores and high school transcripts alone. Our field lacks data, specifically, on the high school writing experiences of students who enroll in Basic Writing, and much First-Year Writing research works on the underlying assumption that students who take Honors or AP courses in high school won't need Basic Writing. This study begins to address that gap in our research on the previous writing experiences of our students and the assumptions about who needs or wants a Basic Writing course.

In 2018, Hope Parisi encouraged Basic Writing scholars to "refocus our founding question to '*Who* are you *here*?' and '*Who* is Basic Writing *for*?'" (122). While she highlighted these questions then, it is clear she was echoing a sentiment and concern prevalent in the field, because those questions existed at the heart of my survey in Fall 2017. My work provides some initial possible answers, and additional questions, to extend Parisi's call to our field. Basic writing instructors and administrators are pulled in many different directions given the current landscape and changes at hand. Many outside actors are trying to push narratives about the type of preparation our students need and how they should get it, but the students' voices are missing from those conversations. To better understand the needs of our basic writers and develop courses that meet those needs, we have to actually ask our basic writers. My survey began with that key goal. I present some initial program context surrounding the implementation of a corequisite pilot that informs the circumstances that prompted my survey, and my results emphasize placement into the Basic Writing courses and the previous high school experiences these students reported. What my results indicate is that our students' experiences need to factor into our programmatic decision-making process more as the field evolves.

BASIC WRITING AT MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY

During Spring of 2017, Missouri State University became involved in initiatives proposed and promoted by the national non-profit organization Complete College America (CCA). CCA states that its mission is "[l]everaging our Alliance to eliminate achievement gaps by providing equity of opportunity for all students to complete college degrees and credentials of purpose and value" ("About"). CCA presents many initiatives that are intended to aid in student success in higher education. Missouri House Bill 1042, resulting from Complete College America data and lobbying, called for Missouri institutions to implement what they defined as "best practices of remedial education" (*Missouri House Bill 1042,* 3). A pilot corequisite course was recommended by administration outside the English Department at Missouri State University to meet this legislative requirement.

In November 2016, department administration informed the Basic Writing coordinator that a pilot would take place the following spring. The initial pilot (one section) of the corequisite in Spring 2017 provided some initial data on issues that would need to be addressed if the institution wanted to move forward with plans for 100% scaling, that is, converting all offered sections of ENG 100 into corequisite sections. The program proceeded with 50% scaling for Fall 2017 (four prerequisite sections offered and four corequisite sections).

Even in prerequisite format, the Basic Writing program at Missouri State University is small, offering only 7-8 sections each fall semester, capped at 20 students each. For comparison, the First-Year Writing program offers approximately 40 sections each fall semester, capped between 20 and 22 students, with 1-2 sections set aside for international students. Additionally, the majority of Basic Writing and First-Year Writing courses are taught by MA-level graduate students in the English department and some per-course faculty. For the sake of brevity, all mentions of ENG 100 refer to the institution's Basic Writing course and mentions of ENG 110 refer to the First-Year Writing course. Distinctions between prerequisite and corequisite Basic Writing sections will be made as needed.

Basic Writing and First-Year Writing Placement Measures

Since 2005, Missouri State University has used the ACT English sub-score for placement in writing courses, and Missouri State University does not require the ACT Writing exam or the SAT equivalent. The institution overall does not have a minimum required ACT score for admission, and

admission eligibility is determined by a scale that considers ACT (or SAT) score alongside class rank percentile and GPA ("Admission Requirements and Deadlines"). Prior to 2005, the English department used a placement essay for ENG 110 that was proctored during the summer registration events for incoming students. However, the choice was made to use ACT scores when both the department could no longer afford to pay readers for the essays and few qualified readers were available. Without the resources to continue a writing-based placement process prior to the start of the semester, the more cost-effective measure became the only viable option available to the program.

Students with ACT English subscores of 18 or higher (or equivalent scores on other standardized exams) usually enroll in the First-Year Writing course. Students with scores lower than an 18 subscore are required by the university to take Basic Writing before proceeding. However, any student may voluntarily enroll in ENG 100 if they desire. Sometimes, due to miscommunications with advisers, students enroll in ENG 100 when they intend to take ENG 110. As a result, the Basic Writing coordinator instituted a second check, so to speak, at the start of each semester to ensure more accurate placement . At the start of each semester, ENG 100 instructors review placement scores (ACT or otherwise) of students who have enrolled in their courses. Any students who have placement scores that would allow them to enroll directly into ENG 110 are approached by their instructor to verify their choice to enroll in ENG 100. This verification happens during the first week of classes so that any students who wish to change classes are able to do so. This process is as close to multiple measures as the program could achieve with limited resources and institutional support. This process was initiated by the Basic Writing program due to lack of influence in campus-wide in advising practices. Often, on our campus, students were placed into courses based less on their *need* for additional writing support than on how well it fit into their schedule and met other graduation requirements. Ongoing research from my study indicates this does play a factor in student choice of corequisite over prerequisite Basic Writing courses, but it is not the only factor.

I must also note here that the placement process for international students differs from that of domestic students. Before most international students reach the First-Year Writing course, they often are enrolled into English Language courses outside the English department, and that placement is based on TOEFL scores. Upon completion of their English Language courses, most are advised on which possible course to take. Advisers offer ENG 100, ENG 110, and international-student-designated sections of ENG

110. However, some students only attend the institution for a single semester, and those students are most commonly advised based on their TOEFL scores.

Students who have completed Dual Credit coursework in English in high school have multiple options. Many high schools in Missouri have Dual Credit options through Missouri State University, and students who complete those courses with passing grades, pay the requisite fees, and meet the eligibility requirements receive credit through the institution that then exempts them from ENG 110 ("Am I Eligible"; "Participating High Schools"). The ACT English subscore of 18 is also used to determine eligibility for enrollment in Dual Credit courses offered by the institution. Students who have completed Dual Credit through other institutions (either in or out-of-state) are allowed to transfer that credit in from the offering institution. If the course is deemed equivalent to ENG 110 by administration, credit is granted on the student's transcript and they are exempt from taking ENG 110. Students who receive a minimum score of 4 on the English Language and Composition or the English Literature and Composition Advanced Placement (AP) exam receive credit for ENG 110.

The Corequisite at Missouri State University

Unlike corequisites based on the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) model, the Missouri State University corequisite model did not intentionally populate the course with a designated percentage of students eligible for First-Year Writing (Adams et al. 57). In form, the corequisite model resembles David Schwalm and John Ramage's *Jumbo* course model at Arizona State University (Glau 33). The institution would not allow a new course number designation without a full curricular proposal, so this necessitated back-to-back scheduling of linked sections, creating an extended six-credit hour course. All students enrolled were enrolled concurrently in a section of the Basic Writing course, ENG 100, and a section of the First-Year Writing course, ENG 110. The linked sections were taught by the same instructor. Additionally, articulation agreements for transfer credit in place with other institutions made administrators (within and outside the department) wary of making the course a single five or six-credit hour class officially, but in practice, that is what the course most resembles.

ENG 100 is credit-bearing for financial aid purposes only. The credits do not count toward graduation. The ENG 100 course is graded Pass/No Pass and has no effect on a student's GPA. ENG 110 is fully credit-bearing, and it counts toward graduation and is a general education requirement. It

is graded on a standardized letter scale, A-F. Because the institution did not allow a separate course designation for the corequisite model, the students enrolled received two grades, one Pass/No Pass and one letter grade.

Placement in the corequisite model was not restricted. The same students who could enroll in the prerequisite model could enroll in the corequisite. In the initial Spring 2017 pilot, 11 of 19 students enrolled in the corequisite section had ACT scores that would have placed them in First-Year Writing (Weaver). The ACT English exam does not require students to compose any writing of their own. Potentially, students with scores that would place them in ENG 110 might still feel they require additional assistance in production of writing. When students have only had to complete tests like the ACT or short answer essays in high school to prove they are proficient in writing, it skews the perception of what college-level writing looks like. Without a writing sample in the placement process, these disparate perceptions of even what writing is, let alone perceptions of preparation for college writing, becomes the first issue the Basic Writing instructor must address before they can proceed further.

This data set, the limitations of institutional placement measures, and the understanding that the pilot was a limited sample of information, led to additional questions about which students were drawn to the course and their reasons for choosing to enroll in a Basic Writing course. The writing program moved to increase the number of corequisite sections offered, even though we still knew little about how this corequisite would work on a larger scale. To address this lack of information, I designed a survey to collect information from the students on their previous writing experience and on their perceptions of the corequisite and prerequisite versions of the course. While I had underlying interests in their perceptions of this new course, I knew that we had little information about our students collected by the program, so understanding their previous experiences with writing became a priority in my survey design and data collection.

PLACEMENT AND HIGH SCHOOL COURSE CREDIT

Writing program administrators and Basic Writing educators at-large advocate for placement that involves multiple measures in order to ensure that students are placed into a writing course that best meets their needs (Hansen, Andelora et al. 185). Much of the literature on placement is framed specifically as placing students "into" First-Year Writing courses rather than emphasizing the placement into a Basic Writing course. Often

the conversation is determined by the outcomes of the First-Year Writing course. If students are not prepared in some way for that level of writing, they are placed in Basic Writing.

Daniel J. Royer and Roger Gilles identify the problem with this implicit mentality toward placement; it "denies student agency" in the process and can have ramifications for the formation of their scholarly identity ("Basic Writing"). But Basic Writing educators understand this. We have all had students in our classes who have confessed to being told they were a "bad" writer, and we see them internalize that label. Though we implement multiple placement measures and work in our classrooms to alleviate this pressure to help them succeed, the process that put them in our class at all can be part of the problem. Changes in the field of Basic Writing, often due to legislative and institutional pressures, have resulted in changes to placement measures that remove the student and their experiences from the conversation. Depletion of program resources, like removing funding for writing sample readers, has long lasting effects that change the classroom environment more than administrators realize. Test scores, high school GPA, and other measures that do not directly assess student writing are often used for the sake of expediency and as cost-saving measures (if the Basic Writing program is allowed to continue at all). Unfortunately, this means we know less about the writing experiences of the students placed into our Basic Writing classrooms. Because we have neglected to ask these questions of our students, we have also neglected to address how their own perceptions of their writing ability changes the way they might engage with a Basic Writing course of any model.

As a field, we have not studied in detail the experiences basic writing students bring from high school. Some work from scholars of writing transfer is applicable here, notably that of Mary Jo Reiff and Anis Bawarshi. Their work studies the previous writing contexts that students have experienced in high school with regard to how that transfers to a college or university First-Year Writing environment (Reiff and Bawarshi). Their study is an example of D.N. Perkins and Gavriel Salomon's "backward reaching" transfer, as it examines how previous experiences can create skills to be applied in a current context (Perkins and Salomon 26). However, the majority of work on writing transfer that has been done on student experiences in high school aligns more with Perkins and Salomon's "forward-reaching" transfer, in that it focuses on FYW students rather than basic writing students, or on FYW students' ability to transfer skills into other college-related or professional contexts (Perkins and Salomon 26; Moore). For example, key questions center on

how credit is granted for AP courses to bypass FYW altogether, the effect of dual-enrollment FYW courses, and how students with different experiences proceed in upper-level writing courses (Hansen, Jackson et al.; Hansen and Farris). Jessie L. Moore and Chris M. Anson emphasize that transfer takes place "across critical transitions" and the role that Basic Writing plays in that transition for many students is overlooked because the emphasis places FYW at the center (3).

My research, with this concern in mind, circles to the 2006 work of Kristine Hansen, Jennifer Gonzalez, Gary L. Hatch, Suzanne Reeve, Richard R. Sudweeks, Patricia Esplin, and William S. Bradshaw who ask, even in their title, whether "Advanced Placement English and First-Year College Composition [are] Equivalent" (461). While they found that students who took AP and FYW "performed significantly better than those who had only AP English or only FYW," the work assumes that students who take AP English will place into FYW courses (461). My work indicates, however, that there is a student population who have taken AP English and place into Basic Writing instead. This calls into question many of the field's assumptions about the role of AP courses and the preparation they provide for college-level work. As a field, we've internalized that if a student takes an AP course, they're high-achieving and well prepared for college in some way. Our students are telling us that's not always the case though. By placing them into courses without having a conversation about their goals and comfort with writing, let alone the new contexts of college-writing, we're doing them a disservice.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

The primary method for data collection in this study was IRB-approved surveys that were conducted in the Basic Writing (prerequisite and corequisite) classrooms in Fall 2017, Fall 2018, and Fall 2019.[1] Fall 2017 functioned as a pilot of the survey, and modifications were made to improve the survey instrument for Fall 2018 and Fall 2019 (see Appendix A). Prerequisite and corequisite sections received different surveys to account for different potential contexts for their course placement choice (Survey Question #1 in Appendix A).[2] All other questions were given to both prerequisite and corequisite sections. In the classroom setting, with permission from the instructors (who would then step out of the room), participating students were given ten to fifteen minutes to complete a survey at the start of a class session that included multiple-choice and open-ended response questions.

Student participation was voluntary, and instructors were not informed which students took part.

Data from the surveys were disassociated from student identity by assigning a code to each student respondent in order to track the completed surveys. All students in a given section of a course were assigned a letter group (A-H for Fall 2017, I-O for Fall 2018, and P-U for Fall 2019). Each individual was given a randomly assigned number based on the total number of participants in a section. Table 1 indicates how the total respondents for each survey year and how the participants were spread across prerequisite sections and corequisite sections.

Table 1. Total Unique Survey Respondents in 2017, 2018, 2019 and Combined

	Respondents	Enrolled	Response Rate
2017			
Prerequisite Sections	58	77	75%
Corequisite Sections	59	73	81%
Total	117	150	78%
2018			
Prerequisite Sections	51	79	65%
Corequisite Sections	38	56	68%
Total	89	135	66%
2019			
Prerequisite Sections	51	74	69%
Corequisite Sections	20	38	53%
Total	71	112	63%
2017, 2018, 2019 Combined			
Prerequisite Sections	160	230	70%
Corequisite Sections	117	167	70%
Total All Years	277	397	70%

Additionally, some data in findings was collected through institutional sources, as allowed by the IRB in place. After the drop period for the university, institutional data were collected about students enrolled in ENG 100 during Fall 2017, Fall 2018, and Fall 2019. While it was known to program administrators that occasionally students with higher test scores would choose to remain in ENG 100, I did not believe this would transfer to sections

of the corequisite model, and I did not have clarity for possible reasons why these students would choose to take ENG 100 when they were eligible for the first-year course. This process also allowed me to analyze institutional student placement scores alongside data on student perceptions of their placement as well as their perceived need for the course at all.

To further understand this potential desire for assistance with writing, and under the assumption that students' preconceptions about writing would have an impact on their perceptions of the Basic Writing course, questions on the survey in all years asked what kind of writing classes students had taken in high school. On the Fall 2017 pilot survey, students were given the choice of Honors, Standard, or AP (Advanced Placement) courses. In Fall 2017, initial analysis of responses from students indicated I had neglected to include "Dual Credit" as a choice for previous high school experience. The question was modified for the Fall 2018 and Fall 2019 data collection to include a "Dual Credit" option, as well as an indicator for students who did not attend high school in the United States.

Many students selected more than one response to multiple-choice questions, so results reflect percentage of the total number of students rather than total selections. This variation also indicated that students had the potential to pursue different tracks in English in high school rather than being constrained to one path based upon performance in earlier years of schooling. However, it may also indicate different enrollment standards for Honors and AP courses at various schools.

FINDINGS

Placement: Required or Not?

Figure 1 shows the percentage of students enrolled in sections of ENG 100 who were eligible to take ENG 110 based on their ACT scores. In Fall 2017, 29% of students enrolled in corequisite sections of ENG 100 were not required to take it based on test scores reported to the institution. In the prerequisite sections, 14% of students enrolled were similarly eligible to take ENG 110. In Fall 2018, even with much lower enrollment, 16% of students in the corequisite were not required to take ENG 100 and could have taken ENG 110 as a single course rather than our six-hour model. Additionally, 4% of students in prerequisite sections were not required to take ENG 100. In 2019, 13% of corequisite students and 9% of prerequisite students were eligible for ENG 110 instead of ENG 100.
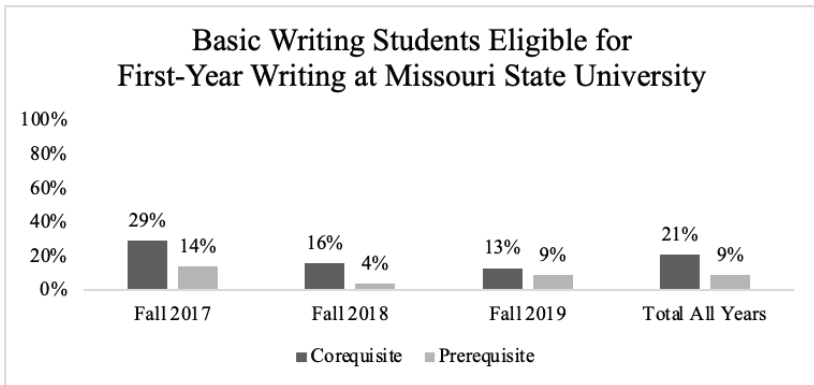
Figure 1. Basic Writing Students Eligible for FYW at Missouri State University

Additional data to ascertain *why* students are choosing to take a Basic Writing course when they are eligible to take the first-year course were collected during this study, and analysis of their responses is ongoing. The initial numbers show that among the students who make this choice, more are likely to be enrolled in a corequisite course than the prerequisite model, and it seems that desire to enroll may be connected to the students' perceptions of their writing ability or desire to complete a general education requirement more quickly. Across all three years of the survey, 21% of corequisite students were not required to take Basic Writing compared to 9% of prerequisite students. However, this can possibly be attributed to the marketing for the corequisite at Missouri State University and placement measures used for ENG 110.

While standardized test scores are understood to be a less effective method for placement, more work is required to develop effective ways to place students into corequisite and other Basic Writing courses in ways that are feasible for programs locally. Directed Self-Placement is one possible solution that also attends to input from students on their experiences and needs in the classroom (Royer and Gilles, "Directed Self-Placement"). Becky L. Caouette's "Directed Self-Placement, Corequisite Models, and Curricular Choice" indicates additional support for the student-centered benefits of combining corequisite course offerings and Directed Self-Placement: it creates "an opportunity for sincere inquiry" with our students about their educational needs with relation to our programs, enabling us to better our courses program-wide (64). The results from this survey also led to more detailed conversations with campus academic advisers about the purposes of ENG 100 and ENG 110 in order to better advising practices. The Basic

Writing coordinator also worked with our Summer Advising administrators during Summer 2018 to ensure that the correct information about course models was being given to incoming students. Due to the impact of this study and changes in institutional policies, the program has more recently (as of 2020-2021) adopted Directed Self-Placement for incoming students without test scores.[3]

Table 2. 2018 and 2019 Respondents' High School English Courses

2018	Honors	Standard	AP	Dual-Credit	International	Other
Prerequisite n=51	20%	53%	16%	16%	10%	6%
Corequisite n=38	13%	82%	8%	0%	2 (5%)	3%
Total n=89	17%	65%	12%	9%	7 (8%)	4%
2019	Honors	Standard	AP	Dual-Credit	International	Other
Prerequisite n=51	8%	80%	8%	6%	4%	0%
Corequisite n=20	20%	70%	5%	10%	0%	0%
Total n=71	11%	77%	7%	7%	3%	0%

High School English Experiences

Key to Basic Writing education is meeting students where they are and providing them with what they need to succeed. Understanding a student's previous writing and schooling experiences is necessary to adapt our classrooms. Allowing students a choice of which writing course will best meet their needs is the first step, and we need to acknowledge that our definition of prepared may not align with the students' perception of their ability. Initial analysis of the Fall 2017 survey data indicated that students enrolled in both Basic Writing course models had taken advanced English courses in high school. In 2018 and 2019, students responded similarly, and their selections

are shown in Table 2. The majority took what they identified as Standard courses in high school. In Fall 2018, 17% indicated they had been enrolled in Honors level courses, and 12% responded they had taken AP courses in English. Additionally, 9% indicated they had taken a class perceived as Dual Credit and 8% indicated status as international students. A few students (4%) chose "Other", and provided responses such as "College Prep Courses," "Pre-AP English," and "Literature as Film." In 2019, these numbers decreased, on average, but still had students selecting those options.

As shown in Table 2, there continues to be some variation between corequisite sections and prerequisite sections. In 2018, more corequisite students indicated taking Standard courses (82% against 53% in the prerequisite), and more prerequisite students indicated enrollment in Honors courses (20% against 13% in the corequisite). In both 2018 and 2019, more prerequisite students indicated previous enrollment in AP courses, nearly double that of corequisite students in 2018 especially (16% versus 8%). Additionally, more international students (of the surveyed population) were present in prerequisite sections than in the corequisite. In 2019, these breakdowns flipped. More prerequisite students indicated taking Standard courses (80% against 70% in the corequisite) and more corequisite students indicated taking Honors courses (20% against 8% in the prerequisite). In 2019, more corequisite students indicated previous enrollment in a course designated as Dual Credit. The reasons for this shift are unclear but may be attributed to better advising practices and more detailed information about the differences between the prerequisite and corequisite models.

The data collected did not indicate a correlation between students who identified taking AP courses in high school and those who were not required to take the course. In the initial 2017 data collection, only 2 of 14 (1 prerequisite and 1 corequisite) students who indicated they took AP had ACT English subscores that would have placed them in First-Year Writing. In 2018, only 1 of 11 (a prerequisite student) claimed to have taken AP in high school and had an ACT score eligible for ENG 110 placement. In 2019, 2 of 5 (1 prerequisite and 1 corequisite) who took AP were eligible for ENG 110 placement. Students who take AP courses in high school are eligible for college credit, depending on their scores on the associated AP exam. At Missouri State University, students who score a 4 or higher on the AP Language and Composition or AP Literature and Composition exam are eligible to receive credit for ENG 110 regardless of their ACT score.

Follow up questions on the survey asked for specifics on which AP courses and tests the students had taken. While results showed a mix of

students who had taken AP Language & Composition, AP Literature & Composition, and both courses, the majority of these students indicated they did not take the accompanying AP exam. Some who took Dual Credit courses did not receive transfer credit because they did not pay for the course, or in some cases did not pass the course. While fewer students indicated having taken Dual Credit courses than AP, the most striking response from the surveys was that while the students passed the Dual Credit course at their high school, the university would not transfer credit because of a low ACT score.

Although there are documented issues with only using ACT scores for placement in college-level courses, the disparity between students who claimed to have taken AP courses and ACT scores that place students in Basic Writing was unexpected. Of the 25 students who indicated they took AP English courses in high school, only 3 had ACT scores that would have placed them in the First-Year Writing course. This raises concerns about curriculum structure at the secondary level and placement measures at the post-secondary level. This conflict in perceptions of student achievement lends credence to the need for multiple measures for placement, especially those with an emphasis on evaluating student writing. It also potentially highlights a conflict in post-secondary assumptions *about* secondary curricula, as well as the reverse. The AP exam does require student writing and could serve as a more reliable measure of placement; however, my data indicated (even in small scale) that some students taking the course do not take the exam.

Additional research is needed to verify why students taking AP courses are not also taking the accompanying exams. Economic hardship is likely a factor, but more research is required. Some schools cover the cost of the exam ($94 per exam as of this writing), while others put test costs on the students and their families. So, potentially, a student might take an AP course but may not have the resources to pay for the test in order to reap the benefits associated with it. As of this writing, the College Board does offer fee reductions of $32 per exam for students with financial need, and students are encouraged to speak with counselors about other offers and regulations in their state ("Exam Fees"; "AP Exam Fee Reductions") However, the reduction still brings the cost of the test to $62, for just one exam. The argument can be (and has been) made that this cost is a benefit to students compared to paying for course credit once they begin college, but this argument presumes students have resources and institutional knowledge of the process, and therefore suggests additional implications for first-generation students.

Additionally, the data collected revealed that 7% of the survey population, 15 students (7 in 2017 and 8 in 2018), indicated they had been enrolled

in a writing course labeled as Dual Credit in high school. None of the 15 students had ACT scores that would have placed them into ENG 110. The survey included questions about students' experiences in AP and Dual Credit courses, but response was limited (only 43 students total across all three years). Additional research on these questions is necessary, but of that small sample, some students indicated they took the AP course but did not pay to take the exam, and similarly some students took a Dual Credit designated course but did not pay for the credit hours. Additionally, some indicated they weren't even sure if they passed the course (which would result in no credit transferring). This is possibly due to disparities between state requirements for high school graduation and college transfer credit requirements, but also could be the result of parental pressure to enroll in high school courses with college prestige before the student is prepared for them.

Even with those possibilities in mind, a student not knowing if they passed a high school class they took before coming to college was something I wanted to better understand. I knew I needed more information on the high school context, because this response was particularly shocking and troubling, so I spoke with a local high school English Language Arts instructor, Stephanie M. Hasty. Hasty has taught at Lebanon High School for twenty-two years. In her tenure, she has taught AP, standard-level, and elective English courses. While some districts may have programs that pay for students to take the AP exam, this is not standard practice, and Hasty spoke of many students taking AP courses with no intention of taking the exam. Over the course of our conversation, it also became clear that, for some students, the AP and Dual Credit designations for the classes exist in name only. Placement measures do not exist, and all students can enroll. Some enroll when electives do not count toward their English graduation requirements (Hasty). While this is only a single high school, it clarifies some of the data collected in the survey, and these types of practices at the secondary level need more research. It appears that in efforts to make high schools more prestigious, some schools offer AP and Dual Credit courses, but perhaps without the necessary resources to provide the level of preparation the titles imply.

While initially I presumed that further understanding the classes the students took in high school would lend clarity to the students' decisions regarding placement in the Basic Writing course, it instead raised more questions about secondary English education curriculum and placement practices overall. Often students in Basic Writing courses are perceived by many as lacking some specific skill or ability in writing. While much of the literature

in the field has shown this perception is not accurate, the assumption and stigma still exist among students, teachers, administrators, and legislators.

Further, it appears that students are aware of this perception and make enrollment choices in order to address these issues. The survey also asked students to identify their reasons for enrolling in the course, and analysis of that data is ongoing. Initial results do lean toward students desiring more preparation for college-level writing and an internalized view of their own preparation. As we continue our conversations in the field about *who* our basic writers are, we must continue to involve their voices when we make choices about practices as programs and in the classroom so we are meeting the students' real needs and not hypothesized ones based on old information.

CONCLUSIONS

The presence of students who took AP courses in high school in Basic Writing courses in college has future implications for both secondary and post-secondary writing education. It has long been assumed that AP courses are structured in ways to prepare high-achieving students for college-level work. Colleges and universities acknowledge this by granting college-level credit for those who achieve specific scores on the affiliated exams. Even with a small sample size, evidence of problems with this model emerge. While College Board requires that AP course syllabi follow specific guidelines and course goals, it is unclear how often these guidelines are followed after initial approval. Placement measures are also unclear, and they are not standardized across states or districts. For courses without an AP designation, the process is more locally controlled. In Missouri, individual school districts determine what an "Honors" class is and then the description is approved at the state level when curriculum is submitted (Hasty). There is no formal process to ensure that the curriculum submitted is the one followed in the classroom.

Students, those placed in Basic Writing and those eligible for the First-Year Writing course, have agency in the decision process, and that is evidenced by those students who chose to take Basic Writing despite eligibility for First-Year Writing. This indicates that multiple factors are involved in students' perception of their writing ability and having additional venues to mediate that in higher education is a necessity. My initial questions sought to understand if the corequisite was an effective model for the institution's Basic Writing program. While the data collected highlighted other issues, it does also appear that a corequisite can present a possible solution for students wishing to have additional writing assistance while still earning credit for

the first-year course. It also serves as further evidence that students must be well-informed and involved in the placement process, and a more holistic view of a student's previous experiences is necessary in that process. Basic Writing scholars are studying the effectiveness of corequisites in multiple contexts, due to changes in the way our field is perceived by those outside it. It's important here that in that research, we give due attention to the students at our institutions, their experiences with writing, and their needs locally, and that we advocate for institutional changes that will serve them best. This attention to student needs often takes place at the classroom level with individual instructors, and that mentality needs to carry through into programmatic decisions as well. So many of the arguments from legislators are couched in doing what's best for the students. As instructors and program coordinators, we need to engage with students to keep our programs in line with their real needs. My data are localized, but it tells one story that many legislators would be shocked to hear: students *want* a Basic Writing class. If we're focusing on giving students what they need, it's *not* removing Basic Writing courses. In fact, a further benefit to students would be increasing the modalities of Basic Writing that we offer, whether through corequisites or other course models yet undefined. Students deserve a choice in their writing course and not one dictated by a lack of options.

The issues my survey highlighted were unanticipated but indicate a gap in our research and understanding of institutional processes that result in students arriving in our Basic Writing classrooms. As with any writing program, some of these concerns are localized, but my analysis indicates that previous assumptions about the types of students who take Basic Writing courses are steeped in assumptions about lack of preparation for college-level work. My data show that, in fact, more students than anticipated are entering Basic Writing courses having taken advanced courses in English in high school. We need closer analysis of curriculum for upper-level English courses at the secondary level. We need more data on the structure of Dual Credit and AP courses and how credit for that work transfers (both in skill retention and in transcript form) to higher education with special attention to the effect on basic writing students. Understanding why and which students choose to enroll in Basic Writing courses, as well as their perceptions about their own writing abilities, will aid in the development of curriculum for future pilots of the corequisite as well as restructuring of the prerequisite courses.

NOTES

1. IRB Protocol Number IRB-FY2018-121 at Missouri State University.
2. Survey documents provided to students reflected their enrollment. Students were not responsible for choosing to answer the question that matched their enrollment (prerequisite or corequisite). However, for the sake of space in this publication, the survey document appended shows both versions of Question #1 in a single document with a note indicating on which survey version it appeared. Additionally, some short answer spaces on the survey have been truncated from their original form to aid in reproduction here. Students were given ample room to write answers to open-ended questions.
3. This is one example of the ways that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the landscape of Basic Writing at our institutions. Due to the initial issues with ACT proctoring in Spring 2020, the university removed all ACT requirements for the incoming first-year class. This resulted in the program moving to implement directed self-placement as an emergency fix to the issue of having no placement measure.

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APPENDIX A: 2018-2019 STUDENT SURVEY

Student Name: _____

ENG 100 Section/Instructor:_____

(Author Note: Answer choices for **PREREQUISITE** SECTIONS SURVEY)
1. Why did you take this class? Please select all that apply.

    ____ I was encouraged by a SOAR representative to take this class.
    ____ I did not want to take both ENG 100 and ENG 110 at the same time.
    ____ I wanted to work on my writing skills before taking ENG 110.
    ____ I was encouraged by my parents to take this class.
    ____ The course was required.
    ____ It fit into my class schedule.
    ____ I was encouraged by my advisor and/or a faculty member to take this class.
    ____ Other:_____

(Author Note: Answer Choices for **COREQUISITE** SECTIONS SURVEY)
1. Why did you take this class? Please select all that apply.
    ____ I was encouraged by a SOAR representative to take this class.
    ____ I desired additional assistance when taking ENG 110.
    ____ I wanted to complete my general education Writing I requirement in one semester at MSU
    ____ I did not pass ENG 100 or ENG 110.
    ____ I was encouraged by my parents to take this class.
    ____ It fit into my class schedule.
    ____ I was encouraged by my advisor and/or a faculty member to take this class.
    ____ Other: _____

2. Which English classes did you take in high school?

    ___ A. Honors Courses

    ___ B. Standard Courses

    ___ C. AP (Advanced Placement) Courses

    ___ D. Dual Credit Courses (or equivalent of ENG 110)

    ___ E. Did not attend High School in United States

    ___ F. Other _____

- If you answered C: AP (Advanced Placement) Courses for Question #2, please answer 2a, 2b, and 2c. If not, proceed to Question 3.
- If you answered D: Dual Credit Courses for Question #2, please answer 2d. If not, proceed to Question 3.

2a. If you took AP English, which AP Course did you take? Select all that apply.

    ___ AP Language and Composition

    ___ AP Literature and Composition

    ___ Both AP Language and Composition and AP Literature and Composition

2b. If you took AP English, did you take the exam?

    ___ Yes, I took the AP Language and Composition Exam.

    ___ Yes, I took the AP Literature and Composition Exam.

    ___ Yes, I took both the AP Language and Composition Exam and the AP Literature and Composition Exam.

    ___ No, I did not take an AP English Exam.

2c. If you took an AP English exam (as noted in question 2b) what was your score? _____

2d. If you took a Dual Credit English course, please indicate any that apply:

    ___ Yes, I passed the ENG 110 Dual Credit course and the credit transferred to MSU.

    ___ Yes, I passed the ENG 110 Dual Credit course, but the cost of the course was not covered.

    ___ Yes, I passed the ENG 110 Dual Credit course, but test scores placed me in this course.

    ___ No, I did not pass the ENG 110 Dual Credit course.

    ___ I am unsure if I passed the ENG 110 Dual Credit course.

3. In what ways has your family influenced your decision to attend college?

4. Are you a first-generation college student? (i.e., the first person in your family to attend college or university)

    ____ Yes, I am a first-generation college student.

    ____ No, I am not a first-generation college student.

    ____ I am unsure if I am a first-generation college student.

5. Have you declared a major with the university, or are you undeclared?

6. Have you taken ENG 100 before?

    _____ Yes, I have taken ENG 100 before this semester.

    _____ No, I have not taken ENG 100 before this semester.

    6a. If you answered Yes to Question #6, at which institution did you take ENG 100 (or an equivalent)?

7. Do you feel like a part of the MSU Academic Community?

    ____ Yes, I feel like a part of the MSU Academic Community.

    ____ No, I do not feel like a part of the MSU Academic Community.

    ____ I am unsure if I am a part of the MSU Academic Community.

    7a. In a few short sentences, describe why you do or do not feel like a part of the MSU Academic Community. If you are unsure, please describe why.

8. What have previous teachers said about your writing?

9. Do you believe writing can improve with practice?   Yes   or   No

10. In what way has your family encouraged writing?

11. What type of writing is your favorite?

12. How confident are you with academic writing?

13. In writing, what do you struggle most with?

14. In writing, what are your strengths?

15. What is your classification?

    ___ Freshman

    ___ Sophomore

    ___ Junior

    ___ Senior

    ___ Nontraditional

    ___ I am unsure of my classification

16. Are you a military veteran?   Yes   or   No

16a. If you answered YES to question #16, are you active duty?

        Yes   or   No

17. Do you believe that some people are naturally better writers?

Yes   or   No

18. What makes an effective piece of writing?

Basic Writing Reform as an Opportunity to Rethink First-Year Composition: New Evidence from an Accelerated Learning Program

Rachel Ihara

ABSTRACT: *This article argues that the national trend to replace developmental writing programs with mainstreaming and corequisite courses presents an important opportunity to reconsider writing goals and assessment practices for all students. This insight emerges in part from data collected over several semesters at one community college, which showed that mainstreamed students in an accelerated learning program often outperform non-developmental students when assessed by the same measure. These results raise questions about placement but also about prior assessment practices that had required developmental students to undergo more rigorous writing assessments than students deemed "prepared" for college-level writing. By offering a history of shifting assessment practices at one institution, this article aims to show how blurring the line between "developmental" and "regular" writers, as a result of recent mainstreaming efforts, can lead to a productive reevaluation of writing assessment for all students.*

KEYWORDS: *accelerated learning program; developmental writing; first-year composition; writing assessment; writing program administration; writing program assessment*

Defining "basic writers" and determining how best to serve students deemed "underprepared" for "college-level writing" have been fraught issues since the field's inception (Otte and Mlynarczyk); however, critiques of Basic Writing became more pronounced in the 1990s, when early proponents began to challenge the entire enterprise—both the mechanisms by which students were labeled as remedial or developmental and the practices that resulted from such classification (Shor; Bartholomae). At the heart of this debate is a tricky question: does providing students with additional time to acquire "college-level literacy skills" through required non-credit-bearing, remedial coursework help them to succeed in their future writing endeavors (Sternglass; Long; Attewell and Lavin)? Or, do prerequisite, zero-credit courses

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function as a barrier, particularly for Black and Hispanic students, with deleterious effects on motivation, persistence, and timely progress toward degree (Hodara and Jaggars; Mlynarczyk and Molloy; Poe, Nastal and Elliot; Nastal)? In recent years, institutions nation-wide have moved toward the latter position (sometimes with an eye to cost-cutting), dismantling or replacing remedial writing programs in favor of curricular models designed to move students more quickly through required composition courses, including studio courses, stretch models, and co-requisite courses (Adams et al.; Glau; Rigolino and Freel). While these reforms have largely been successful with regard to the students they were intended to serve, I would like to suggest that by unsettling the boundary between "remedial" and "regular" college writers, mainstreaming programs ultimately challenge us to rethink the goals of college writing writ large. To put it bluntly, if developmental writing no longer serves as a gatekeeper to full college access, does that mean First-Year Composition (FYC) ought to assume this function, adopting a premise of Basic Writing that students need these courses to succeed in college and/or to demonstrate writing competence? Or, do the results of these curricular experiments underscore equity issues that have troubled basic writing from the beginning, signaling a need to reevaluate our aims and purposes in all required writing courses?

For me, these questions emerged within a particular institutional context and are informed by data from our local mainstreaming program—an Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) in which students previously designated as "developmental" and required to take and pass at least one prerequisite writing class before entering FYC were given permission to enroll in FYC with additional instructional support. Over the past seven years that it has been in existence, this program has achieved the intended result of enabling more "basic writers" to take and pass FYC in order to move on more quickly. Its success could be used to argue that these kinds of programs are needed to provide greater access, in a responsible and supportive way, to students previously excluded from credit-bearing, required writing classes, results that replicate the success of ALP programs documented in a growing body of research (Adams, Gearheart, Miller and Roberts; Coleman; Jenkins et al.; Hern and Snell).

However, here I am more interested in some of the peculiar patterns that emerged as a result of collecting program data, patterns with implications for students beyond those directly enrolled in the ALP program. While most research on ALP, and on FYC, considers those courses and programs

in isolation, on our campus the structure of the ALP program, and the data that emerged, raised unanticipated questions about writing instruction that transcended these categories, calling into question the mechanisms by which students are determined to need additional support and pointing to a need to rethink the goals and purpose of FYC, for *all* students. Our findings, while local and specific, also point to a potential new source of investigation, as corequisite courses disrupt established divisions between "remedial" and "regular" writing courses.

To make this argument for the unsettling potential of corequisite courses, I first offer a local history of writing instruction on my home campus, an environment in which, historically, students' placement in "developmental" or in "regular" writing had a significant effect on students' experience of writing instruction and assessment, and on instructors' understanding of their writing needs. In brief, while the developmental sequence was characterized by a rigorous set of assessment measures designed to gauge students' preparedness for college-level work, there was no real effort to standardize assessment within the regular composition sequence—a situation that inspired a few instructors to develop a small collaborative portfolio assessment practice as a means of fostering greater instructional coherence and community. Having established this local context, I then describe our implementation of a small ALP program in the spring semester of 2013, a program that expanded and evolved but consistently met its goal of mainstreaming "developmental" students, many of whom passed FYC with the additional instructional support. At this point, I zoom out to consider the more surprising outcomes that emerged from our program data from the last five semesters, namely our findings that 1) ALP students tend to pass at higher rates than "regular" students in the same sections; and 2) non-ALP students in ALP sections, currently assessed via portfolio within faculty cohorts, consistently pass at lower rates than students in regular, non-ALP sections, sections in which the classroom instructor assigns grades independently. These outcomes, I argue, compel us to pause and take stock, to review the mechanisms used to classify students as "remedial" or needing supplementary support and to consider the effects of such classification systems on both teachers and students, but also to seriously rethink the goals and objectives of FYC.

Mainstreaming reforms, like the one I discuss here, thus mark a potential turning point, an opportunity to reassess college writing more broadly, given the insights gained in the process of blurring the boundaries between writers formerly classified as either "basic" or "prepared." As Sean Molloy,

Silvester Fonville, and Abdus Salam demonstrate in their discussion of Basic Writing's history at one institution, entrenched views about students' writing "needs" rooted in local "lore" may persist within an institutional ecosystem, impeding real change in how we think about how to best serve new college writers (15). Therefore, we need to resist the temptation to simply transplant ideas about "basic writers" into our new programmatic contexts, instead taking the best of what we have learned from decades of research on basic writing pedagogy, while being mindful of the social justice issues that have troubled the field from the beginning. Understanding the history of assessment within a given program may be the first step to creating a more equitable and socially just approach to writing instruction. As Banks et al. assert in their collaborative statement on social justice and writing assessment, "With attention to contextualization, histories of writing assessment bring to light empirical practices that are themselves value laden and reveal the need for socially just educative processes" (379). Thus, tracing the history of writing instruction in one setting and attending to the data on student performance gathered during a period of programmatic change, may serve as a catalyst to revise our understandings of what college writing courses can and should be.

A Tale of Two Writing Programs: A Local History

In 2008, when I began teaching at Kingsborough Community College (KCC), the community college where I currently help to administer the composition program, I entered a department that essentially had two writing programs in place: a non-credit-bearing developmental writing sequence and a credit-bearing composition sequence. Both programs were housed within the English Department, but these programs were managed by different administrators. Although some faculty taught exclusively in one program, for the most part developmental writing courses and composition courses were taught by the same part-time and full-time instructors, a large faculty pool composed of approximately 100 instructors, evenly divided between part-time and full-time faculty.

To provide some broader context, this community college is one of several within a city-wide, CUNY system of two-year, four-year, and comprehensive schools. In 2008, it served approximately 15,700 students, including 2,386 first-time freshmen. Of these students, 70% qualified for financial aid, 60% were from households earning less than $30,000 annually and approximately 52% of whom were foreign born ("KCC Fall 2008 at

a Glance"; "Household Income"). Many of these students were directed to remedial courses upon enrollment. According to institutional data, in 2008, over half of the entering first-semester students placed into a sequence of non-credit-bearing developmental courses as determined by their scores on the entrance reading and writing tests ("Pass Rate"). In 2008, 65.2% of incoming students failed the reading placement test and 47.9% failed the writing test, meaning that at least 65.2% of the incoming freshman class, or more than 1,556 students, were directed into a course in a multi-level developmental writing sequence.

These students who placed into developmental writing entered a program in which portfolio assessment, and other assessment measures, played a central role in determining progress through the program and into credit-bearing courses. The main courses in the developmental writing sequence included three levels of non-credit-bearing courses, with the lowest two levels meeting for six hours a week, and the highest level (the one just below the regular required writing course) meeting for four hours per week. Progress through these courses was determined by a student's overall performance in day-to-day classwork, performance on a cross-marked course portfolio, and, eventually, scores on the university-wide, timed placement exam. In order to be eligible to submit a portfolio, students needed to keep up with the regular coursework and meet attendance criteria. Then, at the end of the semester, students faced some version of portfolio assessment, which varied by course level but always involved cross-reading by faculty across sections of student portfolios that included some combination of the following: drafted essays with feedback culminating in final drafts; a department-created reading exam; a department-created, timed writing exam; and some self-reflection writing. Students who passed the portfolio assessment also needed to retake and pass the same 90-minute, university-wide, standardized writing test initially used for placement. Students who passed the portfolio assessment but failed the placement test were directed to other non-credit-bearing, developmental courses, which targeted reading or writing and were more explicitly geared to test prep.

In contrast, entering students who passed the reading and writing tests and placed into the first of a two-course required writing sequence found themselves in a composition program that was much more loosely structured, particularly when it came to assessment. There were lists of learning outcomes for both courses and instructors were offered a recommended curriculum. For instance, the first course in the freshman-year sequence suggested that instructors select course readings centered around a theme and

assign three text-based, thesis-driven essays, in multiple drafts. There was, for some time, a department-provided final exam prompt, a timed essay in which students advanced an argument based on two non-fiction texts on the same topic. However, when I began teaching this course in 2008, assessment of student work, including the "common" departmental exam, was entirely at the discretion of the individual instructors. There was no cross-marking of student writing and no other structure in place for fostering communication around goals and expectations for student writing.

This system of placing students on one of these two paths on the basis of a single timed test is clearly problematic from an equity standpoint, although it is hard to say which students were getting the best, or the worst, deal. The developmental students were afforded a demanding and comprehensive set of literacy experiences and assessments designed by teachers working collaboratively. They were held to high standards and compelled to prove that they could meet varied literacy expectations, with an emphasis on text-based, academic essay writing. Some students cycled repeatedly through these remedial courses or dropped out, but others met these various writing challenges and succeeded. The success of these students, the ones who passed out of developmental writing and moved on, led to a general sense that the rigor of the developmental writing sequence prepared them for subsequent writing courses and for college more generally, but this is difficult to prove. Perhaps the students who made it through the developmental sequence would have been fine in FYC without the prerequisite writing courses. Perhaps the students who failed developmental writing or dropped out along the way did so partly because of the stigma of being classified as remedial, the burden of paying for non-credit-bearing courses, and the opportunity costs of completing these additional requirements. Indeed, research has shown that the longer the developmental writing pipeline, the more students fail to persist in college and even those who complete the remedial classes do not always enroll in the credit-bearing course (Hern).

In contrast, the students who placed directly into composition were subject to the luck of the draw in terms of the type and difficulty level of instruction they received: they might have "harder" or "easier" teachers, encounter more or less challenging texts, and face different kinds of writing assignments and revision requirements; and they were graded according to the values of instructors designing their assessment measures independently. However, in the absence of information about the literacy demands placed upon students across the many sections of composition and the relationship between what students did in composition and the writing challenges they

faced in other educational contexts, it is impossible to determine how students were affected by being placing directly into composition, as compared to those who were subjected to the more structured set of expectations that characterized the developmental writing sequence.

Leaving aside the question of which approach is "better," what strikes me most about this entrenched practice of dividing and classifying students, which has been the norm at many institutions, is the way the categories are fundamentally interdependent. We, both instructors and administrators, needed the division to justify rigorous, standardized assessment practices for one population but also, I think, to feel comfortable not giving as much attention to the "regular" students. The developmental writing program owed its existence to a problem, one exposed (and perhaps partly created) by the placement test, namely "underprepared" students (Bartholomae). But, by a similar logic, the creation of these two categories of students—underprepared and prepared—undermined the notion that there could be benefits to a similar programmatic approach to assessing writing in composition. Indeed, when it was proposed at one point that the first course in the composition sequence might benefit from the implementation of some limited collaborative assessment moment, such as cross-marking a single assignment, this was met with substantial faculty resistance. Partly, this was due to exhaustion, I imagine. Faculty who taught in both programs recognized the labor that went into the intensive assessment practices of the developmental sequence and were, understandably, reluctant to take on a similar burden in composition. But the tradition of separating out "underprepared" students and assessing them differently probably also influenced instructors' ideas about when programmatic assessment processes were necessary and for whom.

On the Margins: Piloting Portfolio Assessment in Composition

Despite this tradition of very different approaches to assessment in developmental courses and composition, there were a few composition faculty, including the director of the program and myself, who felt that our teaching could benefit from a greater level of collaboration around assessment. This led, in 2009, to a small group of six faculty coming together to develop a different way of assessing their first-semester composition students collaboratively, a process that might be more manageable and streamlined than the assessment processes in the developmental writing sequence but that would still provide a framework for faculty to work together to clarify values around writing and support one another in assessing student work.

Led by a program director with a background in writing assessment, funded by the department, and inspired by the work of Bob Broad, this self-selected cohort of six faculty members began with a dynamic criteria mapping (DCM) project to develop a set of assessment criteria from the ground up (*What We Really Value*). Rather than start with a list of abstract qualities of "good writing," faculty read multiple samples of student work from previous semesters, carefully recording all observations, in order to determine, as precisely and concretely as possible, the aspects or qualities of writing that they valued the most in student writing.

This initial meeting and mapping exercise resulted in an "Assessment Criteria" document, as well as other communally generated portfolio materials (see Appendix). Faculty developed a feedback form for failing portfolios aligned with the "Assessment Criteria" and a common "Self-Assessment Essay Assignment," also based on the "Assessment Criteria" and inspired by Ed White's argument that reflective, meta-cognitive writing can play a more central role in portfolio assessment. Whereas student reflective writing in the developmental sequence typically took the form of a cover letter or narrative of the student's class experience, the "Self-Assessment Assignment" asked each student to produce a fully-developed "essay" demonstrating how their portfolio met the criteria or course outcomes by explicitly citing their own writing as evidence.

These curricular materials were used in a streamlined version of portfolio assessment, which was open to all instructors who elected to take part. Those opting into CPA met once at mid-semester in cohorts of three or four instructors to share their approaches to teaching composition and to review and discuss the assessment criteria. At the end of the semester, students in these sections were required to submit portfolios that included all drafts of two (out of three) essays and a self-assessment essay. Then, at the end of the semester, faculty exchanged portfolios within their cohort in order to determine which portfolios were passing and which were not, results that could be appealed within the cohort at a final wrap up. For portfolios that passed, the classroom instructor would assign letter grades. This was similar to portfolio assessment processes in the different courses in the developmental sequence, with a few key exceptions: as noted earlier, the self-assessment essay was more explicitly tied to the criteria; portfolios in composition did not include any timed writing or exams; students were not assigned a level (such as high-pass or low-pass, with a corresponding grade range) but only assessed as pass/fail; and cohorts were not directed by "cohort leaders" but were entirely self-managed.

For nearly a decade (from 2009 to 2017), this version of CPA in composition remained a boutique endeavor. It was supported by the department and the composition program, in that participating instructors were compensated for the extra time commitment required to cross read portfolios, but it remained small scale, with the number of people opting in hovering at around 8-10 (in a department of over 100 full- and part-time faculty). New teachers were required to participate during their first semester teaching composition, as a form of professional development at a time when the department was expanding, but for the most part they did not choose to continue after the semester when CPA was required. It may be that these new instructors, who were both part-time and full-time, felt overly burdened by the additional work of meeting and cross-marking. Moreover, because a robust cross-marking system remained the trademark of the developmental sequence, those who taught in both programs might have felt one collaborative assessment experience per semester was enough.

As someone who took part in CPA from its inception, and began teaching composition exclusively, I found it to be a welcome relief from the isolation that had previously characterized teaching composition, but without the intensity of assessment characteristic of developmental courses. By cross-reading student portfolios from other sections, I was able to see what other teachers were assigning and how they guided students in the revision process. Collaborative assessment made me more aware of my patterns in evaluating student work and gave me a broader perspective on my students' performance. There wasn't complete consensus among instructors, something scholars of communal assessment have questioned as either possible or desirable (Colombini and McBride). But there was a high level of mutual respect among this self-selected cohort, a real opportunity for "multiperspectival, dialogic exchange," and it felt like we were part of a collective project, one we'd built from the ground up, to help ensure that students passing composition (at least those in our sections) had demonstrated they had met the course goals (Broad, "Pulling Your Hair Out" 249).

ALP: A Program Expands and Evolves

While this small group of faculty teaching composition remained dedicated to CPA on an opt-in basis, the long-standing divide between developmental writing and composition remained in place when the department launched a small-scale Accelerated Learning Program in spring 2013. At first, ALP was a modest endeavor made up of just five sections of ALP and

modeled on Peter Adam's approach to ALP at the Community College of Baltimore County. In our iteration, ALP students, who would have previously been classified as "remedial," were allowed to enroll in integrated sections of composition, composed of approximately seventeen "regular" students and eight "ALP" students. These sections were indistinguishable from other sections of composition; the only difference was that the eight ALP students received additional support in the form of a one-hour corequisite course, and ALP students, unlike their non-ALP counterparts in the same class, had to retake and pass the placement exam by the end of the semester in order to earn a passing grade.

Over the next four years (from 2013-2017), the basic structure of ALP remained the same, although the requirements for entry were tweaked several times and the number of sections of ALP increased (to ten sections in fall of 2014 and to twenty-two in fall of 2017). A more substantial change came in fall 2017, in response to a top-down, system-wide decision to discontinue the placement exam as an exit measure for students enrolled in corequisite courses. This university-wide decision offered an opportunity to rethink exit measures for ALP students, and the CPA process described above, which had been functioning smoothly on the sidelines for several years, offered an obvious alternative to the timed writing exam. The rationale for making the switch to CPA was that ALP students had always had an additional check (beyond their course performance) to determine their readiness to move on in the composition sequence. It made sense to us, as directors of the program, and to faculty accustomed to standardized assessment of developmental students, that ALP students would continue to face some additional assessment measure to determine their readiness to move on. A key difference, of course, was that this new assessment measure would affect other students in ALP sections as well. Since instructors could not very well teach and assess via portfolio for only a subset of students within a given class, implementing portfolio assessment meant that the entire class would have to be assessed in this way, without any distinction drawn between ALP students and their non-ALP counterparts. This, to us, seemed fair. After all, if ALP was really about mainstreaming students, all students in the integrated sections should be held to the same standard.

This change in assessment was accompanied by two other developments: another jump in ALP's enrollment and the addition of a second hour to the corequisite course. Yet, despite these various modifications to the program, the overall trajectory of ALP between 2013 and 2019 has been one of ongoing expansion and persistent student success. As can be seen in

Table 1, pass rates for ALP students have mostly held steady during this six-year period, with over half of all ALP students, and sometimes significantly more, completing the requirements of the course and passing any additional assessments. These are students who would previously have been obliged to take at least one prerequisite course—typically a four-hour, non-credit-bearing, semester-long class—before being allowed to attempt composition. This is, to me, clearly an argument for the value of ALP as an alternative to required prerequisite writing courses. In keeping with findings at other institutions, our results show that when "remedial" students are allowed to attempt college-level work, and provided with academic support, more often than not they succeed (Adams, Gearheart, Miller and Roberts; Glau, Gregory; Coleman; Jenkins et al.; Hern and Snell).

Table 1. Percentage of ALP Students Passing Composition 1
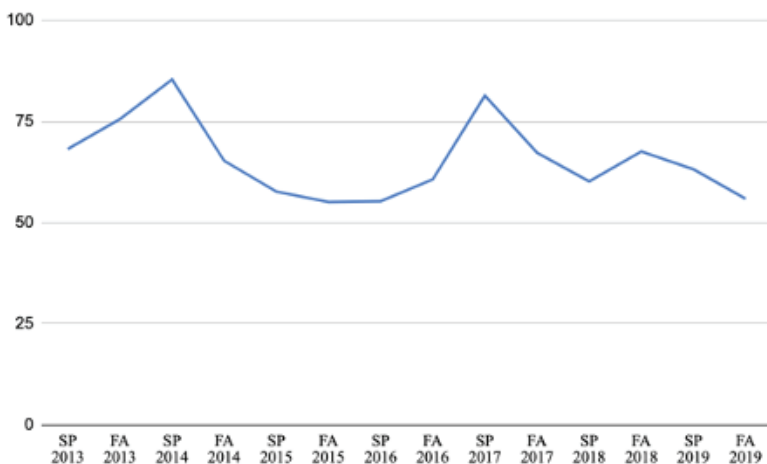
Zooming Out: ALP and Non-ALP Students

If the ALP Program I have been describing can be seen as a success from the perspective of the students it explicitly serves, its broader effects are more complicated. As noted above, fall 2017 marked a transition in the program, characterized by the elimination of the timed essay exam as an exit requirement for ALP students and the implementation of CPA for all students in ALP sections. For ALP students, the new assessment measure did have some impact, resulting in slightly lower pass rates. On average, 62.8% of ALP students passed in the five semesters during which portfolio assessment was in place, as compared to an average pass rate of 67.1% during the

previous nine semesters, when ALP students were required to retake and pass the timed placement test in addition to passing the course. (It should be noted that entrance requirements for ALP students were not consistent over these six years, with the cut-off scores on the standardized reading and writing exams varying slightly just about every semester.)

However, the more surprising finding is that the "regular" students enrolled in integrated ALP sections, those who had *not* been classified as "needing remediation" tended to do a bit worse than the ALP students, passing at lower rates in four out of five semesters for which we have data. As Table 2 illustrates, these students, who happened to be enrolled in ALP sections and, as a result, were assessed via course portfolio beginning in fall 2017, tended to pass at a slightly lower rate than the ALP students enrolled in the same course. The largest gap was in spring 2019, when only 51.5% of non-ALP students passed FYC, while 63.2% of ALP students passed, although the gap disappeared the following semester when fewer ALP students passed compared to their "prepared" counterparts (55.9% versus 57.9%). In all, over the five semesters during which CPA was the common assessment for all students in ALP sections, non-ALP students passed at a rate of 59.2% on average, compared to ALP students who passed at a rate of 64.1%, a difference of 4.9%.

Moreover, these students (the non-ALP students enrolled in ALP sections) performed even worse when compared to students who had happened to be placed into regular, non-ALP sections of composition, sections in which instructors did not use CPA. These students, who were identical in terms of having placed directly into composition, did not intentionally sign up for an integrated ALP section or a "regular" section; they did not know which approach to assessment they would encounter. But, consistently over five semesters, "regular" students in ALP sections were significantly less likely to pass composition—meaning they either failed to submit a passing portfolio or withdrew—than students similarly designated as not needing remediation who had happened to enroll in other sections of composition. Over the five semesters for which we have data, the pass rate of non-ALP students in ALP sections was 59.2%, as compared to a pass rate of 68.9% for students in regular sections of composition, or about 9.7% lower.

Implications: An Opportunity for Reflection

There are really two sets of comparisons to consider. The first question is why non-ALP students in the integrated sections were less likely to pass than

Table 2. Pass rates for different populations.
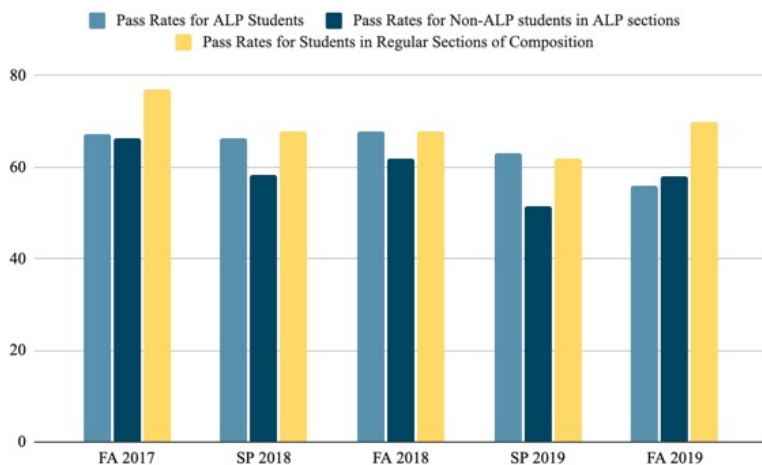
the ALP students despite being deemed better prepared. It could be simply a sign that the supplemental instruction was working; students benefited so much from the additional time with their instructors that they outperformed their "prepared" peers. Alternatively, this finding might point to flaws in the mechanism by which students were originally classified as needing remediation. In our local context, it's quite possible that performance on a 90-minute writing test, in which students compose an essay in response to a 250-300 word passage, is not well correlated to their ability to achieve the very different literacy goals of a 12-week writing course assessed via portfolio, a situation requiring them to read considerably longer texts, to write about multiple texts, and to use instructor and peer feedback to revise and produce multiple drafts. For instance, a non-native speaker might be determined to be a weak writer when asked to produce a short essay in a timed environment but excel in a classroom setting when given substantial time to revise and ongoing instructor support. Or, hypothetically, a writer able to meet the demands of a timed test might not have the necessary drive or buy-in to persist in a writing course emphasizing drafting and revision. In essence, if the mechanism dividing "underprepared" and "prepared" students is flawed to begin with, *and* the former is given access to additional instruction, it makes sense that the "underprepared" students would do better.

If the gap in performance between the ALP and non-ALP students is due to flaws in the initial placement mechanism, then the nation-wide trend away from timed writing tests and toward alternative methods of placement is a positive development. My own institution recently replaced the timed

placement exam with a system of multiple measures, an approach endorsed by a 2016 "TYCA White Paper on Placement Reform." Since spring of 2020, student placement into ALP has been determined by an algorithm making use of students' high school transcripts as well as their scores on national and state standardized tests like the New York Regents Exams and the SAT. This change in policy draws upon important national findings about placement. According to research by Clive Belfield and Peter Crosta, data from high school transcripts, including GPA and courses taken, offer a more reliable method for placing students appropriately when compared to writing placement tests. In another report, Belfield concluded that only 4-8% of students are misplaced when high school transcripts were used, while "between one quarter and one third of tested students are severely misplaced based on their scores on [traditional] placement tests" (Belfield 2).

Given this research on placement, it will be interesting to see whether or not our revised placement process reduces the performance gap between ALP and non-ALP students in the integrated, ALP sections of composition. If placement is more accurate, then supplemental instruction should have the intended leveling effect, resulting in closer pass rate for the two populations. However, it could be that there are other factors at play. For instance, it could be that designating certain students as needing supplemental instruction subtly alters instructors' behavior with regard to ALP students and/or influences these students' perceptions of themselves as writers, in ways that actually have a positive impact on pass rates. After all, instructors are told that the ALP students have been determined to be weaker writers, which could lead to lowered expectations, but might instead occasion a higher level of scrutiny, compassion, and encouragement (as Cheryl Hogue Smith and Maya Jiménez found in their study of identical remedial and mainstream linked classes). From the student's perspective, being labeled "not quite ready" or "just below college level" could certainly have negative effects—on sense of belonging, on motivation, and on self-esteem—but the designation might also serve as an impetus to work harder, something hinted at in a recent article by former developmental writing students in which one recalls using the "fear and anger of never measuring up" as motivation "to do my absolute best to prove them wrong" (Galindo et al. 7). This is not to discount the potential damage done by categorizing and labeling student writers but rather to suggest that it is worth continuing to explore the complicated and varied effects of labels and placement decisions on teachers and students. For instance, research on students' perceptions of remedial designation showed that students were most upset by the time they lost when they were required

to take non-credit-bearing, prerequisite courses, something corequisite courses circumvent (Venezia, Bracco, and Nodine). It could be that reframing the additional course hours as supplemental "support" helps to address the stigma and reduced motivation associated with the remedial label when it also functioned as a barrier to regular college courses.

Then there is the issue of the even higher discrepancy in pass rates between the non-ALP students in the integrated sections and students in regular sections of composition. On a basic level, this finding simply suggests that collaborative portfolio assessment is tougher than traditional grading. When students are asked to engage in a drafting process and to produce a certain quantity of work to be assessed as pass/fail by an outside reader, they are more likely to fail, whether by withdrawing from the course, failing to complete the work required to pass, or failing to demonstrate minimum levels of writing competence. When assessed by a teacher grading independently, the "same" students (according to current placement mechanisms) are more likely to pass. This, too, is an equity issue, and one that we, as a program, will have to consider in moving forward. Unfortunately, at this point we really don't know enough about what makes portfolio classes harder to pass than the classes not assessed via portfolio. Are the standards in portfolio sections simply higher and therefore it is more difficult for students to demonstrate proficiency? Are we too easy on our own students when assigning grades independently and without our colleagues' scrutiny? Are we too tough when reading work by students we don't know, particularly when we are aware that there are unidentified "developmental writers" in the mix? Or, do some students fail portfolio assessment because they have been so conditioned to receive grades on each assignment that they flounder when grading is deferred?

These questions go beyond the issue of how best to serve "basic writers" and require a rethinking of the purposes and goals of college writing instruction more generally. However, they were questions that were hidden, to a certain extent, by the division between developmental writing and composition prior to implementing ALP. Whereas the earlier approach, the one I first encountered in 2008, classified students as "developmental" and "prepared" and then taught and assessed these two groups differently on the basis of this classification, by merging these students in integrated ALP sections and applying the same assessment measure to both groups of students, patterns emerged that suggest a need to rethink our program goals, standards, and assessment practices in FYC.

What Next? Moving Forward as a Program

The findings do not result in a neat set of conclusions or obvious path forward. Instead, they uncover some troublesome aspects of our program that had been submerged by a tradition of assessment in which an intense, collaborative approach to assessment was seen as necessary only for "developmental" students. The question, then, is: what to do with this information? How might we use it to move forward productively? One logical response, of course, is to try first to understand it better. There is still a lot we don't know about how students are affected by different placement designations and assessment measures, which means we can do more to gather data and tease out meaning from the performance gaps we've encountered. Pass rates alone don't tell us *why* students pass, or don't pass, when assessed via portfolio. Nor do they tell us anything about students' experiences of being assessed in different ways.

In an effort to better understand these issues, we have gathered data on the response forms instructors complete for failing portfolios, a grid for feedback that aligns with the "Assessment Criteria" (see Appendix), and we are currently in the process of surveying students in portfolio sections. So far, unfortunately, this has not yielded much insight. Tallying the results of the feedback forms submitted for failing portfolios suggested that faculty readers failed portfolios for a variety of reasons, including students' failure to show "development and growth," to demonstrate "evidence of analysis and critical thinking" and to achieve "basic mechanical correctness" (to name the top three categories marked for spring 2018 and fall 2018). At this time, we have yet to analyze the student survey data to see if it offers insight into things that prevent students from passing. Another angle of inquiry might be to try to determine if students' ability to pass a portfolio course correlates with future academic success, although this approach may be complicated by research at our institution suggesting that reading, writing, and revision (the primary targets of portfolio assessment) make up a relatively small part of the coursework students face in subsequent classes (see Del Principe and Ihara; Ihara and Del Principe).

However, even as we continue to attempt to better understand what is behind these findings, we should accept that they do seem to show that the current assessment system may need to be improved or reimagined. It could be that a CPA process that originated with a small dedicated group of faculty discussing and identifying shared values around writing cannot easily be scaled up to work with a larger group of faculty. Faculty who were not

part of the original cohort that created the composition CPA process may be drawing upon prior experiences with cross-marking in the developmental program and approaching collaborative assessment somewhat differently as a result. At any rate, these findings suggest that we, as program directors, need to think more critically about the new division, and inequity, created by the decision to require that only ALP sections be assessed via CPA. In effect, it appears that we have replicated the divide between "remedial" and "regular" writing classes that was characteristic of our department for many years, although the inequity is more obvious now that the divide is between the "same" students in different types of sections *within* composition.

This places us at a crossroads, requiring us to answer tough questions about whether the composition program can or should become more like our original version of developmental writing—committed to high standards for student writing based on traditional notions of academic literacy and with programmatic structures in place to promote faculty collaboration around assessment and encourage consistency across sections—or persist as a collection of required writing classes loosely organized around abstract learning goals interpreted differently by instructors operating with a large degree of autonomy. In other words, should the movement to mainstream students previously classified as "developmental" result in a composition program that is more like the dissolved "basic writing" program—with both its strengths, such as faculty collaboration around assessment, and its failings, with regard to equity and access—or might it lead us to imagine alternative approaches to curriculum and assessment that retain the communal spirit of "basic writing" without it importing its more damaging elements?

For instance, these unsettling findings may indicate that it is time to reassess our traditional emphasis on introductory writing classes as initiation into "academic discourse." Perhaps this moment offers an opportunity to consider other pedagogical goals, such as putting more emphasis on fostering students' rhetorical awareness, as many have argued for (see Downs and Wardle 2007; Yancey, Robertson and Taczac; Andrus, Mitchler and Tinberg) and as suggested by the "WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition." Similarly, these findings might provide an impetus to explore alternative assessment practices that emphasize students' persistence and labor more than their ability to produce textual products that demonstrate they have met certain abstract benchmarks (as Asao Inoue proposes in offering a model of assessment based on grading contracts developed collectively by the teacher and student).

Regardless, in our particular local context, these fundamental ques-

tions about pedagogy, assessment, and the purpose of FYC, cannot be answered from some kind lofty position of authority, despite our roles as program directors. Faculty at our institution have considerable instructional freedom, and there is a long history of pedagogical autonomy, particularly with regard to composition, as I have discussed above, which means we would need to have considerable buy-in for any major programmatic changes in curriculum or assessment to occur in a meaningful way. That is why continuing to investigate the causes of the discrepancies in pass rates is ultimately less important than disseminating our findings and creating opportunities to discuss these issues with *all* faculty teaching composition, not only those who teach ALP sections but also those who do not. Instructors who have been teaching sections of composition in relative isolation, in particular, need to be made aware of the current performance gap between students assessed via collaborative portfolio assessment (CPA) and those graded by instructors assessing students independently.

Sharing this information, I suspect, may result in more disagreement than consensus, at least initially. I imagine there will be writing instructors who argue that the gap shows portfolio assessment to be overly punitive, or that pass rates are higher in the non-ALP sections because students "do better." I can also imagine a critique that any kind of collaborative assessment process impedes instructor autonomy (although, as noted, faculty collaboration around assessment was never challenged when restricted to "developmental students"). Still, disseminating this information as a way of inviting faculty into a discussion and to shared decision-making is necessary if we are to think more deeply, and more collectively, about what we are asking students to achieve in composition. It could present an opportunity to persuade more faculty of the benefits of building consensus around course goals and establishing ethical collaborative assessment practices, not just for "developmental" students but for all students.

One way that this kind of conversation is currently being facilitated in our department is through the mechanism of a Curriculum Review Committee, a structure for programmatic decision-making launched by the Director of Composition in 2014. A rotating committee, made up of both part-time and full-time faculty who opt in on an annual basis and are paid for the time commitment involved, this group is currently in the beginning stages of revising the composition curriculum and will ultimately propose a new curriculum that will be brought to the English Department for a vote. As it works to revise course outcomes, the committee will also be compelled to consider issues of assessment, including a review of the current portfolio as-

sessment practices in ALP sections of composition. This committee not only offers a model for fostering democratic decision-making within a program, its existence also is crucial at this moment when programs and assessment practices are being disrupted. It is my hope that the faculty taking part in this process will draw upon their prior experiences with writing assessment—in two very different writing programs—and see this moment of change as an opportunity to develop an improved approach to writing assessment, one that maintains the valuable aspects of a communal approach to assessment based on shared standards and goals, without importing the more punitive, gatekeeping aspects that characterized assessment in developmental writing.

Of course, precisely what form a new approach to assessment will take, and how faculty will respond to this moment of disruption, is a subject for a different article. My main argument here has been that the recent, national movement to dismantle developmental writing and introduce corequisite courses has had, on my home campus, the unintended, but ultimately positive, effect of unsettling the distinction between the "basic" and "regular" student writers these two programs were intended to serve, thereby raising important questions about writing instruction more generally. This situation, which is likely occurring in some form at other institutions, provides an important context for rethinking curriculum and assessment and an additional impetus for increased faculty involvement. An interesting outcome of implementing ALP on our campus, then, beyond its clear benefits to the students directly affected, is that it has inspired us to consider fundamental questions about goals and standards for *all* college writers, questions that were easier to ignore when flawed placement practices were used to maintain a tidy distinction between "unprepared" and "regular" students, who were then seen as requiring different kinds of assessment.

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APPENDIX: PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT MATERIALS

Final Portfolio Assessment Criteria for English 12
Department of English
2020-2021

In assessing whether a student's final portfolio will pass or fail English 12, the faculty assessing each portfolio consider the following criteria. The "we" represented in the statements below are the collective faculty of English 12 who engage in the process of collaborative portfolio assessment using the criteria listed below as a guide. We will also rely on you to use your Self-Assessment Essay to show us where you see these criteria evidenced in your own work.

————————————

Minimum Requirements

We look for students to improve their essay writing skills in English 12. We define an essay as a prose document that is written from the author's point of view, has a consistent focus, and offers evidence that illustrates the writer's ideas. Given this goal for English 12, we expect to see the following in all passing portfolios.

☐ Essays that are focused on a point, support the point, and explore implications of the point.

☐ Essays that demonstrate critical thinking and analysis.

☐ Essays in which the thinking at the heart of the essay has clearly grown out of and has been influenced by reading.

☐ Essays in which there is a sense of overall organization and structure. This means that paragraphs are used to help focus and develop ideas, and sentences and paragraphs are understandable, logical, and cohesive.

☐ At least one essay showing evidence of independent research and use of sources. This research should be integrated into the writer's own ideas in the essay. Essay should make skillful and strategic use of direct quotations, summary and paraphrase.

☐ Essays that demonstrate basic mechanical correctness. The readers should not trip over language as they read the essay.

☐ Essays that respond to the particular needs of the assignment given by the classroom instructor.

□ Essays that show development and growth from draft to draft and essay to essay.

Please note that these are the minimum criteria for passing English 12. In addition to these minimum requirements, we read your work by considering the following:

Ideas

□ We value the creativity, originality, and complexity of ideas.
□ We value complex theses over simple "black and white" ones.

Engaging Texts

□ We value close analysis of text and evidence of close reading, where appropriate.
□ We value essays that "show" the reader something rather than just "tell" the reader.
□ We look for growing facility with MLA citation style and procedures.

Process

□ We value writing processes that use feedback offered by the teacher and by peers.
□ We encourage students to take chances in drafts, to do risky and extensive revision, to delete as well as add text in drafts.

Risk Taking

□ We value student writers who take risks with their thinking and challenge themselves in their writing.
□ We value essays that are less about proving a point and more about exploring the difficulties and complexities of an idea.

Presentation of work

□ We value essays which are correctly formatted, follow MLA style, include a Works Cited page, when needed, are clearly labeled, and presented on time in a neat, clear, easy-to-follow manner.

Final Portfolio Feedback

After reviewing the writings presented in your portfolio, the assessment team has concluded that you need to repeat English 12. We do not doubt that you have worked very hard and have produced an impressive quantity of written work in preparing this portfolio, and we are certain that you have learned much through this process. However, at this point your writing skills are not strong enough to advance to English 24. Please review your portfolio readers' comments below to help you focus your energies in your next English 12 class:

Criteria Your essays...	Area of Strength	Area of Struggle
have a focus and a point		
show evidence of analysis and critical thinking		
were influenced by reading		
have clear organization and structure		
show evidence of independent research		
have basic mechanical correctness		
meet the requirements of the assignment		
show development and growth		

Comments:

Instructions for the Self-Assessment Essay
English 12 Final Portfolio

In order for your portfolio to be complete and ready for final assessment by outside readers, you must compose and include a self-assessment essay. In a certain sense, this essay is the most important document in your portfolio, so it deserves your time and attention. It will serve as your readers' "map" for your portfolio, and, as such, it may strongly determine what your readers notice and value as they read over your revised essay and capstone drafts. Please take the time to do meaningful work on this essay before submitting a final version of it in your portfolio.

In this essay, your task is to demonstrate that you have met, or haven't met, the assessment criteria for English 12 as described in the portfolio assessment criteria document. The self-assessment essay should:

- Consider the assessment criteria categories that you think are most relevant in describing your growth and experience in English 12.
- Make explicit and detailed reference to particular pieces of writing and places within those pieces that provide evidence demonstrating your accomplishments and/or your struggles in a particular area. To be clear, this means that you can and should "quote" and summarize from your own writing in your self-assessment essay.
- Be brutally honest and straightforward in its description of your progress, accomplishments, and struggles.
- Highlight progress and change through the semester. Make it easy for your reader to see how your essay writing has developed over the course of English 12. No one expects you to be a "perfect" essay writer by the end of the course; instead, we value evidence of your growth as a writer.
- Be an essay—meaning that it should be a focused, cohesive piece of writing in which you argue for your own development as a writer and reader in English 12.

The self-assessment essay should avoid:

- Flattery of yourself and of your instructor.
- Unsupported and exaggerated claims of growth and change as writers and learners. Any claim you make regarding your growth as a writer should be explicitly supported by evidence drawn from the documents you have chosen to include in the portfolio.

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